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Leadership in the Community Sector: Promoting Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast

Louise O'Meara

March 2016

A thesis submitted to the School of Applied Social Studies, National University of Ireland, Cork, for the award of PhD

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DECLARATION

I certify that all of this work is my own. Where I have used the work of others, it is acknowledged/referenced accordingly. Furthermore this work has not been submitted for another degree, either at National University of Ireland, Cork, or elsewhere.

Signed:



Louise O'Meara

Dated: 17th May 2016

Abstract

Community development is centrally concerned with people in communities working together to achieve a common goal, that is, to collaborate, whether within local geographical communities, in communities of shared interests or among groups sharing a common identity. Its overarching goal is one of progressive transformational social change. As Belfast transitions from a conflict to a post-conflict society, there is a need for greater, more effective work at local community level in order to address a range of ongoing social and economic issues facing communities, including high levels of disadvantage and division. Given the significance of leadership in building effective collaboration and the centrality of collaboration for community development, it is important to understand how leadership is currently enacted and what kinds of leadership are required to support communities to collaborate effectively to bring about social change. This thesis thus centers on the kind of leadership practised and required to support collaboration for social change within the community sector in Belfast, a city that contains an estimated 28% of the total number of community and voluntary sector (CVS) organisations in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012). Through a series of qualitative, in-depth interviews with people playing leadership roles in local communities, the study critically explores and analyses their experiences and perceptions in relation to leadership and collaboration.

Community development in Belfast today is practised within a wider context of neoliberal policies, characterised by austerity and public spending cuts. Whilst not the only influencing factor, this context has had a particular and profound impact on the nature and role of community development practised, and on the kind of leadership enacted within it. The space for reflection and transformative action appears to be shrinking as the contraction of resources to support community development in local communities continues unabated. Those playing leadership roles increasingly find themselves compelled to spend time seeking resources and managing complex funding arrangements rather than focusing on the social change dimensions of their work. Collaboration as

promoted by the state seems to have become an instrumental tactic used to implement its austerity measures and curtail the potential of the community sector.

Despite this, local leaders are driving initiatives that attempt to push back, helping the sector refocus on its transformational goals of social change. To do this requires support. Those playing leadership roles require resources, including time, to encourage and enable communities to reconnect with the purpose and underpinning values of community development. Leaders also need support to develop and promote new, progressive narratives and visions and pursue these through building collaboration and solidarity.

Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCC	Belfast City Council
CD	Community Development
CVS	Community and Voluntary Sector
DL	Distributed Leadership
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DSD	Department for Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NI	Northern Ireland
NICVA	Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
OFMDFM	Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister

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Chapter One: Introduction to Leadership for Collaboration in the Community Sector in Northern Ireland

1.1 Introduction

This study investigates the nature and role of leadership within locally-based community organisations and groups in Belfast. It explores a hitherto under researched aspect of community development, that is, the kinds of leadership enacted and required within the community sector to foster social change. The central research question addresses the nature of leadership required to promote collaboration and bring about change within local communities. In this chapter, the core themes of the study are introduced, that is, community development, leadership and collaboration, along with the specific research questions. Describing the particular and specific location of any research is important in order to place it in context and thereby aid deeper understanding of the research themes. Thus, by way of background, a brief historical overview is provided, outlining the establishment of the Northern Ireland (NI)[1] state and the emergence of community development. The wider political context is reviewed, including an examination of public policy in the North, particularly focusing on the impact of neoliberal policies. The chapter concludes with a description of the community sector, as part of the wider community and voluntary sector, in the North today, its size and activities.

[1] A note on terminology – official titles in relation to the island of Ireland are the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland (NI). More colloquially, and in this study, the terms 'the North' for Northern Ireland and 'the South' for the Republic of Ireland are used interchangeably. The use variously of 'The North', 'the North of Ireland' and 'Northern Ireland' acknowledges the different connotations each has in the local political environment.

1.2 Themes within this Study

There has been a long history of 'self-help' and community development in Ireland, North and South, from credit unions, housing associations and community centres to education and training schemes and trading enterprises (Lewis, 2006). However, over the past thirty to forty years, there has been a significant increase in local community-based activity, much of which was sparked initially by the growing international civil rights movements in the late 1960s (Cochrane and Dunn, 2002). Community development's origins were in communities and areas that experienced economic and social deprivation and marginalisation and these continue to be the kinds of areas where it is mainly practised today (Lister, 1998). Community activism centres on peoples' ability to work together to achieve a common goal – that is, to collaborate - whether within local geographical communities, in communities of shared interests or among groups sharing a common identity (Craig and Mayo, 1995; Willmott, 1989). Leadership is central to building effective collaboration (Cairns *et al.*, 2011; Gray, 2007; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Silvia and McGuire, 2010). Silvia and McGuire (2010) argue that just as organisations require some degree of leadership to function effectively, so too do collaborative initiatives: 'collaborative, integrated structures require leadership that facilitates productive interaction and moves the parts toward effective resolution of a problem' (p.265). NI has experienced a period of extended political and civil unrest, especially between the years of 1969 and 1998 (Acheson, 2013). Now, as it transitions from a conflict to a post-conflict society, there is a need for more effective work at local level in order to address a range of social and economic issues facing communities, including the high levels of disadvantage, fragmentation and division which still exist (Nolan, 2013). The significance of leadership in promoting effective collaboration and the centrality of collaboration for community development suggests a need for greater understanding of how leadership is currently enacted and what kinds of leadership are required to support communities to collaborate to bring about social change.

1.3 Scope and Research Questions

This research centers on the nature of leadership practised and required to support collaboration for social change within the community sector in Belfast, where it is estimated 28% of the total number of community and voluntary sector (CVS) organisations in NI (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012) are located. Communities in other cities, towns and rural areas were not included in the research owing to time and resource limitations. The central aim of the research is to critically explore and analyse the experiences and perceptions of those playing leadership roles in the local community sector in Belfast.

1.3.1 Research Questions

The central research question investigates the kind of leadership within the community sector in Belfast required to promote progressive social change in local disadvantaged communities.

Specific research questions include:

- What are the roles of community development in relation to promoting progressive social change within disadvantaged communities in Belfast?
- What role does collaboration play within community development and the community sector in Belfast?
- What kinds of leadership within community development promote collaboration and social change?
- How does the current neoliberal context impact on leadership within the community sector?

1.4 Overview of Thesis Structure

In *Chapter One*, the core themes of the study are introduced, that is, community development, leadership and collaboration, along with the specific research questions. To set context, a brief historical overview outlining the establishment of the Northern Ireland (NI) state, the emergence of community development and current public policy in the North are presented. A description of the community sector, as part of the wider community and voluntary sector, in the

North today, its size and activities is also offered. Next, in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*, a review of the literature on community development, collaboration and leadership theory and practice is presented in order to provide context for the research. It appraises community development theory and uses this to explicate the idea of a *community sector.* This is followed by an examination of the literature on collaboration that offers insight in a community development context. The chapter also considers the theory and practice of leadership, with a particular focus on that which offers insight in a community development context.

A theoretical framework to help examine the enactment and experiences of leadership to support collaboration and social change in communities in Belfast is developed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector.* This is necessitated by a lack of attention in the literature paid to the wider context within which collaboration and leadership are practised. The framework draws on and fuses concepts of neoliberalism, power and leadership to develop an original, more critical framing to use in the research. Following this, *Chapter Four: Researching Leadership for Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities – Issues of Methodology, Methods and Research Process* discusses the research's methodology, methods and research process and explains the rationale for developing a qualitative research design to explore leadership for collaboration and social change in communities in Belfast. The central research objective and key questions that drive the study are presented along with an exploration of how views on ontological and epistemological issues, as well as the author's political beliefs, inform the study. Personal and professional interests in the research area are declared and associated ethical issues discussed. The chapter concludes with a description of the data analysis strategy used.

The research findings from qualitative data collected are presented in *Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion on Leadership to Promote Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast Communities.* Research participants' views and practical

experiences of leadership, collaboration and social change in their community work contexts form the basis of the chapter structure. Data in key emerging areas are presented: problematising the concept of collaboration; shrinking spaces for collaboration and social change; where spaces for collaboration and social change are to be found in the current context; and the kinds of leadership to promote collaboration and social change enacted and required in community contexts. *Chapter Six: Concluding Comments and Implications of Findings for Leadership to Support Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities* brings the study to a close by assessing the extent to which the research aim has been met and considers the implications of the findings for contemporary community development practice and related policy issues. An examination of the theoretical implications of the findings is offered, along with a commentary on how these relate to the study's literature review. The limitations of this study and further research required in relation to leadership that promotes collaboration and social change in community contexts are identified. The chapter offers a commentary on methodological and ethical issues before ending with a number of final concluding comments.

1.5 NI and the Community Sector

As with any social science study, it is important to provide historical, political and social context. The background of the community sector in NI, a distinct part of the wider community and voluntary sector (CVS), has been described as 'an evolutionary experience which is unique, as it was linked organically to the parallel realities of political instability and politically motivated violence' (Cochrane and Dunn, 2002, p.21). In this section, a brief historical overview of the NI state is outlined, with attention placed on how the contemporary community sector has evolved within this context. This necessitates a discussion concerning the wider CVS, of which the community sector is an, albeit distinctive, part as much of the relevant literature is 'hidden' within this broader body of literature.

1.5.1 Post-partition

Broadly speaking, the political context in NI can be described as essentially a post-colonial one (Lewis, 2006; Robson, 2001). In 1922, Ireland was partitioned and NI was established as part of the United Kingdom (UK). Following this, the unionist majority was in power for over 50 years with various groupings of Irish nationalist parties in opposition. As a result of discrimination and disillusionment from the early days following partition, the nationalist community 'began to develop coping mechanisms in the form of self-help initiatives and community-based organisations' which would eventually provide the 'infrastructure and leadership for the civil rights movement in the 1960s' (Cochrane and Dunn, 2002, p.53). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, political unrest erupted in response to ongoing policies of discrimination against the nationalist/Catholic minority in the North. In reaction to this, direct rule of NI by the UK Government was reintroduced in 1972. The period between 1972 and 1998, 'the Troubles[2]', was marked by violence and political unrest, with over 3,600 people killed during that period (Smyth, 1998). In 1998, following the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, a devolved Government, the NI Assembly, was established. Eventually, in May 2007, devolution of powers returned to NI. The 'peace process' is the term used to describe the series of attempts to achieve an end to the civil conflict and a political settlement to the divisions in NI.

1.5.2 Community Development in NI

It was within this context that the community sector as we know it today began to flourish, with a large number of community groups emerging in the early days of the Troubles. The period from 1969 onwards was described by Acheson *et al*. (2004) as 'widely regarded as marking the emergence of community development and the community movement in Northern Ireland' (p.43). It is

[2] This period was known by many as 'the Troubles', a somewhat euphemistic term, whilst others referred to it as a 'war'. The language around how to describe it was, and continues to be, highly contested. The Troubles refers to the conflict in Northern Ireland that began in the late 1960s and is deemed by many to have ended with the Belfast Good Friday Agreement of 1998, although there has been sporadic violence since then.

estimated that there were approximately 500 [3] community groups and associations in existence in 1973 and that many of these had their origins in the violence of 1969–1971, linked with the political unrest which resulted from on-going discrimination, outlined above (Griffiths, 1975). In his history of community development in NI, McCready (2001, p.141-143) identifies five key phases:

1969-1974 *The emergence of the community movement*, which he describes as characterised by an interest in participation.

1974-1980 *The state strikes back*, characterised by bureaucratisation, institutionalisation and privatisation agendas.

1980-1986 *The emergence of single issue groups*, and continuing bureaucratisation.

1986-1993 *The cheque book and community development*, characterised by the emergence of 'new' sources of funding for statutory and voluntary bodies to call upon to target social need.

1993-1999 *Community development: 'the end of the beginning'*, characterised by partnership, and a major injection of resources, from the European Union and elsewhere, to support peace building, community development and social inclusion.

Community and voluntary organisations increasingly moved to fill the vacuum caused by the lack of a local parliament from 1972 onwards, by attempting to provide some form of representation for local communities (Birrell and Williamson, 2001). As part of the wider CVS, community organisations provided new forms of participation in policy and provision 'when representative democracy was impossible owing to prevailing conditions of political and civil unrest, and because of the suspension of the local legislature and the accompanying political vacuum' (*ibid*., p.206). The sector has thus been used in part as a social policy delivery mechanism by the state. It has been argued that, as a result, the sector has 'occupied much of the political space which is normally the preserve of conventional politics' (Williamson *et al*., 2000, p.51).

[3] Estimates differ. Curtis (2010) puts the number of groups in Belfast in the mid 1970s at approximately 300, McCready (2001) at approximately 450, and Birrell and Williamson (2001) at approximately 500.

This vacuum, and subsequent filling of it by the sector, mobilised community groups and provided them with a strong sense of purpose and direction. It also served the needs of the state as the sector over time increasingly acted as a major channel of funds from the UK central administration and the European Union (EU), and became 'an important conduit for the implementation of social and economic policies' (McCall and Williamson, 2001, p.364). Acheson (2009) discusses the close relationships that developed between the CVS and civil servants at this time, describing them as being jointly involved in 'the shared endeavour of maintaining sufficient stability for public administration to continue to function' (p.70). Another legacy of this close relationship is the manner in which the CVS today still tends to be viewed as operating in competition to local devolved political structures.

The community development movement in the North has been described as having fragmented in the 1970s, with some groups concentrating on local issues and others 'establishing support and resources for community development within a particular ideological or sectarian standpoint' (Lovett *et al*., 1994, p.180). Frazer (1981) describes two broad directions of community action in the late 1960s and early 1970s as both a 'spontaneous outburst of energy in local neighbourhoods' and as an 'increasingly state-controlled, professional and organised community work service' (p.7). This spontaneous upsurge of energy parallels the emergence of anti-war and civil rights movements in many parts of the world in the late 1960s. Oliver (1990) describes it thus:

> New forms of participation and structure were emerging, the state was on the defensive, the people were in the ascendant, the dream of people's power was close to realisation (p.372).

A renewed interest in community development at this time saw it as a way of securing civil rights. Deane (1981) describes this period as characterised by an eruption of activity 'throughout many parts of the world against the old order' which included student riots in France, civil rights marches in the US, sit-ins and others protests in various parts of Europe (p.9). The North of Ireland was no

different, though here feelings about the possibility and desirability of change were to be found mostly within nationalist/republican/Catholic communities and, it is suggested, resulted from 'years of rejection by institutions of the State' (*ibid*.). In making this point, Deane summarises – in a self-acknowledged, 'overly simplistic' way – as follows:

> It appeared that that which was left-wing, radical, liberal, socialist, democratic, progressive and in sympathy with the underdog against established order in other parts of the world was nationalist/republican/Catholic in Northern Ireland. […] and that that which was reactionary, entrenched, imperialist, in fear of change was the exclusive property of unionist/loyalists/Protestants (*ibid*.).

Whilst this may appear to be somewhat simplistic, it expresses something of the history and roots of the politics of community development that we see today. Robson (2001) makes a similar point when he suggests that what he terms the 'community movement' - with its guiding principles of opposition to racism, anti-sectarianism and support for cross-community strategies of development – 'does not operate in quite the same way within the Protestant population because of the degree to which they uncritically adopted the hegemonic values of the Unionist ruling class as well as their understandable reluctance to seek avenues of opposition to what they perceived to be their state' (p.238). Picking up on this theme, Cochrane and Dunn (2002) suggest that the lack of a community organisation tradition within the unionist population was owing to:

> the simple fact that, for the majority of the time, they had an underdeveloped critique of the political system, a condition reinforced, of course, by their perception that the nationalist community was trying to destroy the system [around the time that direct rule was introduced in 1972] (p.64-65).

Given the continued divisions between these two communities – despite the ever-closing gap of disadvantage they have experienced and continue to experience – it is important to understand that, in terms of the differing perspectives as to the role of community development, the seeds were sown at

an early stage.

In 1976, responsibility for community work was given to District Councils, having previously resided in the Department of Education[4]. This move was seen by many at the time as an attempt to position community development in a particular way – to make it less radical and more answerable to the party political machine locally, through control of grant aid and other resources by local elected representatives (Frazer, 1981). One might also see the removal of community development from the Department of Education as a move away from a base that might be expected to have some degree of interest in awareness raising or educative activity. Moving through the 1980s and 1990s, a number of trends impacting on the community development field can be seen: the growth of issue based work; greater involvement by the State in community development; increasing emphasis on community care by Health Trusts; the increasing role of women and women's groups in community development; and the emphasis on community economic regeneration (Lovett *et al*., 1994). Birrell and Williamson (2001) describe this period as one of 'more sustained and less contentious growth' citing the development of a number of bodies with responsibility for supporting the sector and the emergence of 'new social agendas' as key contributory factors (p.208). Examples of such support bodies include the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT), established in 1978 as an independent source of funding for the voluntary and community sector, the Rural Development Council and the Community Relations Council, which funded voluntary and community groups to develop rural programmes and community relations programmes respectively. From further afield, the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) was established in 1986 to promote economic and social regeneration and reconciliation in NI and the border counties. Funding for the IFI came from the United States, Canada, Australia,

[4] On the recommendations of the 1975 Moyle Report (Report of the Joint Working Party on Sport and Recreational Provision of Districts Councils) responsibility for community development was assigned to District Councils. Many community groups were concerned that it would result in the bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of community development, and also that it would stymie development of the work of the Health and Social Services Boards which had been engaging positively with community development and local groups at that time (McCready, 2001).

New Zealand and the EU. In relation to 'new social agendas', there was a growth in organisations and networks focusing on women's issues, rural concerns, the environment and housing as well as a particular policy focus on poverty as evidenced in the third EU Anti-Poverty Programme and in local anti-poverty strategies in the Government-initiated Belfast Action Teams and Making Belfast Work (*ibid*.)

McCready (2001) describes these new levels of support as leading to the increased institutionalisation of community groups whilst others have suggested that the support provided to the sector in the North channelled the development of groups 'in particular directions through explicit political as well as economic developmental priorities' linked with reconciliation and attaining a political settlement (Birrell and Williamson, 2001 p. 211). Whilst these developments may have produced a more complex and diverse community development base, this may have been done at the expense of authentic community development practice; as Lovett *et al*. (1994) argue, actual 'community development principles and processes are often neither understood nor practised' (p.182). This links with themes of community development losing its focus and potency, and the tension between action concerned primarily with service delivery and that more focused on campaigning and lobbying, themes which continue to be ongoing issues of concern within the sector right up to the present day (Acheson, 2013; Frazer, 1981).

1.5.3 The Wider Context – Public Policy in the North

NI has been described today as 'a post-conflict transitional society in which many of the underlying dynamics and legacies of conflict are yet to be resolved' (Acheson, 2013, p.8). One example of this is the manner in which public policy in the North has tended to respond to the manifestations rather than the causes of division in society, hence the erection of so called 'peace walls[5]' and the provision of duplicate public services, delivered on largely sectarian lines in

[5] The term given to walls erected to prevent rioting and attacks between loyalist/unionist and republican/nationalist communities.

many areas, as a response to violence and conflict (Hughes, 2009). Rather than identify and address the causes of conflict – for example, what or who are the peace walls protecting, and why – instead, root causes tend to be ignored in favour of addressing the symptoms. Knox (2014) argues that, alongside wider contextual pressures, 'fragmented governance' has resulted in 'highly fragmented public services and a failure to tackle social disadvantage' (p.17). He suggests that these are further compounded by consociationalism 'put in place to protect against any one political group dominating the decision-making process or a reversion to majoritarianism', and the resulting influence on policy exerted by mutual veto exercised by the two largest parties, the DUP and Sinn Féin (*ibid*.).

The ongoing inability of local politicians to agree a policy aimed at promoting positive community relations and greater integration in NI has been a cause of concern within the community and voluntary sector, especially given the post-conflict context (Nolan, 2013). In May 2013, after a wait of over eight years, a 'good relations' strategy, entitled *Together: Building a United Community,* was published outlining 'shared future' plans that include a target to dismantle all the peace walls in the North by 2023 (Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, 2013). However, three of the most difficult, contentious issues - flying of flags, parading and dealing with the past - are not addressed in this strategy. More recently the Stormont House Agreement[6] has attempted to address these, though it is too early to comment on whether this attempt will be successful. Therefore, at a wider level, whilst progress has been made in relation to the peace process, concern remains as to how 'embedded' the peace is and evidence of significant division and conflict continues to be seen (Knox, 2014; Nolan, 2013). As with many conflicts globally, those who suffer disproportionately tend to be the more disadvantaged and marginalised groups in society (Horgan,

[6] The Stormont House Agreement (SHA) is the latest in a number of attempts to resolve the three outstanding issues: the legacy of the Troubles; flags; and parades. In 2013 US diplomats, Dr Richard Haass and Dr Meghan O'Sullivan facilitated all-party talks aimed at resolving these issues, but talks ended without resolution. The SHA and Implementation Plan were agreed in December 2014 and November 2015 respectively. These are intended to resolve identity issues, come to a settlement on welfare reform, and make government finance in Northern Ireland more sustainable. Legislation to implement the SHA is currently being put in place.

2006). Thus the conflict/post-conflict nature of society in the North presents particular challenges for community groups who work mostly in disadvantaged communities where ongoing issues of poverty, unemployment and low educational attainment are coupled with the manifestations of sectarianism as well as sporadic violence. It is important to take account of this context in attempting to understand this history and present day realities of the community development sector. McCready (2001), in his historical account of the sector between 1970s and 1990s, notes that through the establishment of a range of groups focusing on a variety of issues there emerged 'a forceful critique of society in NI that went beyond the analysis of the sectarian problem' and thereby helped inform a Government that 'appeared fixed on the notion that NI's problems were solely about community relations' (p.60). On a similar note, it is important to remember that, as Donnan and McFarlane (1997) argue, 'it is not sufficient to treat NI as unique simply because it is divided along sectarian lines. [It] has been affected by the same problems as the rest of Europe…' (p.7). Key among such problems currently are continuing inequality and the steady rise of neoliberal policies. Given this study's particular interest on the impact of neoliberalism, and whilst not discounting the influence of other structural factors such as poverty, class and patriarchy, attention now turns to an examination of what neoliberalism is and how it manifests in a NI context.

1.5.4 Neoliberalism in the North of Ireland

Most social policy and sociological writing about the North of Ireland, on various topics, has to contend with a very specific context. The North has been a society at war or in conflict (the very terms used are contested) and now is in a post-conflict situation (Coakley *et al.*, 1992). Therefore, many of the debates concerning social policy necessarily reference the conflict and post-conflict issues, as a major concern of all policy development is securing peace and preventing a return to war. However, the North is also becoming increasingly characterised by neoliberal policies and this has a significant impact on community development and social change. Whilst there are many different ways of theorising neoliberalism, it is broadly accepted that it 'entails normative principles favouring free-market solutions to economic and social

problems' (Nagle, 2009, p.175). Definitions of neoliberalism are considered in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector,* but here attention is placed on how neoliberalism impacts in the North, given the post-conflict nature of that society.

The British Government operated different rules for NI during the conflict (late 1960s to 1998, and beyond) than those present elsewhere in the UK, where 'a tough monetarist strategy and the curbing of aspects of the welfare state were evident' (Adshead and Tonge, 2009, p.188). British policy in the North evolved since the late 1960s from relative disengagement into a broad agenda for equality and reconciliation implemented on a variety of fronts – political, economic, social and security. More generous fiscal and social welfare policies were evident, as a means of employment generation and amelioration of poverty and associated problems. Crighton (1998) describes British policy initiatives as 'nothing if not highly interventionist', albeit developed against an ideological backdrop of minimal state intrusion into markets and society (p.83). Since devolution[7] in 2007, the focus of economic policy has continued to reflect the North's reliance on the public service sector, with only modest growth in the private sector (Adshead and Tonge, 2009). The North's economy has been traditionally dependent on its uniquely large public sector, with current data showing that approximately 27% of all jobs, from a high in the early 1990s of 37%, are in local Government, health, education and the civil service (Office for National Statistics, 2015, p.13; Nolan, 2012). However, increasingly, a discernable shift towards more neoliberal policies is evidenced. The Northern Ireland Executive's [8] current economic strategy exhibits neoliberal characteristics driven, as it is, by export-led growth and promises of £4 billion public spending reductions over the 2011-2015 period (Hinds, 2011, p.19). Similarly in the UK, steps to reduce the budget there have resulted in spending cuts rather than tax rises, with the ratio between these estimated at 4:1 (*ibid*.).

[7] Following protracted negotiations after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, devolution of powers returned to Northern Ireland from the UK in May 2007.
[8] The NI Executive is the administrative branch of the NI Assembly, the devolved legislature for NI, established under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.

The extent to which neoliberalism is a dominant paradigm in NI, and the impact of this, is a complex question. On balance, the literature seems to suggest that, for a variety of reasons, neoliberalism has not been as dominant, nor has it had as much traction, in the North as elsewhere (Crighton, 1998; McEvoy *et al.*, 2006; Nagle, 2009). Nagle (2009) argues that rather than there having been a complete roll out of neoliberalism in the North, it 'rests uneasily with an economy fettered by its reliance on the public sector as well as forms of segregation that duplicate public services' (p.173). Indeed, Crighton (1998) argues that the peace accords relating to NI have succeeded only because of heavy involvement and investment by the governments of Ireland and the UK. She describes 'an embedded bias towards minimal state intervention' as coexisting with substantial state involvement in NI's economy and 'elaborate efforts at social regulation and domestic restructuring' (*ibid*., p.81). Where 'neoliberalism mandates market-building as a strategy for peace', an important consequence of the Troubles has been the adoption of less market-oriented policies such as subvention, larger economic development grants on offer to firms, high levels of public sector employment at a time when 'the largest retrenchment of state economic activity in post-war British history' was taking place (*ibid*., p.82).

Nagle (2009), in a discussion on neoliberalism as a 'peace-building' strategy, points out that NI's capacity to embrace neoliberalism is contradicted by the enormous cost of segregation (especially in housing and schools) to the public purse, estimated at up to £1.5 billion per year. Therefore, whilst the British state might want to advance neoliberalism 'it is unable to wash its hands of underwriting wide swathes of social reproduction, from housing to welfare to transportation infrastructure' (*ibid.*, p.174). Nagle (*ibid*.) goes on to argue that, in NI, there appears to be a strong belief in the conflict solving powers of neoliberalism, whilst Hillyard *et al*. (2005) go further to claim that 'an almost religious belief in the conflict-solving powers of neo-liberalism is common in many major international institutions which enter societies coming out of war', including the North (p.47). Others contend that neoliberal policies have been 'foisted' on the regional devolved power sharing NI Government by the UK state

(Nagle, 2009) whilst O'Hearn (2008) argues the likelihood that devolved Government will succumb to 'neoliberal principles of privatisation, fiscal conservatism, and low social welfare' mirroring the situation in both the UK and the South of Ireland (p.115).

Nagle (2009) makes the case that the values of free market enterprise, urban regeneration, private-finance initiatives to bolster public services, and inward investment by global multinationals have become hegemonic in NI and that all major political parties subscribe to these. While the North does not have a low corporate tax rate, all the major political parties have called for it to be reduced from 21% to 12.5%[9], similar to the South. In addition, party political commitment to foreign direct investment remains strong and attempts at fostering a market friendly state are evident (*ibid*.). A trend towards more neoliberal thinking can be seen in the NI Executive's *Programme for Government*, published in 2003, which emphasised tackling sectarianism, social exclusion and segregation, to its later *Building a Better Future: Draft Programme for Government 2008-2011* which states that 'growing the economy is our top priority' (Nagle, 2009, p.178; Northern Ireland Executive, 2011). The latter programme makes it clear that 'economic growth precipitates the amelioration of a 'divided society', rather than the elimination of sectarianism and segregation as a prelude to prosperity' (Nagle, 2009, p.179). The most recent *Programme for Government* (2011–2015) describes its 'number one priority – a vibrant economy which can transform our society while dealing with the deprivation and poverty which has affected some of our communities for generations' (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011, p.12).

Thus it is arguable that the impact of neoliberalism in the North is less obvious than in the South of Ireland and other Western countries as the post-conflict context here has predominated, and the North did not experience an economic boom as occurred the South between 1995 and 2000. Prior to the global

[9] At the time of writing a Corporation Tax (Northern Ireland) Bill has been introduced at Westminster in order to allow Northern Ireland to set its own, lower, rate of corporation tax from April 2017.

recession of 2008, the North had lower levels of unemployment and, between 1998 and 2008, experienced low inflation and rising house prices. Despite this, Adshead and Tonge (2009) argue that the kind of growth seen in the South during the boom years could never have happened to the same extent in the North, due to its inability to vary its tax rates from UK levels and its 'continued dependence on hand-outs from the treasury, which tend to be used to allocate welfare priorities rather than stimulate economic growth' (p.191). It is suggested that domestic security concerns have outweighed ideology in the North (Crighton, 1998). The power of a socio-economic elite (comprising property developers and bankers) became stronger in the South whilst in the North the social reforms of the post-World War Two period and the eventual collapse of the unionist dominated state meant that economic power became more concentrated in the hands of the state (Kirby, 2012).

Therefore, it seems that the North does exhibit certain characteristics of neoliberal states, such as cuts in public spending, 'reforms' of the welfare state and attempts to lower corporation tax rates, albeit to varying degrees. The state, it appears, can and does accommodate itself to whatever level of intervention is required in order to serve the interests of capitalism and the markets. However, it is worth noting that if the state can intervene in economic matters, other actors can as well. O'Riáin (2004) suggests there is potential to influence the course that economic and other developments take, and that Governments are not powerless but *can* exert influence on how states position themselves in the international economic order. Whilst neoliberal policies may currently predominate it is important to remember that, although not a focus of this study, there are also other structural factors such as poverty, class and patriarchy which also shape the realities of present day NI, as well as influence the enactment of leadership, power and social change in local communities

Poverty and social exclusion continue to be characteristics of the NI socio-political context. A set of recent statistics serve to illustrate this (MacInnes *et al*., 2012):

- Between 2006/7 and 2009/10, 22% of people in Northern Ireland were living in poverty.
- Poverty for children, working-age adults and pensioners has risen since the middle of the last decade.
- The rise in pensioner poverty in Northern Ireland has coincided with a fall in England, Scotland and Wales.
- All the increase in poverty between 2006/07 and 2009/10 came in working or retired households. Half of the 120,000 children in poverty live in working households.
- On average, between 2009 and 2011, 34% of working-age adults in Northern Ireland were not in paid work; this includes people who are unemployed and people who are not actively seeking work due to a disability.
- In 2011, 38% of working-age women were not in paid work, compared with 28% of working-age men, although this gap has been closing [since 2009].
- Children on free school meals are much more likely not to attain expected levels of educational qualifications. In 2010, 69% of pupils on free school meals did not achieve five GCSEs at A*–C (including maths and English) compared with 36% of other pupils and this gap has not closed over time.
- School leavers receiving free school meals are twice as likely as other pupils to be unemployed or not in touch with education services. They are also more likely to go into employment or training, so if such options are limited, poorer children would be most affected.

Here we see that inequality persists, with 22% of people living in poverty, 34% of adults not in paid work and children from poorer backgrounds continuing to experience significant disadvantage; it is estimated that 25% of children leave school functionally illiterate and innumerate (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2015b). Equality gaps align to community divisions to some degree also. The deprivation indices show that Catholics experience considerably more socio-economic disadvantage than Protestants (Kent, 2015), with sixteen of the top twenty most disadvantaged wards having a majority Catholic population, while only six of the twenty least disadvantaged wards

have a Catholic majority (Nolan, 2013). The deprivation indices also show that 22% of Catholics live in households experiencing poverty, compared to 17% of Protestants. However, there has been a recent change in terms of education and youth unemployment as, for the first time ever, unemployment is now higher among young Protestant males aged 18-24 than their Catholic peers, with the former experiencing unemployment of 24% compared with 17% of the latter (Nolan, 2014). Coupled with this, young people from disadvantaged PUL areas are underperforming at school compared with their peers in other communities (Equality Commission for NI, 2015; Mills, 2014).

As discussed earlier, the focus of economic policy has continued to rely on the public service sector, with relatively little growth in the private sector (Adshead and Tonge, 2009) and the Northern state has been characterised as neoliberal in nature by a number of theorists (Crighton, 1998; Curtis, 2010; Hinds, 2011; Nagle, 2009). Also noted earlier, its policy initiatives have been described as highly interventionist, despite being developed within an ideological backdrop of less state involvement (Crighton, 1998). Therefore, whilst at least some state intervention continues to sit alongside them, is arguable that neoliberal polices are becoming more dominant. For example, two key elements of current British Government policy are spending cuts to reduce the budget deficit and welfare reforms to reduce the benefits bill (Morrissey, 2012). Writing in a local context, Murtagh and Shirlow (2012) claim that peace and stability 'have permitted NI's re-entry to global markets and circuits of capital with new governance structures being assembled to reconfigure 'post-conflict' economic space' (p.46). At the time of writing, there is a political impasse in the North in relation to the implementation of public spending cuts, more specifically welfare 'reform' measures – seen as part of a wider policy of restructuring welfare systems around market principles - which some local parties are refusing to implement (McDonald, 2015). It will be interesting to see the outcome of this and whether the British Government will effectively 'pay' for political stability as it has done in the past.

In summary then, it seems that neoliberalism in NI has developed in a hybrid form, 'partnered on the one hand by the over reliance of the North's economy on state subsidies, and on the other, by the dominance of ethnonational-based politics and economic redistribution' (Nagle, 2009, p.188). The use of the term 'subsidies' here is in itself interesting, connoting something more akin to charity than a redistribution of state funding gathered through taxation. British policy makers appear to repeatedly have chosen state action over neoliberal ideology in a range of areas including security, political reform and social reconstruction: 'they have followed a state-centred route to peace' (Crighton, 1998, p.78). All this begs the question of what impact a less interventionist and more neoliberal-friendly state is having, and will continue to have locally, on the role and activity of the community sector.

1.5.5 Neoliberalism and the CVS

Within a neoliberal ideology, the role of voluntary organisations is to provide for individuals and families who cannot meet their needs because they do not have sufficient resources or because their ability is limited for some personal or structural reason (Halfpenny and Reid, 2002). Only as a last resort should the state be called on to provide support for such people, when neither the private, informal or voluntary sectors can meet their needs (*ibid*.). It is in this context that, within the UK, Conservative Governments in particular have supported the promotion of voluntary activity. Also, part of the neoliberal ideology is that where state support is needed, it is not to be provided directly but purchased in the market, and voluntary organisations are encouraged to bid for contracts to deliver welfare and other services (Walsh *et al*., 1997).

The 'lean welfare state' associated with neoliberal policies takes on a particular characteristic in the North. Here, it has been argued, the increased funding to the non-governmental organisation (NGO) sector in the 1980s was partly a consequence of neoliberal policies that sub-contracted public services to private and other bodies and, as a result, NGOs became more firmly incorporated into the welfare state. Curtis (2010) suggests that far from being determined by 'a logic of global, universal neoliberalism' NGOs were greatly

shaped by local ethical constructs – in this instance by 'framing state subsidy as social justice' (p.201). The local 'culturally specific ethic and orientation to the state' meant that welfare benefits were regarded as a form of social justice and collective redistribution, as opposed to charity for individuals (*ibid.*, p.202). Her argument is a rebuttal to critiques of development NGOs as engines of depoliticisation and those that view NGOs as having been co-opted and absorbed into the state, or have unwittingly contributed to increased inequality and political tension. In her paper, "Profoundly Ungrateful": The Paradoxes of Thatcherism in NI, she focuses on community-based organisations (CBOs), as a subset of NGOs, which grew in number in Belfast, from approximately 300 in 1973 to over 5,000 in 2002, a growth she attributes to significantly increased state subsidy during the 1980s. By the end of 1986-87, state funding for the community and voluntary sector exceeded £279 million annually. This funding increased further under Thatcher-led Governments adhering to, what Curtis describes as, policies which were broadly neoliberal (*ibid*.). However, she suggests that CBOs were ultimately using state funds 'to pursue local aims and to oppose state policies, building their own political legitimacy' and that Thatcher's view of welfare as 'charitable reciprocity among individuals rather than redistribution or entitlement' did in effect not work in Belfast in the 1980s when 'privatising welfare provision did not create compliant, self-regulating NGOs' (*ibid.*, p.216). Curtis' argument points to the complexity in thinking about the impact of any ideology – the way in which it is intended to operate may not be the way it translates at implementation stage. She argues that many NGOs are creative and skilled in being tactical and will often subvert state attempts to control them. Curtis highlights a number of 'paradoxes' in the struggle between CBOs and the Thatcher regime, for example, neoliberalism did not individuate – it created new coalitions, and private charity did not replace public expenditure - instead West Belfast's residents took advantage of, or 'exploited', state funding (*ibid*.). Funding for NGOs did not produce passive service providers; rather, new alliances and a new space for political opposition were cultivated (*ibid.*). Such paradoxical consequences are an example of Harvey's contention that neoliberalism is not 'entirely consistent' (Harvey, 2007, p.21), a topic discussed

further in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector.*

More recently, the contract culture appears to be having a significant impact on the CVS in the North[10] with voluntary organisations forced to bid competitively against each other for funding. Benson (2015) describes the mechanics of procurement systems as imposing 'heavy burdens' on CVS organisations both in terms of preparing bids and, if successful, having to 'cope with onerous contract and performance management regimes' (p.76). Vacchelli (2015) goes on to identify two major funding and policy trends that have challenged the CVS as the move from needs-led grants to service commissioning, and the increasing focus on 'payment by results' (p.87). Alongside this, there is a dominant Government narrative of 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' [11] and a policy framework which is promoting greater collaboration, sometimes even insisting on it by making it a requirement of funding, between organisations in the wider community and voluntary sector, a contradiction returned to later.

Acheson (2013) references Laforest's (2013) work in which evidence from states committed to debt reduction through reducing public expenditure, and relying on monetary policy to foster economic growth, shows 'a close association with a significant weakening of the ability of the third sector to express its values base publicly and act for collective interests' (Acheson, p.6). Recent research evidence from England suggests that current pressures are making it more difficult for voluntary agencies to 'be innovative, [and] act collaboratively rather than in competition and avoid mission drift' (*ibid.*, p.7). Therefore, it seems that the kinds of polices associated with neoliberalism are

[10] According to the most recent figures available (for 2009) two thirds of government funding to the CVS comprised 'earned income' for provision of goods and services (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012).

[11] For example, the 2012 *Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP) Joint Policy Statement* describes voluntary and community sector organisations across NI as needing to 'function effectively to deliver government objectives' and the aims of the RISP programme supporting CVS organisations 'to operate effectively and efficiently' (Department for Social Development, 2011(a), para 3.1, 3.2). Also, in the UK in 2009, the Cabinet Office introduced a Modernisation Fund (£16.5 million) to encourage collaboration and mergers and to ensure that viable voluntary and community organisations would be 'more resilient and efficient' (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012, p.5).

influencing the context in ways that make it increasingly difficult for voluntary and community groups to operate on the issues they want to address and in ways that are congruent with their values. In order to survive they may have to engage in activities and/or deliver services which are not part of their social change purpose, or indeed change their agendas.

The impact of austerity measures on the community sector in the North has meant a further reduction in available funding for the work it undertakes[12], and signs for the future do not augur well. Morrissey (2012) describes NI as 'highly vulnerable to public spending cuts and benefit reforms whose effects will be felt for years to come – poverty, worklessness, homelessness and debt' (p.4). Also, the May 2015 general election in the UK saw the British Conservative Party elected to government, promising ongoing austerity measures including further cuts in public spending[13] (Campbell, 2015).

Robson (2001) has described the transformation of the community-based organisation generally from one 'moved by local, neighbourhood considerations and accountable to local people, to one influenced by the interests of the state and accountable to its stringent financial controls' (p.242). The current context as outlined here would seem to support this view. Whilst Robson's views may be seen as overly pessimistic, Acheson (2013), writing more recently, argues that the evidence *does* suggest that the community and voluntary sector in the North is 'going down a familiar path in cost-cutting neoliberal welfare systems' and struggling to maintain its independence, echoing concerns about a loss of potency within the sector (p.13).

To summarise then, the North of Ireland is in a post-conflict transformational

[12] According to NICVA, the areas of CVS work most impacted by current and ongoing (in 2015) public spending cuts have been those focusing on children and young people and work in the local community (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2015a). By August 2015, £8 million worth of funding cuts, affecting 115 organisations, have been identified (*ibid*.). The government departments and funds most reported on are the Early Years Fund, Neighbourhood Renewal, HSC Trusts, DHSSPS Core Funding, the Department of Education and the European Social Fund. It is anticipated that 450 jobs will be lost (*ibid*.).

[13] Including, for example, a further 7% cut on the previous reduction of £1 billion between 2010 and 2015, and £12 billion in cuts to the welfare budget by 2018.

space, having come through a sustained period of almost 30 years of violence and political unrest. This context is significant as it has shaped the emergence of the community sector, as well as state and social policy responses to it. The extent to which peace is embedded is contested as a number of significant issues of division and conflict continue, with many of these manifesting 'on the ground' in the most disadvantaged communities which continue to suffer disproportionately as a result. Whilst the state has acted in highly interventionist ways at different times, the advance of neoliberal policies is evident and recent political pronouncements promise more. On a more optimistic note, the inherent contradictions of an interventionist state working in a wider framework of neoliberal policies may allow spaces for such contradictions to be exploited.

1.6 The Community Sector in NI Today

To chart the progress of, and resistance to, neoliberal policies at a local level, it is important to identify the size and influence of the community sector. Unfortunately, no map or profile is available and there is no central register[14] of groups engaged in community development. Instead, information and statistics are collected relating to the wider CVS, and these are generally not disaggregated. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the actual size of the community sector. Indeed, making a distinction between the voluntary and community sectors is in itself contentious – some activists argue that it is one sector, others that it is two. Arguments in favour of conceptualising a distinct and separate community sector focus on its grass roots community development work undertaken on a geographical and/or thematic basis. The broader CVS is considered to include a much wider range of activities, from charitable and voluntary perspectives and which may or may not include a community development focus or approach. It also tends to be associated with larger, more 'professionalised' and formally organised non-profit organisations (Roginsky and Shortall, 2009). Whilst, as noted earlier, the focus of this study is

[14] The recently established Charity Commission for NI has begun a registration process for charities, though it remains too early to say whether and how it will enable quantification and categorisation of community development groups.

on the community sector, it is necessary to engage in discussion on the wider CVS, of which it can be seen as a subsector. In this thesis the term community sector is used to include those groups and organisations that engage primarily in community development work. This topic is returned to later when the sampling strategy for this research is outlined (see page 148).

In order to estimate the size and scale of the community sector in the North, the most recent profile and information on funding sources of the CVS, as described by NICVA[15] in its *State of the Sector VI* (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012), is used.

[15] NICVA is a membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in NI.

Table 1. Overview of the CVS in NI in 2011 (Source: Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012)

	2011
Number of Voluntary and Community Organisations	**4,836**
Income (£ million)	
Income from general public	£220
Income from Government	£392.1
Income from Europe	£70.1
Income from Lottery	£31.1
Income from Trusts	£28.5
Total income	**£741.9**
Earned income (from the sale of goods and the delivery of services)	**£430.3**
Total expenditure (£ million)	**£719.6**
Total assets	**£863.8**
Giving	
Average monthly donation	£25.35
Proportion giving to charity	83%
Workforce	
Total paid workforce	27,773
Employment status	
Full time	59.5%
Part time	40.5%
Gender	
Male	22%
Female	78%

As Table 1 indicates, in 2011, there were approximately 4,836 voluntary and community sector organisations in NI, with income from all main sources in 2009-2010 estimated at £741.9 million. The main source of funding income came from central Government (34.2%), followed by the general public through charitable giving (29.7%), and a range of non-departmental public bodies and

statutory agencies (17.4%)[16]. It is estimated that 58% of the sector's income came from the sale of goods and the delivery of services.

The major 'sub-sectors' within the overall voluntary and community sector in NI were community development (15%), children and families (14%), health and wellbeing (8%) and education and training (7%). It is estimated that there were 15,901 volunteers in the community development sub sector, equating to six volunteers to every paid staff member in that sub sector. The wider CVS employed around 27,773 individuals (4% of the total NI workforce) with women accounting for 78% of employees. This is slightly higher than the female composition in the public sector where 65% of employees are women, however, it is significantly higher than the private sector where less than half of employees are women (45%). Therefore, while the predominance of females in the CVS workforce continues to be a feature, a change can be seen with regard to the number of chief executives that are female. A recent Salary Survey reported that females now account for 48% of these positions, a change from the previous figures of approximately 33% (*ibid*.).

Apart from these statistics – already five years old – there is a paucity of current data on the CVS. The above figures, while useful, do not give a reliable sense of the size of the community element of the sector. For example, whilst 15% of organisations said their work could be 'best described' as within the sub-sector of 'community development' this cannot be taken to mean that organisations which instead checked another descriptor (say 'children and families') are not locally based community groups. Acheson *et al.* (2005) describe what they term the main voluntary sector 'industries' in the North as education and training, and community development, giving a figure of 10.6% of CVS organisations as involved in community development – based on 2002 figures (p.187). Within Belfast, the City Council estimates that there are more than 1,200 community

[16] Other sources of funding for the sector over the last 20 years have included EU PEACE funding programmes which supported work to address social exclusion, Big Lottery, Children in Need, CFNI, International Fund for Ireland, Comic Relief, Making Belfast Work (McCready, 2001; Never, 2010). The most recent PEACE III Programme finished in 2014.

and voluntary sector organisations and that 'a high proportion have a community based structure or community development purpose across the city' (Belfast City Council, 2012, p.29). Whilst quantitative data, as described above, is available, it is not possible to match the numbers of community development organisational types with the nature of their activity. Therefore, there is, in effect, no way of telling which of the models or conceptions of community development are practised, where or by whom.

In relation to the resourcing of the sector, the state is the primary provider of funding for the CVS. The most recent figures, as per NIVCA's 2011 overview, put income from Government at £392.1 million, over half the sector's total income. How much of this is 'earned' income (as opposed to grant-aid) is not known but, according to NICVA, two-thirds of Government's funding of the voluntary and community sector in 2009 was 'earned income' from Government purchasing goods and services. This terminology is significant as it indicates what Benson (2015) describes as an underlying shift in assumptions 'from one that sees state funding as a way of supporting VSG's [voluntary sector groups] own plans and priorities, to one that see these groups as a means of delivering state plans and priorities… [and] in the process core funding has all but disappeared' (p.75). The amount and nature of Government funding, coupled with the wider economic context of austerity and public spending cuts, arguably makes the CVS dependent on the state and gives it a disproportionate influence on what the sector can do and how it does it.

Other more recent sources of funding for the sector have included those that target peace building initiatives. Table 2 presents information on estimated amounts of funding for peace building work. However, it is important to note that this table includes grant aid made available to private and statutory as well as voluntary sectors. The proportion of this that found its way to the CVS is not known.

Table 2. Funding Sources for Peace Building Activities in NI (Source: Nolan, 2012, p.172)

Programme	Total (£ million)	Annual average (£ million)	Duration
EU PEACE Programmes	£1455.5	£76.6	1995-2013
International Fund for Ireland	£628	£27.3	1987-2010
Central Community Relations Unit/Community Relations Unit/Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	£134	£5.6	1987-2011
Dept. of Education NI	£66	£2.9	1987-2010
NIO/OFMDFM Victims	£70	£5	1998-2011
Irish Government	£20	£1	1987-2010
Atlantic Philanthropies	£90	£4.5	1990-2010
TOTAL	**£2463.5**	**£94.75**	1987-2013

As can be seen in Table 2, the EU has been a significant funder and at least some of this funding has been to the CVS. A new PEACE IV Programme 2014-2020[17] with a budget of approximately €270 million, announced in January 2016, will make resources available to local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations and public bodies in 2017. However, in the meantime, many of the funding sources are shrinking and some funders are withdrawing. Atlantic Philanthropies, for example, is a limited life foundation that will complete its grantmaking in 2016. Finding resources for activities and activism that focus more broadly on change within this scenario is therefore likely to continue to be challenging.

One particular funding programme is worth noting, as it focuses on promoting collaboration from a non-governmental source. The Building Change Trust was established in NI in 2008 by the Big Lottery Fund[18], with a grant of £10 million

[17] See announcement on Special European Programmes Body Website: http://www.seupb.eu/2014-2020Programmes/PEACEIV_Programme/PEACEIV_Overview.aspx [last accessed, 2 March 2016]

[18] The Big Lottery Fund is responsible for distributing 40 per cent of all funds raised for good causes by the UK National Lottery, which was approximately £670 million in 2014. 95.6 per cent of its awards made in 2014/15 went to the voluntary and community sector.

to invest in community capacity building and the promotion of the voluntary and community sector in NI. One of its six core areas of work over the 10 year period is collaboration and it has funded a project, *CollaborationNI,* to provide practical support and resources across the whole spectrum of collaborative working to voluntary and community sector organisations. Clearly, collaboration is seen as worthy of significant resourcing even at a time of austerity and public sector cut backs. The *CollaborationNI* programme is in its early stages and therefore it is too soon to draw lessons or conclusions from it. However, it is interesting to note that it states it will only support what it terms 'collaboration of the willing', a theme returned to later.

The absence of accurate and up-to-date data on the CVS is a significant drawback when undertaking study in the area. Despite its limitations, the study will draw on NICVA's data and the relevant literature to develop a working definition of the 'community sector'. This is discussed in more detail in *Chapter Four: Researching Leadership for Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities – Issues of Methodology, Methods and Research Process.*

1.7 Concluding Comments

This chapter introduced the themes and specific questions the research is concerned with, namely the kind of leadership within the community sector in Belfast that is required to promote progressive social change in disadvantaged communities. The context, described here, sets the scene for this study in important ways. The wider socio-political context is one of increasing neoliberalism, albeit mitigated to some extent by the particularities of the post-conflict nature of society in the North. The British Government has, and for now seems willing to continue, at least to some extent, to pay the cost of maintaining political stability, even if such intervention runs somewhat counter to wider neoliberal policies in the UK. Nonetheless, the language and austerity policies associated with neoliberalism are becoming increasingly evident in NI (Tomlinson, 2016) whilst disadvantaged communities in Belfast continue to be characterised by poverty and inequality. This is important for this study as these are the communities within which community development is enacted.

The community sector is part of a wider CVS that is in a state of flux, with significant changes in how it is resourced and organised, and many of these changes are the result of neoliberal Government policies and outside of the sector's control. An assault on the mission and ethos of the sector can be seen, as evidenced by analysis of developments which indicate that it is increasingly being seen by the state as the cheap option in terms of providing services locally. As part of this, an ever more competitive culture is being encouraged within a sector that traditionally places solidarity and addressing inequalities at the core of its work. This context, and the inherent complexity and tensions within it, will have a bearing on the role and practice of leadership in community development. It raises a number of important questions for this study. How can a sector that seeks social change bring this about when its focus is drawn towards providing local services as cost effectively as possible? Where is the possibility of fostering collaboration between local organisations when they are obliged to compete with each other to win contracts to deliver services? The following chapter addresses in more depth three core themes that are at the centre of this study: community development; collaboration; and leadership.

Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us

2.1 Introduction

This Chapter draws on a range of different sources including academic and professional journal articles, books and web-based resources and presents a critical appraisal of community development, collaboration and leadership theory and practice. As such, the review provides a context for the research and helps articulate a rationale for why this is an area worth investigating. It is important to locate the research within existing bodies of knowledge, and to show how it builds on and adds to an understandings of leadership and collaboration in the area of community development. In this way it also contributes to the ongoing refinement of the topic. The chapter starts with a review of community development theory and attempts to use this to help explicate the idea of a *community sector.* The implications for the practice of community development in conflict and post-conflict contexts is considered, especially important in the NI environment discussed in Chapter One. This is followed by an examination of the literature on collaboration that offers insight in a community development context. The multiple meanings of collaboration, as well as claims and cautions offered in the literature, are discussed. The third and final section of the chapter explores the theory and practice of leadership, again attempting to maintain a focus on that which offers insight in a community development context. While there is a much wider literature on leadership, collaboration and leadership *for* collaboration that pertains to a range of other sectors, the review is confined to those aspects that relate to the current research question and the community development context it is concerned with.

2.2 Community Development

This section examines the theorisation of community development and draws on this to attempt to delineate the community sector, at least for the purposes of this study. Attention is also given to issues raised for the theory and practice of community development, including those pertaining to conflict and post-conflict contexts. It begins with an exploration of the various definitions of both the community and voluntary sector and of community development. An examination of different ways of categorising community development organisations is undertaken before issues relating to community development in conflict and post-conflict contexts are discussed.

2.2.1 What is Community Development?

First, it is necessary to outline descriptions and definitions of the CVS in general, and also to provide a working definition of the community sector 'element' or 'sub-sector' of it, in particular. The dearth of literature on the subject makes this a necessarily limited exercise but international definitions are drawn on in order to help elucidate the topic. Questions relating to the nature of community development, and the role of community groups/the community sector element of the wider CVS are considered and a number of definitions of community development are offered.

Pyles (2014) argues that the very task of 'trying to force a definition [of community organising, a term broadly analogous with community development] and attempting to include some activities and exclude others [is] difficult and ultimately, a false construction' (p.8). Nonetheless, she suggests some parameters that are useful and offers the following definition of community as:

> a group of people with a common affiliation, identity or grievance that may be geographically or non-geographically based (*ibid*., p.9).

Popple (1995) argues that 'community' here exists 'not only in a geographical and material sense but also reflects people's thinking and feeling as to where they believe a community exists' (p.4). Similarly, Bhattacharyya (2004) argues

against the use of place as a proxy for community and says that an understanding of community that 'transcends all connections with place' (for example, the Black community or the Jewish community) is required (p.11). She maintains that the concept of solidarity, comprising shared identity and norms, unites these two different understandings of community and thus defines community development as:

> the pursuit of solidarity and agency by adhering to the principles of self-help, felt needs and participation (*ibid.*, p.5).

This definition with its focus on both community as place and as shared interests is useful, as is her attention to the concept of agency. She argues that community development, in order to promote agency:

> aims at generating critical consciousness, addressing problems that the affected people "own" and define, and take active measures to solve (*ibid*., p.13).

She suggests that, by implication, weak solidarity and low levels of social capital 'diminish the potential for collective action' and that neighbourhood organising is necessary but, alone, is insufficient (*ibid*., p.17). Influencing change at other levels such as the region, state and internationally on issues such as housing, education and employment is also required (*ibid*.). By contrast, Robson's (2001) idea of 'community' is one which 'masks a deeply conservative ideology in which [such] developments have exposed to full view many coercive tendencies within government' – or, put another way "community" is in, whilst "class" is out' (p.222). However, this perspective appears to lack appreciation of the multiple meanings different actors can bring to the concept of community.

Pyles (2014), drawing on the work of Alinsky (1971) and others, suggests four elements of community organising that are helpful in thinking about community development, whist noting that that not all of these elements will necessarily be emphasised: 'self-organization, confronting power, building community, and transforming oppression' (p.10). A somewhat simplistic, though none the less useful, differentiator is to consider voluntary

organisations as being more focused on delivery of services whilst community organisations are more concerned with, as Pyles describes it, 'helping people help themselves' (*ibid.*, p.10), notwithstanding the blurred distinctions in practice. Of course, voluntary organisation delivering services can conceivably do so in ways 'with a strong social change or activist orientation' and, as Pyles notes, often people in local communities 'do not have the luxury to ignore services and just focus on organising' (*ibid*., p.11).

A more local definition of community development is offered by Belfast City Council in its recently published *Community Development Strategy 2012 - 2015* which defines community development as enabling people to come together to:

> influence or take decisions about issues that matter to them and that affect their lives; define needs, issues and solutions for their community; and take action to help themselves and make a difference. It is a long-term, value-based process which targets positive social change (Belfast City Council, 2013, p.7).

Although the language may be slightly different this definition does not differ hugely from one offered in the early 1980s by Deane (1981) - '[people wanted] to take control over the decision-making in their own lives and to reject centralised control' (p.9). The reference in this to power, through the use of the term 'centralised control', suggests a more critical perspective in the earlier definition. Pyles (2014), writing in the US context, describes community organising as that which 'works towards the liberation of oppressed and marginalized individuals and the transformation of social systems that perpetuate the oppression' (p.20). She further suggests that organising for social change is a process with activities that have fairly broad goals:

> [it encompasses] both an empowerment element and a social change element: it leaves open the possibility that the goal may be to pass a piece of legislation and get new programming or funding, or it could be developing leadership, creating a new way of living, a new community, such as a community-based, cooperative business venture that is empowering to previously marginalized populations (*ibid*., p.17).

Therefore, whilst the aim is social change, this can be pursued through an extensive range of activities. Taking an equally wide perspective, Lister (1998) suggests that community development can be understood as an expression of citizenship in action – its importance lies 'not only in what it achieves in terms of practical outcomes for disadvantaged communities but also in the process of involving the members of those communities in working for change and the impact this involvement can then have on those individuals' capacity to act as citizens' (p.229). Both these definitions adopt a critical, though nonetheless, pragmatic perspective. Powell and Geoghegan (2004) reference Popple's (1995) work in attempting to define community development. They focus in particular on the distinction between a democratic pluralist model, which is broadly opposed to ideological politics, seeing these as too concerned with political abstractions, and emancipatory political traditions which seek the 'fundamental transformation of the social, political and social order, based upon the principles of equality, solidarity, social justice and human rights' (Powell and Geoghegan, 2004, p.19). This is a useful definition, especially the distinction between ideological and other politics, and has resonance in a Northern context where many disadvantaged communities have strong and active links with parties which were once on the margins of electoral politics and are now in Government.

Schwabenland's (2012) description of voluntarism captures the plurality of views about its role and potential impact:

> The phenomenon of people coming together voluntarily to create institutional arrangements to alleviate some social ill is immensely potent. This phenomenon is variously seen as the guarantor of democratic society, the means to include the excluded by increasing participation from marginalised groups, the way to restore or preserve our sense of communality with others, the best hope for the regeneration of deprived and despairing neighbourhoods and the enemy of corrupt and self serving government (p.6).

All these definitions are sufficiently broad to leave room for a variety of

interpretations and, as such, are not hugely helpful in delineating the boundaries of community development for the purposes of research. Lister's (1998) description is useful in that it marries the immediate, pragmatic goals of community activism with broader, less tangible outcomes relating to citizenship and change. Similarly, Pyles (2014) introduces an explicit reference to empowerment and tags it pragmatically to everyday community development activities. When studying whether and how community development promotes progressive social change within disadvantaged communities in Belfast, these different lenses guide us to understand 'community' as constituting both place and shared interests, and the possibility of community development and social change being pursued through a broad range of activities. As such, they will help illuminate the linkages between theory and practice of community development on the ground.

Community Development in Practice

How do definitions of community development play out in practice? As noted in the introductory chapter, concerns have been expressed over the last 30 years about the co-option, as some would see it, of the community sector by the state. Writing about community development in the 1970s, Deane (1981) describes a dialectic between community development as, on the one hand, a means of relatively powerless people and communities taking control of their own lives and, on the other, the State and other institutions seeking to control communities. Or as Frazer (1981) puts it, community work had become 'primarily a means of controlling local protest and not a means of promoting radical social change' (p.20). This tension has continued in the intervening years and central questions about the potential of community development remain contested among practitioners and academics alike: is community development a locally owned response to disadvantage and oppression or a strategy by the state to maintain control over local communities?

Ife (2013) provides a useful framework of perspectives on social justice as a foundation for a model of community development and how these result in different approaches in practice (Table 3).

Table 3. Accounts of Social Issues (Source: Ife, 2013, p.59)

Perspective	Source of 'blame'	Source of problem	Solution
Individual	Blame the victim	Individual pathology, psychological, biological, moral or character defect.	Therapy, medical treatment, behaviour modification, moral exhortation, control.
Institutional reformist	Blame the rescuer	The institutions established to deal with the problem: courts, schools, welfare departments etc.	Reorganise institutions, more resources, more services, better training etc.
Structural	Blame the system	Structural disadvantage or oppression: class, race, gender, income distribution, power etc.	Structural change, changing basis of oppression, liberation movements, revolution.
Post structural	Blame the discourse	Modernity, language, formation and accumulation of knowledge, shared understandings.	Analysis and understanding of discourse, access to understandings, challenging the 'rules' etc.

Ife (*ibid*.) contends that community development, as traditionally practised, has been largely concerned with the *institutional reformist* and *structural* perspectives, although in a Belfast context some community development practitioners can be seen operating at least sometimes from an *individual* perspective. Working from a social justice paradigm, he goes on to suggest that while the postmodern perspective has influenced the thinking of community development workers since the 1990s with its focus on power and disadvantage, it has been criticised for having 'relatively little to say about what one should actually do about it' (*ibid*., p.62). Nonetheless, he argues for its importance in allowing 'space and legitimacy for alternative voices to be heard and validated, and for alternative discourses to emerge as part of a development process' (*ibid*.). He also suggests that a post structural perspective is useful in conjunction with a structural understanding of class, race and

gender and it helps us 'understand how those oppressions are defined and reinforced through changing discourses of power' (*ibid*., p.62). This conjoining of different perspectives is useful as it draws on an understanding of the multiple dimensions of disadvantage as well as narrative construction, both of which are within the critical paradigm which underpins this study, an issue returned to in *Chapter Four*.

Co-option of the sector?

Concerns regarding the sector's co-option by the state are ones which are frequently articulated in any discussion of the role of the CVS, in Ireland and further afield (Acheson, 2013; Birrell and Williamson, 2001; Lovett *et al*., 1994; Robson, 2001; Rooney, 2002). Writing in a UK context, Milbourne (2013), identifies a number of specific challenges for community organisations involved in collaboration and partnership work, including: representing community voices and maintaining alternative approaches 'which may be perceived as counter-hegemonic'; and the suppression of 'cultural alternatives in favour of dominant or more prevalent models of operation, a process of institutional incorporation masquerading as network governance' (p.125). She questions the ongoing role of the VCS, and particularly its ability to remain autonomous and distinctive and 'retain social and philanthropic values against diverse pressures for change' (*ibid*., p.24). Similarly, Ledwith (2011) argues that community development has become distracted from its commitment to social justice by 'allowing its radical agenda to be diluted by more reactionary theories that lead to ameliorative rather than transformative approaches' to practice (p.32). Writing in a local context, Acheson *et al*. (2004) suggest that voluntary action in NI 'is now largely incorporated as part of the system of public administration, operating in a sphere whose parameters are determined by state patronage' (p.223). This, they argue, is in part due to Government remaining 'the main purchasers of voluntary sector services' and the sector functioning 'as an extension of state welfare either by providing similar services to hard-to-reach sections of the population or, perhaps more typically, providing different but complementary services' (*ibid*., p.221). Alongside this, the rhetoric of

involvement is evident in many Government polices[19]. Some theorists put it even more strongly, describing community interventions as being driven by the needs of the state and that too often they compromise on issues of importance – Robson (2001), as noted earlier, suggests that the discourse surrounding the very concept of 'community' acts as a 'denial of class as a motor of political and social transformation' (p.221). This issue of co-option is a critical one and it will be important to see whether and how it manifests in the community sector in Belfast.

Whilst relatively little local research has been carried out in this area, Acheson (2010) notes the shift in emphasis from CVS organisations working in partnership with the state, to public procurement whereby CVS organisations are increasingly being contracted to deliver services for state institutions, in effect, to earn their funding (my term). He also suggests that public policy has resulted in the voluntary sector's (of which the community sector is a part) role changing, from that of being a key player in the peace process to being a provider of modernised public services, and argues that there is little interest in resourcing a broader civic role for the sector (*ibid*.). Current state funding of the sector(s), which is based increasingly on procurement of services, would certainly seem to support this hypothesis but the impact at grass roots community level remains to be understood more clearly. The tensions within the sector are framed, somewhat starkly, by Morrissey (2012) in his assertion that 'when the global economy is beyond reach and Government policy is part of the problem, community organisations are caught somewhere between a subordinating competition for diminishing funds and repetitive, but powerless, protest' (p.4). The current research explores these tensions and attempt to identify where space for protest may lie and what forms it may take.

[19] For example, the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) Departmental Business Plan 2011 – 2015 describes one of its priorities as '[improving] the design, delivery and evaluation of health and social care services through involvement of individuals, communities and the community, voluntary and independent sector' (Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2014, p.2).

Some theorists do not have a positive association with the idea of community activism, or community development, as it has increasingly come to be called and have drawn attention to it as a political response to colonial needs in African countries after World War Two, whereby programmes of development based on forms of 'community' education were developed (Frazer, 1981; McVeigh, 2002; Robson, 2001). These programmes were, it is argued, more to do with securing political stability than with empowering local communities, and some writers question whether it is ever possible to bring about real change through a process of community development (Robson, 2001). McVeigh (2002) argues that the notion of community development has been distorted 'to the point where it has been excised of the radical and transformative qualities it once possessed' and, in critiquing the 'hegemony of the community relations paradigm', suggests that what is needed instead is 'equality and justice, not 'relations' or 'development' (p.57). These views challenge assumptions about the positive role and benign nature of community development.

Community development, then, it appears can take very different forms and play entirely different roles. It has the potential to be a catalyst and support for radical, ground-up transformative action; or, it can in effect act as a quasi state service provider and controller of specific populations. These very different views on the role and function of the CVS in general and community development in particular are to be found within the community sector and among community practitioners in the North, and lead to a central question: how great is the gap between pragmatism and radicalism – or between community development's transformative potential and its transactional bind? This research aims to investigate the experience of community development in Belfast, and whether and how it promotes progressive social change within disadvantaged communities. In particular, the research aims to explore whether views on leadership are influenced by participants' broader perspectives about the nature of community development and whether these fall along transformational or transactional lines.

2.2.2 Delineating the Community Sector

The work of the community sector can be broadly described as community development – or community activism as it was more commonly called in the 1970s and 1980s. This section explores how the community development sector is understood and defined, and considers ongoing debates in relation to these.

What constitutes a voluntary organisation? Salamon *et al.* (1999) suggest five common or shared features of such organisations, as follows: organisation (they have an organisational presence and structure); private (they are institutionally separate from the state); non-profit distributing (they don't return profits to owners or managers); self-governing (they control their own affairs); and voluntary (membership in them is not legally required and they attract some level of voluntary contribution, be it time or money). This is a somewhat instrumentalist definition and tells us little about what voluntary organisations are concerned about or do. Let us turn now to the literature that focuses on the motivation and purposes of voluntary and community organisations.

Some theorists describe the space between the state and the market as a 'third sector of private associations that are relatively autonomous from both state and economy' (Young, 2000a, p.158). Young describes these as 'voluntary, in the sense that they are neither mandated nor run by state institutions, but spring from the everyday lives and activities of communities of interest' and operate on a not-for-profit basis (*ibid*.). Powell (2007) discusses this space between the state and the market in the context of civil society, which he subdivides into private and public spheres, with private associations categorised by exclusivity and civic association taking place in the public sphere, being broadly inclusive and oriented towards democratic participation. In line with these descriptions, the community groups that are the subject of the current research would fall within the rubric of civic associations.

Marshall (1996) suggests that, rather than talk of a voluntary sector in the singular, it is more helpful to think of the multiplicity of voluntary sectors which

he describes as 'evolutionary social phenomena that develop (and change their nature) in interaction with each other' (p.54). He proposes a fourfold categorisation of the voluntary sector comprising: a religious sector; a philanthropic sector; a community sector; and an informal sector (an amalgam of several sub-sectors) (*ibid*.). His description of the community sector is useful as it focuses on the end-point of the sector, arguing that its aim is to:

> achieve influence on the other sectors – to gain economic power through combination in order that members will be better placed to operate in the private sector (through co-operatives, for example), to generate credibility for their cause and stake a claim as a group deserving of public help (which may recruit philanthropic support), or to influence government to change or create legislation in their favour (*ibid*., p.54).

This definition combines a pragmatic, or transactional, focus along with a more transformational one which seeks influence and change at policy levels. It parallels those definitions of community development, described earlier, which highlight the range and variety of activities which can co-exist and together constitute CD.

As outlined earlier, there is often a distinction, made by at least some practitioners, between the community and voluntary sector(s). There is little to be found in the literature in relation to this distinction, at least as articulated in this manner. Roginsky and Shortall (2009) suggest that the term voluntary sector includes, or sits alongside, the community sector and note that 'in both cases it usually means service delivery' (p.480). They reference Taylor's (2004) work on this, in particular his assertion that the distinction between the voluntary and community sector in the UK has been promoted by a Community Sector Coalition, 'set up to ensure that the interests of smaller, more associational organisations are not crowded out by those of larger, more professionalised and formally organized 'non-profit organisations'' (Taylor, pp.124-125).

Mirroring this, Donoghue (1998), writing in a Southern Irish context, suggests that many community organisations make a distinction between themselves and the voluntary sector, which they tend to associate with larger non-profit bodies that employ paid personnel. In terms of the size of the community sector (my term), she points out that community organisations in the South are the largest single group to have been granted charitable exemption in recent years (*ibid*.). The Revenue Commissioners, who make this determination, include a wide range in this grouping, describing community organisations as organisations of 'benefit to the community' including area-based partnership companies, local enterprise groups and community centres as well as social and welfare services including citizen information services, women's shelters and rape crisis shelters, relief agencies and environmental groups (*ibid*.). This range is too wide to be of use on its own, but her further description, offered when she states that the more recent manifestation of community activism 'has occurred around the principles of a rights culture, viz. the right to consultation and direct democratic participation' (*ibid*., p.11), helps narrow the focus again. Arguably, this also holds true for community sector organisations in the North, where common discourses primarily centre on rights, equality and inclusion. This is in large part related to the origins and evolution of many community groups being in the civil rights era in the late 1960s and 1970s, and in direct response to struggles for rights and equality, struggles which have continued.

Also useful is Donoghue's (2003) description of the organisational field of community development as specifically concerned with the expression of self and group identity, whether that identity is based on a geographic or social locale. According to her, community development organisations are 'formed on the four principles of empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights', and although they are involved in service provision they are 'more strongly associated with advocacy and campaigning' (*ibid*., p.5). The community development organisational field also includes communities of interest, formed to give expression to and fight for the rights of people such as, for example, people with disabilities, lesbians, gay men, lone parents and Travellers (*ibid*.).

This rights-focused framing aligns with the original and ongoing concerns of many groups in the North, as noted earlier.

Despite challenges associated with studying the community development sector in the North, given its 'diverse and unstructured' nature (Robson, 2001, p.232), Acheson *et al.* (2004) go some way towards addressing this when they describe a four way split in the structure of the voluntary and community sector in the North and suggest the following typology presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Typology of Voluntary Associations in NI (Source: Acheson *et al.*, 2004, p.222)

Organisation Type	Orientation	Relationship with the State
Service delivery	Meeting needs of individuals in clearly defined categories of people.	Client/sub-contractor. State defines both needs and methods of intervention.
Community associations	Servicing needs of individuals at local level and provision of facilities.	Supplicant of state. Outside of the state but wanting to become more a part of it.
Self-help associations	Inward-looking and supportive of group membership	Outside of the state, but making few demands on the state.
Networks	Member-orientated and often policy focused.	Ambiguous. Critical, but reliant on state sponsorship.

According to the typology, there are four organisational types, each having a different orientation and relationship with the state, ranging from being closely connected to it, to being separate and critical of it. However, it is noted that these categories are a considerable simplification, are not mutually exclusive, and categorisation does not cover all the potential functions of voluntary associations (*ibid*.).

In summary then, the concept of a voluntary and community sector – or sectors – has unclear boundaries and comprises huge diversity making it difficult to define. Notwithstanding these limitations, some classification or typology is

required for the current research to provide a frame of reference and categorise which community groups/organisations constitute the research 'site'. Marshall's (1996) point about the multiplicity of the voluntary sector serves to underscore the need to delineate which elements of it are the focus of this research. The current study therefore draws on two of Acheson *et al.*'s (2004) organisational categorisations described above, namely 'community associations' and 'networks' and on Donoghue's (2003) focus on what community development is essentially concerned with, that is, empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights with a strong emphasis on advocacy and campaigning. Thus, what is defined as 'the community sector' in Belfast, for the purposes of this study, comprises community-based, neighbourhood groups, along with the 'next level up' networks, described by Acheson *et al.* (2004) as member-orientated and often policy focused and concerned with transformational rather than purely transactional work and, as such, focused on issues such as empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights. This is discussed further in *Chapter Four,* along with a proposed typology of the community sector in the North and the types of community sector organisations included in the current research sample.

2.2.3 Community Development in Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts

As discussed in *Chapter One: Introduction to Leadership for Collaboration within the Community Sector,* community and voluntary organisations played a role in filling the vacuum caused by the absence of a local parliament from the early 1970s, by attempting to provide representation for local communities. These 'new forms of participation in policy and provision' provided by community organisations (Birrell and Williamson, 2001, p.206) also served the interests of the state. Acheson (2010) argues that this role lead to the CVS being seen as a source of civic stability and, in effect, gave it a significant source of legitimacy at the time that the Good Friday agreement was being negotiated, as formalised in the *Strategy for Support for the Voluntary Sector and Community Development* (Department of Health and Social Services, 1993). This strategy clearly acknowledged the CVS's role and intrinsic value in the emerging post-conflict context, and recognised community development as important in building a

stable society (*ibid*.). McCall and Williamson (2001) describe the CVS as 'participating in the governance of the region to a degree that is unusual, if not unknown, elsewhere' during the thirty years of direct rule from Westminster (p.364). This close relationship with the state was not unproblematic, however. Kilmurray (2009) describes how 'the increased emphasis on professionalism, governance and partnership […] served to tie community activism with greater constraints, while offering the potential of greater access to resources' (p.113). Her argument sits somewhat at odds with Curtis' (2010) contention, discussed earlier, that community groups have been able to circumvent funding structures and use resources to pursue *their own* goals. This trend, described by Kilmurray (2009), has continued and, as we shall see, has had a significant impact on the independence and potential of the sector.

Also, as noted earlier, an additional dimension for community development groups and organisations more recently is the post-conflict nature of society in the North, although the extent to which it can be considered post-conflict is far from clear. Acheson's (2013) description of NI as a society in transition from conflict acknowledges that many issues remain unresolved. Writers have commented on the lack of attention traditionally paid to peace building work at grassroots levels carried out by local groups/communities - communities which Cochrane and Dunn (2002) claim often 'play an important role in developing peace processes within divided societies' (p.3). The same authors also claim that such groups in a NI context tend to focus on the symptoms of conflict rather than on working on an analysis of its fundamental causes – in contrast to similar groups in other post-conflict contexts such as South Africa (*ibid*.), a point reiterated by others (for example, McVeigh and Rolston, 2007; Rooney, 2002). It has been argued that community relations (CR) initiatives have been funded at the cost of mainstream CD, through government bodies primarily funding projects that could point to cross-community/reconciliation imperatives and that this has influenced CD projects to re-consider their aims and objectives along such lines (Burgess, 2002). In addition, it has been suggested that state support for a CR paradigm over a CD one was due to a CR focus being 'arguably always a softer and more palatable alternative to rights

discourse with its inevitable critique of the state' (McEvoy *et al*., 2006, p.86). Indeed writers such as McVeigh argue that 'state-led community relations intervention has had a destructive impact on the integrity of community development and robbed it of its radical and transformative potential' (McVeigh, 2002, p. 47), while McMinn (2000) maintains that contemporary state sponsored community development 'is concerned with managing inequality rather than eradicating it' (p.37). Given the contentious nature of trying to identify, much less agree on, the causes of conflict locally, it is hardly surprising that there is a tendency to focus on symptoms rather than the causes of conflict. However, the implications of this are significant for community development organisations that focus on addressing rights and inequality.

Barnes (2001) argues that in post-conflict societies the population needs to 'identify with and feel loyalty to its social sectors' – whether they are unions or economic associations or religious, social, ethnic or political organisations (p.100). Without this, he says, leaders who speak for them will have 'no way of enforcing social agreements made on their behalf'. He further suggests that, in the case of populist and charismatic leaders, such leaders may perceive 'few incentives to keep their bargains and tolerate opposing points of view' (*ibid*.). This issue of loyalty and identification resonates in the North where arguably most community sector organisations can be defined as based on the identification and loyalty of their respective community members. The troublesome nature of neighbourhood identity has been written about, with Deane (1981) suggesting that it can encourage parochialism and may reinforce division, rebutting the argument that groups will culturally meld if they are coming from their own solid base, at least when there are (or appear to be) only two groups involved. In a similar vein, Barnes (2001) suggests that caution is required as 'political mobilisation through exclusionary associations can instead reinforce social divisions' and that separate and conflicting associations may be maintained by different factions or groups (p.99). This can be seen in the North where the positive roles played by community associations and groups can sit somewhat uneasily alongside a sense of difference and division they may, at the same time, maintain and foster. Barnes recommends that, in

post-conflict societies, civic associations undertaking activities on a crosscutting basis should be supported so that civil society does not serve to reinforce ethnic or other identifications (*ibid*.). This would appear to have been taken on board to a large extent in the North. That said, a more recent challenge in relation to this is discussed by Nolan (2013) when he suggests that loyalist paramilitaries 'have been granted a degree of recognition by their stewardship of their communities during flags protests, and have been brought back within the unionist fold by the mainstream unionist political parties wishing to build a united front in the face of perceived threats to British culture' (p.7). Such support for what might be termed 'exclusionary' organisations runs counter to Barnes' (2001) recommendation that cross-community work be supported. However, cogent arguments for the need to resource and support single identity work (i.e., work within one community) have been and continue to be made within the community sector locally. This issue continues to have a contemporary relevance, as evidenced by the ongoing division of communities in the North, discussed in *Chapter One*.

It is argued that the involvement of citizens in the associations of civil society is a major route to the development of a commitment to negotiation and compromise as well as a forum for 'increasing political and organisational skills and other forms of social capital' (Barnes, 2001, p.99). The community sector in the North is a significant stakeholder in the public sphere and civil society, albeit not the only one. The extent to which it plays – or part of it plays – what Powell (2008) calls 'a counter-hegemonic role' (p.54) in challenging fiscal and social conservatism is open to debate. Powell's argument seems to be based more on hope than on fact, as the loss of potency of the community sector continues to be a dominant concern (Acheson, 2013; Morrissey, 2012). In addition, the political differences along traditional lines discussed above, coupled with diminishing resourcing, may compromise the ability of the sector to engage in radical social change work. Despite these challenges some argue that community development, nonetheless, can make a difference. Morrissey (2012) suggests potential for community development action in four areas: fostering the development of relationships within and between communities to

improve community resilience; advocating for change in relation to service delivery and calling those in power to account; delivering 'some local services' in a more inclusive and participatory way; and sustaining a dialogue within communities about what kind of future they want and how it can be achieved (p.4). On a similar note, Milbourne (2013) argues that 'strong communities of practice and clarity about organisational goals', along with the creation of 'stronger narratives', will help individuals community organisations to survive (p.227). The current research examines whether this potential resonates with leaders today in community development organisations.

2.2.4 Concluding Comments

The trajectory of community development in the North has been particularly influenced by the nature of the state and responses to this, and in particular by 'the Troubles'. One of the distinctive features of the community sector in the past has been the number of groups with close relationships with the administration, established during the years of direct rule when the Government needed partners that could help both practically and in terms of offering some kind of democratic legitimacy (Acheson, 2013). This is significant for this study as 'close relationships' of this nature between the CVS and the state may not sit easily alongside an agenda of progressive social change. A variety of views on the role and function of the CVS in general, and community development in particular, are to be found among academics in the field. These vary from those who see huge potential in community development as transformational - a way of bringing about significant social change - to those who see it more as transactional - simply a way of delivering services on behalf of the state. This distinction is helpful in offering a way of conceptualising community development along a continuum, from progressive social change to service delivery. Whilst it is very difficult to quantify the amount and nature of community development work, it can be conservatively estimated that approximately 15% of the work of the wider community and voluntary sector is concerned with community development (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012). However, it is not known how much of this is at the progressive social change end or the service delivery end of the continuum. At a

neighbourhood level, the different experiences of Protestant/unionist/loyalist (PUL) and Catholic/nationalist/republican (CNR) communities have arguably led to different levels of engagement with the concept and practice of community development, resulting in uneven development and a lack of a common understanding and approach (Frazer, 1981; McCready, 2001). This has had, and will continue to have, repercussions for the potential level and nature of community development work focused on social change across communities in the North. Also, it is likely that research participants' views on the role and function of community development will influence how they think about and approach leadership. The kinds of leadership required in relation to a community development agenda concerned with progressive social change is likely to be somewhat different to that required for service delivery.

2.3 Collaboration

A common and significant thread running through all definitions of community development is the concept of taking joint or collaborative action to address issues or provide services. The concept of collaboration has tended to be taken-for-granted and not interrogated to a significant degree in the literature, especially as it relates to the CVS. However, a number of theorists have focused on it and this section presents core themes and concepts emerging from this somewhat limited literature. The strengths and weaknesses are highlighted, focusing on how they contribute to an understanding of the work of community development in the North. Definitions of collaboration, along with descriptions of its value as a practice, are outlined. Consideration is given to dangers implicit in seeing collaboration as a panacea capable of solving all social problems, as well as to critical success factors and challenges associated with collaboration. This is followed by reflection on collaboration within the context of the community and voluntary sector. The discussion then turns to what the literature on collaboration has to say about leadership, before concluding with some general comments about the literature available.

2.3.1 Defining Collaboration

Whilst the concept and practice of collaboration are not new, there is no one clear definition of what constitutes collaboration, with terms such as partnership, networking, alliances, cooperation and collaboration used in very similar contexts and/or interchangeably (Armistead *et al*., 2007). Gray (1989) describes collaboration as a 'process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited versions of what is possible' (p.5). A number of generic descriptions of the different forms collaboration can take, based on level of collaboration intensity, are offered in the literature. For example, the UK National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) defines collaborative working as a spectrum of ways that two or more organisations can work together, with options ranging from informal networks and alliances, through joint delivery of projects, to full merger (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2007). The WEA suggest a somewhat similar continuum, as described in Table 5.

Table 5. Continuum of Collaborative Working (Source: Workers' Educational Association, 2003, p.9)

Formal	**Merger**
	Partnership
	Service Level Agreement
	Resource Sharing
	Network
	Interest group on specifics
Informal	**Working together**

As Table 5 illustrates, at the informal end of the continuum, people work together and share information on a task by task or project by project basis. At the formal end, partners have consolidated and integrated activities, services and resources to the extent that they have merged. At the midpoint of the

continuum collaboration involves some sharing of resources and/or a degree of formality of relationships.

Whilst there is no single agreed definition of collaboration theorists seem to not so much disagree on definitions as to emphasise and give prominence to some aspects over others. From the literature a number of core distinguishing factors within definitions of collaboration can be identified, including:

- authority;
- relationships;
- common goals or vision;
- a focus on something that cannot be achieved by a single organisation or group;
- structure and mechanisms; and
- a transformational / transactional focus.

Each of these factors is now considered in turn. Authority is the defining factor for some theorists, who see it as the most important distinction in various types of collaborative working ranging from 'types of joining up where partners maintain their individual authority but cooperate on some issues, and types of joining up where partners pool authority' (Balloch and Taylor, 2001, p.6). Mattessich *et al*. (2001) also list mutual authority in explicating their definition of collaboration which focuses on relationships: '[collaboration is] a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals' (p.59). They describe this relationship as including a commitment to a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards (*ibid*.). This definition helps differentiate collaboration from 'less reciprocal processes where one organisation makes decisions and owns the initiative, even though multiple stakeholders may contribute' (Bergen and Hawkins, 2012, p.2).

This idea of relationship towards a common end is also put forward by others such as Chrislip and Larson (1994) who define collaboration as 'a mutually

beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work towards common goals by sharing knowledge and information (communication) and more than a relationship that helps each party achieve its own goals (co-operation and co-ordination)' (p.5). They further add that the purpose of collaboration is to 'create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party' (*ibid*.). Theorists such as Huxham and Vangen (2005) make a similar point, as do Bryson *et al*. (2006) in their definition of intersectoral collaboration, which they describe as 'the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities and capabilities by organisations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately' (p.44). Having appropriate structures, including ones to facilitate the good working relationships required, is another element identified in collaborative work (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). These structures need to respond to a number of things: to changing membership of organisations and groups, and of individuals within these; to shifting purpose driven by changing Government policies and other forces; and to continual renegotiation of purpose linked with 'new' members coming on board (*ibid*.).

Collaboration can also take place at different levels within organisations and communities. Bergen and Hawkins (2012) outline the range of these from 'a systems level, where groups and individuals come together to define social issues and plan solutions, to an administrative level that involves staff and resources sharing, to a service delivery level, which includes communities of practice, coordination of services, and planning and implementing programmes' (p.2). Finally, the idea of transactional or transformative intent is used by some as a differentiator. An earlier definition from 1977, within an organisational context, captures more of the richness of the transformational potential of collaboration, rather than a mere transactional exchange:

> collaboration is defined in terms of consciousness, choice, caring and commitment… collaboration operates within a relational system characterised as a just system based upon fairness, mutuality, and responsibility (Appley and Winder, 1977, p.264).

Thus, as we can see from the above discussion, elements within definitions of collaboration as a concept, whether explicitly stated or otherwise, include references to authority, relationships, common goals or vision, a focus on something that cannot be achieved by a single organisation or group, structures and mechanisms, and transformational rather than transactional approaches. The discussion now turns to look at the resonance of these elements within the community sector in the North.

Definitions which focus on authority raise the important issue of power and decision making, an issue of significance for the community groups in this study, many of whom will have empowerment as a goal of their work. For these groups, sharing the power of decision making is likely to be one of the ways in which they operationalise collaboration. Pyles (2014) argues that the way in which organisations operate internally matters, 'particularly [for] those working from a transformative approach' and that this includes 'a commitment on the part of community organizations to attend to its own processes and mechanisms, particularly when it comes to issues of leadership and decision making' (p.121). Definitions of collaboration which include a focus on relationships, and the structures put in place to support these, also resonate, given the voluntary nature of the work so many community groups engage in in local neighbourhoods. Many community practitioners tend to be unpaid volunteers, as noted in the previous section, with NICVA's (2012) estimate that there are six volunteers to every paid staff member in the community sector. Therefore, a degree of personal satisfaction, engagement or 'pay back' for their efforts is required to keep volunteers motivated to remain involved in voluntary activity in their communities, and a focus on relationship building and maintenance supports this. Bono *et al*. (2010) identify motivation as one of a number of key factors that supported volunteers to become more involved in their communities. Mutual benefit – a reason or reward to be gained from engaging in collaboration with others – and joint action are also significant from the perspective of community groups as they suggest that both the ends and the means need to be meaningful for groups, given their voluntary nature. The idea of collaboration as a way of achieving something that could not be achieved

alone (Chrislip and Larson, 1994) is important for community groups for, as we shall see, collaboration requires significant input and effort and so the benefits need to be worthwhile to the extent that it justifies such input/energy. Whilst there is little written specifically about definitions of collaboration in the context of the CVS, Appley and Winder's (1977) focus on justice and fairness as underpinning principles is useful in that it speaks to the transformational aspect of collaboration which is a focus of this study. It also resonates with stated values of community development, including: social justice and equality; anti-discrimination; community empowerment; collective action; and working and learning together (Federation for Community Development Learning, 2015), as well as its ethos and practice.

2.3.2 Why Collaborate? The Potential Value of Collaboration

Much has been written about the benefits of collaboration, with different writers highlighting the various beneficiaries including individuals, groups, organisations and communities (Archer and Cameron, 2009; Austin, 2010; Bocatto and de Toledo, 2008; Bryson *et al*., 2006; Chrislip, 2002; Himmelman, 1996; Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Mattessich *et al*., 2001; National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2007; Rubin, 2009; Schuman, 2006; Straus, 2002; Tamm and Luyet, 2004). A summary of the potential contribution of collaboration identified in the vast literature is offered by Mattessich *et al.* (2001), based on an extensive review. According to the literature they reviewed, collaboration can:

- make services more accessible and effective;
- enable services to be delivered in integrated ways leading to higher quality results;
- help avoid duplication;
- enable the sharing of good practice between different agencies and sectors; and
- reduce costs in planning, research, training and other development activities (*ibid*.).

Many others concur. Miller and Ahmad (2000) argue that 'successful collaboration in respect of complex problems […] will undoubtedly increase understanding, enhance communication, improve policy planning and produce more effective services' (p.33). However, relatively little empirical work has been undertaken on the efficacy or other wise of collaborative approaches. The above list of the benefits of collaboration is useful, but somewhat instrumentalist on its own. Arguably, the broader and more significant argument for collaboration, summarised well by Huxham (1996) when she describes what she calls the moral argument for collaboration, is based on the belief that:

> the really important problem issues facing society – poverty, conflict, crime and so on – cannot be tackled by any single organisation acting alone… they are inherently multi-organisational. Collaboration is therefore essential if there is to be any hope of alleviating these problems' (p.3-4).

Somewhat similarly, Himmelman (1996) considers collaborative endeavour from a transformational perspective and highlights it as a means of transforming power relations. For such a transformation to occur, he argues that collaborative change practice must move beyond a focus on service delivery and efficacy to a focus on social justice whereby collaboration challenges 'existing practices of power, wealth, and control that substantially contribute to growing class, race, gender, and other inequities in many societies' (p.19). This speaks to current concerns about the nature and role of community and voluntary sector groups in the North, and to those who question whether the sector is losing its independence, potency and transformational focus (Acheson, 2013; Robson, 2001). It raises a number of significant questions – can greater collaboration within and between community groups in Belfast contribute to a more equitable distribution of wealth and power? In addition, given the earlier discussion concerning Government insisting on collaboration as a prerequisite for funding, what is the impact of the 'politicisation' of collaboration on the practice of collaboration and community development locally?

2.3.3 Collaboration – Not a Panacea…

Many writers argue that collaboration, far from being an easy or obvious option, requires ongoing nurturing through significant resource investment, patience from individual participants and experienced facilitation and/or management (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Miller and Ahmad, 2000). Balloch and Taylor (2001), whilst positive about the value of collaborative working in partnerships and seeing it as having the potential within the welfare system 'to transform radically the culture of public sector delivery, through compelling people to think in new ways' warn that it has 'too often been dominated by the more powerful partners and has not 'delivered', especially for the communities and service users who are now a required part of partnership life' (p.6). The rhetoric of involvement and partnership is part of current social policy, both implicitly and explicitly. For example, the Department for Social Development's draft *Advice Services Strategy for 2015-2020* devotes half a page to the topic of 'working collaboratively' and says that it is 'vital to work collaboratively not competitively' extoling voluntary organisations to 'work together with government [and] ensure services are complimentary and never conflicting' (Department for Social Development, 2014, p.15). Some theorists express concern about a particular form of collaboration, 'partnership' arrangements between state bodies and CVS organisations, cautioning that community partners are likely to be less powerful and 'if their members are not very watchful [they] can be used merely to legitimate decisions which would have been taken anyway and which may not be in the community's interest' (Twelvetrees, 1991, p.83). Milbourne (2013) suggests that organisations have a choice as to how they engage in collaboration – either 'opportunistically or pragmatically' to access funding or maintain existing activities or for 'less instrumental' reasons such as improving local services or attempting to influence strategy and in effect being 'consistent with existing organisational goals and purposes' (p.130). The arguments about the value of collaboration are cogent in a NI context. Collaborative working for community groups requires nurturing and this has resource implications relating to both time and money. A context characterised by scarcity of resources is likely to have an impact on this. The rhetoric of involvement, co-design and co-delivery of services and the

requirement to engage with, and within, local communities can be for cosmetic reasons rather than because of an authentic commitment to jointly addressing issues of concern (Twelvetrees, 1991). Interestingly, Huxham and Vangen (2005), positive advocates of the benefits of collaboration, advise people to collaborate *only if they have to* (my emphasis). Whilst this is potentially an overly cautious warning, it nonetheless clearly makes the point about collaboration not being an easy option. Another note of caution is sounded by Ling (2000) when she reminds us that, whilst partnerships tend to be seen 'generally as a "good thing"', very little empirical work has been carried out 'to justify either the claim that policies in the past failed because of a lack of partnership or that new partnership arrangements have demonstrably improved outcomes' (p.82).

In a similarly cautious vein, Bocatto and de Toledo (2008) warn against making inflated or easy claims about collaboration suggesting that 'holding up a rhetorical flag of 'collaboration' as a taken-for-granted banner indicating a magical pathway to success, does not necessarily lead to desired results' (p.29). This is a useful reminder. Notwithstanding Huxham's (1996) contention that the really important issues facing society such as poverty and conflict cannot be tackled by any single organisation acting alone and that collaboration is 'essential if there is to be any hope of alleviating these' (p.3-4) it is important to remain alert to the challenges and potential negatives associated with collaboration. Within the CVS in the North there are examples that illustrate the difficulty and potentially damaging effects of specific organisations being compelled to collaborate[20]. Acheson (2013) describes this as 'an increasing readiness by Government ministers to act unilaterally without consultation to force funding bids from consortia of organisations' (p.10). This sits uneasily alongside Milbourne's (2013) suggestion, discussed above, that organisations

[20] For example, community based women's groups being required to collaborate on pain of otherwise losing their core funding. The aim of 'improved working relationships, better collaboration and more effective partnerships, pertaining to the specific interests and needs of women from disadvantaged areas and rural women's needs, across the VCS (sic) and Government' was not achieved, according to the *Evaluation of Regional Support Arrangements for the Voluntary and Community Sector, Women's Regional Support strand of RISP* (Department for Social Development and Department for Agriculture and Rural Development, 2015, p.48)

have a choice about whether to collaborate instrumentally or not – it seems that many organisations are being compelled rather than choosing to do so volitionally. This highlights issues for the current research, in terms of power and choice for community groups in relation to whether, how and with whom they engage in collaboration. It also raises questions about the efficacy of collaboration and what factors contribute to its success or otherwise.

2.3.4 Collaboration – What Makes it Work?

There is an extensive body of literature in relation to what makes for effective collaboration, with hundreds of practitioner guides containing lists of critical success factors. This section summarises the contributions from those writing in broadly not-for-profit contexts.

Gray (2007) highlights that effective collaboration requires an ability to work constructively with diverse points of view, along with the development of strong negotiating skills. With a slightly different emphasis, Chrislip (2002) focuses more on the inclusion of marginalised groups, suggesting that attention is paid to what he terms 'the unusual voices', that is, those with a high stake but low influence in their communities.

In a slightly lengthier manner, Bryson *et al.* (2006) offer a comprehensive framework for understanding cross-sector collaboration, putting forward 22 propositions suggested for success, which are organised around:

- the initial conditions affecting collaboration formation;
- process, structural and governance components;
- constraints and contingencies;
- outcomes; and
- accountability issues.

They argue that, in relation to these propositions, 'success depends on leadership of many different kinds' (*ibid*., p.52). An equally detailed set of contributing factors is offered by Mattessich *et al.* (2001) based on their review of the literature relating to collaboration. They list a set of 20 factors that

influence the success of collaborations formed by not-for-profit agencies, organisations and groups. The most significant of these are mutual respect and trust, and sufficient resources, including funds and time.

Therefore, the lists of critical success factors in making collaboration work are long, with many of these factors overlapping and interdependent. Whilst such lists are helpful in some regards, they fail to alert us to what is most critical. Perhaps then Chrislip's (2002) premise is as good a synopsis as any, since it contains what appears to be many of the core elements identified by others:

> If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways, and with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organisation or community (p.ix).

This premise usefully points to many questions about collaboration which this research is interested in, including: who are the 'appropriate' people, how is this determined and to what extent are they engaged in local community developments; how participative and inclusive are the ways in which they are convened; what efforts are made to ensure all are well informed; to what extent are those involved in local communities bought together to collectively build a vision for their community; how do leaders involve people in determining the most significant problems that beset their communities and then support them to develop and implement ways to address these? Also, Chrislip's (*ibid*.) contention that a particular focus on 'the unusual voices' is critical alerts us to the question as to what attention is being paid to inclusion of the most marginalised.

2.3.5 Challenges to Collaboration

Challenges in relation to collaboration are well aired in the literature. Many writers (Bryson *et al*., 2006; Himmelman, 1996; Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Straus, 2002) concede that, despite the inherent (but not always acknowledged) interdependence of organisations and communities, 'achieving collaborative outcomes is far from easy' (Gray, 2007, p.32). Most recognise that

the particular context of any collaboration is unique and the factors governing its success are situational, that is, they depend on the particularities of that context in which collaboration takes place. As such, it will be important to examine whether and how context influences collaboration within and among community groups in Belfast.

In summarising the literature that highlights the problematic nature of collaboration Williams (2013) categorises these into structural factors, 'social, economic and environmental context, institutional and organisational configurations, cultural and collaborative capital, resource, accountability and planning frameworks', and agential factors 'relating to leadership, management, professionalism and personal capabilities' (p.18). He contends that the interplay of these factors is complex as well as contested, and that this mirrors the traditional structure-agency debate in the social sciences over the primacy of structure or agency in shaping behaviour – are actors the unwitting products of their context or do actors 'display their agency, making unconstrained choices?' (Hay, 1995, p.189). Gray (2007) also offers a categorisation of three general types of challenges to collaboration: i) those associated with past history, mistrust and identity issues; ii) differing frames of reference among partners in terms of how they see and make sense of the world and of themselves; and iii) process issues and institutional constraints. William's (2013) categorisation is helpful, drawing attention to those areas where community groups are more, or less, likely to have agency. Gray's (2007) is a little more detailed, and can be seen as helping to populate the two categories of structural and agential.

Huxham and Vangen, among the best known of writers on collaboration, especially in relation to tackling social issues in which public agencies and community and voluntary sector organisations are involved, coined the term 'collaborative advantage' to describe the achievement of outcomes that could not be reached by any organisation acting alone (Huxham, 1996, p.14). They too focus on structure and describe a key challenge of collaboration as the need to understand structures as ambiguous, complex and dynamic so that

practitioners and policy makers appreciate the size and nature of the challenges involved in making collaboration work (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Ambiguity relates to the degree to which individuals in a collaboration are representative of their organisation or of their own interests, and is also cognisant of the fact that they may 'wear multiple hats', that is, have a variety of different roles to play. Complexity arises in relation to hierarchies of collaboration, concurrent membership of multiple partnerships and that different departments may be involved independently of each other in the same initiative. The dynamic nature of structures relates to changing membership of organisations, and of individuals within organisations, as well as shifting purpose (*ibid*.). Many of these challenges referred to have been seen by the researcher to arise in community development groups and organisations. For example, different people often represent the same organisations at different meetings, and people routinely wear more than one hat (and are not necessarily clear about which hat they are wearing at any given moment!). This complexity and ambiguity can make it difficult to know where aspects of power are located within and between groups, how decisions are made and by whom. This mitigates against a sense of empowerment and ownership, which are likely to be key reasons for the community groups at the heart of this research becoming involved in collaborative working. Other challenges linked to this include 'differences in aims, language, procedures, culture and perceived power' along with the huge investment of time required to build understanding and agreements (Huxham, 1996, p.4).

To summarise, many of the challenges associated with collaboration are concerned with structural and agential factors. However, the interlinked nature of structure and agency make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to pull the strands apart, especially in an investigation underpinned by the interpretivist epistemology of the current research. Rather than attempt to do so, focus is instead placed on how those playing leadership roles in communities think about and enact those roles in practice.

2.3.6 Collaboration and the Community Sector

Whilst collaboration *within* the sector is certainly under-theorised in an Irish context, both North and South, collaboration between the CVS and the state, especially in the context of social partnership, has received some attention, though not a lot of this focuses on it from a CVS perspective.

Writing about the CVS in the South, Meade (2005) argues that the autonomy of the sector has been compromised by the over involvement of the State in its affairs, and that community organisations need to 'cultivate alternative alliances outside the state controlled sphere of social partnership, in order to challenge neoliberalism's hegemony and to promote the political interests of those they claim to represent' (p.349). In a similar vein, Robson (2001) argues that the concept of social partnership is driven by the needs of the state and has become 'synonymous with compromise and concession' (p.221). Meade's and Robson's thinking on this mirrors similar contemporary concerns in the North about the independence or lack thereof of the CVS, referred to earlier in relation to the loss of potency of the sector.

At a policy level, there is a tension within the CVS in relation to the concept and practice of collaboration, as promoted by the state. On the one hand, the Government, through a Concordat[21], and in an environment of restructuring of welfare systems around market principles as described earlier, has created a context wherein the 'survival and future health of voluntary organisations [has come] to depend more and more on their ability to compete to provide public services under contract to a government agency' (Acheson, 2013, p.5). On the other hand, current Government policy in the North is promoting greater collaboration between organisations in the wider CVS, sometimes making it a prerequisite for access to funding. This is evidenced both implicitly and explicitly – for example, the first listed recommendation in a report entitled *Review of Government Funding for Women's Groups and Organisations* is that

[21] The Concordat is an agreement between Government and the CVS that lays out the shared vision of working together as social partners to build a participative, peaceful, equitable and inclusive community in NI (Department for Social Development, 2011b).

'women's groups and organisations need to embrace collaborative partnership working, particularly for complex projects' (Department for Social Development, 2012, p.18). The reasons for this promotion of collaboration by the state are unclear and various hypotheses are put forward by those working in the field. Some see it as part of an avowed ongoing efficiency drive on the part of Government, whilst others see it as a way of the state attempting to control the sector: it is arguably easier to control one large organisation than many, more varied, smaller ones. This links with the ideas of growth and efficiency that are inherent in neoliberalism, discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*. The dearth of research on the sector means that important questions such as this tend not to be explored. Acheson (2013) notes that some Government funding agencies are 'insisting on collaborative arrangements that might not suit the organisations being told to collaborate' (p.12). He refers to recent research evidence from England which suggests that it is becoming more difficult for voluntary agencies to act collaboratively rather than in competition, due to a reduction in funding (*ibid*.). Within Northern Ireland, he argues that 'the need to drive down costs is making collaboration harder and forcing organisations to become much more competitive' (p.12). The net result of this is an increase in competition and a reduction in trust among organisations being compelled to collaborate in this way and which, in turn, makes it difficult for CVS organisations to collaborate over wider, shared social goals (*ibid*.)

The promotion of collaboration comes from other sources also. As noted in *Chapter One*, the Building Change Trust was established in 2008 with a grant of £10 million to invest in community capacity building and the promotion of the CVS. It funds a programme, *CollaborationNI,* to provide practical support and resources in relation to collaborative working to voluntary and community sector organisations. It is interesting to note that the tension in relation to compulsory collaboration is evidenced in the programme, which is at pains to clarify that it will only support what it terms 'collaboration of the willing', suggesting that 'unwilling collaboration' is evident in practice. Three key

drivers for this programme were identified[22]: Government policy at that time, *Positive Steps*[23], which explicitly referenced partnership working; awareness of similar types of programmes being run successfully in Britain; and as a response to feedback from CVS organisations in the North who had been consulted in relation to what support they needed to do their work.

The surrounding context, as discussed here, is important for the current research. The extent to which community groups can collaborate to bring about change is informed by these wider considerations of power and the potential of the sector as a whole to challenge the established order, what Williams (2013) refers to as structural factors, discussed earlier. It is essential to explore the context within which groups are operating in order to determine whether and how it is an enabling one, or otherwise.

To summarise, it is clear that collaboration *per se* is neither good nor bad but its usefulness to the CVS is entirely contingent: it depends on with whom, and to what ends, it is used. In the current research the focus is on the use of collaboration to bring about positive social change and, whilst collaboration is no guarantee of success in this regard, it is likely that the absence of authentic, volitional collaboration will severely limit the community sector in its efforts to access the kind of power and influence it needs to make change happen. The current research draws particularly on Chrislip's (2002) collaborative premise, Huxham and Vangen's (2005) contribution relating to structural complexity and ambiguity, William's (2013) categorisation of structural and agency-related challenges, Gray's (2007) pragmatic focus on dealing with diverse points of view, and Himmelman's (1996) work on the transformative potential of collaboration.

[22] From interview with Director of Operations, Building Change Trust.
[23] Positive Steps, published in March 2005, and reported on in 2009, was a Government plan in relation to resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector (Department for Social Development, 2009).

2.3.7 Leadership in the Literature on Collaboration

The literature on collaboration, despite being 'increasingly voluminous, speaks only occasionally to leadership' (Silvia and McGuire, 2010, p.266), with limited reference to the community sector. A number of writers on collaboration have addressed the issue of leadership directly and some core themes emerge, namely: the *need* for leadership; the significance of leadership mechanisms; a focus on trust; and dealing with complexity. In contrast to popular notions about collaboration being entirely spontaneous and self organising, Silvia and McGuire (*ibid*.) argue that just as organisations require some degree of leadership to function effectively, so too do collaborative structures. Gray (2007) develops this theme by arguing that leadership is not simply needed, but that skills for leading and managing partnerships, as one formalised expression of collaboration, are of critical importance.

A focus on the *mechanisms* required for collaboration, and not just on the individuals involved, is also evident. For example, Huxham and Vangen (2005) offer a simple framing of collaborative leadership as being enacted through people, processes and structures. They note the limitations of mainstream leadership approaches which focus on traits, style or charisma as these 'all assume a formal leader who either influences or transforms members of a group or organisation – the followers – towards the achievement of specified goals', arguing that what is important to study are the *mechanisms* that lead collaborative activity and outcomes in one direction rather than another (*ibid*., p.202). This, they suggest, can include both visionary and more mechanistic aspects of leading and managing (*ibid*.), or what other theorists may refer to as transformative and transactional aspects.

Building trust among those involved in collaborative initiatives is important. Snavely and Tracy (2002) charge leaders with being central to what they describe as the all important task of developing trust for collaboration to be effective. Dealing with complexity and tension is a theme addressed by Connelly *et al.* (2008) who argue that effective leaders do not attempt to resolve paradoxes, understood to include tensions, inherent in collaboration. Rather

'they manage paradox by accepting, indeed embracing, the existence of simultaneous opposites, in some cases transcending the paradox to develop alternative approaches' (*ibid*., p.31). For many of those playing leadership roles in local communities, an ability to 'transcend paradox' and enable themselves and others to imagine and co-create alternatives seems to be a certain requirement of leadership.

2.3.8 Concluding Comments

This section identified a number of the key features of collaboration in the literature which are important for this research as they resonate in a community development context. These include: a focus on authority; the importance of relationships; the centrality of a common goal or purpose; potential synergy; the significance of structures and mechanisms to enable collaboration; and the placing of collaboration somewhere along a transformational/transactional continuum. The value of collaboration is considered as well as its significance in addressing some of the 'really important problem issues [for example…] poverty' (Huxham, 1996, p.4) which cannot be effectively addressed otherwise. This is notable for this research as participants in the study work in communities which are characterised by 'really important' issues such as significant and sustained levels of disadvantage. The extent to which willing or authentic collaboration can contribute towards a more equitable distribution of wealth and power is less clear. Indeed some writers warn against not making too many claims for what can be achieved through collaboration, and given the current Government drive towards collaboration, this seems a useful caution.

Chrislip's (2002) premise, along with his focus on engaging those most marginalised so that visions and new narratives for communities can be co-created, emerges in the literature as a succinct summary of critical success factors for collaboration. Structural and agential challenges to collaboration, and the inextricably linked nature of these, have been discussed. Rather than attempting to untangle these, the focus in this research is on leadership *as practised*. The manner in which the ambiguity of collaborative structures can

serve to obscure where elements of power are located and how this can mitigate against local involvement has also been noted. This is useful in that it draws attention to the complexity of structures which many community development organisations are required to deal with and links it with issues of power. The literature on partnership in the South is noted and parallels drawn with the situation in the North, whilst acknowledging the relative lack of NI specific research on this. The section has discussed ideas about leadership as it is conceptualised in the writing on collaboration, a number of which are significant in the context of this research: the need for leadership and the importance of mechanisms which enable the building of relationships and trust.

A number of gaps in the literature, especially as they relate to the community sector, are considered. There are hundreds of 'top tips', practitioner's manuals and 'how to' guides and writings in relation to collaborative working (for example: Archer and Cameron, 2009; Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Chrislip, 2002; Craig and Mayo, 1995; Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Rubin, 2009; Schuman, 2006; Tamm and Luyet, 2004). This seemingly non-additive research rarely challenges what has come before but, instead adds to a lengthy list advising on the 'do's and don'ts' of collaboration for practitioners. Much of it could be described as descriptive and normative, rather than analytical and critical. Whilst practitioner guides are useful, they do not offer insight at a theoretical level nor do many focus specifically on the community and voluntary sector. Indeed quite a few are written for/from a public sector perspective, with voluntary organisations mentioned in passing, as though the experiences and perspectives of these two sectors are interchangeable. Other issues of interest to this study which do not get due attention in the literature include a lack of focus on power and the wider political context within which collaboration takes place. The descriptive rather than analytical approach of much of the literature, perhaps, accounts for the lack of a broader political framing of collaboration. Linked to this, only a small amount of the literature focuses on collaboration for social change. Therefore, questions such as how do we get those with power to divest themselves of it – or share it – tend not to be addressed. Nor do questions about how some groups benefit by not

collaborating to address issues of change. Whilst a number of theorists consider membership of collaborative initiatives few, with the notable exceptions such as Chrislip (2002) and Huxham (1996), pay significant attention to who needs to be involved – that is, who constitutes stakeholders, how they are identified and by whom. This is an important early part of any collaborative initiative as it is vital to have all the key stakeholders involved, particularly so in a community context (Chrislip, 2002; Huxham, 1996), for sustainable change to be possible. The underpinning values and principles of collaboration for social change, as motivators, are not given much attention, nor indeed is the issue of motivation itself. Finally, there is relatively little written specifically about leadership in collaborative contexts, a theme returned to shortly. This lack of a more critical understanding of collaboration as it is enacted is significant for this research given its aim to understand the role of collaboration within community development locally and in a context characterised by neoliberal policies. These gaps in the literature concerning the community sector's experiences of engaging in collaboration are ones which the current research aims to fill.

2.4 Leadership

The previous section looked at what the collaboration literature tells us about leadership. This section turns its attention more directly towards the literature that focuses on leadership, both within the CVS and in relation more specifically to collaboration. Whilst there is a vast body of general leadership literature, much of which focuses on the private, for-profit, sector and to a lesser degree on the public sector, scant attention has been paid in the literature to the CVS generally, and the community sector more specifically. The small body of literature that focuses specifically on leadership *for* collaboration does not do so in a CVS context but, nonetheless, it offers insights of relevance for this research.

2.4.1 Leadership and the Community Sector

This section focuses on what the literature tells us about the kind of leadership found in and/or required for community development groups concerned with

empowerment and participation. Unfortunately, there is little that focuses particularly on this. Research on leadership specifically in the wider CVS is at an early stage of development, with much of the focus still on individuals in leadership roles or positions of formal authority, usually in large professional voluntary organisations (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012; Smith, 1997). Yet Acheson (2013), one of a small number of contemporary writers on the CVS in the North, refers to the importance of the concept of leadership when he tells us that the sector needs 'resourcing and leadership and a refocusing of energies on more than survival strategies' if it is to overcome current challenges relating to its independence (p.13).

Traditional, hierarchical models of leadership do not appear to work. Writing about community organising in a US context, Pyles (2014) warns against the dangers of centralised, hierarchical models of leadership which 'have oppressed many people in organizations and, more generally, in society', explaining how they have particularly tended to marginalise women, ethnic minority members and others (p.121). She suggests that all members of local communities have the potential to be leaders and that

> by teaching leadership skills and organizing [… members] into positions of increasingly greater responsibility, community organizers directly confront traditional models of leadership (*ibid*.).

In the literature a number of themes in relation to leadership as enacted in the CVS are discernable. Based on their empirical research, Ockenden and Huttin (2008), identified a group approach to leadership which involves a sharing of tasks, through delegation by the leader, and collective decision-making by those who are most active. This approach resulted in greater ownership of the work among junior volunteers and volunteers stepping in to act in the absence of the leader. Another theme identified by them is the external-facing role of the leader as the one that distinguished the leader from others (*ibid*.). This suggests an important leadership task assigned specifically to the leader is one of 'playing the role of leader' with external stakeholders/organisations, while other leadership tasks are shared more easily (presumably) among groups

members. Other writers similarly have identified a communicative, or 'ambassadorial', dimension in leadership, which links with 'networking, conversation, representation, and articulating a vision both within and beyond the organisation' (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012, p.6).

A more nuanced and complex conception of leadership within the CVS has been suggested by Kay (1996) when he defines it as 'a social interaction process, rather than the behaviour of a particular person' whilst acknowledging that particular skills are needed to participate in the leadership process (p.131). He argues that by conceptualising leadership as a multi-dimensional, socio-political enactment process it can be 'separated off from only depicting the actions of a role-holder having formal authority' and instead leadership can be understood as 'involving individuals *and* teams or groups in the process of sense-making and the influencing of others over the meaning of events, issues and actions' (*ibid*.). Given the particular nature and role of the community sector, that is, not-for-profit and seeking empowerment or betterment of the communities it serves, and the plurality of beliefs and perspectives it contains, leadership considered more broadly in this way enables us to take account of this particularity.

A focus on meaning making and constructing narratives also broadens our understanding of the way leadership is enacted and any consideration of leadership needs to take account of the social and cultural context in which it happens (Kay, 1996; Macmillan and McLaren, 2012). The idea of leadership discourses is similarly a useful one drawing attention to the ways in which certain ideas about leadership become dominant and how these influence the way we think about it. Macmillan and McLaren (2012) when arguing the need for closer attention to the idea of narrative, also remind us of the struggle for competing narratives – 'leadership becomes part of a struggle for meaning, credibility, influence and authority, and [is] about how particular visions or narratives of the sector can be forged, developed, circulated, sustained and defended against others' (p.7). They distinguish between *illustrative* narrative, which is concerned with constructing and reinforcing a case for the role, value

and impact of CVS organisations, and *strategic* narrative, which has a broader policy, advocacy and campaigning emphasis addressing what organisations are for and what they want. The authors question whether there can be a single coherent narrative for the CVS given the diversity within it, as discussed earlier, and suggest that the concept of civil society 'could provide a banner around which different elements of the third sector could coalesce' and upon which a powerful narrative could be constructed (*ibid*., p.7). This echoes Young's (2000a) and Powell's (2007) framing of a third sector and civic associational space, discussed earlier. In the context of NI, this could be challenging as here communities are still dealing with conflict and its legacy, with little consensus on what the society – civil or otherwise – should look like, as evidenced by issues such as the continuing failure to agree on the flying of flags on public buildings, and the segregated nature of education, with 93% of children in NI still attending separate faith schools (Nolan, 2014).

Nonetheless, a focus on meaning making and narratives resonates with this research as the work of imagining communities is an important part of community development. Kent (2015), describing a participatory research project undertaken in NI, attests to this when she describes how through community groups, as well as individuals, 'the dominant narrative of personal failings and individual blame can be challenged, enabling individuals and communities to advocate for their needs and posit structural solutions as agents of social change' (p.138). The theme of 'illustrative narrative' (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012) is picked up by Acheson (2013) who contends that 'collective acts of naming and framing "who we are and what we are here to do" […] require […] collective capacity among voluntary and community organisations and access to a shared story' (p.13). Pyles (2014) concurs, going so far as to argue that for the 'practice of deconstructing narratives and inquiring further… ultimately a kind of critical thinking is […] the most important skill for social change' (p.13). It will be instructive to examine what leadership discourses are dominant within the community sector in Belfast in the current context and consider their role in progressive social change.

Writers have commented on how little attention has been paid to leadership in the community, as distinct from the voluntary, sector. Robson (2001) describes the 'community movement' in NI as 'leaderless, and [lacking] a clear focus or perspective' (p.232) while Han *et al.* (2011) notes a frequent complaint of the Loyalist working class is that it is 'leaderless'. Reasons put forward for the under theorisation of leadership in the community sector context include community development's own ethos of stressing its role in providing background support rather than leadership, which reinforces a low profile on the leadership aspects (UK Department for Communities and Local Government, 2006). Community development itself 'inadvertently feeds the widespread notion that communities, including disadvantaged ones, will spontaneously play a much larger role in local society and development if they are simply 'allowed' to do so' and the good community development practitioner is considered 'to be an 'enabler' and 'facilitator', rather than a leader' (*ibid*., p.30). Often community development workers themselves submerge their own role in that of the group which is, from a critical perspective, unhelpful. The mission of empowering communities requires leadership that enables and facilitates action. It would seem advisable that CD workers name and own their role and power, and, in so doing, leave these open to challenge by others in the community they work in. It is anticipated that this research will begin to uncover and address, in some small way, this issue by opening up and informing more debate about leadership and how it is enacted.

The core themes emerging from the literature on leadership in the community and voluntary sector include an ambassadorial or communicative role for leaders, associated with their playing an external-facing role. A wider conception of leadership is suggested in the idea of it being a social interaction process rather than behaviours of specific individuals, which brings a focus on leadership as involving others in the 'process of sense-making' (Kay, 1996, p.131) and the co-creation of alternative narratives. The apparent reluctance of community development literature to theorise leadership in this context is also noted.

2.4.2 Leadership *for* Collaboration

Within the wide body of leadership literature, a smaller number of writers attempt to address leadership *for* collaboration as a theme in its own right (Chrislip, 2002; Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Rubin, 2009; Silvia and McGuire, 2010; Straus, 2002; Tamm and Luyet, 2004). In this section, attention turns to what this literature tells us and also to explore the challenges identified in relation to leadership for collaboration.

Leadership *for* collaboration has not been given much attention in the literature, as noted by Williams (2013) who argues that 'understanding what constitutes leadership for collaboration, and whether and how this differs from leadership in single organisations, is largely under-researched' (p.23). Nonetheless, a number of writers address the topic, though notably mostly in private and public sector contexts rather than in a community sector one (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Sullivan *et al*., 2012; Williams, 2013). Here, some of the key themes emerging from this work are identified, as well as how these can contribute to an understanding of leadership for collaboration in community contexts.

Notwithstanding individual styles and/or approaches to leadership, in traditional individual organisations leadership is typically linked to formal hierarchical position whereas in collaborative contexts, whether informal collaborations or more formalised partnerships, even formally designated leaders frequently do not have the same type or level of authority that designated leaders in other contexts have. and often with limited means – with which to set an agenda, initiate projects, allocate resources and resolve conflicts' (p.160). They argue that leadership in collaborative initiatives such as partnerships requires a different set of orientations and skills from that of leadership in a traditional hierarchical organisation (*ibid*.) - although this seems to assume a certain type of leadership in a traditional hierarchical organisation, which may or may not be the case.

Williams (2013) describes the differences between leadership in collaborative, as opposed to individual organisational, contexts as follows:

> goals and motivations are unclear, changing and ambiguous; power relationships are diffuse, divided and contested; accountabilities are multiple and blurred; people from different agencies and sectors are imbued with different values and cultures; and, different forms of performance management and scrutiny make it difficult to judge collaborative success (p.18).

This echoes what other writers, such as Huxham (1996) and Himmelman (1996), have identified as characteristics of collaborative initiatives, discussed earlier.

De Meyer (2011) similarly argues that too often leadership is associated with 'taking power over' people, as opposed to taking power with people over the change process. Traditional leadership is, he suggests, associated with formal command and control, or with a new leadership approach, charismatic leadership, 'where the leader may seduce groups of followers to sometimes blindly execute his or her wishes' (*ibid*., p. 2). Williams (2013) points out the limitations of the 'great man' or single 'heroic' leader theories in a collaborative environment: they tend to overly focus on those at the top of organisations 'assuming that leadership is enacted by them in a downwards and hierarchical fashion; their clear demarcation between 'leaders' and 'followers'; and finally, their neglect of informal leadership processes' (p.23). Arguably, the not-for-profit and volitional nature of the community sector adds yet another dimension of complexity to this picture painted above. De Meyer (2011) suggests that effective leadership in the current climate requires listening, influencing and flexible adaptation, rather than command and control - and he defines this as collaborative leadership. Adding to this, Sullivan *et al*. (2012) argue the need for models that 'reject hierarchical approaches premised on sovereign sources of power in favour of models that emphasise the process' (p.46). Models such as these appear to be congruent in a community context

where the practice of community development encourages people to be part of processes of empowerment.

Another theme emerging in the literature is a focus on the complexity inherent in collaborative contexts (Armistead *et al.*, 2007; Sullivan *et al.*, 2012; Van Wart, 2003). Sullivan *et al.* (2012) give an account of this complexity when they describe the environment associated with collaboration, where relationships and agreements may change and have to be renegotiated, and where

> [leadership] means coming to terms with ambiguity, dilemma, risk and loss of control […] and being able to adapt to the particular conditions of any collaborative situation, […] accommodating the fact that in collaborative situations no one person or organization is in charge, […] building trust and productive relationships between partners and finding ways of influencing people and organizations over whom leaders have no direct authority (p.53).

Therefore, instability and adaptability are significant, as are tasks relating to building relationships and influencing people. The complexity dimension is a significant one for community groups as almost all of the elements listed above can be seen at play in the community sector. Here arrangements often tend to be temporary, relationships change as the community changes, agreements are subject to renegotiation, no one person or organisation is in charge and there is often no one with direct authority. To these, we could add that power may be contested, there will be different and, perhaps, divergent motivations as well as diverse cultures and ways of doing things. Speaking about partnerships, as one expression of collaboration, Alexander *et al.* (2001) remind us of their voluntary nature, their diverse membership, and the complex and sometimes ambiguous nature of partnership goals, noting how these can create particular challenges for such types of organisation. The authors identify five leadership themes from their empirical research which are distinctive to collaborative initiatives compared to traditional organisations[24], as follows:

- systems thinking;

[24] Traditional in the sense that leadership is linked to formal hierarchical position.

- vision-based leadership;
- collateral leadership (which supports, rather than replaces, the leadership exercised by formally designated partnership leaders);
- power sharing; and
- process-based leadership (how a leader pursues a goal is as important as achieving the goal itself).

They argue that leadership in collaborative contexts is about the need for appropriate balance of these themes, for example, between power sharing and control, between process and results, between continuity and change, and between interpersonal trust and formalised procedures and that the ability 'to walk (this) fine line often distinguishes truly effective leadership from mere management' (*ibid*., p.174). This notion of balance, including the leader's need to balance the interests of their own organisation with the interests of the wider area or region, is a theme that recurs later.

Ospina and Foldy (2010), in a study in social change organisations, identified five leadership practices that create conditions that bring diverse actors together and facilitate their ongoing ability for collaborative work. These include:

- prompting cognitive shifts to create a sense of shared interests;
- naming and shaping identity - leaders prompt others to identify with them or their organisation;
- engaging dialogue about difference – 'surfacing conflicting needs, interests, goals and activities is, paradoxically, essential to the long-term goal of a common vision and a shared agenda';
- creating equitable governance mechanisms – as a unifying force to maximise the likelihood of full ownership of the outcomes; and
- cultivating and nurturing one-on-one relationships, thereby 'weaving multiple worlds together through interpersonal relationships' (*ibid*., p.299).

This is a useful list and identifies issues relating to difference and conflict, and the necessity to acknowledge multiple worlds or different realities. As

discussed in *Chapter One*, significant differences and conflict continue to manifest in the North. As well as being diminishing in their own right, these divisions impact on the ability of groups to collaborate over significant social and political issues such as poverty and unemployment.

Underpinning values is a topic which gets at least some attention by those writing on leadership for collaboration. Komives and Dugan (2010) describe a values based, social change model of leadership, 'a purposeful, collaborative, values-based process that results in positive social change' (p.115). This model is based around three sets of values which, they suggest, need to be developed and nurtured in individuals, groups and community clusters. Individual values include consciousness of self, congruence and commitment. Group values they identify are common purpose, collaboration and controversy with civility. The societal-community value is identified as citizenship. They argue that these values dynamically interact to contribute toward both individuals' and groups' capacities to engage in social change (*ibid*.). This model is helpful in highlighting the central place of values in motivating collaborative behaviour and in identifying areas of leadership focus associated with these. Unfortunately, it tells us little about how leadership goes about embodying or encouraging these values in practice.

Some theorists focus on emotional competencies which are a requirement of leadership for collaboration. Slater (2005), in a study looking at ways leaders (in this instance, school principals) influence collaboration, identified a number of specific emotional competencies as significant. These include:

- modelling collaborative behaviours;
- communication, especially listening and openness;
- valuing others' contributions; and
- advocacy, including the 'promotion of beliefs, goals and information about the value of collaboration' (*ibid*., p.328).

Whilst this is useful, it is limited as it remains at an individual, behavioural level and does not take account of context or situational factors. A more critical

perspective is arguably required, although a focus on competencies can contribute towards a broader approach. Such a critical perspective is to be found in the literature on the issue of agency.

Agent-orientated leadership analyses focus on traits and styles that are needed and promote a view of leaders as 'managers of meaning, articulating organisational and inter-organisational possibilities through visions, missions and core values' (Sullivan *et al.*, 2012, p.44). Sullivan *et al.*'s (2012) empirical research suggests that structure and agency (the ability to set and pursue one's own goals and interests) combine to shape leadership outcomes, approaches and behaviours – with agency 'influenced but not determined by structures' (p.56). This combination seems a more holistic one, taking account of both individual competencies and the structures within which leadership is enacted.

Another major focus in research concerning leadership for collaboration is on relationships between key stakeholders associated with the collaboration and ways to facilitate these. Chrislip and Larson (1994) emphasise the importance of process and suggest that the leadership role is to 'convene, energise, facilitate and sustain the process [of collaboration]' (p.146). This lens is an important one as collaboration takes place between individuals and organisations so the processes of how they meet and work together is going to be significant. Taking this idea further, Rubin (2009) goes so far as to define leadership for collaboration with the concept of relationships at its core, thus: 'collaborative leadership is the skilful and mission-oriented facilitation of relevant relationships' (p.2). Owing to the voluntary nature of collaboration, Rubin emphasises the centrality of managing relationships within the role of the collaborative leader and specifically identifies the task of 'building *structures* to support and sustain these productive relationships' as a key leadership function (*ibid*.). Similarly, Tamm and Luyet (2004) stress the significance of relationships when they argue that teams and organisations 'live or die' based on the effectiveness of relationships and suggest that the world has become 'far too complex and interrelated for individuals to succeed without collaborative skills' (p.4). Again, much like the criticism of emotional competencies made above, a

focus on relationships and mechanisms to support them is very useful – essential even - but, on its own, is insufficient as a theory of leadership for collaboration.

A number of others who have written extensively on collaboration also offer leadership frameworks (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Gray, 2007; Williams, 2013). These are worth outlining and reviewing briefly.

Gray (2007) describes several types of tasks that constitute leadership because 'their execution can enhance the likelihood of reaching collaboration among partners:

- Appreciation or visioning;
- Convening;
- Problem solving;
- Designing the process;
- Reflective intervention;
- Conflict handling;
- Brokering; and
- Institutional entrepreneurship' (p.34).

If this set of tasks focuses more on processes, Williams (2013) offers a list of skills needed for collaborative leadership, which emphasises building relationships and trust:

- building and sustaining high quality inter-personal relationships between a diverse set of stakeholders;
- fostering trust;
- managing complex, shifting and subtle power relationships;
- promoting effective, transparent and inclusive group working; and
- negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution skills (p.24).

Gray's (2007) focus on convening is an important inclusion as it is a critical task in, perhaps even a task unique to, community contexts, where members often need to be convinced of the usefulness of coming together to address issues of

local concern, and the question of how this task in undertaken, and by whom, is significant. Williams' (2013) list seems to be a good summary of the thinking on key elements comprising leadership for collaboration, and usefully, explicitly references power, in contrast to many writers on the subject. This is an issue returned to presently when considering challenges in relation to leadership for collaboration.

More widely within the leadership literature, a number of new and post-industrial approaches connect with the idea of collaboration and shared power and reject more traditional hierarchical approaches. Instead they focus on an expanded view of leadership, including a recognition of the dynamic and relational nature of it and bringing the concept of followers centre stage. For example, Williams (2013) suggests that models of shared, distributed and dispersed leadership align more easily with collaboration because leadership functions are diffused among both formal and informal leaders. Referencing the complexity discussed above, he argues that this:

> reflects the realities of collaboration where actors are the subject of different and multiple accountabilities; where knowledge and expertise are widely distributed; and where multi-disciplinary and multi-organisational teams provide the focus for negotiating and enacting shared purpose (*ibid*., p.23).

As described here, these realities are easily transposed to community settings where accountabilities are various and multiple, and knowledge and expertise are dispersed. The models Williams refers to counter the limitations of traditional hierarchical approaches as they are 'anti-heroic, dispersed and predicated on a different set of skills and principles to those associated with hierarchical alternatives' (*ibid*., p.24). Pyles (2014) suggests that community groups working from a transformational approach need alternatives to traditional, hierarchical ways of organising which are more congruent with values of inclusion and equality. The current research draws on one of these new models in particular, distributed leadership, for this and other reasons,

which are discussed further in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector.*

Thus, relevant core themes and competencies for leadership *for* collaboration emerging in the literature include: tenuous authority; the inherent complexity and need for trust and relationship building to address this, along with supporting structures and processes; emotional awareness; an agent-orientation; and the need for appropriate balance within and between these. These resonate in community contexts where arrangements can be temporary, contingent and often there is an absence of formal or direct authority. In this study the term formal authority is taken pragmatically to mean authority where both the right to decide and effective control over decisions exist, using a combination of Aghion and Tirole's (1997) definitions of formal and real authority. Given this definition it can be argued that such formal authority tends to be less common in the community sector. Rather, people enacting leadership because of their job role / title (director, for example) in local communities are likely to have informal authority. Informal authority comes from what Kotter (1985) terms multiple bases, including 'ones associated with information or knowledge, good working relationships, personal skills, intelligent agendas for action, resource networks, and good track records' (p.39). Kay's (1996) implicit definition of informal authority includes sense-making and 'the influencing of others over the meaning of events, issues and actions' (p.131). This parallels Alexander et al.'s (2001) description of 'tenuous authority' which can also be understood as a kind of informal authority which those playing leadership roles in local communities tend to have. Pyles (2014) describes the difference between types of leadership in progressive community organisations versus traditional organisations as one whereby 'leaders are not afforded any more privilege than any other person in the organisation', although she acknowledges that this can be more complicated in practice as the voices of those playing leadership roles may be 'more likely to be heard during discussions about certain decisions' (p.122). This can be seen as a kind of informal authority, one that is arguably tenuous, but one which nonetheless carries a certain degree of power. Local community groups, in pursuing progressive agendas of

empowerment and participation, are likely to find theories where leadership is shared or distributed in some ways more congruent with the ethos and values of community development.

Challenges in Relation to Leadership for Collaboration

A number of challenges in relation to leadership for collaboration are also identified in the literature. Running through much of what is written is an assumption that if people, groups or communities can be persuaded and supported to collaborate they can bring about significant social change (for example: Archer and Cameron, 2009; Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Chrislip, 2002; Himmelman, 1996). However, it is important to take account of the wider political framework, characterised by a global capitalist economic system and a neoliberal state locally, as discussed earlier. For example, Himmelman (1996) appreciates the need for 'destablilising existing power relations' but he does not address how this can be done – other than by assuming that, through collaboration, power holders and gatekeepers will be recruited 'into processes that move them […] to democratically shared power' (p.2). Beyond stating that 'transforming power relations is increasingly difficult' he does not address the question of how the elites he refers to can be compelled to share power (*ibid*.). History would appear to suggest that those with power do not give it up so easily (Eyben *et al*., 2006; Magee and Galinsky, 2008).

Reynolds (1994) suggests that collaboration and democratic decision-making can result in a conflict-filled process where power issues and individual agendas are complicating factors. He argues that if members fail to address conflict then collaboration is meaningless. However, he also recognises that conflict and differences can slow down the decision-making process which, in turn, can result in frustrated members (*ibid*.). The ensuing tension can often be seen within community groups as some members will appreciate the need to 'go slow to go fast', that is, take the time to resolve issues when they arise, whilst others will not.

In a paper exploring power in the context of collaborative approaches, Githens (2009) further develops this idea. He reminds us that participatory approaches can be 'used as a means of subtle control that help to obscure who is really in charge' (p.416). He also discusses the 'complexity in reconciling the needs for autonomy and community', arguing that suppression of conflict and avoidance of discussions about power can lead to 'a false uniformity that can threaten the sustainability of organisations' (*ibid*., p.420-421). He draws on Foucault's (1978) notion of power '[as being] everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (p.93) and is 'exercised from innumerable points' (p.94). Githens contends that the taboo around talking openly about power may make it more likely that people 'do think and quietly talk about it' thereby helping to 'subvert the illusion of egalitarianism' (*ibid*., p.421). He argues that power is exercised continuously whether or not attempts are made to repress it and that 'dynamic societies and organisations encourage open and continuous conflict, while closed societies and organisations (with their goal towards uniformity) aim to suppress such conflict' (*ibid*., p.422). This suggests that community groups, in order to be healthy and well functioning, need to be open to surfacing and dealing with conflict on an ongoing basis.

In a somewhat similar vein, Elliott and Turnbull (2003) discuss the complexity in reconciling the needs for autonomy and community and argue that, when these two needs arise, the result is oftentimes a distorted view of community that obscures power and leans toward conformity. Taking a broader perspective on this, Pittinsky and Simon (2007) suggest that strong 'ingroup' leadership comes at the expense of relations with 'outgroups' and argue that fostering strong group cohesion, which is a foundation of strong leadership, can lead to intergroup conflict. This mirrors Barnes' (2001) caution about the dangers of political mobilisation through exclusionary associations as noted earlier in the discussion on community development in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Pittinsky and Simon's (2007) contention is that *both* strong leadership and intergroup connectedness are associated with feelings of group connectedness.

While it is important to address conflict openly, in the Belfast context this can be quite challenging for those playing leadership roles unless they are supported to do so. In some ways they may feel vulnerable, or lack confidence, or a sense of legitimacy, to tackle more difficult issues, no matter how useful it is to do so. Arguably, the absence of a conducive or enabling policy context at a broader societal level makes this even more difficult[25]. So too do issues of power and conflict which are particularly live in the conflict/post-conflict NI context, and the theorising of strong group or community cohesion at the expense of 'the other community', an issue which resonates in both community development and local community contexts in Belfast, given the divided nature of communities there.

The distance between the aspirational principles and actual application of leadership for collaboration may be great. Key challenges identified in the literature in relation to leadership for collaboration include the difficulties of bringing about social change as it as requires addressing power in the wider context. Conflict is inevitable and, in order for organisations and communities to be healthy, needs to be addressed. Githens' (2009) caution about the danger of 'false uniformity' that may make it likely that people 'do think and talk quietly' about power, and thus subvert it (p.420-422) is interesting, although it seems that it could be argued that thinking and talking 'quietly' about power – rather than talking openly about it - could also reinforce it. The dilemma of fostering strong group cohesion and mobilising through exclusionary associations, potentially at the expense of relationships with other groups and communities, is highlighted and resonates particularly in both the field of community development and in local communities in Belfast. Dealing with complexity, getting buy-in and balancing individual organisational needs with those of the community are also identified as challenges for leadership. These mirror those challenges experienced in the community sector, especially the tension around balancing the need for autonomy with interdependence in the

[25] For example, the length of time spent awaiting the Together: Building a United Community strategy, discussed in Chapter One, p.22.

current funding context that extols collaboration while forcing groups to compete with each other for scarce resources.

Other challenges which are specifically associated with leadership in collaborative contexts are discussed by a number of theorists (Chrislip, 2002; Huxham, 1996; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Rubin, 2009; Straus, 2002; Tamm and Luyet, 2004). Key among these are the difficulty of getting 'buy in' to the collaborative leadership approach, the complexity and multiplicity of stakeholders' agendas and cultures, the leader's need to balance the interests of their own organisation with the interests of the wider area or region, and historic issues of power and competition which can get in the way of collaboration. Certainly in the community sector in NI these challenges resonate. At a policy level in particular we can see how incentives for collaboration may be counter-balanced by the individualised and competitive nature of current social policy and funding contexts within which the community (and voluntary) sector operates, as described in *Chapter One*.

2.4.3 Concluding Comments

The leadership literature that is relevant to this study is that which considers leadership situated and enacted in contexts of community development and collaboration. The more generalist literature is vast whilst, by comparison, there is little specific to the current research area. Nonetheless, key issues emerging include the complexity that attends leadership in community contexts where there typically tends to be an absence of formal or direct authority, as understood in this study, and the resulting need to develop trust and build and maintain good relationships. Leadership is theorised more as a social interaction process and includes a focus on meaning making and the co-creation of alternative narratives. These link with the concept of convening as significant in community contexts, where convincing others of the usefulness of coming together to imagine changed or different communities and address issues of concern are core leadership tasks. This usefully highlights the contingent nature of leadership which is likely to be found in communities such as those in which this research's participants work. Theories that highlight shared or distributed

leadership are of particular interest as they are congruent with the ethos and values of community development. However, from the perspective of this research, a gap in the literature is evident; there is little that explicitly considers the tension in balancing the need for autonomy with interdependence in the current context that encourages collaboration while requiring groups to compete for ever dwindling resources. Other specific themes and competencies found in the leadership for collaboration literature include a focus on agent-orientation, emotional awareness and the need for appropriate structures and processes to support relationship building and effective engagement. Conflict, in so far as it is discussed in the literature, is considered mostly in the context of the need to acknowledge and address it in order to build healthy communities. There appears to be little literature that focuses specifically on leadership in local communities in conflicted contexts. This, arguably, presents particular challenges in Belfast, a context where conflict and its legacy still resound.

2.5 Concluding Comments on the Literature

This chapter reviewed the literature concerning the three core areas of focus of this study namely, community development, collaboration and leadership. These three areas have been theorised to different degrees, with an extensive body of literature on leadership, and relatively smaller bodies on both community development and collaboration. However, the size of these bodies of literature shrinks further when we look for contextualisation in relation to community development and to local communities in Belfast. Nonetheless, the review has drawn from what is there to scope out current thinking and issues in each of these three domains.

The history and development of voluntary and community activism in the North has been particularly influenced by the nature of the state and responses to this, and in particular, by 'the Troubles'. Whilst difficult to quantify the amount and nature of community development work, it can be conservatively estimated that approximately 15% of the work of the wider community and voluntary sector is concerned with community development (Northern Ireland Council for

Voluntary Action, 2012). Current conceptualisations of the sector focus on the transformational/transactional continuum, with some theorists seeing huge potential in community development as transformational – as a way of bringing about significant social change – to those who see it more as transactional – as simply a way of delivering services on behalf of the state. This continuum is helpful for this research as a way of thinking about the different roles community development can play in local disadvantaged communities in Belfast and the extent to which they promote progressive social change.

Arriving at an agreed definition of collaboration is difficult, and rather than attempt to do so it is suggested that, for this research, a focus on the different emphases within the literature is more useful. The most significant of these for this research context are: a focus on authority; the significance of relationships; the need for a common goal or vision; the importance of structures and mechanisms to enable collaboration; and the placing of collaboration somewhere along the transformational and transactional continuum. The value of collaboration is considered and its significance is framed as the ability to achieve something that cannot be achieved by groups acting alone. Implicit in a good deal of the literature is an assumption that if people, groups or communities can be persuaded and supported to collaborate they can bring about significant social change (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Chrislip, 2002; Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Himmelman, 1996). This addresses a central concern of this research, that is, the role of collaboration within community development. The suggestion that collaboration is a critical requirement to deal with some of the most pressing social problems we experience today (Huxham, 1996) is particularly relevant for this research as community development focuses, to varying degrees, on addressing complex socio-economic issues. Thus the nature and level of collaboration in relation to such issues will be important to consider. However, it is important for this research to take cognisance of the caution that collaboration should not be seen as a panacea, and not 'over-claim' what can be achieved. As noted earlier, given the current policy environment and pressure on groups to engage in collaboration, these seem to be especially useful cautions in this research context.

The leadership literature that is relevant to this study considers leadership situated and enacted in contexts of collaboration and community development. Despite the relatively small bodies of such literature, a range of issues which are significant for this research is raised in them. Key among these is the complexity of leadership in community contexts where formal authority is often absent, and the resulting imperative to build relationships and develop trust with and among people locally. A focus on creating appropriate structures and processes to support relationships and effective engagement is also significant. Convening people to address issues and develop alternative visions for their communities is highlighted, whilst the lack of focus in the literature on the tension in balancing the need for autonomy with interdependence in the current context has been noted. All this draws attention to the contingent nature of leadership in local communities such as those that research participants work in. As noted earlier, theories concerned with shared or distributed leadership are of particular interest for this research given their congruence with the ethos and values of community development and are considered more fully in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*.

Chrislip's (2002) premise emerges in the literature as a succinct summary of critical success factors for collaboration, and for leadership in relation to it:

> if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways, and with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organisation or community (p.ix).

This is particularly useful for this research given its focus on engaging those most marginalised, and in ways that support their authentic involvement, so that visions and new narratives for communities can be co-created. Whilst this focus is congruent with the mission and values of community development, without a critical analysis of the wider socio-political context, Chrislip's premise can seem somewhat naïve.

Overall, a good deal of the literature on leadership for collaboration seems somewhat uncritical, or even apolitical in a wider sense, in so far as it engages only tangentially with the concept of power and appears to treat all stakeholders in collaborative initiatives as more or less equal players, when in reality this may not be the case. Often there will be significant structural power differentials among groups or stakeholders. Similarly, it is notable that relatively few writers on leadership and/or collaboration address the wider context of how power holders can be compelled to share power. Conflict, where discussed in the literature, tends to be considered mostly in local, micro contexts where the need to address it in order to build stronger communities is usefully noted. As the North continues to be in a conflict and/or post-conflict period, issues of power are significant for this research. However, even if this context did not pertain, community groups dealing with issues of marginalisation and inequality such as poverty and unemployment tend to work in and/or be part of communities experiencing powerlessness. Thus the absence of a significant focus on power in the leadership and collaboration literature is a gap which needs to be addressed for the purposes of this research. To do so, a discussion on power is presented in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, where it is employed as part of a theoretical framework developed for this study.

A number of questions in relation to collaboration and leadership in community contexts, and which build on the research questions, are suggested by this literature review, including:

- How is leadership enacted or 'done' in local community groups in Belfast?
- How significant is context in relation to the enactment of leadership?
- How predominant are transactional and transformational approaches in light of the current state of the community sector and concerns that it is losing its potency?
- Are such approaches mutually exclusive or can both be drawn on?
- How do leaders and 'non-leaders' see themselves in relation to leadership in their communities?

- What is the relationship between leaders and followers in local communities?
- In relation to the structure and agency debate, what are the leadership roles that can be played to bring about social change?

These questions contribute nuance and direction to the broader research questions and, as such, are helpful as prompts in interview questions (see Appendix iv for list of interview questions used).

In conclusion, whilst the literature concerning the three core areas of focus of this study - community development, collaboration and leadership - offers a range of highly significant insights that are helpful in framing questions and undertaking analysis, it remains to be seen how fully they account for how leadership is or needs to be enacted in the community sector. Acheson (2013) makes a strong case for the 'collective independent contribution of a re-energised voluntary and community sector' arguing that what is required now to make this happen is 'resourcing *and leadership* (my emphasis) and a refocusing of energies on more than survival strategies for individual organisations' (p.13). For the leadership component of this we need to understand more about how leadership is conceptualised and enacted at local community sector level if we are to be better able to support and nurture it. The dearth of leadership theorising in the context of community organisations is a gap which the current research aims to fill.

Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector

3.1 Introduction

The aim of a conceptual model is to establish a structure to guide the research and build on previous research and theories. It shows the nature of the component themes of the research and determines how the data is perceived and interpreted. This chapter presents a framework developed to help examine the enactment and experiences of leadership to support collaboration and social change in communities in Belfast. It marries the concepts of neoliberalism, power and leadership to build a conceptual structure which will enable consideration as to how these manifest in the community sector in Belfast. As discussed earlier, much of the leadership *for* collaboration theory does not take sufficient account of the wider context within which leadership is enacted. This is a significant weakness; and hence the effort to develop an original, more critical framing of leadership to use in the current research which draws particularly on theories of neoliberalism and power to provide an additional political contextual dimension.

The main features of neoliberalism are identified including its ideological roots and some of its key manifestations locally. In order to understand its reach and how it operates awareness of the different characterisations of neoliberalism and how these have evolved over time is required. This is particularly important given the wide spread use of the term and the lack of an agreed definition of neoliberalism. Addressing power imbalances is integral to community development that focuses on social change. To help examine this aspect, an exploration of power, particularly focusing on Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power and Gaventa's (2005) power cube, is presented. Foucault's (1988) theories relating to governmentality and technologies of the self are also

drawn on. Leadership is a central concern of this research and the chapter explores a number of ways of conceptualising and understanding it. In particular, distributed leadership theory, along with a number of other leadership concepts, including meaning making and narrative shaping as forms of leadership, as well as the transactional/transformational dichotomy are examined as these seem to offer insights that are especially pertinent in a community development context, as noted in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*. Then, in a case of methodological bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011), a pragmatic and eclectic approach is adopted by considering the potential complementarity/synergy of combining these into an original framework for interrogating the data in relation to leadership in local communities in a neoliberal context.

3.2 Neoliberalism and Social Change

For social change activists it is important to explore and understand the idea of neoliberalism, what it is and how it has developed to become such a dominant paradigm in Irish society, North and South, as discussed in *Chapter One*. A deeper understanding will elucidate the potential for challenge as well as for creating alternatives through social change interventions.

3.2.1 What is Neoliberalism?

Thorsen and Lie (2007) trace the development of neoliberalism starting from what they describe as original economic liberalism which is a belief that states ought to abstain from intervening in the economy, and instead leave as much as possible up to individuals participating in free and self-regulating markets.

Classical liberalism is a political philosophy that advocates a limited role for government, the rule of law, sovereignty of the individual, the importance of private property and free markets. It came to prominence in the mid 20th century when Austrian economists, concerned about the erosion of liberty by both socialist and fascist governments in Europe at that time, tried to restate the case for liberty (Livingstone, 2013). The classical liberal state has been

described as a 'night-watchman state', as the sole purpose of the minimal state is to uphold the most fundamental aspects of public order (Thorsen and Lie, 2007). Crighton (1998), quotes Sanders (1992, p.370) pithy description: 'Government's role is to lay the tracks and then get out of the way'. In contrast, modern liberalism is characterised by an increased willingness to have the state be an active participant in the economy and it recognises the need for the state to be proactive in welfare provision and to play a role in upholding social justice.

What then is neoliberalism? Whilst the answer is contested, there is, according to Nagle (2009), a broad consensus that it 'entails normative principles favouring free-market solutions to economic and social problems' (p.175). Key elements associated with this include a lean welfare state, deregulation[26], low taxation and flexible labour markets. The possibility of a self-regulating market is a core assumption in classical liberalism and also an important presumption among neoliberals as well. According to neoliberal economic theories efficient allocation of resources is the most important purpose of an economic system and the most efficient way to allocate resources is through market mechanisms. Thorsen and Lie (2007) paraphrase Munck (2005) when they argue that acts of intervention in the economy from government agencies are 'almost always undesirable, because intervention can undermine the finely tuned logic of the marketplace, and thus reduce economic efficiency' (Thorsen and Lie, 2007, p.8).

Harvey (2007) offers the following description of neoliberalism:

> '[It] is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices – [rather than a complete political ideology] – that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (p.2).

[26] The reduction or elimination of government power in an industry, usually enacted to create more competition within the industry.

The role of the state is to develop and maintain an institutional framework to support such practices. This includes setting up military, defence, police and legal structures and functions in order to protect private property rights and the functioning of markets. Where 'markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary' (*ibid.*, p.2). According to Harvey the world has experienced 'an emphatic turn towards neoliberalism' in political-economic practices and thinking since the 1970s (*ibid.*). He argues that the role of neoliberalism is a political one 'to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites', with Russia and China being particularly effective in the latter (*ibid.,* p.19).

Many argue that neoliberalism is neither a simple nor a homogeneous philosophy (Harvey, 2007; Nagle, 2009; Thorsen and Lie, 2007). Rather it is helpful to think of it as a philosophy or set of policies along a continuum. At the one end of the line is 'anarcho-liberalism', arguing for a complete *laissez-faire* and the abolishment of all government. At the other end is 'classical liberalism', demanding a government 'with functions exceeding those of the so-called night-watchman state' (Blomgren, 1997, cited in Thorsen and Lie, 2007, p. 12). Harvey (2007) suggests that neoliberalism is 'not entirely consistent' as a theoretical framework; its supposed distrust of all state power does not fit with 'the need for a strong and, if necessary, coercive state that will defend the rights of private property, individual liberties and entrepreneurial freedoms' (p.21). There is, he concludes, a tension between the theory of neoliberalism and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalisation (*ibid.*).

In summary, neoliberalism can be seen as a somewhat amorphous set of political theories or practices which can be drawn on more or less depending on the needs of the state and of the economy at any given time (Thorsen and Lie, 2007). Neoliberalism in a 'pure' sense does not appear to exist; in countries where it is seen to be predominant, the state continues to be required to ensure the creation and maintenance of the conditions whereby the market economy can operate, unfettered. Therefore, just as there is a role for the state in other

types of political systems so too is there a role for the state in neoliberal systems. What will differ from one neoliberal state to another is the extent to which particular policies are pursued. Arguably the impact of neoliberalism will always be mitigated by other factors, as we shall see particularly, though not exclusively, in the case of the North of Ireland.

3.2.2. Foucault and Neoliberalism

Foucault (1982) offers a somewhat different perspective when he introduces the concept of governmentality to explain how power operates in neoliberal contexts. He has described his work as creating 'a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects', and as such, is concerned with power and what he termed 'governmentality' (p.208). Foucault gives an historical background to the concept of government, tracing how it was a term used not only in political contexts, but also in philosophical, religious, medical and pedagogic contexts (Lemke, 2001). For example, in the 18th century, as well as control by the state or the administration, '"government" signified problems of self-control, guidance for the family and children, management of the household, directing the soul, *et cetera*' (*ibid*., p.191).

Foucault (1988) describes 'governmentality' as 'contact between technologies of domination of others and of those of the self' (p.19). Lemke interprets this as conduct, or, more precisely, as 'the conduct of conduct' and thus, as a term which ranges from 'governing the self' to 'governing others' (Lemke, 2001, p.191). As such, governmentality refers to a continuum, which extends from political government right through to forms of self-regulation, what Foucault termed 'technologies of the self ' (Foucault, 1988, p.18; Lemke, 2001). Building on this, Cotoi argues that human subjectivity does not stand alone, outside and separate from power, liberty or technology and argues that the freedoms we have within the present day neoliberal governmentality are the 'mobile outcome of a multitude of human technologies' (Cotoi, 2011, p.117-118). She suggests that governmentality is more a new perspective than a new theory or paradigm, and offers the following description:

> '[it] is about the emergence of specific 'regimes of truth', exploring the ways in which various modalities of speaking the truth are formed, authorized truth speaking persons designated, and areas in which, about whom and from where, statements, discourses and practices rooted in truth are generated' (*ibid*., p.111).

This is similar to Foucault's description as 'practices, reflexive modes of action, and special ways of rationalizing the governance' (*ibid.*, p. 112) in that both suggest how truth becomes legitimised as truth. In this sense we can see how contemporary narratives work as 'technologies of the self' in framing and delimiting debate, resulting in internalised, deeper dimensions of power not even being articulated. The oft quoted mantra of neoliberalism, ascribed to the previous British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, that 'there is no alternative'[27] is a clear example of the promulgation of a 'truth' which in effect curtails the agenda for debate and deliberation. The predominance of this and similar phrases, for example, in relation to the banking crisis in the South of Ireland in 2010 made it difficult for alternatives views and voices to be put forward and heard, much less debated (Donovan, 2014).

Cotoi (2011) alludes to this when she describes the market in neoliberal times as becoming a space of 'enouncing the truth and of verifying the government' – 'the people are governed by and through their own interests' (p.113). Through governmentality, 'neoliberalism governs by giving the impression that it is not governing' and does this through 'creating and consuming a regime of freedoms' – it produces, organises and consumes freedoms which 'entails the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats' (*ibid.*, p.114). Others pick up on this theme. Kilmurray (2009) also refers to 'disciplinary' as well as sovereign power, describing the former as 'the influencing of the conduct of others through rewards, condemnation and

[27] There is no alternative (abbreviated to TINA) was a slogan frequently used by the Conservative British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. In economics, politics, and political economy, it has come to mean that there is no alternative to economic liberalism - that free markets, free trade and capitalist globalisation are the best or the only way for modern societies to develop.

regulation, as well as through socialisation and related 'self-discipline' (p.99). Knowledge is seen as a major source of power that is exercised through the production and dissemination of truth claims. Deep and fundamental questioning of what is usually considered to be self-evident is required if we are to understand the dynamics of power in contemporary neoliberal societies (*ibid*.).

In a broadly similar vein, Bhattacharyya (2004) writes about narratives and how they link with 'instrumental reason' when discussing community development. She describes participation, in its broadest sense, as taking part in the production of collective meanings and argues that people can be excluded from it in many ways: by silencing a language; by overwhelming or de-legitimising a culture; or by instrumental reason (*ibid*.). She argues that 'the deep penetration of instrumental reason opens up to conscious scrutiny what are culturally settled practices and makes them contingent upon re-validation by instrumental reason' and that, in this way, every aspect of life becomes public, exposed to control and manipulation by the state and the market (*ibid*., p.23). True participation therefore must include deciding what is on agenda for debate and decision-making, and defining problems and how to solve them (*ibid*.).

Rose and Miller (1992) argue that political power is exercised through 'a profusion of shifting alliances between diverse authorities in project to govern a multitude of facets of economic activity, social life and individual conduct (p.174). Power, they argue, is not the antithesis of personal autonomy and is less concerned with imposing constraints on citizens but, rather 'is more about 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom' (*ibid*.). This begs the question of how citizens in local communities are 'made up' to bear a kind of regulated freedom.

3.2.3. Welfare and Neoliberalism

Lemke (2001) argues that neoliberalism is a political rationality that tries to render the social domain economic, and to link a reduction in (welfare) state

services and security systems to the increasing call for 'personal responsibility' and 'self-care' (Lemke, 2001, p.203). In this way, individuals as well as organisations, public institutions, corporations and states have to be healthy, 'lean', 'fit', 'flexible' and 'autonomous': it is a technique of power (*ibid.*, p.202). Following on from this, from a neoliberal perspective, the only sound social policies are 'economic growth, access to private property and individual insurance [whilst] redistribution policies, social security or revenue equalization are the paragon of unsound policies' (Cotoi, 2011, p.113). In NI we see both these dimensions at work. Contemporary narratives in the current Programme for Government 2011-2015 and elsewhere increasingly focus on personal responsibility and the pre-eminence of economic growth as a key driver in government policy (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011), along with the necessity to introduce welfare reform (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013) which will result in a diminution of the welfare state[28]. But the focus on efficiency involves more insidious and deleterious impacts, as identified by McCluskey (2003) when she argues that:

> 'the problem with the neoliberal emphasis on efficiency is not that it promotes individual self-interest over community solidarity, or economic growth over social equity. Instead, neoliberalism embraces a racialized, genderized, and class-biased vision of social equity and community solidarity that favors the interests of the most privileged members of society' (p.785).

This is a useful reminder given the predominance of the 'efficiency' argument locally in the public sector generally, and in the CVS more specifically.

3.3 Power and Leadership in Local Communities

So far power has been considered specifically within the context of neoliberalism. Attention now turns to a number of other theories relating to the concept of power and its place within leadership and community development.

[28] Beatty and Fothergill (2013) estimate that when the proposed welfare reform have come into full effect they will take £750m a year out of the NI economy, or around £650 a year for every adult of working age (p.12).

Here the work of Lukes (2005) and Gaventa (2006), significant theorists on power, is discussed.

Lukes (2005) attempts to address the question of how the powerful secure the compliance of those they dominate and, more specifically, how they secure their willing compliance. He presents a conceptual analysis which outlines three dimensions of power (*ibid*.) The first is overt power, typically exhibited in the presence of conflict in decision-making situations, where power consists of winning, that is, prevailing over others. Lukes describes this as involving (with his emphasis):

> a focus on *behaviour* in the making of *decisions* on *issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation (*ibid*. p.19).

An example of this dimension of power in a community context is deciding whether to grant aid a local group or not, or deciding to take or not take action to address a specific issue. Milbourne (2013) offers another example when she references Lukes in describing the differential power in contractual relationships between community groups and their funders as 'overt and often positional' (p.25).

The second dimension is described as covert power, consisting of control over the agenda and/or what gets decided, reinforcing the powerful by excluding threatening issues from discussion. This two-dimensional view of power is, he argues, a 'qualified critique' of the behavioural focus of the first view, as it:

> allows for consideration of the ways in which *decisions* are prevented from being taken on *potential issues* over which there is an observable *conflict* of (subjective) *interests*, seen as embodied in express policy preferences and sub-political grievances (*ibid*., p.25).

An example of this in a local context is getting local political representatives or the local authority to consider an issue or raise it as a matter of concern - in other words, getting it 'put on the agenda' - with the relevant authorities.

Lukes' third dimension of power is based on a critique of the previous two dimensions as being 'too individualistic' and, instead, allows for consideration of :

> the way in which *potential issues* are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individuals' decisions. This, moreover, can occur in the absence of actual, observable conflict [...] What one may have here is a *latent conflict*, which consists in a contradiction between the interests of those exercising power and the *real interests* of those they exclude (*ibid*., p.28).

Thus the third dimension of power, that shapes desires and beliefs, is a more insidious form of power which influences people's wishes and thoughts, inducing them to want things which may not benefit them. An example of this third dimension in a community context is where beliefs are held that appear to run counter to the interests of those who hold or espouse them, such as, people struggling on welfare benefits holding the view that welfare cuts should be made. A core argument of Lukes is that we need to think about power broadly and to pay attention to those aspects of power that are least accessible to observation.

Gaventa (2006) also proposes an analysis of power along three dimensions: how arenas of power are created; the degree of visibility of power; and the levels and places of engagement. This framework is commonly known as the 'power cube' as it describes how power is enacted across three continuums of space, place and forms. The space dimension refers to 'opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests' (*ibid*., p.26). Such decision-making spaces can be closed, invited or created by less powerful actors. The place dimension refers to the local, national and global levels as locations of power, and 'vertical alliances across local, national and global levels' (*ibid*., p.30*).* The forms dimension refers to the degree to which 'conflict over key issues, and the voices of key actors, are visible in given spaces and

places' (*ibid*., p.29). This last dimension builds on Lukes' three dimensional view of power with the different levels referred to by Gaventa as visible, hidden and invisible (or internalised) forms of power. Gaventa suggests that power in relationship to space and place can put boundaries on participation and exclude certain voices from entering the participation arena in the first place, and that the question of representation – who speaks for whom, and on what basis – is a critical one (*ibid*.). Pragmatically, the power cube is helpful in suggesting that there are different entry points for groups in relation to participation and citizen engagement, and highlights the relational nature of power – those who are relatively powerless in one setting may be more powerful in others. Empirical evidence in relation to the use of the power cube suggests that as well as entering and engaging with the spaces of power, it is necessary to pay attention to the 'culture of participation' *within* the spaces also – that is, to the quality as well as quantity of engagement (Gaventa, 2005, p.35). Indeed, Gaventa warns that without prior awareness raising, so that citizens have a sense of their right to express voice, and 'without strong capacities for exercising countervailing power against the 'rules of the game' that favour entrenched interests, new mechanisms for participation may be captured by prevailing interests' (Gaventa, 2006, p.30). It is useful to remember that, rather than see power as almost always 'negative' – holding power is to exercise control over others – power is also concerned with capacity and agency to be deployed for positive action (*ibid*.).

How do these concepts link to the current research into leadership within and among community groups in Belfast? An important question for community groups, and one which directly links to the issue of the potency of the CVS (Acheson, 2013), is whether increased engagement will contribute to challenging power relationships or simply give legitimacy to the status quo? Gaventa (2006) argues that creating new institutional arrangements will not alone necessarily result in greater inclusion or anti-poverty policy change but rather, the 'nature of the power relations which surround and imbue these new, potentially more democratic, spaces' is what matters and argues that power must be put at the centre of the concept and practice of participation and

engagement (p.23). He also links his discussion with the idea of narratives, drawing attention to the manner in which the contemporary language and discourse of participation and inclusion has confused the boundaries of who has authority, and who is on the 'inside' and on the 'outside' of decision-making (*ibid*.). Contemporary governance arrangements which include greater formal levels of participation and involvement can serve to obscure inequalities of resources and power. Coupled with this, globalisation increasingly challenges the idea of the 'nation state' and 'community', which makes the ability of citizens to locate or identify where and how decisions are made increasingly difficult.

This discussion on power also highlights the importance for community groups which espouse empowerment to, as Gaventa suggests, endeavour to build awareness and capacity locally in order to support meaningful participation. The inclusion and exclusion of certain voices is a critical issue in relation to participation, and the role of leadership in facilitating this or otherwise is something which the current research seeks to elucidate.

3.4 Distributed Leadership Theory

As discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us,* there is a significant body of writing on leadership, yet a relatively limited focus on leadership in collaborative contexts that concentrate on social change. Nonetheless, a number of key theories and concepts emerge which are useful as conceptual handles in analysing data in this study. Critical theories of leadership which stress the relationship between leadership and followership are important as they offer a wider way of thinking about leadership, and are particularly important in the kinds of informal contexts that constitute communities. The need to broaden out the concept of leadership to take account of the complexity and rapidly changing contexts in western societies is alluded to by new leadership theorists and many who write from a critical perspective.

The model of distributed leadership (DL) is a particularly useful one in the context of community development, where a 'one best way' approach is inadequate (Butcher *et al*., 2007; Komives and Dugan, 2010). A number of writers, especially those in the social services, social work, social change and education fields, comment on the usefulness of DL (Butcher *et al*., 2007; Dunoon, 2002; Hughes and Wearing, 2007; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Leithwood *et al*., 2007; van Zwanenberg, 2010). In relation to community development, Butcher *et al.* (2007) make a strong claim for what DL has to offer organisations that support critical community practice as

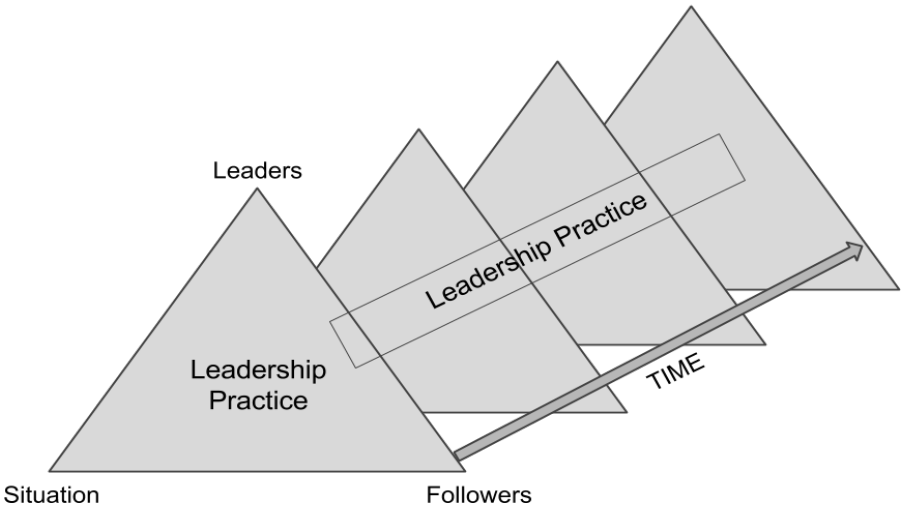
> an approach [DL] can draw on the range of expertise and talents that become available to, and necessary for the success of, whole-systems working. At the same time it demonstrates a good 'fit' with the participatory aspirations of critical practice [and] sits comfortably with the values and ethos of working methods of critical community practice (p.112-113).

They also more generally argue that 'appropriate organisational management and leadership – no less than innovative policy making and effective face-to-face work in the community – is vitally important if the full potential offered by critical community practice is to be realised' in order to optimise active citizenship for social change (*ibid*., p.115). This research seeks to examine the extent to which this manifests in a Belfast context.

3.4.1. Distributed Leadership – Key Concepts

Distributed leadership can be defined in a number of ways, but all definitions describe a similar phenomenon – leadership by more than only the formal or appointed leader. DL is most contrasted with more traditional 'vertical' or 'hierarchical' leadership, which resides predominantly with an individual rather than a group. DL sees leadership activities as a situated and social process at the intersection of leaders, followers and the situation.

Figure 1. Leadership Practice from a Distributed Perspective (Source: Spillane, 2006)[29]



Key components of distributed leadership include a focus on:

- leadership *practice*;
- leadership as situational;
- vertical and horizontal dimensions of leadership;
- formal and informal leaders;
- the manner of its distribution – *what* is distributed, and *how*.

This section discusses these components and concepts and argues why they are helpful in understanding leadership in community contexts.

Distributed leadership: focus on practice

Spillane (2005), a key theorist of DL which he developed in studies of school principals, describes it as concerning leadership *practice* rather than leaders or their roles, functions, routines and structures, and defines practice as the product of the interactions between leaders, followers and their situation. He argues that whilst leaders and their roles, functions, routines and structures are important considerations, leadership practice is still the starting point (*ibid*.). Leaders need to 'distribute' leadership to key colleagues throughout the

[29] Licensed under Public Domain via Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Leadership_Practice_from_a_Distributed_Perspective.png#/media/File:Leadership_Practice_from_a_Distributed_Perspective.png

organisation, and this is not delegation as it constitutes a 'division of (leadership) labour' with those who lead having the expertise and experience to 'co-produce the leadership function within the organization' (*ibid.*, p.112). His thesis is that with the increasing responsibility and complexity associated with the role of school principal, traditional methods of leadership no longer work and 'even the most capable and highly qualified principal will not have the skills and time at their disposal to master the increasingly complex agenda that the contemporary high school has to address' (*ibid*., p.112). Indeed, some theorists argue that distributing leadership works best in response to tasks that are relatively complex as 'the collective capacities of the organisation theoretically far exceed the capacities of any one organizational member' (Leithwood *et al*., 2007, p.46). Thus they argue that distributing leadership can enable the organisation's collective ability to be utilised in achieving more complex organisational goals (*ibid*.).

This focus on practice as the product of interaction is also identified by Bennett *et al.* (2003) where, in a review of relevant literature, they describe leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals – as distinct from a phenomenon which emanates from an individual. It would seem likely that as the process of community development is similarly enacted by a group or network of interacting individuals, leadership as an emergent property will be found there also. As such, this will be a useful handle in my data analysis.

This concern with practice also resonates in a context of collaboration. Huxham and Vangen (2005), who have written extensively on collaboration, describe DL as useful in working across discipline and organisational boundaries. Echoing the focus on practice discussed above, they describe leadership in collaborative settings as being concerned with 'the mechanisms that lead to the actual outcomes of a collaboration… it is concerned with what '*makes things happen'* in a collaboration' (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, p.75). From this perspective they argue that leadership is something that is not only enacted by people but that, rather, 'structures and processes are as important in leading agendas as are the

participants involved in the collaboration' (*ibid*.). In this way they qualify Spillane's (2005) focus on *practice* somewhat. They explain that 'structures, processes and participants can be thought of as different media through which collaborative leadership is, in practice, enacted' and point out that all three are largely not controlled by *members* of the collaboration – structures and processes are sometimes imposed externally, often by a funding body or government department *etc.* (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, p.75). This resonates locally, with the growing trend of the community sector being compelled, through contracting, to adhere to externally set agendas, ways of organising and other constraints.

Distributed Leadership: Leadership as Situational

Another important aspect of DL is its situational nature (Bennett *et al.*, 2003; Butcher *et al.*, 2007; Spillane, 2005). Butcher *et al.* (2007) argue that diversity in organisational contexts, tasks and time-lines lend support to a 'contingency' approach to leadership. In contingency approaches, the effectiveness of a given pattern of leader behaviour is contingent upon the demands imposed by the situation. Different styles of leadership will be appropriate to the needs of different organisational situations and leadership approaches can be either task-motivated or relationship motivated. Drawing on DL theory counters the weakness within contingency theory, that is, its treatment of followers as passive. This has particular resonance in a community context where the espoused *raison d'etre* of local development and social change work is engagement and involvement of others. Thus, a theoretical model that takes account of 'leaders' and 'followers' and the dynamic interplay between them is helpful. Spillane (2005) goes so far as to argue that situation is not only important to leadership practice but that 'it actually constitutes leadership practice – situation defines leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers' (p.145). Leaders act in situations that are defined by the actions of others and it is in these interactions that leadership is constructed. Also, the relationship between situation and practice is two-way: 'aspects of the situation can either enable or constrain practice, while practice can transform the situation' (*ibid.*, p.149). A significant variable factor is how the internal and/or

external context may act in a positive way to create and maintain the conditions for distributed leadership to flourish, or otherwise (Bennett *et al.*, 2003). In the case of the current research, attention to the impact of neoliberal policies and austerity measures in NI, outlined earlier, on the community sector is an important context in which to situate the role of current leadership practice and its potential in relation to collaboration for social change.

Distributed Leadership: a Hybrid of Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions

Traditionally in leadership studies the unit of analysis has been a solo or stand alone leader, however, an expanded unit of analysis is proposed in DL. Gronn (2002) argues for 'a unit of analysis which encompasses patterns or varieties of distributed leadership' (p.424). He outlines a framework for understanding distributed organisational leadership and a taxonomy for classifying varieties of distributed patterns, based on a range of elements identified in research studies (*ibid*.). Central to this is his idea of 'concerted action', a dynamic which is the product of conjoint activity. By this he means an outcome which is greater than the sum of the actions undertaken by individuals. This usefully avoids the structure/agency dualism which tends to view leadership as either the result of structural relationships *or* the result of individual action and Gronn (2002) outlines three forms that concertive distributed leadership may take, forms which are readily seen in the community sector in Belfast:

- Spontaneous collaboration – where groups of individuals with different skills and knowledge come together to pool their expertise and take joint action to undertake a task, and then disband. The community development sector is littered with examples of just this kind of spontaneous collaboration, with individuals and groups coalescing around particular issues such as, for example, the introduction of a retrograde policy or the closure of a local authority amenity.
- Intuitive working relations – this kind of DL emerges over time as two or more individuals begin to work closely together and come to rely on each other more. This leadership may be more likely to be found among those in the community sector who play a formal leadership role, a role which can be a stressful one for the individuals concerned owing to the increased

pressures to deliver contracts and deal with shrinking resources in the current austerity context.

- Institutionalised practice – formalised committees and teams as designed or arising from systemic adaptation. Many community organisations routinely institutionalise leadership by establishing and delegating tasks as well as decision-making to working sub groups and committees – in effect, distributing leadership.

DL includes spontaneous collaboration, intuitive working relations and institutionalised practice, and together these represent an increasing degree of institutionalisation, from unplanned, short-term collaborations to formalised organisational structures. Thus, DL is more than simply inviting more people to feel empowered as leaders; it is integral to the practices of the organisation.

A potential weakness in DL is that it may suggest that leadership is not concerned very much with individuals. Interestingly, in his later writings, Gronn (2008) refined his thinking on this and argued for the concept of 'hybrid' as 'a more accurate representation of diverse patterns of practice which fuse or coalesce hierarchical and heterarchical[30] elements of emergent activities' (p.155). In other words, DL usually exists *alongside* some kind of focused or hierarchal leadership. Others make this point more strongly. Leithwood *et al.* (2007) argue that 'effective forms of distributed leadership may well depend on effective forms of focused leadership – leading the leaders' (p.55, see also Skinner, 2010). Citing their research concerning leadership in the Canadian school system, they argue that:

- effective forms of DL are unlikely in the absence of focused leadership on the part of the schools formal leader; and
- regular monitoring of progress, and occasional active forms of intervention, by the principal can still be required (Leithwood *et al*., 2007).

[30] Heterarchical is a structure in which each element shares the same "horizontal" position of power and authority, each playing a theoretically equal role. It is usually used in contrast to hierarchical.

Similarly, Harris (2009) argues that DL is concerned with the 'co-performance of leadership practice and the nature of the interactions that contribute to co-performance' (p.5). Like Gronn and others, she warns that distributed leadership should not be seen as the antithesis of top-down, hierarchical leadership, arguing that it involves both the vertical and lateral dimensions of leadership practice (*ibid*.). Wright (2008) concurs, citing her empirical research findings that differing contextual factors require both 'top-down' and more organic 'bottom-up' leadership approaches. Locke (2003) further develops the idea of a hybrid of vertical and lateral dimensions, arguing that there are a number of leadership functions and tasks which should and should not be shared. Albeit writing in a business rather than community context, he argues that 'top leaders' which he defines rather loosely as 'the top person in a company, such as its CEO' should be assigned the job of deciding on the organisation's vision (including its core values), determining an overall strategy for pursuing the vision and making sure the organisational structure supports its strategy (*ibid.*, p.276). According to him, at least partly shareable leadership tasks are goal-setting in relation to the vision, intellectual stimulation, individual support and building a collaborative culture. These are tasks that need to be carried out at all levels if the organisation is to succeed in moving toward its vision. Disaggregating functions and tasks in this manner is useful, although some of his specific thinking in this regard is questionable. For example, other theorists (Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Ospina and Foldy, 2010) highlight the importance of developing a *shared* or *common* vision (my emphasis) and so leaving the job of deciding that vision, as well as values and overall strategy to the 'top leader' would not inculcate the level of ownership and 'buy in' that would be needed to implement the associated strategy effectively. This is particularly likely to be the case in the community sector where those with leadership roles may have little or no authority with which to enforce such decisions, were they to make them. Rather, as suggested by writers such as Ospina and Foldy (2010) and Sullivan *et al*. (2012), bringing others on board through influencing, discussion and negotiation is a key leadership task.

This hybrid idea of the vertical and lateral dimensions of DL has resonance within the community sector in Belfast. Those playing formal leadership roles are often charged with significant responsibility to manage contracts and resources and, in so doing, often are forced to make difficult decisions about where and how to deploy these resources. Some leadership tasks are often not necessarily amenable to delegation or significant involvement of others, especially if the leader is held personally accountable. Also, the local community context is one where leaders are likely to have a degree of informal or tenuous authority which is linked to their role or title, while others will not and, instead, derive their authority or legitimacy from elsewhere.

Distributed Leadership: Formal and Informal Leaders

Another feature of DL is the openness of the boundaries of leadership, with a wider net of groups and individuals being seen as contributors to it, as well as wider boundaries of the community within which leadership is distributed (Bennett *et al*., 2003). Spillane (2006) uses the term 'stretched over' to describe how leadership can be shared among a number of people, over time. Given community development's concern with inclusion of *all* members of the community this emphasis on open boundaries resonates. Leithwood *et al*. (2007) consider the question of what is distributed by introducing the idea of constrained and unconstrained leadership, arguing what they term 'constrained' forms of DL entail leadership functions carried out by one formal leader or shared among formal leaders only. 'Unconstrained' forms include the distribution of leadership to whomever has the expertise required for the job, rather than only those in formal leadership roles (*ibid*.). Underpinning this is the idea that various kinds of expertise are distributed across many rather than fewer people. A range of distinct and relevant perspectives and capabilities are to be found in individuals spread throughout the group or organisation and if these are brought together 'it is possible to forge a concertive dynamic which represents more than the sum of the individual contributors (Bennett *et al.*, 2003, p.7). Bennett *et al.* (2003) identify the degree to which informal leaders are involved in the process of DL as one of a number of variable features. This

links back to the issue of how leadership is distributed and where power lies in relation to this.

An associated variable feature within DL is control versus autonomy: certain goals may be seen as set by leaders who are accountable to outsiders for the performance of the organisation and, in this sense, may be seen as non-negotiable (Bennett *et al.*, 2003). This is in contrast to an emphasis on a greater degree of autonomy for those who contribute to leadership, including the ability to review and change underpinning values and aims. The degree of control and autonomy of those playing formal – and informal – leadership roles within communities in Belfast is an interesting dimension to explore in this study. Certainly, the wider context described in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us* would suggest that there is some degree of curtailment.

Focusing on collaboration, Williams (2013) suggests that models of shared, distributed and dispersed leadership align more easily with collaboration because leadership functions are diffused among both formal and informal leaders. He describes these models as having been developed to counter the limitations of traditional hierarchical approaches and he describes the former as 'anti-heroic, dispersed and predicated on a different set of skills and principles to those associated with hierarchical alternatives' (*ibid*., p.24). In the current research, DL theory helps explore the extent to which local community leaders attempt to develop alternatives to more traditional, hierarchical ways of organising. This is especially significant given the implicit assumption in community development that everyone in the community has something to contribute, and that at least part of the task of leadership is to facilitate people's involvement and contribution to a collective wisdom.

A serious criticism of DL relates to the question of the distribution of power, with particular concerns that it does not engage with issues of inequality such as gender and ethnicity. Lumby (2013) argues that opportunities to contribute to leadership are not equal and that DL 'remains silent on persistent structural

barriers' and that, in effect, it maintains the power status quo (p.581). Writing in an educational context, she argues that

> 'distributed leadership has proved admirably fit and adapted to the needs of the early 21st century school environment, both in reconciling staff to neoliberal conditions in the workplace and as part of a much longer propensity whereby troubling underlying power structures are written out of thinking. Contrary to the suggestion in some literature that power is being redistributed, the customary uses of episodic agency by those in authority endure, as do more subtle forms of two- and three-dimensional power' (*ibid.,* p.592).

This alerts us to the tensions between the aspirations to a distributed model of leadership and the possibility of it in practice. Lukes' three dimensions of power, discussed earlier, addresses the question of how the powerful secure the compliance of the less powerful (Lukes, 2005). One of his core arguments is that particular attention needs to be paid to those aspects of power that are least accessible to observation. Lumby (2013) critiques DL by drawing on the concept of dimensions of power, and on Foucault's idea that power is deeply embedded in how reality is constructed and in people's acceptance of or resistance to 'truth' and of the structures of society. She argues convincingly that whilst a few theorists refer to the under-theorisation of power in DL theory, this is 'generally more in relation to the use of power in the service of the state, not in relation to deeper systemic issues such as those related to ethnicity and gender' (*ibid*., p.585). Others too refer to the absence of a power analysis in DL theory, with some noting that whilst leadership might be distributed power may not be (Bolden, 2011; Hatcher, 2005). Whilst Hatcher (2005) argues that 'authentic distributed leadership requires distributed power' he suggests that this is challenging in the current climate (p.265). Lumby (2013) challenges Bennett *et al.*'s (2003) assertion on the 'openness of boundaries', arguing instead that DL theory is implicated 'in longstanding maintenance of a false narrative of equality' by not drawing attention to underlying power structures (Lumby, 2013, p.590).

Much of the daily work of leadership involves other people, who may not have a designated or formal leadership role, playing their part in making the work or project of the community happen. If we take the idea of followers, in its broadest sense, as encompassing others who may play informal leadership roles, we can see how the idea of 'leading the leaders' (Leithwood *et al*., 2007) becomes an important task. This links to the idea put forward by some DL theorists that, as leadership behaviours and practices are not solely the preserve of the formally designated leader, effective leadership involves 'developing the capacity of others to take on leadership responsibilities' (Dunoon, 2002, p.80). If leadership is to be effectively distributed then the issue of building the capacity of others to play a leadership role becomes a critical one. Indeed, Leithwood *et al.* (2007) conclude that distributing leadership to others does not seem to result in less demand for leadership from those in formal leadership positions. Rather it results in greater demand to undertake tasks including coordinating who performs which leadership functions, building leadership capacities in others and supporting the leadership work of those others (*ibid.*). They also contend that characteristics attributed to informal leaders are no different to those of formal leaders (*ibid*.). This issue of naming and developing leadership capacity is a live topic in the community sector in Belfast, and not without its own contradictions.

Distributed Leadership: What is Distributed, and How

The final key component of DL to be discussed here relates to what is distributed and how this process occurs. In relation to *what* is distributed a number of broad categories of leadership functions are suggested by Leithwood *et al.* (2007) which they used in their study of leadership in Canadian schools and which 'reflect a transformational approach to leadership which has proven to be useful in many different cultural and organisational contexts' (p.43). These include: setting direction; developing people; and redesigning the organisation to be as effective as possible (*ibid*.). These are leadership functions which are also clearly undertaken in communities in Belfast.

Spillane (2005) contends that what matters is not so much that leadership is

distributed, but *how* it is distributed. Gronn's (2002) idea of concerted forms of leadership – spontaneous, intuitive and institutionalised – discussed earlier, offer some insight into this but fail to specify how these come about or who initiates them. Other theorists address this specifically. Leithwood *et al.* (2007) suggest that certain forms of distribution are more effective or desirable. They make a case for what they term planful alignment where the tasks and functions of those providing leadership have been given 'prior, planful thought by organisational members', with agreement as to who is to carry out which functions (*ibid*., p.40). They identify shared values and beliefs that are associated with planful alignment as including: reflection and dialogue as the basis for decision-making; trust in the motives of, and confidence in the capacities of, leadership colleagues; commitment to shared organisation goals; and cooperation rather than competition (*ibid*.).

They explicate this idea of planful alignment further by advancing the contrasting ideas of *spontaneous alignment*, *spontaneous misalignment* and *anarchic misalignment*. In spontaneous alignment, leadership tasks and functions are distributed with little or no planning, which offers few guarantees of what they term fortuitous alignment. Values associated with this form of concerted action include: 'gut feelings' as the basis for good decision-making; trust in the motives of others; idealistic beliefs about the capacities of leadership colleagues; commitment to shared organisational goals; and cooperation rather than competition. With *spontaneous misalignment* – where the alignment effectively does not work – the outcomes can be less fortuitous even though underlying values and norms can be similar to spontaneous alignment. *Anarchic misalignment* includes active rejection, on the part of some or many organisational leaders, of influence from others about what they should be doing in their own sphere. As a result, those leaders' units 'behave highly independently, competing with other units on such matters as organisational goals and access to resources' (*ibid*., p.41). Shared values and beliefs likely to be associated with anarchic misalignment include: reflection and dialogue as the basis for good decision-making about one's own work and sphere of influence; mistrust in the motives and capacities of one's leadership

colleagues; commitment to individual or unit, but not whole organisation or goals; and competition rather than cooperation as the best way to promote productivity across units within the organisation. What is particularly useful about how this concept of alignment and misalignment is framed, from the perspective of the current research, is the focus on how leadership tasks are distributed, and how associated values emerge, within individual organisations and in the wider community, especially in the current competitive, survivalist context in which groups find themselves. More specifically, anarchic misalignment, with its link to competition rather than co-operation may be a helpful conceptual handle.

Other theorists highlight DL's focus on shared goals and values and suggest that it is useful in a range of social sector settings. For example, Stevenson (2010) suggests that DL has something to offer in social care organisations where 'tasks and goals are shared and based on a common framework of values and where the members of the organization work together to pool their experience' (p.35). He references Hafford-Letchfield *et al.'s* (2008) description of DL as leadership which focuses on engaging expertise within organisations rather than simply focusing on formal positions or roles. Hafford-Letchfield *et al.* (2008) argue that distributed leadership is therefore 'largely equated with team work and collaboration', and it can contribute towards 'an ideal culture for learning which can shape the practitioner identity and therefore the organisational culture' (p.29). As discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us,* values are a significant driver in both community development and collaboration, and identifying and inculcating shared values around empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights is a key function of community development – it is essentially a values-based endeavour. If values influence behaviour, then looking at the congruence between values and leadership behaviour will be helpful. Leithwood *et al.* (2007) suggest that planful alignment, with its values of trust and cooperation, seems more likely than spontaneous alignment, spontaneous misalignment or anarchic misalignment to contribute significantly to long-term organisational success. The current research considers the types of

alignment evident in the community sector, the extent to which these are planful or otherwise.

Why and how leadership emerges is an important aspect of understanding the kind of leadership that exists and is required to promote collaboration for social change. Bennett *et al*. (2003) suggested a number of reasons as to why DL *emerges*, based on a literature review, including:

- A restructuring of the organisation, often with senior formal leaders likely to be significant influences on such restructuring;
- A 'top down' initiative from a strong or charismatic leader. (The view of distributed leadership as concerted action through relationships allows for strong partners in relationships which at the same time entail power disparities between them);
- A 'bottom up' initiative from within the organisation or community – which sometimes can represent a challenge to existing leadership arrangements (p.8-9).

Coming from a critical perspective Lumby (2013) argues that viewing DL as an intentional action and focusing on how it is distributed 'imply use of one-dimensional power' whereby 'someone distributes the power to act' (p.585). In this way, staff are shaped by the leader's one-dimensional power. Day *et al.* (2009) make a similar point when they argue that 'greater "distribution of leadership" outside of those in formally established roles usually depends on quite intentional intervention on the part of those in formal leadership roles' (p.14) and thus, Bolden (2011) suggests, the implementation of DL cannot be considered as politically neutral. Gordon (2010) makes a comparable claim when he suggests that 'power is always implicated with the discourse and practices of leadership' (p.283) whilst noting that much of the relevant literature 'adopts a normative, apolitical approach to power' (p.281).

Lumby (2013) also queries the representation of what she terms 'residual control by those in authority' as being a requirement of successful distribution, suggesting that greater autonomy remains within 'the imperative of the official

agenda' (p.587). In doing so she draws attention to the contradictions within the DL literature which on the one hand, rejects heroic, hierarchical models of leadership but on the other hand, supports its necessity and value (*ibid.*). Its ultimate success is, according to her, in 'enrolling staff willingly into a regime of control, while appearing to loosen the bonds. In this respect it is a highly effective use of two dimensional power' (*ibid*., p.589). Bolden (2011) also notes this limitation of DL theory, that is, its focus on the role of those with formal authority and argues that this 'limits opportunities for recognizing the contribution of informal leaders and the manner in which situational factors (physical, social and cultural) impact upon leadership' (p.261). In relation to issues of diversity, he suggests that despite DL's promise of a more inclusive perspective on leadership generally 'much of the work fails to take a cross/multicultural perspective' (*ibid*., p.262) although, nonetheless, he acknowledges that rather than attempting to replace other accounts of leadership, it enables 'a recognition of the variety of forms of leadership in a more integrated and systemic manner' (*ibid*., p.264).

3.4.2. Distributed Leadership – Summarising its Strengths and Limitations

The strengths and limitations of distributed leadership theory have been debated over many years, but particularly so in the last 12 years (Dunoon, 2002; Gronn, 2008; Hatcher, 2005; Jones *et al*., 2014; Storey, 2004; Wright, 2008). Here a summary of these is offered.

Strengths of DL theory include:

- By 'de-monopolising' leadership and increasing the sources and voices of influence in organisations, DL may help widen the span of employee and member participation (Gronn, 2008, p. 154).
- It may help avoid or minimise some of the problems associated with charismatic approaches to leadership. As Dunoon (2002, p.9) puts it 'the prospect of the maverick leader is likely to be less of a problem if leadership responsibility is widely distributed and ideas are contestable'. Similarly, there is less likelihood of egocentric individual leaders being able to impose their ideas on others.

- DL is based on trust in the expertise of individuals and thus helps to build institutional leadership capacity. It is also based on a culture of autonomy rather than control whereby individuals are respected for their knowledge which can be the source of new approaches to ambiguity (Jones *et al*., 2014).
- It is a more participative approach to change in which the processes of decision-making and implementation enable people at all levels of the organisations to be involved in decision-making and implementation (RMIT *et al*., n.d.).
- With its central focus on the development of collaborative relationships, it encourages, nurtures and develops leadership capabilities in many people. This should avoid over-burdening the leadership of an organisation as well as offering growth and developmental opportunities for multiple individuals.
- It allows for decision-taking and execution by individuals and groups with the most appropriate capabilities, which in turn has a motivational potential and can build commitment to the joint enterprise.
- As the environment becomes more complex, uncertain and subject to rapid change, organisations need to adapt. This requires leaders at different levels in the organisation to be able and ready to respond.
- Aids better, more informed decision-making which, in turn, supports the active implementation of agreements. This is especially important in community contexts where there are few (legal) ways to compel people to engage.

Limitations of DL theory include:

- The issue of power is not addressed in DL theory to a significant degree. This renders it somewhat apolitical and, as such, this is a major weakness.
- Informal leadership 'dispersion' can 'negatively affect team outcomes by contributing to inefficiencies within the team' and therefore 'having fewer leaders rather than more would seem preferable' (Harris, 2009, p.13).
- It also can result in conflicting priorities, targets and timescales among different leaders, both formal and informal.

- In relation to the actual distribution of leadership, questions remain unanswered, such as: 'how widely should leadership be 'distributed'? Is the governing principle a fair share all round? Who determines the distribution? Are the activities parcelled out and allocated by a central leader or do group members naturally gravitate to assuming leadership roles in accordance with their competencies?' (Storey, 2004, p.253).
- Concerns have been raised as to how it fares in practice when competing against a dominant cultural model of the top-down leader who is willing to assume responsibility. Storey (*ibid*.) also suggests that some organisational members 'may in reality be rather attached to the relative comfort and lack of exposure that may derive from operating under the dominant leader mode' (p.254).
- If DL is exclusively implemented in a "top-down" approach, there is a danger that it can be interpreted as misguided delegation or coercion (Wright, 2008).
- The DL framework assumes a ready and willing team of followers waiting to assume leadership responsibilities and this may not always be the case (*ibid*.).
- People may not have the capacity and/or experience to play a leadership or decision-making role. Support to enable them to do so may be required.
- Formal leaders may work against distributing leadership by holding tightly to power and control, being unwilling to nurture other leaders, and involving only those who support their agenda (Wright, 2008).

Despite the many well-argued reservations about the limitations of DL theory it is nonetheless useful for this study. In particular its focus on leadership as enacted by more than only the formal or appointed leader, and its framing of leadership activity as a situated and social process at the intersection of leaders, followers and the situation is helpful in a community sector context. In an attempt to overcome some of its limitations the current research draws on other leadership concepts, as well as framing it within a power analysis and neoliberal context, as discussed earlier.

3.5 Other Useful Leadership Concepts

Two other leadership concepts included in the current research's conceptual leadership framework are:

- the transactional/transformational continuum which views leadership as somewhere along a transformational/transactional continuum – leadership as a transformational influence process rather than simply a transactional process which promotes compliance of followers through both rewards and punishments; and
- meaning-making and narrative-shaping as forms of leadership.

3.5.1 Transactional/Transformational Dichotomy

As discussed earlier, much of the work of community development is concerned with empowerment, participation, inclusion and rights (Bhattacharyya, 2004; Billis and Harris, 1996; Donoghue, 2003; Pyles, 2014). A number of theorists, writing more broadly about leadership, address the distinction between transactional and transformative approaches, and more recent attempts to integrate these, in terms of the extent to which leadership is characterised by these approaches and promotes social change (Barker, 2001; Bass, 1998; Bass and Stodgill, 1990; Burns, 1978, 2003; Northouse, 2004; Rost, 1993). According to Burns (2003, p.143), transformational leadership involves 'leading by being led' and the leader's self-actualising qualities are turned outward to learn from and be led by followers. This requires the transformational leader to be visionary and creative, as well as to seek to introduce radical change whenever necessary (*ibid*., 1978, 2003). By comparison, he describes transactional leadership as concerned with brokering and taking a practical, more pragmatic approach to leadership whereby the leader creates a psychological contract guaranteeing others that effort expended will be rewarded (Burns, 1978). Northouse (2004) suggests that transactional leadership constitutes 'the bulk of leadership models, which focus on the exchanges between leaders and their followers' (p.170). Rost (1993) emphasises that leadership is about transformation; transformation in the motivations, values and beliefs of followers, as well as a transformation in the structures of organisations. Bass and Stogdill (1990), in the most extensive literature review on leadership,

provide a general definition of leadership which supports the idea that leadership is a transformational influence process. Bass is credited with developing the formal transformational leader concept, building on the work of Burns and others (Sun and Anderson, 2012). Bass defines leadership as 'an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members' (Bass and Stogdill, 1990, p.19). The critical transformation in this definition is of the perceptions and expectations of members. Bass emphasises that leadership, so defined, allows any member of an organisation to exhibit leadership, thus aligning it with the idea of DL (*ibid*.). Barker (2001) argues that bringing about change is a core leadership task, and goes so far as to contend that 'if there is no need for change, there is no need for leadership' (p.491). He defines leadership as 'a process of transformative change where the ethics of individuals are integrated into the mores of a community as a means of evolutionary social development' (*ibid*., p.491). This transactional/transformational binary parallels current debates within the community sector in the North about the role of the sector and the extent to which it is losing its autonomy and its potency, as discussed in the *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*. The idea of transformational leadership is particularly helpful in a context such as the community sector where often the leader may have little formal authority and depends on her/his ability to inspire, stimulate and persuade others to be part of trying to bring about change. However, whilst leadership arguably ought to be more concerned with transformation than with transaction, it seems that in community contexts the focus on 'doing business' and dealing with bureaucratic and administrative requirements will almost certainly result in leaders, at least sometimes, resorting to the use of more transactional approaches.

3.5.2 Meaning-making and Narrative-shaping

Another concept which emerges in leadership theory and which resonates particularly in the current neoliberal context is that of meaning making and narrative-shaping (Kay, 1996; Macmillan and McLaren, 2012). Macmillan and

McLaren (2012) view leadership as part of struggle for competing narratives whilst Kay (1996) suggests that leadership needs to take account of the wider social and cultural context within which the construction of narratives takes place. This, of course, also links with the earlier discussion on the Foucauldian idea of contemporary narratives working as 'technologies of the self' in framing and delimiting debate, resulting in internalised, deeper dimensions of power not even being articulated (Cotoi, 2011).

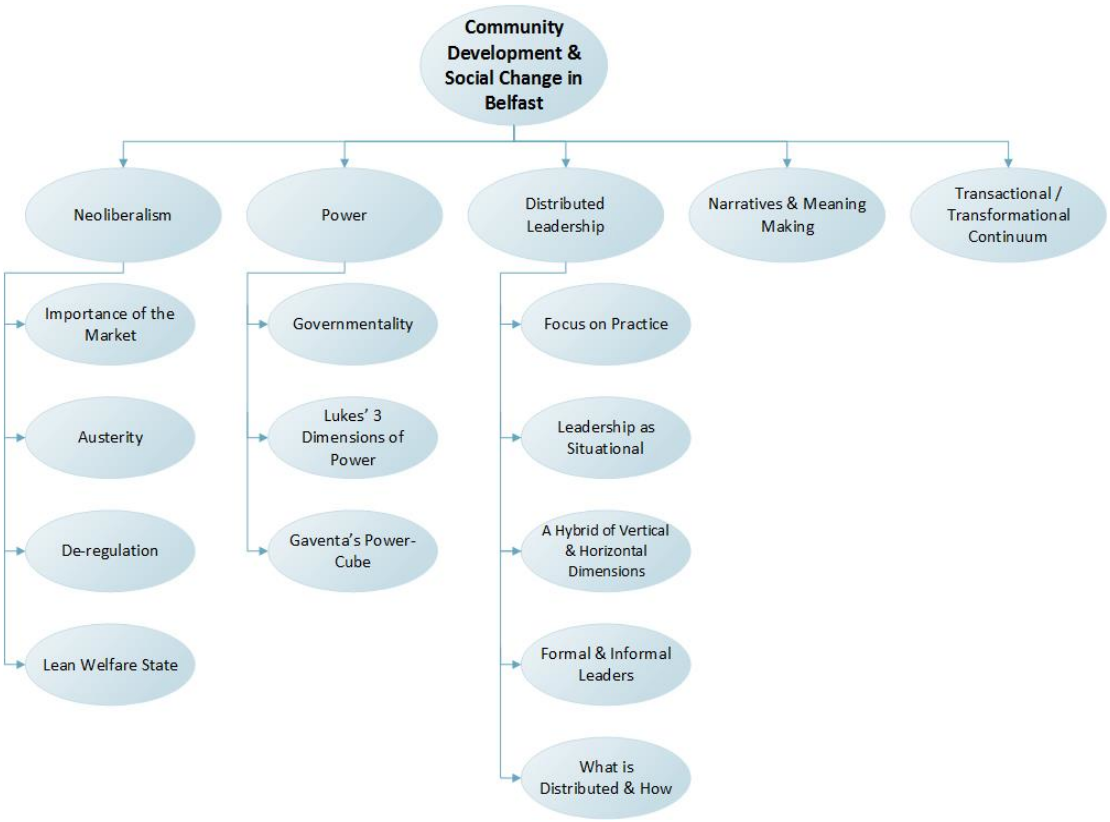
Heifetz (1994) and Skinner's (2010) contributions are helpful here as they connect the idea of inclusion of a wider range of people in leadership and decision-making with influencing and changing narratives. For example, Heifetz (1994, p.184) argues that 'people – perceived as entrepreneurs and deviants, organisers and trouble-makers – provide the capacity within systems to see through the blind spots of the dominant viewpoint'. Skinner (2010) builds on this point by arguing that DL may be about an individual expressing a point of view that is 'missing from the accepted argument and, as progress requires new ideas and innovation to get to new ways of thinking and doing, attitude and behavioural change are necessary' (p.49). This is an important consideration in community contexts where creating conditions to enable dominant narratives to be challenged, and Chrislip's (2002, p.75) 'unusual voices', those in communities with a high stake but low influence, to be heard, is required if social change is to be achieved. Milbourne (2013) picks up on the theme of narratives, arguing that 'an independent narrative' for the voluntary sector is needed and that developing this may mean 'no longer being able to act both within *and* against the state' (p.20). It seems that the bigger question remains as to whether and to what extent narratives other than the dominant ones are possible and/or are articulated.

3.6 Developing a Theoretical Framework for this Research

This section concludes the theoretical chapter. Drawing on three theories/domains, namely neoliberalism, power and distributed leadership, along with a number of other leadership concepts borrowed from elsewhere, a

theoretical framework for this study has been developed. Here, in Figure 2, a summary of this framework developed in this chapter is presented.

Figure 2. A Theoretical Framework for Examining Leadership for Collaboration and Social Change in a Community Sector Context



This theoretical framework is used to interrogate and analyse the current data on leadership for collaboration and social change in communities in Belfast.

The first theory drawn on is a neoliberal theory of society. The cornerstones of this theory are that principles favouring free-market solutions to economic and social problems have become widespread in the last 30 years. Key elements associated with neoliberalism include a lean welfare state, deregulation, low taxation and flexible labour market. These constitute what has perhaps best been described 'not [as] one distinct political philosophy, but as a convenient description for an amorphous set of political theories' (Thorsen and Lie, 2007, p.14) which can be drawn on more or less depending on the needs of the state

and of the economy at any given time. In this theoretical framework Foucault's (1988) concept of governmentality is also drawn upon to examine how power operates in neoliberal contexts. For Foucault, governmentality refers to a continuum, extending from political government right through to forms of self-regulation, which he termed 'technologies of the self ' (*ibid*., p.18). Other theoretical concepts of power used are Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power and Gaventa's (2006) power cube. The three dimensions, comprising overt, covert and hidden power, help us understand how those with power acquire the, often willing, compliance of the less powerful (Lukes, 2005). An important element of this is that attention needs to be paid to those aspects of power that are least accessible to observation. Gaventa's (2006) power cube is a framework which describes how power is enacted across three dimensions: how arenas of power are created; the degree of visibility of power; and the levels and places of engagement. In relation to leadership, DL theory along with leadership concepts relating to narratives and the transactional/transformational continuum are also drawn on in the theoretical framework. The foundation of DL theory is a description and understanding of leadership as being enacted by more than only the formal or appointed leaders through the distribution of leadership tasks among various members of a group or organisation. It focuses on leadership as it is *practised* rather than on the traits or behaviours of individual leaders and sees leadership as a social process contingent on the *situation* in which it is enacted. As such, it is aligns well with the participatory ethos and practice of community development. Transformational versus transactional approaches, and meaning-making and narrative-shaping as forms of leadership, are also part of the theoretical framework. Overall, the theoretical framework has been developed in an attempt to politicise leadership theories through the 'bricolage' of building a critical conception of power into distributed leadership theory and thereby addressing a key limitation of that theory, namely its lack of substantial focus on different kinds of persistent structural barriers. The next Chapter goes on to discuss the methodology used in the current research.

Chapter Four: Researching Leadership for Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities – Issues of Methodology, Methods and Research Process

4.1 Introduction

Making explicit the rationale for the application of a specific methodology and methods used to identify, select and analyse data allows a critical evaluation of a study's overall validity and reliability (Lincoln *et al*., 2011). This chapter describes the development of a qualitative research design to explore leadership for collaboration and social change in communities in Belfast. The research objective and key questions that drive the study are presented before exploration of how my views on ontological and epistemological issues, along with as well as my political beliefs, inform the study[31]. In an attempt at reflexivity my personal and professional interests in this research area are made explicit so that the reader can take account of these. Ethical issues associated with undertaking the study are considered before a discussion of the research design, focusing on methods and sampling approaches adopted. The process used in securing and setting up interviews with research participants are outlined and the chapter concludes by presenting details of the data analysis strategy.

4.2 Research Objective and Questions

Community activism centres the ability to work together to achieve common goals, that is, to collaborate, whether within local geographical communities or in communities of shared interests. Much of my professional life has been located in the community and voluntary sector in NI, and I am increasingly

[31] In this chapter the writing changes from the third to the first person, in light of the personal, reflexive nature of much of the discussion.

persuaded that collaboration is required to address the complex, multi-faceted social problems we face as a society. This research has grown out of that conviction and is concerned with exploring the significance of leadership in relation to such collaborative working within the community sector in Belfast.

Whilst from the outset, my research interests were broadly concerned with exploring collaboration and social change in local communities, I was less clear on how to go about selecting a specific area of research to investigate. To help me identify and think through a range of possible options, I undertook six scoping conversations: four with academics and two with experienced activists who know the community sector well. These discussions, in addition to input from my supervisors, helped to clarify my thinking and to delineate my research area more specifically. I decided to focus my research geographically in Belfast and developed the following research objective and questions.

Research Objective

The objective of the research is to describe and critically assess experiences and perceptions of those playing leadership roles in the community sector in Belfast in relation to promoting collaboration for social change. Specific research questions include:

- What are the roles of community development in relation to promoting progressive social change within disadvantaged communities in Belfast?
- What role does collaboration play within community development and the community sector in Belfast?
- What kinds of leadership within community development promote collaboration and social change?
- How does the current neoliberal context impact on leadership within the community sector?

Will this help us know about leadership in communities more widely? In relation to generalisation, Lewis and Ritchie (2003) argue that, in certain settings, 'the findings of a single study, which can be representationally generalised, will be of value even if they cannot be inferred to other populations

or if they make little or no contribution to wider social theory' (p.266). I argue that such generalisation can be made in this study, that is the findings 'can be inferred to the parent population that was sampled', in this case to those playing leadership roles in Belfast communities. This is because the context within which leadership is enacted does not vary widely across the different communities throughout the city.

4.3 What is Valid Knowledge and How do we Access it?

Generally there is a tendency not to reflect on the way we think (Haverland and Yanow, 2012). However, theories are based on underlying, though not necessarily explicit, epistemological and ontological assumptions (*ibid.*). Assumptions and choices about ontology and epistemology have significant consequences for the conduct and outcomes of research (Blaikie, 2007). As Moses and Knutsen (2012, p.2) point out, 'underneath any given research design and choice of methods lies a researcher's (often implicit) understanding of the nature of the world and how it should be studied'. In light of this I discuss the epistemological and ontological approaches which underpin this research.

Ontology refers to the nature of social reality: is it a 'given' (*objectivism*) or is it created by the meaning human beings bestow through their interaction with it (*constructivism*)? Epistemology is concerned with theory of knowledge, that is, how can we gain knowledge of the social world and/or social reality? Is it through the application of the methods of the natural sciences ('positivism') or through seeking the subjective meaning of social action ('interpretivism')? Linked to ontological and epistemological positions are the types of methodologies and methods used by researchers. Grix (2002) summaries it as follows: what is out there to know about (ontological position), what and how can we know it (epistemological position), how can we go about gaining this knowledge (methodology), and what particular tools and techniques can we use to acquire it (methods). Assumptions and choices about these need to be made clear for a number of reasons: so that the links with methodology and methods are understood; to help avoid confusion when discussing theoretical debates

about social issues; and to be able to understand the position of others as well as defend our own.

In this research I largely adopt an interpretivist approach in so far as I believe that knowledge is a social reality which is value-laden and comes to light through individual interpretation. As Snape and Spencer (2003, p.17) describe it 'the researcher and the social world impact on each other; facts and values are not distinct and findings are inevitably influenced by the researcher's perspective and values, thus making it impossible to conduct objective, value free research, although the researcher can declare and be transparent about his or her assumptions'.

Epistemology is concerned with how we can study reality; some believe that we are part of that knowledge whilst others believe we are external to it. I see knowledge as essentially subjective, as something that is interpreted by individuals. Therefore, my methodological approach is an interpretivist one. In other words, I believe that we cannot understand why people do what they do, or why particular institutions exist and operate in particular ways, without knowing how those involved interpret and make sense of their world. As a result of this, I use a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology in this research. To describe the difference between these, at its simplest, quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). However, many quantitative and qualitative researchers differ with respect to their ontological and epistemological foundations. Quantitative research entails a deductive approach whereby theories are tested. It incorporates the practices and norms of the natural sciences, and positivism in particular, and embodies a view of social reality as external and objective. By contrast, qualitative research emphasises an inductive approach, with a focus on the generation of theories and the ways in which individuals interpret their social world, and sees social reality as created by individual's perceptions (Neuman, 2005; Ritchie and Lewis, 2010; Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2000). Qualitative research also tends to provide 'thick' description and to study particular rather than typical accounts (Green and Thorogood, 2013). In this

research I attempt to 'study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of meaning people bring to them' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011, p.3) through the use of a qualitative methodology.

I locate my theoretical position broadly within the critical tradition. Critical research approaches challenge taken-for-granted norms and aim to expose structures of power and domination, how these operate and in whose interests (Cannella and Lincoln, 2009). Such approaches explicitly assess social practices and institutional arrangements and often in terms of equity or social justice. Another important feature of a critical perspective is that it is seen as providing a practical guide for transforming society. Critical research tends to view social science as playing an oppositional role in political terms by challenging 'common sense' views which can be distorted by ideologies which are socially generated in order to obscure injustice and its causes. Mills (1968) described common sense as norms and assumed knowledge, and encouraged people to not simply accept what was going on around them, but rather to question it and ask why things happen in the way they do. Common sense is usefully differentiated from what Bauman (1990) calls 'responsible speech', characterised by being corroborated by available evidence as opposed to 'provisional, untested guess' (p.8). Arguably, good social research is in essence about a way of challenging dominant ways of thinking, that is, challenging 'common sense' understandings. It is fundamentally concerned with moving beyond ourselves and outside of our own experience. The ongoing debate about the role of social science posits, on the one hand, that its purpose is to identify solutions to contemporary problems and, on the other, its purpose is to challenge dominant ways of thinking and, in effect, 'destabilise' existing power relations (*ibid.*). I situate myself within the parameters of the latter argument, with a concern that if research overly concentrates on seeking solutions, issues may become 'de-politicised', by focusing on more immediate term solutions or 'quick fixes' which address symptoms rather than on underlying causes. Therefore, this research is interested in uncovering ideas about leadership practices and institutional arrangements within the community sector in Belfast, by drawing attention to and challenging 'common sense' views which

can be taken for granted and prevent people from seeing the causes and impact of inequalities.

As discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*, the leadership for collaboration literature, along with many new and post-industrial theories, tend to be directed at improving what Komives and Dugan (2010) describe as 'the common good' and are underpinned by a sense of social responsibility (p.114). It is for this reason that I draw on these theories as they are congruent not only with the broad aims of community sector groups but also with my own interests and beliefs about the value of leadership. These theories also chime with my critical interpretivist perspective. As Komives and Dugan (*ibid*., p.112) argue 'social constructivism, critical theory, postmodernism and feminist theory have all played important roles in shaping contemporary leadership theory and are characterised by the degree to which they give voice to historically marginalised populations, capture the complexities of social interactions, and address power dynamics' (*ibid*., p.112). Similarly, leadership theories that focus on narratives and meaning making come from an interpretivist approach which does not view leadership as some objective phenomenon, behaviour or trait which can be measured but more as a social construct which has a 'use value rather than a truth value' (Kay, 1996). Such bodies of theory resonate with my interests, particularly those around the empowerment of traditionally excluded people and challenging the dominant voices.

To summarise, as a researcher, I identify with the critical interpretivist approach. I believe the kind of change required is radical and structural and therefore I focus in particular on recent approaches which take account of the complexity and subjectivity of the field and of a growing interest in a constructivist epistemology.

4.4 Positionality

4.4.1. The Insider/Outsider Dichotomy

The authorship of any paper is significant; the writer will come with a frame of reference that is influenced by geographic location, cultural context, social background and historical backdrop (Mills, 1968). Thus what can be termed the researcher's own 'location' in relation to the object of study is a significant factor in social research. The writer is at once both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' in terms of what is being written about (Bauman, 1990). As an insider, the researcher may share with participants one or more of the characteristics, roles or experiences under study. As an outsider, the researcher is outside that which is common to participants. In both cases, the researcher 'including her or his membership status in relation to those participating in the research, is an essential and ever-present aspect of the investigation' (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.55) and can impact on both what is researched and how the research is undertaken. Because of my professional background in the field of community development, discussed more fully in the partisan or scholar discussion overleaf (page 142), I can consider myself both an insider and an outsider in this research. The benefit of being, in some ways, an insider in this research was acceptance, which resulted in 'a level of trust and openness' towards me which might not otherwise have been present (*ibid.*, p.58). On the other hand, being a member of the group studied can result in a complacency of sorts, in that participants may make 'assumptions of similarity and therefore fail to explain their individual experience fully' or the researcher's perceptions may be clouded by *their own* personal experience (*ibid*., p.58). In my research I became aware of this happening on a number of occasions. For example, some questions I asked were met with responses that suggested I already knew 'the answer'. DeLyser (2001) argues, in a similar vein, that it may be difficult to elicit desired responses because of assumptions of prior knowledge: 'much is communicated with an assumed shared knowledge… answers to interview questions tend toward the brief, leaving much implied -"you know...."' (p.444). I experienced this and was aware that sometimes participants did not provide many details because of assumed shared common knowledge. In these

situations, I responded by probing with more questions with regard to their experiences and in some cases asking for more information.

It is worth acknowledging that undertaking research in conflict / post-conflict contexts involves a number of additional considerations. Campbell (2010) argues that even if a researcher is highly sensitive to the cultural, social and political dynamics of the research site it is still difficult to predict all the risks as well as benefits associated with the research. This, she argues, is particularly true in conflict and post-conflict environments where 'the institutions of state and society are in flux and outcomes are even more difficult to predict' (ibid., p.3). Undertaking research in disadvantaged communities in Belfast, despite the current peace process, carries with it certain dangers; sectarianism and sporadic violence continue to manifest. I was likely to be perceived to be part of, or sympathetic to, one of the two traditional - and conflicted - communities in the North by virtue of my name and my accent: I was born and grew up in County Clare in the South. Therefore, in one community I would be seen as an insider for the very reasons that would make me an outsider in another community. Linked to this, there were likely to be sensitivities associated with working in areas where many people have been directly impacted by conflict and its legacy. In this study I had concerns around how easy or otherwise it would be to forge a researcher/participant relationship within certain areas for these reasons. Whilst my previous professional background in some localities where the research was conducted helped to ameliorate these, they nonetheless remained concerns throughout the data collection phase. As best I could, I strove to establish rapport and demonstrate my local knowledge, track record and commitment to community development locally when meeting with new people (from both communities).

Ganga and Scott (2006) argue that while both insider and outside status require critical reflection, there has been a lack of research on the particular complexities and contradictions inherent in the insider interview. In particular, they warn against assuming that the insider position 'leads to greater proximity…and ultimately a smaller divide between researcher and participant'

and coin the term 'diversity in proximity' to describe the phenomenon of the insider status 'bringing to the fore a range of [previously hidden] social fissures that structure interaction between researcher and participant' (*ibid.,* para. 8). Whilst from a distance the researcher may appear to be an insider, a range of social dynamics and differences can become apparent when interacting with participants. The insider/outsider dynamic may vary according to issues such as social class, gender and age and may, they suggest, have to be continually negotiated (*ibid.,* para. 36).

Some argue that that the insider/outsider dichotomy itself is unhelpful and unrealistic. For example Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that it is perhaps the *space in-between* being an insider and an outsider that researchers can only ever fully occupy, not one or other of these positions. The following quotation from them is apposite:

> The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders (p.61).

This mirrors my experience, as I was neither a 'true insider' nor a 'true outsider' in this research as discussed earlier. In many ways I have occupied a space somewhere between these two binaries, a space which was fluid and which changed in particular immediate contexts and moments. This fluidity was useful in that it gave me a wider range of perspectives from which to seek and interpret views of participants.

4.4.2 Partisan or Scholar?

The distinction in social research between the researcher as 'partisan' or as 'scholar' is equally useful. The scholar believes in the standards of logic and factual knowledge, whereas the partisan seeks to challenge the status quo, provides theoretical underpinnings for transformation and seeks data which will support his/her premise (Silverman, 1998). It has been argued that both the partisan and the scholar can suffer from elitism at either end of this spectrum where they may be 'too extreme and thus fail to cope with the

exigencies of the actual relationship between social researchers and society' (*ibid.,* p.93). Given my professional background and personal politics, I locate myself towards the partisan end of this spectrum. There are a number of reasons for doing so. As alluded to previously, I have always worked in the not-for-profit sector and am driven to do so by an interest in justice, equality and social change. I have held community development posts in various parts of the North, including Belfast, over the last 25 years. In my current professional role, I am director of a small, not-for-profit organisation in Belfast. This is, in turn, a 'branch' of a larger charitable organisation based in Boston, USA. Our core mission is to promote the concept of collaboration as a necessary way of bringing about social change, and build the capacity of people, groups and organisations to collaborate effectively in practice. My work is grounded in a belief that collaboration is a necessary prerequisite to bringing about progressive change. On a daily basis, I professionally engage in collaborative activities including teaching facilitative leadership and collaboration skills, as well as designing and facilitating change processes with teams, organisations and communities. One of my organisation's best known training programmes, entitled '*Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation*', is based on a number of core ideas: that leadership is a service and a central task is to create the conditions that enable *others* to achieve their full potential; and that everyone has the ability to play a leadership role. In my professional work I draw explicitly and practically on Chrislip's (2002) 'collaborative premise', as discussed earlier. I have experienced situations where, when the different elements of Chrislip's premise are present, groups have identified creative and workable solutions to problems that seemed initially to be intractable. However, whilst I feel this premise is true, it begs a wider question – how is such collaboration catalysed, and by whom? This is where, I believe, leadership comes into play. Leadership is required to give a sense of possibility and direction to change initiatives and to facilitate the involvement and alignment of people in pursuit of these. Thus my research topic has been suggested by my interest in social change and this collaborative premise. My study investigates the role and nature of leadership which is implied within this premise, and about which I seek greater knowledge and understanding.

I believe in the power of people to identify and implement changes needed, though I appreciate that this takes place in an unequal world. Indeed *because of* an unequal world, I think it is important to take concerted action to try to address inequality and injustice, to do what we can do, even though we will sometimes - or perhaps often - fail in the attempt. In line with these beliefs, I therefore describe myself as, to use Silverman's (1998) term, 'partisan'. However, I am aware of the importance of ensuring that this commitment to the concept does not bias nor blind me to potentially unpalatable aspects or issues that may arise in the research data.

I have attempted to remain alert to the need to maintain a degree of reflexivity and be aware of the challenges associated with this. I did this through reflexive techniques including keeping a journal where I 'thought out loud' and reflected upon what was happening in the research process and my own feelings in relation to it. I also reviewed the total set of 'raw' data on three separate occasions during the data analysis phase, and rechecked quotes on an ongoing basis, to ensure data was accurately contextualised and that I was not drifting from the intent and meaning of the participants.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Lewis (2003) points out that the unstructured nature of qualitative research, and the fact that it raises issues that are not always anticipated, means that 'ethical considerations have a particular resonance in qualitative research studies' (p.66). I considered my research to fall into the category of extremely 'low-risk', i.e. interviews with adult professionals and activists about relatively non-contentious subjects. I took advice from my academic supervisors and we determined that the study did not require approval from the University's Research Ethics Committee. Whilst this level of formality was not required, there were nonetheless ethical issues to be considered and approaches to be adopted, which I discuss here.

4.5.1 Informed Consent

Each participant was asked to sign a consent form (Appendix ii) and, for the most part, readily understood the need for this and signed it without question. This may also have been in part due to the breaking news about the so-called 'Boston Tapes' at the time, whereby the issue of consent for research not being honoured was in the news[32]. I anticipated, correctly as it transpired, that at least some of the information I received would be politically sensitive. This is to be expected in a post-conflict society where past and present experiences of discrimination and division abound. It was important that I let participants know in advance that I would give them control of their transcripts, as well as attempt to build a degree of trust and confidence among them in my ability to be sensitive in handling difficult issues. In particular, issues relating to sectarianism and paramilitarism were likely to surface so it was imperative that participants knew they would have a later opportunity to 'clean up' their transcripts if they choose to do so. The consent form specified that:

- participants were free to decline or withdraw from the study at any time;
- all data collected would be destroyed after completion of the research;
- transcripts would be available only to the researcher, her supervisors and transcriber;
- participation in the research would be kept confidential and names would not be used in the study;
- no attributed quotations would be used and all other personally identifying details would be removed from the data;
- a copy of the interview would be sent to each participant and if, on listening to it, they were concerned about any section of the interview that might identify them or others, these sections would be deleted and not used;

[32] Dozens of former paramilitaries were interviewed in Belfast and other cities and towns from 2001-2006 as part of an oral history project in Boston College. Details about internal politics and activities of Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries were revealed on tape. Each interview was transcribed, and stored in Boston College. It was originally agreed that participants' accounts would not be released without their permission or until after their deaths. After a legal battle, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) gained access to some of the tapes. Several people who gave interviews have stated their intention to seek the return of their transcripts. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-27286543

- recordings would be destroyed within three months of the final research dissertation being completed. I did not refer specifically to transcripts but understood 'recordings' to include these.

My concern was that, without these assurances, participants may have engaged in self-censorship and have interrupted the flow of their thinking and input during the interview process. I also emphasised that their participation was voluntary, an especially important aspect in cases where research is conducted by people 'who also have a professional relationship with sample members which may lead to feelings of obligation or gratitude' (Lewis, 2003, p.67), as was the case to some extent in this research. I had worked with a small number of participants, albeit quite a number of years ago. In relation to data storage, transcripts were anonymised with each interview labelled by letter rather than by name, and identifying documentation such as letters and emails were stored separately.

4.5.2. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were significant in this research, given the relatively small size of Belfast and the ease with which people could potentially be identified. To address this, I attempted to avoid both direct and indirect attribution and, in one case where organisational specifics might lead to identification of a participant, I changed minor descriptive details to disguise identity, without changing the substance of the point being made. I also aggregated and analysed the data in ways that would not reveal the identity of the person speaking. I attempted to make my intentions around this very clear to participants in a number of ways. In my initial email contact, I explained the nature and purpose of the research and at the outset of each interview, I shared a short written description of the research project which reiterated its purpose and the nature of the interview (Appendix iii). I also explained the details covered in the letter of consent, as described previously.

Hearn (1998) argues that making the researcher's interests in the research topic explicit is important and given that working to promote collaboration is a

personal, professional and political issue, it was important the research respondents knew something of this. The challenge has been how much to reveal in order to be open and honest, but without leading the research participants to give responses they may think I wish to hear. To give some indication to those who did not know me, professionally or by reputation, I introduced myself both in an initial letter, and again in person, by outlining my professional background and my twenty-five years of experience in working with the community and voluntary sectors locally. This also helped me establish empathy and a degree of legitimacy as I had a working knowledge of the community sector in Belfast and support its aims in promoting greater social justice. My letter was written on headed notepaper which provided my employing organisation's website details so that they were free to find out more if they wished. I anticipated that some politically sensitive information might be disclosed in the course of interviews and, where it was, I responded with empathy and reassured participants that anonymity as well as discretion would be exercised in processing the data. I reminded them of the opportunity they would have to 'control' what they said by commenting on a transcript of their interview and this seemed to reassure and enable them to continue with the conversation. This seemed to be the most appropriate course of action as instances of this arose from 'over disclosure' in the main, rather than as a result of a particular line of questioning I was pursuing.

4.6 Research Design

Here I describe the approach adopted in my research, the sample interviewed, the number of interviews, research locations and research schedule. As discussed earlier, I approached this research from a critical interpretivist perspective and have used qualitative research methods as I believe these are well suited to exploring concepts of leadership, collaboration and social change. There is a variety of ways individuals may approach these concepts, and therefore, the methods required to examine these need to focus on people's perceptions and understandings of them (Himmelman, 1996). My data collection was undertaken using in-depth, one-to-one interviews. I selected this particular qualitative method for a number of reasons. The main function of

one-to-one interviews is to 'provide a framework in which respondents can express their own thoughts in their own words' (Leonard, 2003, p.166). In-depth interviews have been described as a form of conversation (Legard *et al.*, 2003), and more specifically as a 'conversation with a purpose, a unique instrument of the social investigator' (Webb and Webb, 1932, p.130). The metaphor of the 'interviewer as traveller', with knowledge generated by 'wandering through the landscape and entering into conversations with people encountered', is fitting for how I see my research role (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p.48). My reasons for choosing semi-structured interviews are that these allowed me to solicit data on the broad topics I wanted to cover, based on my literature review, whilst still allowing room for research participants to digress. Semi-structured interviews offered flexibility in terms of allowing me to clarify and confirm responses in the moment, as well as enabling me to make connections with previous points made, and provided research participants with opportunities to comment on the accuracy or otherwise of these (Leonard, 2003). Other qualitative methods such as observation would not have been as appropriate in the context of this study as they would be less likely to reveal what the perceptions and understandings of those playing leadership roles are about leadership and its connection with collaboration and social change. Also, given the breadth and fluidity of leadership and collaboration as enacted, it would be challenging to find a 'typical' day or event to observe. In addition, given that my professional role includes teaching leadership, it would seem unlikely that participants would be comfortable and/or naturalistic with me acting as observer of them/their leadership practice.

I developed interview questions (Appendix iv) that were reasonably open ended in order to elicit more information on topics that are not necessarily nor routinely discussed whilst, at the same time, attempting to minimise my influence on the generation of data (Roulston, 2010). I moved from more general to more specific topics, starting with questions about participant's background that were easier to answer and towards the end of the interview, asked questions which sought an overall summary of attitudes and views (Arthur and Nazroo, 2003). I anticipated, correctly, that the level of engagement

and capacity of research participants would be high – as a local researcher, who undertook her doctoral thesis within the community sector, pointed out in a scoping conversation with me – 'people love to talk!'.

4.6.1. Sampling

Sample Size

Qualitative research projects use non-probability samples and I have used purposive sampling, a non-probability sample whereby members are selected with the purpose of representing a location or type in relation to a key criterion (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003). I also employed snowballing techniques, albeit to a lesser degree, to 'access[es] informants through contact information… provided by other informants' (Noy, 2008, p.330). This was helpful in identifying individual leaders who I did not have a direct connection with, and whom I otherwise would not have been able to reach.

The sample I selected comprised fourteen people playing a leadership role and therefore having an interest in, and knowledge of, leadership, collaboration and social change in communities in Belfast. As noted earlier, I focused the research geographically in Belfast, primarily for pragmatic reasons as I live and work in Belfast. However, I was also aware that since over one third of the population of the North lives in Belfast, it would provide a greater number and concentration of community development groups to form a research sample. I felt that for this research, purposive sampling would be the most appropriate as there is a particular group with a common characteristic – they play leadership roles within community-based groups in Belfast – which would 'allow for detailed investigation of social processes in a specified context', in this case as members of groups concerned with community development (Ritchie, Lewis and Elam, 2003, p.79). I took account of Ritchie *et al.*'s (*ibid*.) advocacy that samples need to be selected 'to ensure the inclusion of relevant constituencies, events, processes and so on, that can illuminate and inform [understanding]' and their suggestion that the sample needs to be 'as diverse as possible within the boundaries of the defined population' in order to help identify the full range of factors or features associated with a phenomenon and to 'allow some

investigation of interdependency between variables' (p.82-83). Qualitative samples tend to be usually small in size, with the size of purposive samples often determined on the basis of theoretical saturation, that is, the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights (Rugg and Petre, 2006). There tends to be a point of diminishing return where increasing the sample size no longer contributes new evidence. It has been argued that studying small samples results in findings which cannot be generalised but this is countered by the argument that it is a reversal of survey research where depth was sacrificed for breadth (Brewer, 2000).

Other sampling issues I considered were how easy it would be to gain access to research participants as well as potential ethical considerations in relation to my research methods or my approach to engaging people (Kvale, 2007). As discussed earlier, I have extensive contacts with a wide range of community and voluntary sector members who work in the field and through whom I felt it would be relatively easy to reach potential participants. This background would result in me being trusted by those who knew me and would help me build trust with those who did not. While my initial target number of respondents was between 12 and 15, by interview number fourteen I felt I had reached theoretical saturation, as described above.

Sample Frame

As discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*, the concept of a separate 'community sector', as distinct from a community and voluntary sector, in the North is a contested one. Therefore the task of describing the sector and attempting to map it in order to frame the target group was difficult. For the purposes of this research, I have drawn on the available literature to develop the following typology of the sector, comprising three levels:

i) local, geographically based 'grass roots' community group level;
ii) mid-level infrastructural organisations (which provide support to local groups); and
iii) regional level partnerships and/or organisations.

Levels i) and ii) mirror Acheson *et al.*'s (2004) *community associations* and *networks* respectively, as discussed earlier (see Table 4. *Typology of Voluntary Associations in NI*, p.53). Community associations are mostly area-based, local organisations providing direct services and facilities in their neighbourhoods; their closest relationships would be with district councils[33], both for funding and infrastructure support. Networks are organised regionally or sub-regionally around themes or issues, their members are other groups or organisations and they typically act as a source of support for smaller, locally based organisations and groups (*ibid*.).

These were appropriate levels at which to locate my research. The local community group level is where actual work 'on the ground' happens and, as such, is an important site of action and, consequently, research. The 'next level up' is where such local organisations come together to develop and strengthen their voice collectively, through the establishment of umbrella or network type organisations. This is an important level of operation as it is here that more widely focused, strategic thinking takes place. This is influenced by smaller, local groups and in turn, influences them. Leaders at both these levels are likely to be either very locally based and/or have a deep understanding of local leadership practice (Acheson *et al*., 2004). Having identified my sample frame, I then faced the challenge of identifying groups and individuals within this since there is no formal registry of such groups in Belfast. However, Belfast City Council, which supports community development through the provision of a range of supports, including grant aid, has developed a set of criteria it uses for local, community development groups to be eligible for such support[34]:

- Groups must work inside the Belfast City Council area;
- Have community development as a primary objective (this would include promoting the benefit of the area, relieve poverty, sickness and the aged, improving social welfare and quality of life, etc.);

[33] Local authorities or councils carry out a range of functions including waste and recycling services, leisure and community services, building control and local economic and cultural development.
[34] Source: unpublished internal Belfast City Council document shared with researcher.

- Have membership that is open to their identified community, with each member having an equal vote;
- Have a board or management committee, with a clear democratic process for the selection of members;
- Hold an Annual General Meeting (AGM) when the board or management committee is elected;
- Present an annual statement of accounts is presented at the AGM.

Therefore, for the purposes of my research, I used Belfast City Council's list of groups which are in receipt of some form of support and meet the above criteria to identify local, geographically based 'grass roots' community groups to target. For those mid-level infrastructural organisations (or networks) which provide support to local groups, I additionally used Belfast City Council's criteria[35] for community capacity building groups, as these *de facto* serve as a useful categorisation mid-level infrastructural (my term) groups, and are as follows:

- Be seen as a "lead" community development organisation representing the interests of their member community groups, area and residents;
- Be a locally based community organisation operating within a defined geographical catchment area which is smaller than north, south, east, and west (Belfast);
- Be a membership organisation, made up from community groups in their area;
- Provide a range of capacity building activities for their area, to strengthen the ability of local community groups to build their structures, systems, people and skills;
- Play a lead role in the development of local community infrastructure e.g. networks, forums etc.

Approximately 73 community groups[36] in 2012/2013 received revenue grants from Belfast City Council as a contribution to running costs for community buildings and to enable groups to respond to community needs by delivering a

[35] Source: *ibid*.
[36] Source: unpublished internal Belfast City Council document shared with researcher.

broad based programme and supporting community development. In the same period, 19 mid-level infrastructural organisations[37] were in receipt of capacity building grants. Together, these groups constituted my research sample and provided a degree of diversity, as advocated by Ritchie *et al.* (2003) and discussed earlier.

Interviews

I set out to interview a person playing a leadership role in 12-15 of these groups, approximately half from infrastructural (or network) organisations and half from smaller, more local community associations in order to get leaders at both these levels with the attendant mix of locally based practice and somewhat more strategic views. In total, in-depth, face to face interviews were carried out with 14 people. Of these, six participants were connected to infrastructural organisations, and the remainder affiliated to more locally geographically based groups and organisations.

The identification of people who play a key leadership role in local communities is potentially challenging. For pragmatic reasons I targeted, in the first instance, the paid leader (that is, the person paid to play the role of leader, be they director, co-ordinator, executive) in the infrastructural organisations. In the local community associations, I targeted a voluntary member of the management committee who plays a leadership role (either formally or informally) or the group's paid worker. Belfast is broadly divided into four geographic areas – North, South, East and West – each with its own demographic and socio-economic profile. I initially connected with the largest/most active infrastructural organisation in each quadrant of the city. In some cases this was straightforward - in West and North Belfast there are two large infrastructural organisations; in South and East it was less clear and I took advice from gatekeepers (such as Belfast city Council staff and CD colleagues) as to which were the main infrastructural organisations. Once I had secured interviews with someone from these organisations I then sought introduction to local more grass roots leaders through them. In total I was previously

[37] Source: *ibid.*

acquainted (albeit over 10 years ago) with 3 of the 14 participants I interviewed.

All the organisations which participants were associated with were well established, with the majority in existence for between 20 and 40 years. Each organisation/group was located in areas that experience what are considered to be high or very high levels of deprivation, and have suffered disproportionately as a result of 'the Troubles'. One participant was volunteering independently, as a previous project he worked with had ceased due to lack of funding. See Appendix i for a summary of the types of organisations/groups participants were associated with. I also sought diversity in terms of gender and in terms of traditional community background, that is membership of CRN (Catholic/Republican/Nationalist) and PUL (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist) communities, as demonstrated in the following table.

Table 6. Gender and Community Backgrounds of Research Participants

Community	Women	Men	Total
CRN (Catholic/Republican/Nationalist)	2	4	6
PUL (Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist)	2	3	5
Mixed/interface	1	2	3
TOTAL	**5**	**9**	**14**

Interviews were carried out between April and August 2014. A number of immediate issues in the wider context during that period are worth noting. These relate to the 'flag protests', the ongoing issue of welfare reform and an increase in racially motivated hate crime in Belfast and beyond. Tensions had been high in 2013 and into 2014 as a result of the flags protests[38], particularly in disadvantaged PUL areas. Welfare reform was a contested issue at that time also, with a threatened return to direct rule if local parties could not reach an agreement on it. In relation to racism, PSNI statistics showed that racially

[38] These were loyalist protests over the decision to fly the union flag at Belfast City Hall only on designated days. Threats were issues to members of the Alliance Party, which held the balance of power in Belfast City Council at the time and had voted for this compromise. The PSNI suggested that members of loyalist paramilitary groups were orchestrating the violence which erupted at this time.

motivated offences had increased across the city of Belfast by 43% in a period of eight months in 2014 (BBC, 2015a).

Individual research participants were identified using a mix of personal contacts and snowball sampling, a non-probability sampling technique described earlier. I selected this mix as I did not have ready access nor personal/professional connections to leaders in more locally based groups and organisations and I felt that some kind of personal contact or introduction would be helpful. In most instances, I asked those I interviewed in mid-level infrastructural organisations to identify a leader(s) working at a more local level and to provide an introduction. I made this request at the end of the interview, stressing that there was no pressure on them to do so. I explained that I would asking the same questions of everyone so this gave initial participants a sense of the kinds of experience and interests that would be helpful in future participants. In all instances, participants were happy to help in this way and a number asked for time to identify a person to ask to participate. This proved an effective way of accessing more local leaders and the introduction aspect was significant in giving me a certain degree of credibility with participants whom I did not know. Whilst, as discussed earlier, in some respects I'm an insider in the field, that is only in relation to those participants who know me, professionally or by reputation.

Whilst I was moderately successful in achieving a gender mix, I feel in retrospect I could have made further attempts to access a greater number of women leaders. That said, it reflects the situation up to very recently in the sample population, where despite the predominance of females in the workforce in the voluntary and community sector, almost two out of every three chief executives in the NI CVS were male (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2010). However, this figure has been queried as a result of a salary survey carried out by NICVA which suggests women may now account for 48% of such positions (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2012). It is in some ways a limitation of snowball sampling, as my initial contacts in mid-level organisations were men and some, though not all, tended

to identify other men. This links with Noy's (2008) caution that, because of its informality, snowball sampling is susceptible to being considered 'plain and rather commonsensical' and can therefore avoid 'systematic reflexive consideration' (p.330). As we shall see later, in *Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion on Leadership to Promote Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast Communities,* issues of gender tended not to surface unprompted.

Approaching Potential Participants

Having identified a number of potential participants, I requested their participation in the research via letter (Appendix v). In my letter I outlined my professional background and described the research, explaining that it was part of a PhD Programme. I also explained my hope that research findings would be of practical use, and would be made available to research participants, as well as more widely. The letter also said that I wished to conduct a one-to-one interview with them and pointed out that confidentiality would be maintained and their contribution would not be identified in any way as data would be anonymised when collated and analysis conducted at an aggregate level. I followed up each letter with a telephone call a few days later. Every person invited to participate in the research agreed to do so.

I undertook my initial interviews with people I had previous connections with, and who I felt would be readily able to engage with the topics of leadership and collaboration. This strategy was useful in that it allowed me to 'pilot' the questions in more (for me) relaxed settings. After I shared transcripts of these initial interviews with my academic supervisors, I added two further 'prompt' questions to my interview schedule. Interviews were carried out between April and August 2014, with each lasting on average 1.5 hours. Participants chose the location for their interviews and, in all but one case, I met with them in their place of work. One interview took place in a participant's kitchen, at her request.

4.7 Working with the Data

My initial intention was to transcribe the tapes myself in order to develop a deeper familiarity with, and understanding of, the data (Brandenburg and Davidson, 2011). However, as the size of this task became clearer, I decided to get them transcribed professionally, one by one as the interviews progressed (Kvale, 2007). This proved to be a good decision as it left me able to focus my attention on completing all the interviews in a timely fashion. It also enabled me to further refine prompt questions in later interviews.

To process each transcript, I first anonymised it by deleting names and other identifiers, and then sent it to the research participant for review. In total, three participants responded: one wanted some politically sensitive paragraphs removed; another said he planned to review it and get back with comments which he subsequently did not do; and a third felt she had over disclosed in the interview. I met with this third person at her request and did a number of things in response to her concerns: I reassured her about the confidentially and anonymity that would be maintained; I invited her to review the transcript and let me know which anecdotes/examples she wished me not to use; and I ascertained that she was content and not under any duress to let her input be used. She reviewed her transcript and in a subsequent conversation indicated that she did not want to make any changes.

To analyse the data in relation to the community background and gender of participants was beyond the scope of this research, a topic returned to in *Chapter Six: Concluding Comments and Implications of Findings for Leadership to Support Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities*. Also, there is a danger in a NI context of reducing complex issues to ones of difference between the two largest communities there and, in so doing, of essentialising such differences. As Young (2000b) argues, essentialising differences 'expresses a fear of specificity, and a fear of making permeable the categorical border between oneself and others' and that what is required instead is an understanding of group difference 'as indeed ambiguous, relational, shifting, without clear borders that keep people straight' (p.320). She describes how

groups can end up being frozen 'into a self-enclosed nature' (*ibid*.). Whilst this study avoids such essentialising it nevertheless identifies the source of quotations in terms of gender and community background. This helps the reader contextualize where view points are coming from. As discussed earlier, community development took root differently in CRN and PUL communities; and women are over represented in the CVS generally, but not when it comes to playing formal leadership roles.

I collated the data by grouping responses under the eighteen question headings. I followed Saldaña's (2009) advice to review data initially with an open mind in relation to coding. He advocates for the use of what he terms 'pragmatic eclecticism', arguing that the 'necessity and pay-off of coding for selective qualitative studies' whilst keeping an open mind during initial data collection and review 'before determining which coding method(s), if any, will be appropriate' is most likely to result in a robust and substantive analysis (*ibid*., p.47). I used structural coding, following the interview structure, to both code and initially categorise the data, and then worked to reduce the body of data to make sense of it (Bryman, 2012). I labelled certain emerging concepts using 'in vivo' codes (Saldaña, 2009), that is, using the actual language of participants themselves as I felt this helped me stay close to their individual intents and meaning.

Having identified emerging concepts, I then sorted and grouped these under a smaller number of higher order categories. I identified links between categories, grouping them thematically. This enabled me to focus on each subject or theme in turn more intensely and identify the similarities and distinctions within each area. To do this, I used quotations from the data, and posted these on a large wall chart to sort and resort these until I had a workable structure. I reviewed the total data set at three different stages to check for any missing concepts and to ensure that I did not lose the context of individual pieces of material. Also, I felt it was important to understand the transcripts as lived realities and revisiting them enabled this. I sometimes put the same piece of data in more than one location where it was relevant to a number of different

subjects. This also helped me to identify associations and links that were less obvious. I examined this sorted data to identify individual meaningful patterns and ideas and relationships between the categories. These patterns and ideas were then considered in light of my conceptual framework and key theories around leadership, power and neoliberalism (Berg, 2004, p.267).

4.8 Concluding Comments

In this chapter, I have presented the research objective and key questions that drive this study, namely:

- What are the roles of community development in relation to promoting progressive social change within disadvantaged communities in Belfast?
- What role does collaboration play within community development and the community sector in Belfast?
- What kinds of leadership within community development promote collaboration and social change?
- How does the current neoliberal context impact on leadership within the community sector?

I have explored the underpinning ontological and epistemological issues and elucidated my position as one of critical interpretivism. I have argued that a qualitative rather than quantitative approach is appropriate for this study; I am concerned with the meaning that those playing leadership roles ascribe to leadership and how it is enacted by them and others in a community context. I have made explicit my personal and professional interests in this research area which lead me to locate my theoretical position broadly within the critical tradition. My interests are concerned with doing research that is based on, and designed to contribute to, a fundamental understanding of the world and how inequality can be addressed – I am a 'partisan' (Silverman, 1998). I have explained how I can be considered both 'insider' and 'outsider' (Bauman, 1990) in the community development field in Belfast and discussed some of the ethical issues associated with this, and with other aspects of undertaking research in a post-conflict context. Seeking informed consent, providing guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, and making my interest in the research subject

known are key elements of the ethical approach adopted. The qualitative research design, sampling approaches and specific face-to-face interview methods adopted have been described and justified. The sample comprised fourteen people playing leadership roles in communities in Belfast, drawn from community development groups and locally based mid-level infrastructural organisations which provide support to local groups. Belfast City Council's criteria categorising groups was used to identify individual research participants. I have explained the steps taken in securing and setting up interviews with these research participants and concluded by describing how I set about analysing the data collected. In the next Chapter, the findings of that analysis are presented.

Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion on Leadership to Promote Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast Communities

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative data collected during interviews with fourteen people playing leadership roles in local communities in Belfast. A table summarising the types of organisations/groups participants were associated with is given in Appendix i. The interviews explored research participants' views and practical experiences of leadership, collaboration and social change in their community work contexts. The chapter structures the findings in two sections. The first section considers data in three emerging areas: problematising the concept of collaboration; shrinking spaces for collaboration and social change; and where spaces for collaboration and social change are to be found in the current context. The second section narrows the focus to concentrate on the kinds of leadership enacted or required in community contexts and discusses the data in relation to this under four headings: the distributed nature of leadership in the community sector; the ambiguity of leadership language; power; and shaping narratives as a form of leadership. The themes discussed are not always discrete, therefore data pertaining to some appear more than once. The chapter discusses the nature and potential of leadership for collaboration and social change and the number and sizes of spaces for such change in the current context. The approach adopted looks primarily at structural constraints, though it acknowledges the complexities of the day-to-day lives of those playing leadership roles in conflict/post-conflict contexts. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings presented.

5.2 Spaces for Collaboration for Social change

In this section the data in relation to collaboration are considered. A strong theme which emerged from the data on collaboration concerning the idea 'organic' and 'forced' collaboration is introduced. The current size of spaces for collaboration and the potential for social change within these are then, in turn, discussed.

5.2.1 Problematising the Concept of Collaboration: Organic versus Forced

The need for collaboration in relation to attempting to bring about social change is clear from the interview data. Participants all speak about the necessity of it, pointing out that communities have more power and are less vulnerable if they work in solidarity with each other. A number of quotes attest to this:

> There's power in bringing groups of individuals together. There's a definite power in that. For instance young mothers we have in the area – and we have a very strong young mothers group. And bringing them together and talking about issues affecting them personally and also about issues within their community, how that impacts on how they're feeling or how that impacts on how they lead their lives through their children in the wider context. That's strong. (Female community development practitioner working in PUL area)

> I think that in many ways community development organisations within communities create a point of reference that allows some degree of confidence within that community to then go on and engage with other communities. So there [is] a kind of community stepping across boundaries. (Male community development practitioner working in a mixed area)

Whist these speak to the power of collaboration and community development, through coming together to increase awareness, learn from each other and build solidarity, there are also potentially less positive reasons cited for why collaboration is needed:

> [Collaboration is] vital, because if you don't you'll have fragmentation, and if you have fragmentation you'll have division, if you have division then you're weak and you're vulnerable and you'll be picked off, and whoever wants can do what they want and a community will be

> powerless to do anything about it. Whereas if a community's united and together on it and they're singing from the one hymn sheet and they're pooling their resources to do it you still might get defeated but you've a much better chance. But you've no chance when you're divided like this. (Male community development practitioner working in CRN area)

The benefits of collaboration are clearly identified here as an antidote to fragmentation and weakness, which can leave communities potentially vulnerable. A degree of pragmatism is evident too. Participants appear to be under no illusions about the difficulty and complexity of the tasks involved in seeking social change, acknowledging that communities may still 'get defeated' even if they are collaborating but recognising that they increase their chances of success if they work together. This chimes with Huxham's (1996) contention that collaboration is essential to alleviate social problems that communities are grappling with. The context within which collaboration is enacted is important and the reference, in the above quote, to communities losing their power is significant given that empowerment is at the heart of community development.

The notion of collaboration is problematic in a Belfast context, where two very different conceptions of collaboration sit side by side. In local communities, collaboration which can be thought of as 'organic' or 'authentic' is a central part of both the theory and practice of community development, as seen in the first two quotes above. In this context, participants speak positively about it and its centrality to their work, arguing that community development cannot be done without it. It is concerned with building solidarity within and between communities, creating connections between communities and state agencies and challenging dominant power structures.

However, as discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*, it appears that collaboration has, in some respects, been appropriated by the State and has arguably changed its purpose and how it is perceived within the community sector. This is evidenced by the State's push for organisations and groups to work together – commonly referred to by participants as 'forced' collaboration. Forced collaboration takes

the form of community groups being required to establish consortia to seek resources for their work, ironically in a context where they are simultaneously being compelled to compete for scarce resources. This push is seen by participants, for the most part, as a cost cutting exercise that does not take account of local needs and issues. It can also be seen as an expression of a neoliberal focus on market efficiency, discussed earlier. The competition for resources among groups is an important backdrop and participants describe the government requirement that group must seek funding for some programmes by forming consortia rather than seek funding on an individual organisational basis. This latter type of forced collaboration seems to be predominant, linked to resourcing the sector. Making certain kinds of collaboration a requirement of funding in this way appears to be changing the potential for community development to address issues raised at local level, as well as negatively affecting its 'reputation'. As Himmelman (1996) argues, it is necessary to move beyond a focus on service delivery and efficiency to a focus on social justice whereby collaboration challenges the practices of power and control that contribute towards inequalities. Also, the increased competition that is currently fostered between groups negatively impacts on possibilities for organic collaboration between them:

> Collaboration is to me very much a drive that came in a few years ago for partnership working. And not so much a drive but I suppose a push that we're not encouraging you to do - we're telling you to do, in terms of cost saving rather than something that was thought about in a way that would bring about more positive change or more creative in terms of social change. (Female community development practitioner working in CRN area)

Here we can also see how forced collaboration is understood by participants as something that has little to do with social change, a view in opposition to the more organic one outlined earlier. It is a 'drive' that has come from the State and those who fund the community sector. This is particularly significant in the current context where the community sector is increasingly disjointed and solidarity eroded, despite individual organisations working closely to address community interests on the ground:

> The community sector can often be seen as very fragmented and often you will find organisations greatly opposed to each other because they're in competition for resources. However, I would acknowledge that there are very few organisations that I've ever worked with in Belfast that I would say do bad things. But we're all fragmented, you know. So there's a big context around leadership and there's the local context that I think we're all failing. (Male community development practitioner working in a 'mixed' area)

There is a tension between community development that is organic and represents local interests and its need to form sometimes temporary, 'issue-based' strategic collaborations and the Government's concern to regulate and control community development through insisting on partnerships and more permanent forms of collaboration. In addition to this, the cuts in the level and nature of funding available are *de facto* promoting competition between groups. The data suggest that forced collaboration is, in effect, undermining the potential of organic collaboration at local level. It is interesting to note that the literature has little to say on this issue of forced or involuntary collaboration.

To summarise, research participants recognised the contested nature of collaboration and used the concept in a variety of ways, depending on the particular context within which it is enacted. Thus throughout the rest of this chapter the terms organic and forced are used to differentiate between these two very different conceptions of collaboration; the former being a source of promoting community empowerment, whilst the latter is a form of governance that appears to undermine the possibilities of organic collaboration and building solidarity.

5.2.2 How Spaces for Collaboration and Social Change are Shrinking

As well as reporting scarce resources, participants also argued that funding is increasingly linked to activities that align closely with government agendas rather than necessarily for actions deemed important by local communities. These are clear indications of the welfare state retracting or becoming 'leaner'. Thus it can be argued that the agendas that groups and organisations can pursue are being tightly circumscribed by a contracting welfare state and

associated funding policies and arrangements (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2015b) which, in effect, constitute a shrinking of the space for social change.

At a slightly less obvious level, the space for change can also be seen as contracting as a result of the erosion by the State of the building of solidarity within and between communities:

> Years ago I brought local women to the [ ] meetings, and there's still talk about how excited it made them to hear people like [ ]. They excited them, they made them think in a different way, they learned from them, they learned from their debates. They want that for this generation. But [the sector] has become so structured and stultified. I used to have somebody with me everywhere I went and it was great, because you could have a discussion after the meeting. Because it was their community you were speaking [about], and they could say: 'I thought you went a bit too far.' And you were getting a different take on it, you know. And I think that's been lost completely. That's [a result of] the funding; how things are being funded and structured. And now everything's so formal. You can't bring people to board meetings. They're all boards with a legal structure. (Female community development practitioner working in CRN area)

This description of the sector as becoming overly structured and 'stultified' is telling. It appears that while the space for critical thinking is shrinking, the State is intervening in ways that weaken and damage the idea and practice of community development. As Bhattacharyya (2004) argues, agency in community development is important to generate critical consciousness and allow ownership of local issues. The data suggest the stultifying of the sector militates against this. The lack of space for creativity, discussion, debate and learning is linked to resources and to changes in relation to how organisations are structured, which in turn are a result of funding requirements. Here we also see less obvious or tangible impacts of current resourcing and structuring of the sector by the state; opportunities for local people (in the above example, women) to learn, to think differently and to challenge the paid community development worker as much as wider power brokering. It echoes concerns

that the need to drive down costs is making collaboration harder and forcing organisations to become more competitive (Acheson, 2103; Milbourne, 2013).

Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power describe how the powerful secure the willing compliance of those they dominate through what he terms overt power, covert power and the power to shape desires and beliefs. In the above example, the curtailment of activity at this level is a serious restriction of the kind of important empowerment work that takes place at the second and third dimensions of power, that is covert power and power that shapes desires and beliefs and influences people's wishes and thoughts. The formalising of organisational structures which preclude local people from attending meetings can be seen as an example of this second dimension of power. The possibility (or otherwise) for people to get 'a completely different take' on issues by exposure to alternative perspectives can be seen as an example of the third dimension of power in action. Gaventa's (2006) cautions, discussed earlier in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, that power in relationship to space and place can put boundaries on participation and exclude certain voices also come to mind. The question of who speaks for whom, and on what basis, is a critical one and is evident here also. Local people are now effectively denied access to fora which in the past 'excited them [and] made them think in different ways' and are not allowed to attend board meetings, and in effect, are not allowed speak for themselves. Thus the constraints on community development, arising from neoliberal policies at a macro level, appear to increasingly render it unable to tackle 'wider' or more structural issues, as well as steer it away from its avowed commitment to inclusion and participation of marginalised voices.

However, many participants attempt to 'work the system' as best they can despite the inherent tensions in this. Curtis' (2010) assertion that, in some cases, local communities exploited State funding in creative and skilled ways by 'framing state subsidy as social justice' (p.201) has arguably been true in the

past, but now appears to be increasingly less likely to be the case[39]. The extent to which community groups across Belfast are able or willing to use funds in unspecified ways, or 'exploit', as Curtis termed it, State funding in the present context is unclear, though the data gathered for this research does not appear to support her thesis. Indeed the data would suggest that the last ten years have seen increasing curtailment of a transformative role for community development organisations generally. The following quote makes explicit reference to the agenda of a women's organisation being influenced by what is and is not resourced:

> That [kind of community development work] is not on the agenda anymore for women's centres and I feel a big part of that is because funding is difficult and women's centres have had to go down other avenues, and sometimes that can get lost. And it's not to say they don't value it, but it has been a consequence of being pushed into other areas. (Female community development practitioner working in CRN area)

It is clear that the increasing lack of resources for community development work, and the tight procurement and monitoring frameworks associated with funding granted, makes it less likely that funds can be used creatively and/or for purposes other than those for which they are given.

Narratives associated with shrinking space are also evident in the data. One participant described the role of leadership in community development as being concerned with information provision and 'logical explanations' of what can and cannot be done to address issues locally:

> I think a leadership role is about providing people with the information. It's providing them with the logical explanation of what can work and what can't work and what might work and what is totally crazy and what is a non-runner to start with. It's all of those things mixed up. (Male community development practitioner working in PUL area)

[39] It is worth noting that her data relate to the period 1997–2000, and were set in the context of West Belfast, a large politicised community that has a more highly developed community infrastructure than many other areas. This links to the history of self-help and community development that emerged within that community in the 1970s as a response to ongoing discrimination, as outlined in *Chapter One*.

Other similar narratives include ones which focus on personal responsibility rather than acknowledging the structural and social dimensions of issues in disadvantaged communities:

> So people talking about lack of educational attainment in [this community] – and it's a whole big issue – it's fact. Okay, here's the facts. We have young people leaving school with little or no qualifications. That's a fact. What we need to do is ask ourselves why. And then we need to take responsibility for that. We as a community need to take responsibility for that and be honest about the issues that's giving that result. (Female community development practitioner working in PUL area)

These narratives suggest that community development is playing a *de facto* limited role in addressing key issues of disadvantage locally, a role which, far from being challenging, appears to be uncritically linked to dominant neoliberal narratives.

Community development can thus be seen to be doubly under attack, from the competing forces of neoliberalism and an interventionist state that seeks to curtail its voice and its autonomy. The tension between the theory of neoliberalism and the actual pragmatics of neoliberalisation, which Harvey (2007) describes, is felt at local, grassroots level. On the one hand, groups are being forced to compete with each other for scarce resources and on the other hand, are being forced to work collaboratively. The funding climate that seeks to compel groups to collaborate, ironically tends to discourage slower, more organic collaborative working, and hence is likely to stifle innovation in the process. Speaking to the 'hybrid form', discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*, that some argue neoliberalism has taken in the North (Nagle, 2009), there are examples of the State playing quite an interventionist role, especially in relation to conflict and post-conflict issues. Crighton (1998) asserts that peace accords covering NI are not based on neoliberalism but, on the contrary, have succeeded only because of heavy involvement and investment by the governments of Ireland and the UK. This, which she describes as 'an embedded bias towards minimal state intervention' coexisting with substantial state involvement in NI's

economy and 'elaborate efforts at social regulation and domestic restructuring' (*ibid*., p.81) appears to be supported by the evidence. It has been argued by some commentators that shrinking the State in the UK has proved politically impossible, and instead there have been efforts to use the State to reshape social institutions on the model of the market - a task which, they argue, cannot be carried out by a 'small state' (Gray, 2010). This paradox of the State needing to regulate in order to create the ideal of a minimal, de-regulated State is noted, in a local context, by Crighton and others (Crighton, 1998; Kirby, 2012). Research participants shared examples of what can only be described as highly interventionist actions. For example, some talked about funding being used to secure the commitment of certain communities to the peace process, whilst others alluded to the duplication of state services along sectarian lines, what Hughes (2009) has described as a response to the manifestations rather than the causes of division in society. It seems that neoliberalism in the full sense of the term cannot be said to be predominant in NI – although, as noted in *Chapter One*, writers on the topic (for example, Harvey, 2007) acknowledge that, in any case, it is not entirely consistent as a philosophy. Issues such as funding of peace initiatives, high levels of subvention by the state, the establishment of partnerships, as well as a range of social and other policy actions point to more rather than less intervention. Murtagh and Shirlow (2012) argue that 'devolution has restructured and rescaled the state to better facilitate growth in a competitively global world but in so doing has also struggled to manage the instabilities built into the very meaning of the Northern Ireland state' (p.47). That said, these are part of an historic legacy and current trends strongly suggest that it is likely that we shall see more austerity and less intervention in the future. For example, despite the well-documented poor educational outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas, referenced in *Chapter One,* with 25% leaving school functionally illiterate and innumerate, public spending cuts affecting local early years services in 153 communities in the most disadvantaged parts of NI, with a loss of 2,500 early childhood pre-school places and 177 jobs, were announced in March 2015[40] (Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2015c).

[40] Since then, a reprieve of sorts has been secured through an offer of additional funding that

It appears from the data that the funding environment serves to, in effect, de-politicise the sector by, for example, not providing core-funding to organisations and thereby, as Benson (2015) argues, comprising their ability to be 'independent, self-determining, and free to decide on their activities in collaboration with their users and communities' (p.72). The focus seems to be increasingly on service delivery:

> I think today many people who are involved in community – calling it community work – it's really service delivery and they don't think of it in terms of community development or that this is about changing society or challenging poverty or inequality and stuff like that. (Male community development practitioner working in CRN area)

However, the implicit assumption that more resources would necessarily result in greater engagement and social change requires some scrutiny. More resources in the current context could result in simply more service delivery and more attendant administration and not result in greater space for transformational community activism. Therefore, whilst the cry for more resources is understandable, perhaps a fundamental shift in how the work of community development is understood by community activists and those who would support it, is also required. Curtis' (2010) contention that State social provision was viewed by NGOs 'as an entitlement that did not buy loyalty', and that privatising social welfare provision 'did not create compliant, self-regulating NGOs' (p.216) suggests that there may be space for community organisations to not play the game. Where might such spaces be?

5.2.3 Where Spaces for Collaboration and Social Change are to be Found

While spaces for collaboration and social change are reported as increasingly limited, the data indicates that there are a number of sites for action by local groups. A number of these identified include the following:

- creating their own spaces for deliberation;
- developing economic projects as alternatives to the market; and
- challenging government to push back against global neoliberal policies.

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will maintain existing services until March 2016. http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-de-090715-education-minister-confirms

Creating their Own, and New, Spaces

A proactive effort to develop space for debate and dialogue is suggested as an important task for community groups:

> I think both the community and the women's sector need to be creating more of those open spaces and events where you're bringing groups and people in… All that is skills-building, and that was a way of working that was accepted. People like to talk. And it is important. There's no space. There's no space for it. (Female community development practitioner working in CRN area)

One example of such space being created was given of a group of local women who were supported to access adult education:

> And at that very early stage they would have gone into a mixed environment where they would have been working with men and women from all over the city and it was the only place that they could actively be exposed to that shared learning in a safe, neutral space. They would have explored all sorts of issues. Then the next thing you would have known they would have all been visiting each other's community centres…you'd a link or a connection or a basic understanding. (Female community development practitioner working in CRN area)

However, this participant also commented that work like this is no longer happening in local communities today. Such spaces are closing down as the constraints on autonomy and time make it ever more difficult for the sector to set its own agenda. The above example also demonstrates an understanding of the necessity to think outside of current parameters, to challenge dominant narratives and create alternative ones. As Acheson (2013) argues, it is about having control over the story of who and what the voluntary sector is. This point is returned to later in the discussion on leadership in this context.

Developing Alternative Projects

An interesting example of finding space to work within, but slightly apart from, the system is provided by the success of a local neighbourhood centre in securing £1 million in resources without any governmental financial support. System here refers to both the welfare State, which has provided some services in response to this community's needs but is becoming increasingly 'leaner', and

the dominant economic system, characterised by neoliberal principles favouring free-market solutions to economic and social problems. Against official advice, this local community organisation forged their own path and achieved resources for women in the community 'which otherwise would not have been accessed'. The resource operates as a social enterprise arm of the organisation, providing daycare and catering services, with all profits 'gifted' back to the charity. It currently contributes in the region of 40% of the community organisation's total income. Through this, the local community has created a number of jobs and secured a degree of autonomy not only economically but also in relation to their wider social change agenda. For example, the organisation has been able to use its 'own' funds to employ an empowerment worker:

> So we have a business here – we've a social enterprise – and our board have decided within the life of this strategic plan that they are making women's empowerment a core theme of our three-year strategy. So we have through our own funding employed a women's empowerment worker. That worker will connect all of the women that are in all of the activities into programmes that will build up their leadership. We would say it's a three-step approach. It's around engagement, empowerment and leadership, and the idea is that we will now begin to work with a group of women – or groups of women – ultimately who will become the next generation of our board of directors. (Female community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

This is an interesting, current example of how a degree of economic independence can lead to considerable opportunities to create, and work to implement, a community's own agenda.

Others also referred to the idea of alternative models of empowerment. An example was given of a social economy project which provides both full and part-time care, as well as ancillary services, and which employs over seventy qualified staff. Local people are formally involved in guiding the direction of the project and, whilst some state funding is accessed for this work, its primary source of income is from users purchasing services which then allows them to access employment:

> And in the process [of] having a social economy enterprise [we] developed a little bit where you're now confident that people are employed…I think we're 50% [state] funding-dependent now compared to what it used to be. And that's a model of empowerment. You know, can we develop the social enterprise model more and create more jobs and better services for people as an alternative form of economics, if you want, to the market and the private market? (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

Research participants recognise the significance of creating alternative spaces and projects which challenge dominant thinking and demonstrate different ways of doing things.

Challenging Government

Neoliberalism and intervention are seen as competing forces, with neither fully dominant. Therefore, perhaps space for change, through the work of transformative community development, can be seen to also lie in efforts at influencing the state to intervene and to push back against the hegemony of neoliberalism. In other words, perhaps there is a role for community development to seek to influence Government(s) towards this end. However, whilst some theorists argue that there are signs of such movement, for example, the water charges protests in the South (Duncan *et al*., 2015) and that the impact of neoliberal policies may well lead to a real appetite for change (Kirby, 2012; Lynch, 2010; Powell, 2012), there appears to be little evidence of this yet in Belfast.

Nonetheless, research participants appear to continue to hope that that change is possible, citing alternative economic models and the power of people convening and 'getting out on the streets', as ways of pursuing this in the present climate of austerity and cut backs. One participant described this power of convening people in an example relating to work on the issue of community safety:

> So if we take community safety it's about pulling people together from across [name of area] to come together to discuss issues, to find solutions, to do things, you know. The piece of work we're embarking on

> now is about unwanted bonfires. That's highly about collaboration. It's about the residents groups coming together. We're about to form a federation of [-] residents associations who will work collaboratively on issues. So while they'll work distinctively on their own issues locally, on issues of policy and things like that they'll work collaboratively. In terms of [-] project, when it goes into an area to work the first thing is does is call a public meeting, get people together. And to get people in that room it has buy-in from the local community...(Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

Bringing people from different communities together to address common concerns, whilst acknowledging that they will continue to work on their own discrete issues, is an example of attempts to collaborate 'organically' and create alternative fora for consideration of policy and other issues on which joint action can be taken. This can also be seen as an example of community development playing a role in attempting to influence government policy.

Some see change as being possible within the confines of the current system. For example, one participant described how his organisation will soon access resources through a social programme delivered by the State, and as part of this will be tasked with re-distributing resources locally. He described how his organisation will require that partnerships are established to enable smaller, local groups to effectively bid for these resources. It will be interesting to see the extent to which this development will offer real opportunities for change and/or for doing things differently. The type of collaboration this participant espouses is more organic in nature. However, whilst perhaps not intended to be, this example can also be seen as a narrative which seems to work as a 'technology of the self' in delimiting debate; a number of mid-size community organisations, which now have more influence as they administer a number of funding programmes which they have bid successfully for, appear to adopt the dominant rationale and narrative. It may be one example of Rose and Miller's (1992, p.174) concept of power as being a matter of 'making up citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom' in local communities as well as obscure where real power lies.

Also, as the above example illustrates, mimicking the state's approach of making collaboration or working in partnership mandatory or forced may well serve to undermine it. It may transpire that passing resources 'downwards' in order to have community based organisations take responsibility for dispersion of inadequate amounts of funding may merely direct anger and negativity towards those groups rather than towards those institutions and structures that are the real power holders. Gaventa's (2006) argument, discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, that creating new institutional arrangements will not necessarily result in greater inclusion and that power must be put 'at the centre of the concept and practice of participation and engagement' is apposite (p.23). Establishing partnerships so that smaller community groups can share in the resources can be seen as 'good' 'new institutional arrangements', but they need to be augmented by a clear articulation of 'the nature of the power relations which surround and imbue these…potentially more democratic, spaces' (*ibid*., p.23) if they are to serve the interests of local communities.

The data suggest that the ability of community organisations and groups to recognise the importance of creating spaces where power can be analysed, finding ways to fund such spaces from within their own resources, as well as taking action to address imbalances of power and challenge private-market dominance, is present. This stands in contrast to the idea that that power can be completely taken from communities:

> sometimes it pays to just keep your mouth shut and keep your head down. But I think the point is [if you do this] you lose your radical edge. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

This pragmatic advice, whilst understandable, suggests the existence of boundaries around alternative spaces. If groups 'sometimes' have to refrain from challenging, how often can they do this without causing serious harm to their community development work? Furthermore, is their radical edge lost completely, or only temporarily? It also begs the question how high is the price for communities of keeping their 'heads down', and will it simply lead to the status quo being maintained? Might the implicit acceptance of funder-led

directives, in time, become viewed as 'common sense', or as the only viable alternative?

Organic collaboration initiated and pursued by groups as a means of building solidarity in local communities is necessary for social change. However, the current context which promotes forced collaboration serves to curtail the number and nature of opportunities for such organic or authentic collaboration within and between communities. Instead their energies are redirected towards a much narrower agenda of meeting contractual obligations and other funding requirements. The space for thinking is shrinking through a combination of 'stultifying' and increasingly formalised structures and a depoliticisation of the sector, driven by the pursuit of scarce resources. Alongside this, a subtle pressure to 'buy into' the dominant narrative and emulate the State's thinking in relation to the necessity of collaboration as a requirement of funding can be seen as an attempt to govern the thinking of local groups and leaders, and thus serve to help maintain the status quo. In this way, these prevent the sector from focusing on its social change work. However, the kind of organic collaboration that has always been part of the focus and values of community development is still evident, through practices such as creating spaces for individuals to meet, developing alternative economic projects, and convening people to address policy issues collaboratively. The data appear to indicate a trend that such creative spaces are under threat and not increasing in number. The lack of time and other resources makes it difficult to convene people, create spaces for deliberation and organise challenges to government to push back against neoliberal policies. Whilst there are examples of community-led economic projects as alternatives to the market, these are few in number and require larger organisations with significant levels of capacity to develop them. A key challenge for the community sector now would appear to be how to protect and increase alternative spaces such as these.

This section has examined the nature and status of spaces for collaboration and social change in Belfast communities. The next section narrows the focus to concentrate on what leadership within this context looks like and what kind of

leadership might promote greater organic collaboration and social change.

5.3 Leadership for Collaboration and Social Change

The idea of sharing or distributing leadership within communities resonates very strongly with participants. As such, DL theory would seem likely to be useful in helping to understand how leadership is enacted through and with others in local communities. In this section, an analysis of the data on leadership is presented, focusing on four core themes which have emerged: the distributed nature of leadership in the community sector; the ambiguity of leadership language; power; and shaping narratives as a form of leadership.

5.3.1 The Distributed Nature of Leadership in the Community Sector

The collaborative approach which, as discussed earlier, is intrinsic to much community development work, brings with it challenges in relation to leadership. As discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us,* leadership skills are of critical importance in collaborative contexts (Gray, 2007; Silvia and McGuire, 2010). The research data seem to support Spillane's (2005) contention that traditional methods of leadership do not work in the contexts of increasing responsibility and complexity. In terms of how participants appear to understand the kind of leadership that needs to be enacted, they make a strong case for the inadequacy of traditional, 'top-down', leadership approaches:

> I think that very traditional styles of leadership create conflict in [those kinds of] collaborative contexts because very traditional styles of leadership don't recognise the complexity. So the command form of leadership is not appropriate to working collaboratively. (Male community development practitioner working in mixed area)

According to this participant, traditional or command styles of leadership do not recognise the complexity of the situations within which leadership is enacted and create conflict rather than further the collaborative endeavour. Many participants refer to the close alignment between organic collaboration and leadership that is *de facto* distributed at a conceptual level:

> So [leadership is] not just about the Director or the Deputy Director or

> the top echelons of the organisation. (Male community development practitioner working in CRN area)

Another participant describes the kind of leadership that supports community development practice as leadership as:

> spread about all of the organisations, it's about everybody playing their role irrespective of whether it's a major role or a minor role (Male community development practitioner working in PUL area).

Many leaders in local communities in this research espouse an approach to leadership that appears to be congruent with a DL model. The above quote resonates strongly with Spillane's (2005) idea of leadership practices which can be 'stretched over' leaders. Core leadership tasks that emerge in the data focus on engaging with others and include: *involving; consulting; negotiating; persuading; educating; influencing; building relationships;* and *facilitating*. These tasks do not align closely with a traditional, hierarchical, 'command and control' approach to leadership. Rather, they appear to implicitly recognise the complexity of leadership as a negotiated and contingent set of actions, in other words, that acknowledge that 'situation constitutes leadership practice' (*ibid*. p.145). The above quotation also attests to the idea of leadership functions being diffused among both formal and informal leaders (Williams, 2013) as everyone has a role 'irrespective of whether it's a major role or a minor role'.

DL is premised on the idea that leadership cannot be done effectively by individuals acting alone, and data to support this emerges in the current research. A central task of leadership identified by participants is 'bringing people along', that is, encouraging engagement and involvement in both community development activity locally and in the leadership of that community development activity. This resonates with DL's focus on open boundaries which results in a wider net of individuals and groups contributing to leadership. Also in alignment with this is the concept of inclusion, a core organising principle of community development:

> Collaboration for me and my leadership is about driving things that are right, and I think that collaboration is a way to do it because you can't do it on your own. (Male community development practitioner working in

interface area)

Inclusion is driven by the need to engage others and by a recognition that no single person can collaborate or enact leadership alone, ideas that arise frequently in the literature (Himmelman, 1996; Huxham, 1996). There were numerous examples in the data of those playing a leadership role collaborating with others, both within their own community and with external communities. Indeed, this was seen by many participants as a requirement of good community development practice.

Therefore, it would seem that the type of leadership that is required is one that takes cognisance of the complexity inherent in community contexts where leadership, according to research participants, seems to be centrally concerned with engagement and involvement of others. This links with a focus on trust and relationship building, which are theorised as responses to increasing complexity (Sullivan *et al*., 2012), as discussed in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*.

The Collaboration Dimension

Huxham and Vangen's (2005) contention that DL is useful in working across disciplinary and organisational boundaries is supported by the data. One participant provides an example of the different kinds of leadership roles he is required to play in different situations:

> the leadership role in that [consortium] is complex because I'm leading leaders. All of the people around the table are leaders in their organisation and that is an interesting concept around leadership – how do you lead leaders, you know? So my role is often consultative, argumentative. Sometimes I am mummy – and that's a type of leadership. And I am mummy and they come to me – 'Mummy, help!' I can also provide leadership within groups locally. So groups will come to me and say: 'This, this, this. What do we do?' Now, I don't have any formal leadership role there, but what I say significantly influences how they proceed. And that's a kind of leadership. (Male community development practitioner working in mixed area)

It seems that leadership needs to be able to navigate through such complexity

whilst, as noted above, also being able and willing to attempt to 'significantly influence' others, and as Leithwood *et al*. (2007) suggest, be involved in leading the leaders. Being able to do this effectively is, of course, situational or contingent on the context and on the reason groups have come together in the first instance. In local, organic collaborative contexts formal authority is often absent and there may not be the requisite levels of relationship and trust upon which effective collaboration depends. Therefore, the building of such relationships is an important leadership task, as noted by a number of writers (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Ospina and Saz-Carranza, 2010; Rubin, 2009; Tamm and Luyet, 2004; Williams, 2013) and as we shall see later. To add to this complexity, challenges in the current context including competition for scarce resources and a requirement that organisations formally collaborate together, are well aired in the data with participants arguing that it is difficult to build trust and relationships with those you are being compelled to compete with.

Whilst leading collaboration involves a greater degree of complexity the evidence does not seem to suggest that the type of leadership *per se* is hugely different from what is required in single community organisations. It still seems to be centrally concerned with bringing people along, 'driving things that are right' and co-creating and navigating pathways to change.

Legitimacy and Authority

The nature of what Alexander *et al.* (2001) term 'tenuous authority' and legitimacy of those playing leadership roles was identified in the data and it seems that this is particularly significant in collaborative contexts. Local community leaders are generally unelected and have to source their legitimacy and authority elsewhere. This is in contrast to elected representatives who have to put themselves forward every four or five years for re-election, but tend to be, in practice, not easily held to account during the intervening periods. The current data indicate that community leaders are accountable on an ongoing basis, albeit in different ways, and had a variety of views on where their authority and legitimacy comes from: the authority bestowed on them by virtue

of their role or title; their track record of work in the community; and being known in their community.

Participants suggested that leaders' authority, insofar as they have some degree of what can be thought of as formal authority, comes through boards or management committees. Such authority also comes from the roles leaders play within the organisation, as well as the roles they undertake representing their group or organisation on other external boards and partnerships. Here we can see leaders' authority intersecting with the structures available to community groups which are, in turn, determined by the State. In other words, organisations have to be governed in particular ways and co-operate with formal processes in order to be able to fulfil criteria for, among other things, access to funding. Community leaders' authority and legitimacy which derives from such structures and processes can be thought of as given rather than earned, and in some instances, sanctioned, by the State.

However, participants reported that another source of legitimacy is that which is earned by virtue of the work leaders do in their community, what they described as their 'hard work', what they 'deliver' and the 'quality of the results':

> There's always going to be that thing about where your authority comes from. Ours here, I suppose, is just results-driven. If we weren't delivering for the community then we wouldn't be [where we are]. (Male community development practitioner working in PUL area)

Being local, in the sense of being from the community in which they worked, was also suggested as a source of legitimacy for some. Interestingly, this tended to be linked to the idea of being committed to the work, rather than simply being local in a more parochial sense:

> I think people also see me - because I come from the community and live in the community - that people don't see me as one of them people that finish at 5 o'clock and go on home and you don't see them until the next day. If something happens I'm there, I'm trying to diffuse it, I'm trying to deal with it, I'm trying to do whatever needs to be done in reference to it. So people seeing that have confidence in you to play that role. (Male

community development practitioner working in CRN area).

To maintain legitimacy, it seems that leaders have to continue to work hard and deliver on the ground. This somewhat tenuous nature of their authority and/or legitimacy in relation to leadership is in contrast to more traditional forms of authority, and is arguably especially challenging in the current context. Being able to 'deliver' is increasingly difficult for the many reasons discussed earlier in this chapter, particularly the scarcity of resources to address issues that are of importance to local communities, what Pyles (2014) describes as 'felt needs' and 'problems that the affected people 'own' and define' (p.13). This again seems to give a certain degree of power to the State in terms of being able to influence who can and cannot deliver services, by the kinds of resource allocation decisions it makes. In turn, this can influence who can and cannot build legitimacy locally.

However, there are still a number of unanswered questions. For example, in relation to legitimacy, it seems that it is quite localised, and this begs the question as to whether legitimacy can necessarily be gained by working/collaborating across boundaries and communities? Also, if, as the data appears to suggest, it is increasingly difficult for leaders to get issues 'put on the agenda', does this inability to do so result in them losing their legitimacy as leaders?

What Can and Cannot be Distributed

Whilst Butcher *et al.*'s (2007) contention that DL has much to offer organisations that support critical community practice resonates, it begs the question of what can and cannot be distributed. In relation to *what* is distributed, a number of broad categories of functions which reflect a transformational approach to leadership include: setting direction; developing people; and redesigning the organisation to be as effective as possible (Leithwood *et al.*, 2007). Interestingly, these are the same as those which Locke (2003) suggests ought *not* distributed but, rather, be left to 'constrained leaders', that is, those with formal authority. Whilst this broad range of

leadership functions are certainly found to be undertaken in communities in Belfast, Locke's contention that certain leadership functions and tasks should not be shared does not find great resonance in the data. Writing more in a business rather than community context, he argues that those with most formal authority should be assigned the job of deciding on the organisation's vision, values and strategy. The research data suggest that the opposite may well be the case in the community sector. Engaging people in a vision of better, more just, communities emerges in the data as a significant practice of those playing leadership roles. Its function appears to be to help motivate people, inculcate a sense that change is possible and help ensure leaders are grounded in issues coming from communities:

> Leaders need to have a vision. They need to be able to look into the future and see where they are, where they want to go, where they see things. And the vision needs to bold, imaginative. It doesn't need to be constrained. It needs to be airy-fairy at times, idealistic, it needs to be big and bold and out there. The leader then needs to be able to sell that vision to buy people into it, to convince people that this is where we're going, this is our roadmap, this is how we're going to get there. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

The leader's ability to 'bring people along' with her or him again is critical in relation to vision – convincing people to 'buy into' it is essential if it is to serve a function in motivating people to work for social change. Linking back to the earlier discussion on creating space to develop alternatives, we can see this as a way of leaders encouraging and supporting local communities to 'set their own agenda' and, presumably, counter existing agendas that are not in their true interests:

> And I think there's a distinction…leadership is about having a vision for the organisation…What do we look like in ten years' time? - let's go into that world and let's lead from there. We don't create enough space for people to do that, and within organisations, particularly managers, leaders, whatever we want to call them, get that bogged down with administrative duties. They don't get enough time to lead. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

In this quote, the administrative duties that 'bog people down' are not

connected with the community's own agenda, but rather, with an externally imposed one. This seems to parallel the distinction made between transactional and transformational tasks associated with leadership, that is, people are bogged down with transactional rather than transformational aspects of the work. In the same quote, the leadership element clearly comprises 'having a vision' and getting priorities associated with that vision on the agenda. Linked to this is another aspect of leadership which emerges in the data, that is, being positive and optimistic, 'holding out hope', to influence people to keep them on board with the vision and encourage them to believe that change is possible:

> Well, one of my leadership practices is – which can piss our staff off, like – is always being positive even though deep inside I'm feeling very negative…I was always the guy who would have said: 'How can we turn that into a positive action?' – because it was all negative and everybody was down and down and down and I was always the guy [saying] 'let's turn this around and how can we make it a positive action?' (Male community development practitioner working in PUL area)

The question of whether the creation and promotion of a vision, and the promulgation of hope, within local communities are tasks that can be distributed is less clear from the data. There is a need for such a vision to be 'bought into' and jointly owned, otherwise it will not serve as a driver and motivating force, and this is explicit in the data. It also needs someone to 'sell' it and to convince people to believe in its potential. However, whilst the data does not specify whether the vision is collaboratively developed or not, it is clear that leaders do have a particular role in creating and promoting it. In Leithwood *et al.*'s (2007) framing, this aspect of taking responsibility for the development and promotion of a vision could be considered a constrained task of DL. This also links with the previous discussion on creating spaces for alternatives, in that leaders feel a responsibility for imagining the vision and ensuring it gets attention, as a way of creating an alternative agenda. Then the leader effectively promotes this back to the community - an example of Pyles (2014) 'deconstructing narratives and inquiring further' (p.13). This can also be understood as an example of Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power in operation as it is concerned with shaping the perceptions of the community towards ones that are more transformational. This is an interesting example of

power not necessarily being a negative concept. As noted earlier in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, power can be about capacity and agency wielded for positive action, as well as being about exercising control over others. 'Being positive' or holding out hope seems to be a task less likely to be 'distributable'. Those playing leadership roles can hope that others adopt a positive, up-beat sensibility but cannot assume or indeed command it! However, it is likely that the more successful they are at deconstructing narratives and getting people to internalise the reshaped perceptions or vision, the more they gain legitimacy. Indeed Pyles (2014) goes so far as to argue that the 'practice of deconstructing narratives and inquiring further [,] ultimately a kind of critical thinking is […] the most important skill for social change' (p.13).

How does the issue of what can and cannot be distributed intersect with the transactional/transformational and power aspects of leadership? It appears that transactional tasks are less amenable to being distributed as they are likely to be constrained by law and by legal agreements relating to fulfilling contractual obligations which are often not allowed to be transferred to others. As discussed earlier, those playing formal leadership roles in communities are increasingly charged with significant responsibility to manage contracts and resources and, in so doing, are often forced to make difficult decisions about where and how to use these limited resources. Taking 'hard decisions' – often in relation to resource allocation and related issues - emerges as a common leadership task in the data, and it seems that such hard decisions are ones which participants feel cannot be easily distributed. They certainly do not allude to distributing these types of tasks.

Transformational leadership tasks such as setting direction and building solidarity are, on the other hand, tasks which tend to require convincing people - or 'followers' - and securing their commitment or 'buy-in'. As such, these could be distributed from the perspective that there is no legal or quasi-legal constraint on so doing. However, these may be the very tasks that ought not be distributed given their significance in relation to community development and

social change. As discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector,* given the importance of developing a shared or common vision (Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Ospina and Foldy, 2010) leaving this job to the leader alone would be unlikely to inculcate the level of ownership and 'buy-in' that would be needed in local communities to pursue that vision and implement associated strategies effectively. Nonetheless, it seems clear that someone has to take initiative in risk-taking, in reminding people of the bigger picture and maintaining a strategic focus. So whilst there is no legal or quasi-legal constraint, it remains a moot point as to whether these types of tasks can be distributed without significant danger of the community development project going adrift. Research participants for the most part describe their roles as centrally concerned with involving others – 'bringing people along' – in decision-making, in planning and in local action. What is less clear is *to what end* people are being brought along – for transactional or transformational purposes – as this seems to vary among leaders in the data. For example, as previously cited, a participant suggests a transactional, consensual view of leadership which includes providing people with information and 'a logical explanation of what can work'. In contrast, a transformational approach can be seen, in a quote from another participant, to highlight the need to create a new vision or agenda, one which is 'bold and imaginative', and determined by the community itself.

A parallel can be drawn between the transactional and transformational continuum and the enactment of power. From the data, it appears that leadership which is enacted at the transactional end of the continuum is less likely to identify or challenge dominant narratives and hidden power that is exercised; in the words of one participant, '*sometimes it pays to just keep your mouth shut and keep your head down*'. Neither is it likely, by definition, to attempt to change what is on the agenda but, rather, will tend to work more within the system or within current parameters, without challenging these. In contrast, transformational approaches are more likely to address power at overt, covert and hidden levels. However, the data suggest that the ability of leaders to play such a transformational role is severely constrained by the

current context, as discussed in the previous section and as evidenced by the following participant:

> I think the new up-and-coming community development people will become more business-like. I'm not 100% sure that people will come through on a social issue base or from a socialist point of view or a community point of view. It may be just a business point of view for them. [they will become] managers of funding. And that's a danger. (Male community development practitioner working in an interface area)

A clear concern evident here is that community development is increasingly concerned with 'business' and 'managing funding' rather than with changing society or challenging poverty or working from a 'community point of view'. This is hardly surprising given the way community development is currently resourced and structured, that is, almost exclusively through contracting and procurement of service delivery. In light of the predominance of a neoliberal agenda, transactional forms of action and leadership are likely to take precedence, with little, if any, resourcing of transformative community development and the leadership required to promote it. Indeed the promotion of transformational approaches would arguably run counter to a neoliberal agenda.

There are other complexities associated with the leadership role of 'bringing people along'. Tasks in local communities such as setting direction and building solidarity are not by nature singular or individual tasks; they can only be accomplished by *groups of people* and enacted jointly. It seems almost certain that an initiator or catalyst will be required, there may even be a leader who will be held formally accountable, but without the participation of others these tasks or actions cannot be accomplished, no matter how 'effective' the leader or how much positional authority s/he has. What seems to be emerging in the data can perhaps be understood as the enactment of leadership necessarily including playing the role of catalyst or initiator, along with a focus on those others over whom leadership is, to use Spillane's (2005) term, stretched.

In summary, it seems that transactional leadership tasks are less amenable to

being distributed as they are likely to be constrained by legal agreements relating to fulfilling contractual obligations. In particular, taking 'hard decisions', a common leadership task found in the data, is not easily distributed. Transformational tasks and activities which are core to community development, such as setting direction and building solidarity, can only be accomplished by groups of people, albeit usually with the help of an initiator or catalyst. As such we can conceive of these as being, in many respects, leadership tasks which can be distributed, albeit with the help of an initiator.

Planful Alignment

Another feature of DL that is useful for the purposes of this analysis is the concept of 'planful alignment', discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, where the tasks and functions of those providing leadership have been given 'prior, planful thought by organisational members', with agreements built as to who is to carry out which functions (Leithwood *et al.*, 2007, p.40). The constraints discussed in the previous section of this chapter posed by what can be termed an undermining or undervaluing of time for thinking raises issues in relation to leadership. For example, without time for reflection, how planful can alignment be? Similarly, without time to reflect on the strategic direction or vision for local communities, how can leaders avoid becoming caught up in day to day transactional aspects and failing to pay attention to transformational ones?

Certainly, anarchic misalignment, the antithesis of planful alignment, as framed by Leithwood *et al.* (2007), seems to account for some of the less successful experiences of DL within the community sector in Belfast. Such misalignment includes the rejection, on the part of organisational leaders, of influence from others whereby leaders 'behave highly independently, competing with other units on such matters as organisational goals and access to resources' (*ibid*., p.41). One participant shared an example of where his group 'walked away' from a collaborative initiative because 'it was not a genuine process' and people involved 'broke the terms of what we were trying to do'. Others referenced a

breakdown in trust as a reason for misalignment, and a lack of confidence in the motives of others for being involved in collaborative initiatives:

> If people decided that they wanted to water down their views for the sake of short-term expediency as opposed to long-term good relations then that's up to them. (Male community development practitioner working in interface area)

It seems that in the current competitive, survivalist context in which community groups find themselves, anarchic misalignment, with its link to competition rather than co-operation, as discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, is fostered (Leithwood *et al*., 2007). It can be seen as an, albeit unhealthy, response to competition for scarce resources and a consequence of the tension between groups being forced to simultaneously compete and collaborate with each other. Such misalignment can only result in division and is, in effect, an attack on solidarity within the sector. This clearly runs counter to the very *raison d'etre* of community development. Leadership for social change needs to work against anarchic misalignment and instead plan to build alignment within and between communities.

Interestingly the data also suggest that such anarchic misalignment appears to be able to co-exist with good practice internally. While some participants noted a degree of insularity among leaders, others also felt that it often sits alongside good work taking place *within* leaders' own organisations. This links to what was described as a lack of 'coherence' in the sector:

> There is a total lack of coherence. People are very parochial and single-issue… And there's a lot of egos involved…[Coherence] in part comes from leadership in that you are getting an actual informed opinion from a community where the community have been part of it rather than whichever individual you're speaking to at that point in time. (Male community development practitioner working in CRN area)

Leadership in this instance is concerned with engaging in the work required to get opinions which are both *informed* and *from the community*, not just from individuals within it. The implication is that effort is required to do this.

However, leadership can also involve going further and, in effect, constitute a leadership practice '[which] can be stretched over leaders over time' (Spillane, 2005, p.147) as evidenced by the following quote:

> So some of that leadership I think is about pulling people together, about creating situations where people can work collaboratively together and then taking yourself out of it. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

'Taking yourself out of it' can be read as divesting oneself of leadership tasks and distributing these to others. This quote also suggests that planful alignment is at work here. A degree of intentionality is evident; it is by design rather than by chance that the leader here takes himself out of it, and is in keeping with the idea of distributing or sharing leadership.

Another participant highlighted the need for planful alignment when he made the case for greater *local* organic collaboration and relationship-building with other stakeholders, citing engagement with churches as an example, in a community where relationships with churches had broken down:

> We [leaders] need to set up relationships with the leaders in [other, local] organisations. We need to be talking to them. (Female community development practitioner working in PUL area)

Without leadership which focuses on planful alignment, this level of organic collaboration is unlikely to manifest.

To summarise, it appears that there is a lack of space or time to reflect on, and engage in, planful alignment in the sector. As a result, examples of anarchic misalignment, or 'lack of coherence', are to be found, arguably a consequence of forced collaboration as well as the competitive culture fostered by the wider neoliberal context. Linked to this is Alexander *et al.*'s (2001) idea of leadership in collaborative contexts as centrally concerned with balancing a number of polarities: power sharing and control; process and results; continuity and change; and interpersonal trust and formalised procedures. This notion of balance echoes some of the challenges of leadership for collaboration noted earlier, including the leader's need to balance the interests of their own

organisation with the interests of the wider area or region. Without space and time to reflect, it will be increasingly difficult for those playing leadership roles to consider and consciously balance these.

A Hybrid of Approaches

Leadership in communities is described in the data as concerned with both facilitating others to be involved and have a voice and advocating one's own point of view. Leaders, whilst often 'acting as a focus where people can take issues', also play a proactive role in raising difficult issues and developing processes whereby these can be dealt with. The challenge for leaders is how and when to balance facilitative and more directive approaches. Gronn's (2008) later thinking focused on the idea of a hybrid of diverse patterns of practice, which fuse hierarchical and heterarchical elements, whereby distributed forms of leadership operate alongside more traditional forms. The data appears to support this idea of some kind of hybrid. For instance, the following quote suggests that different forms of leadership can operate concurrently, at least to some degree, in local community contexts:

> At times [women] will say: 'You really stepped into your leadership role there'. And I always take that as the biggest compliment. To me my role is to model leadership for the women in the organisation and we would have discussions in staff because while there is a managerial hierarchy, the purpose of the organisation is to nurture leadership and everyone can be a leader, and play a leadership role. I'm trying to instil that with the other people that are here. (Female community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

According to this participant, it appears that more 'managerial' aspects of leadership – which here attract the term 'hierarchy' – are less amendable to being distributed. As discussed earlier, tasks associated with the managerial hierarchy are often not amenable to delegation or significant involvement of others, especially if the leader is held to be personally, legally accountable.

This raises the question of what Gronn's concept of 'hierarchical' looks like in a community context, where there is often little formal authority. If we replace the term 'hierarchical' *in this context* with 'catalysing', and conceptualise it as

being about advocating and putting forward arguments, as distinct from simply facilitating people locally, then the idea of a fused or hybrid of hierarchical (so described) and DL forms is a resonant one. Certainly, words used by participants to describe a range of leadership actions suggest a facilitative dimension, including: *involve; consult; negotiate; educate; build relationships*; with few terms used which are associated with more traditional approaches such as: *being dictated to; have somebody standing over you* or *making decisions.* Many participants suggested that taking risks is a requirement of a leadership role. Arguably, this can be reframed as 'a catalysing or directive role' in a community context, that is, to take a risk is to stand up for something and often involves going against the majority and/or the perceived wisdom:

> Leadership [is] in a sense that, you know, if something's wrong we shouldn't go to the lower common denominator just because it's popular. We need to be standing up and saying: 'Look, it's not right. We're wrong here.' (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

> Well, we have an organisation here that needs to function and it needs to be managed, so that's fine. But we have issues out there that leadership needs to be shown on. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

The language used here is telling. A course of action should not be pursued 'just because its popular' and 'leadership needs to be shown on' suggests taking a stand, and/or making an argument for something. This clearly distinguishes a proactive, risk-taking aspect of leadership from a more functional management aspect. Perhaps it can also be seen as linking to Sullivan *et al.*'s (2012) description of the task of leadership as managing meaning and articulating organisational and inter-organisational possibilities through visions and values. In addition, it can also be seen as proactively naming issues and then working to convince people of the need to and/or wisdom of taking action on those issues and building consensus within the local communities as to how to do that.

Therefore, whilst there is not exactly a hybrid of heterarchical and hierarchical patterns of practice, the data appear to suggest that there is something similar

to be found; a mix of heterarchical and catalysing or directive patterns of practice. It seems that leadership as enacted within the sector does not take the form of DL in a 'pure' form. Whilst certain important leadership tasks cannot be achieved by the leader acting alone, there nonetheless appears to be a particular role for leadership which is concerned with initiating and catalysing action by *proactively* encouraging or facilitating the engagement of others.

5.3.2 The Ambiguity of Leadership Language

A consistent theme throughout the data is the marked unwillingness of those playing a leadership role to call themselves a 'leader'. There is an ambiguity among participants as demonstrated by the fact that, when asked if they would use the term 'leader' to describe themselves, almost all said no. However, despite the reluctance to use the term, many of those who reject it were also of the opinion that their role *is* to provide leadership:

> I very rarely would use the word 'leader' or 'leadership'…or use it to describe my role, but I would see the actions I take as being a leadership role in different scenarios. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

This participant takes leadership 'actions' but rejects the term leader or leadership. This ambivalence is echoed by another participant:

> I wouldn't describe myself as a leader, but it's my role to give leadership…everybody in here should be a leader…this organisation is made up of leaders. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

While he would not describe himself as a leader, he explains that he nonetheless extols everyone in his organisation to think of themselves, and act, as leaders. Clearly leadership is seen by him as something which is played by both formal and informal leaders. However, this quote is interesting for a number of other reasons. As discussed previously in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*, community development traditionally may have inadvertently and uncritically fed the notion that leaders/leadership are not required. Also, the term leader may connote a traditional, authoritarian or hierarchical concept of leadership more

typically assumed in mainstream society. It is possible to see a rejection of the term as a rejection of a type of leadership that is associated with the mainstream, and perhaps used by leaders acting within and/or supportive of the neoliberal paradigm:

> Well, I do and I don't [use the term leader]. I do at times. I'd be selective in the use of [the term], depending on the audience that I'm trying to encourage. I try and use the whole sort of equality approach. (Male community development practitioner working in an interface area)

Here it is interesting to note that the conceptualisation of leadership is framed as being, in some ways, at odds with an 'equality approach'. If leadership is assumed to be of the traditional, top-down kind, then it is understandable that it could be seen as counter to an equality approach. The data suggest possibly under-theorised notions of both leadership and equality and a lack of a common language or shared understanding of leadership among participants. Whilst this quote can be read as suggesting a somewhat limited view of leadership, especially one to be held by people who play leadership roles in local communities, it can also perhaps be understood as a way leaders attempt to distance themselves from commonly held ideas about (traditional) leadership. Also, perhaps it can be read as an articulation of the differentiation leaders are attempting to make between the leader as a person and the actions of leadership, in the context of trying to align leadership work with the ethos of equality and participation.

A number of participants commented that whilst they would not use the term leader in relation to themselves, others would use it about them and this did not seem to be problematic. A degree of humility seems evident whereby it appears to be acceptable to have it said *about* you but not *by* you! Comfort with the term being used by others can perhaps be seen as an expression of the external-facing role of the leader (Ockenden and Hutin, 2008) or a communicative, or 'ambassadorial', dimension which Macmillan and McLaren (2012, p.6) refer to.

It may also suggest that the core leadership task assigned specifically to the leader is one of 'playing the role of leader' in interactions with external

stakeholders/organisations, while other leadership tasks are shared more easily (presumably) among groups members. Another participant noted:

> I believe…that leadership is about developing leadership throughout the organisation. It's key…growing leaders. (Female community development practitioner working in CRN area)

It seems that many leaders are happy to be leading but they bring to that leadership a particular understanding of it. The leadership they try to enact and encourage is towards the end of bringing about change and making improvements in the local community. Implicit in their understanding is a rejection of the 'heroic' framing of leadership, and instead the personalisation of it. As leaders, they may want to influence issues and the local community, but they are not seeking 'the glory' that traditionally often accompanies leaders. For example, one participant talked about two women leaders who made great changes in social policy for women in NI and commented that, while they were very aware of what they were doing, they 'were not looking for recognition of it' (female community development practitioner working in CRN area). She seems to suggest that these leaders appear to be rejecting the personal gain that is often associated with being a leader and trying to deflect attention instead towards the issues they are concerned with. Another commented that:

> You find yourself being facilitator, leader, broker sometimes, but whatever you are the important thing is to remember that it's not about your progress through your career. This is about capacity and empowerment of groups. (Male community development practitioner working in a mixed area)

Thus it seems that leaders in communities appear to be rejecting a more traditional, hierarchical approach and, instead, are attempting to practise a different type of leadership. The reluctance to use the term leader points to a lack of adequate or appropriate language around leadership that articulates the differences between traditional and non-traditional approaches. Whilst community leaders are trying to do something that is more transformational in relation to leadership and are rejecting a traditional notion of it, they still have to use language associated with traditional forms.

This also links with the issue discussed earlier relating to an 'attack on thinking'. Without time to reflect on their practice as leaders or discuss it with others, it is difficult to make leadership practice explicit and to develop it. In a similar vein, if leaders do not identify themselves as leaders, how can they authentically promote the idea and importance of leadership? Also, if leaders do not identify themselves as such, do they render themselves somehow unaccountable? This would be ironic given their efforts more widely to be open, accountable and grounded in their communities. These are important considerations as many research participants described their role as involving the promotion of leadership among others in their group and community. For leadership to be distributed a clear recognition that leadership is important, and that it can be enacted by any number of people, is required. Arguably, without such an awareness it is not possible to distribute leadership in a 'planful' or effective way.

There may be cultural issues at play here too. More than one participant spoke of how she/he would be seen as 'presumptuous' or 'arrogant' by others in the community if they were to use the term *leader*. Again, this suggests that leadership is being equated with hierarchical forms that locate significant amount of power in individual leaders; if one uses the term leader, it can be seen as one making a claim to be 'above' others on the hierarchy. This may account for participants viewing the term leader as 'presumptuous' and 'arrogant'.

In relation to the concept of DL, the data appear to suggest that, in the case of communities in Belfast, it is the leadership dimension rather than the distributed element that is contested, but only insofar as leadership is understood in a traditional way. Leaders, it seems, want people to follow their *ideas* for community development and change and rather than follow *them* as (the person who is a) leader. In others words, they do not appear to want to be leader for the sake of being leader but rather for the purpose of catalysing change, they want people to follow the ideas rather than the person.

As already noted, the leadership that is referenced generally in the data aligns closely with the idea of DL, though the concept of DL does not shy away from using the term *leadership* explicitly. Indeed, an important prerequisite for the enactment of DL is that those playing leadership roles acknowledge and are comfortable with these roles. Interestingly, in light of the above discussion, the data allude to the need for leaders to be accountable for the *quality* of their leadership. It was suggested by one participant that 'good community development structures' will result in 'good leadership coming through'. In this instance, 'good community development structures' were understood to include empowering the community more widely to be able to 'challenge as well, [so that] you're not getting dictators coming through either'. However, some of the literature, as well as this data, suggest that the lack of an explicit focus on leadership within community development casts doubts on the assumption that good community development structures will necessarily result in good leadership practice.

Despite a willingness on the part of participants to engage fulsomely in this research, it was difficult to get at the day to day individual *practices* of leadership. Somewhat similarly to the point made above, the lack of reflection on leadership has led to a lack of awareness of leadership practices and a lack of language to talk about them. When this is coupled with the lack of time for deliberation on the part of those playing leadership roles more generally, we can see that leadership as a set of practices is itself weakened or in danger of falling short of its potential.

There appears to be a certain dissonance between the idea of leadership, the practice of leadership and the language used to describe these. Indeed the absence of language to adequately reflect what leadership in the community sector looks like, and needs to look like, and how it is and should be enacted is a serious limitation. As discussed in Chapter Three, Bhattacharyya (2004) describes how people can be excluded from participation, in its broadest sense, by silencing a language. If we do not have a language for leadership to promote social change it is very difficult to know it, explore it or develop and improve

practice in relation to it. There is a need to support those playing leadership roles to address this gap, an issue returned to in *Chapter Six: Concluding Comments and Implications of Findings for Leadership to Support Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities*.

5.3.3 The Exercise of Power

The issue of power is significant in any research relating to community development and leadership. Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power offer valuable insights in relation to how the powerful secure the willing compliance of those they dominate. The data suggest that instead of leading or campaigning for social change, many leaders are involved in significant levels of bureaucracy:

> You spend so much time doing all that side of [administration] work you lose all the time that you would want to be doing other kind of more proactive and engagement kind of side of stuff. (Male community development practitioner working in CRN area)

This is a typical comment expressing frustration at the drain on time to engage in the social change work of community development. This can be seen as the second dimension of power, that is, the power to influence decisions by shaping the agenda, not merely by getting involved in existing decision points (Lukes, 2005). As discussed in *Chapter One,* the State appears to be increasingly pursuing a largely neoliberal agenda, characterised by austerity policies, cut-backs in public spending, efficiencies and attempts to lower the corporation tax rate. The power to change that agenda seems to be diminishing, evidenced by the British Government's recent declaration that austerity measures, including further cuts in public spending, will be ongoing (Campbell, 2015), despite attempts to counter recent cuts to the CVS through protests, strikes and lobbying (BBC, 2015; Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, 2015c).

The following quote about leadership addressing issues of disadvantage in a conflict/post-conflict context raises the question of who sets the agenda. For example, in this case, who decides that social and economic issues are less important than others:

> And my big hope and my big disappointment has been that there weren't

> cross-communities in these areas that would have came together - and could have came together with the right type of leadership…And again it's a subjective view on it – things like flags and marching and stuff like that are far less important than addressing issues of social and economic neglect and need. They were the things for people to come together on: how do we address the issues in our communities that really matter. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

The implications are that local communities do not set the agenda or that issues of very real significance for communities do not form part of the agenda. Interestingly, this participant relates such powerlessness (my term) to the issue of leadership, suggesting that it could have happened 'with the right type of leadership', by which he appears to mean political leadership that is not afraid to take risks and raise the difficult issues such as discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage in working class communities.

A more positive view is that the community sector undertakes good work in *de facto* addressing issues of power despite poor quality 'wider', 'political' leadership:

> If you look at the work that has been done within the community and women's sector there's work going on through the flag protests, through the 12th July and through bonfires, through dissident threats, and it continues because of good leadership, because of consistent messages, positive messages and community development work. And it's more than just bringing a wee bus trip here and there. There's a recognition and, I suppose, a drive to really want to bring communities together…So there has been a lot of good leadership, but our lack of leadership is in a wider sense and that's in a political sense. I think that they can certainly take inspiration from a lot of the work projects and leaders on the ground. (Female community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

This demonstrates that 'behind the scenes' activities, which are perhaps less visible but nonetheless effective and address dominant narratives that say what is important and what is not, continues. In the above quotation, we see leadership in challenging circumstances being directly linked with community development and 'consistent' and 'positive' messages. It is attempting to

address a range of issues that are important to the community and, in this way, attempting to influence the agenda. It seems that leadership can be more, or less, successful in particular instances, but the core task of creating agendas that counter the externally imposed, neoliberal, one continues to be challenging.

The attack on time to think, discussed earlier, can also be seen as a type of covert power. One participant said that her day-to-day work is so busy that she does not have time to engage in reflection:

> You know, when you're doing stuff you actually don't reflect on it. I reflect a lot on the work but this [conversation] is making me go away and think more about my own leadership role and defining it more, because it's something that you never really think about until somebody asks you a question. (Female community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

It is interesting that a participant who is conscious of the need to 'reflect a lot on the work' nonetheless does not appear able to spend time reflecting more widely on the leadership role she plays. A disproportionate amount of energy and time is spent in developing funding applications and servicing the reporting requirements of a range of different funders. All groups and organisations have a multiplicity of funding sources, not just one or two. This same participant described having prepared five separate funding applications in the previous two week period and commented that, in relation to leadership, 'other priorities take over'. In this way we see governmentality at work, as power is exercised covertly through the current funding environment. Both the number of funding sources that have to be engaged with as well as the different specific financial reporting requirements of each, result in leaders struggling to achieve balance between transactional and transformative leadership tasks, discussed earlier.

The exercise of power emerges in other ways in the data too. The issue of educational underachievement is one that arises a number of times; young people from disadvantaged PUL areas of NI are underperforming at school compared with their peers in other communities (Equality Commission for NI, 2015; Mills, 2014). In this research data, there is a sense of surprise at the lack

of local leadership on this issue and on the surrounding narrative:

> I just can't comprehend how the likes of the Shankill have 90-something per cent of children failing [the 11 Plus[41]]. And there's no one within their communities showing leadership and saying: 'Actually we need to stand up against it.' I honestly don't know [why that is]…I also think that people are crying out for leadership in reference to, especially, the educational stuff. I talk to schoolteachers who work in Protestant areas, then I talk to people just from the community and they're wanting things to change around them. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

It is interesting that this issue, despite receiving considerable attention regularly in the media, does not seem to gain traction as something that requires action at community level – it appears to be 'not on the [community's] agenda'. Returning to a quote used earlier, another participant speaking on the same topic, said:

> We have young people leaving school with little or no qualifications. That's a fact. What we need to do is ask ourselves why. And then we need to take responsibility for that. We as a community need to take responsibility for that and be honest about the issues that's giving that result. (Female community development practitioner working in a PUL area)

This is a surprisingly individualistic, personalised analysis of what is happening in relation to a complex, multi-faceted issue and a good example of beliefs being held by and about a community that do not appear to be in the interests of that community. Here we can see a link between how a social issue is framed - in this instance, as one of personal responsibility rather than as a structural issue – and subsequently how it does not get on the agenda: examples of Lukes' (2005) *covert* and *hidden* power in operation. The educational underachievement issue is not on the agenda and the community either do not want to, or cannot, get it included on the agenda. Underlying this, at a more 'hidden' level, part of the dominant neoliberal narrative of personal responsibility seems to hold sway whereby people tend to internalise or blame themselves rather than state education structures for the current situation. This

[41] The 11 Plus is a selective entry examination for secondary schools that children sit during their school Year 6.

narrative of personal responsibility also links with Lemke's (2001) conception of 'techniques of power' whereby narratives attempt to 'render the social domain economic' through framing issues as ones of 'personal responsibility' and 'self-care' (p.202). This issue is returned to later when discussing narratives and meaning making in more depth.

Whilst addressing issues of power is core to community development, power expresses in different ways that are not always open to scrutiny, as Lukes (2005) and others have theorised. The role of leaders in influencing others and catalysing action around issues of inequality requires an awareness and understanding of power on the part of those playing leadership roles; what Pyles (2014) refers to as 'a kind of critical thinking' (p.13). Whilst the data suggest that leaders are aware of the need to focus on structural issues - mostly, it seems, around socio-economic inequality - the extent to which they do so consistently and persistently is arguable, with increasing pressures to deliver services and meet funding and contractual deadlines. The current context of 'busyness', the inexorable hunt for scarce resources and the resulting lack of time to reflect individually and collectively, forces this awareness and understanding far down the list of priorities of many leaders struggling for organisational survival.

But what of the power leaders themselves command? Such power can most readily can be seen in relation to decision-making, an issue central to any discussion on leadership, being concerned as it is with power and how it is used. The data suggest that there is a strong desire to involve others in local communities in decision-making but that some aspects of decision-making are less amenable to being shared:

> And it's about taking the hard decisions. But it's also about bringing people and the decision-making to the lowest common denominator. People will say: 'Look, we can't do that.' You go: 'Why can't you do it?' You know, if we're talking about the education of children in this school, why can those parents not have a role in the decision-making? Not necessarily the decision-taking – somebody has to take a decision – but there has to be a process and a mechanism for getting people involved in the decision-making process. So devolve power to those people. (Male

community development practitioner working in a PUL area)

The 'somebody' that 'has to take a decision' here is likely – for legal and perhaps moral reasons – to be the person or people with formal authority or position, a case of Leithwood *et al.'s* (2007) constrained leadership, discussed earlier. However, the process by which the decision is made appears to be one that attempts to be inclusive and underpinned by a clearly articulated desire to devolve power 'to the lowest common denominator'.

It would seem then that, in the case of the community sector, leaders are conscious of the need to pay attention to issues of power. This is interesting as the most substantive criticisms of DL theory come from a critical perspective and centre on the 'apolitical' nature of it, that is, its insufficient attention to power and power relations (Gordon, 2010; Hatcher, 2005; Lumby, 2013; Youngs, 2009). While such reservations are well argued and DL theory 'remains silent on persistent structural barriers', this does not hold fully true in practice in this community context, as evidenced by the foregoing discussion. Nonetheless, a number of the concerns identified in the literature *are* mirrored in the data, including the concern that DL theory does not pay due attention to power and in particular, to hidden structural aspects such as gender and race. In this research, the issue of gender was raised almost exclusively by women participants, focusing on the additional constraints they often face. Chief among these include the overburden of other responsibilities, lack of confidence and fear of stepping into leadership roles locally. The absence of a wider focus on gender is surprising, and concerning if, drawing on Pyles' (2014) definition, community development is connected with transformational actions relating to liberation of marginalised groups and the transformation of social systems. Also, given the recent and well publicised rise in numbers of racist attacks in various parts of the city[42], it is somewhat surprising that issues of new communities and ethnic minority representation at leadership levels were not highlighted more. There appears to be a lack of critical awareness of these

[42] http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/local-national/northern-ireland/two-racist-attacks-every-day-in-northern-irelands-racehate-crime-surge-30202329.htmly6

issues facing communities which, in the context of community development, is a significant gap. Community development is centrally concerned with citizenship in action, not only in terms of practical outcomes for disadvantaged communities but also, as Lister (1998) puts it, 'in the process of involving the members of those communities in working for change and the impact this involvement can then have on those individuals' capacity to act as citizens' (p.229). Particular groups experience multiple discrimination or disadvantage through oppressive institutions within society, such as racism, ageism, sexism and homophobia, which are interrelated and continuously shaped by one another. Awareness of this is required if community development is to address the needs of all members of a community and not just some, and create the conditions for the empowerment of all. Unless leadership within local communities pays attention to distribution, it may be privileging more traditional power holders within communities - white men - and in this way, may be operating to maintain rather than change the status quo. However, there is not enough data to investigate this further.

Transformative and Transactional

Related to this discussion about power, a transactional view of leadership emerges in the data, where leadership is understood as working within the existing system to make the system work, rather than working to change it in a more fundamental way:

> Health, housing, education, environment, transport, jobs, training, unemployment…they will always be the issues. And how you actually tackle those issues…There's only three ways…public money, private money, or a combination of both. And it's not about the need for better housing. Everybody agrees you need better housing. Everybody agrees you need a better health service. Everybody agrees you need better education. It's actually how do you achieve all those things…
>
> So everybody's actually moving much, much closer together and it's about the method of delivery. And if you have people involved right from the start of the method of delivery it becomes much, much easier…I think a leadership role is about providing people with the information. It's providing them with the logical explanation of what can work and what can't work and what might work and what is totally crazy and what is a

> non-runner to start with. It's all of those things mixed up. (Male community development practitioner working in a PUL area)

The above quote points up some interesting aspects of leadership and community development. A number of underpinning assumptions are apparent: community development is primarily about resources or a lack thereof, rather than about engaging in advocacy and building solidarity; there *is* consensus on what the issues are and the only divergence in thinking is about how to address them (not whether or not they need to be addressed); the role of leadership is to get local people to buy into 'logical' solutions; and 'everybody is moving much, much closer'. These seem to be very market-driven and highly consensual ways of seeing the world. The leadership alluded to here appears to involve playing a role that is akin to being an agent of the State and doing the State's work for it. This also links back with Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power, in that views which serve the interests of those in power are internalised and promoted in an uncritical way. It is also notable in the above quotation that other pressing and potentially contentious issues in local communities, such as equality, racism and building a shared society, are not mentioned. These are issues which would likely elicit a less consensual view, and for which solutions may not be at all 'logical' and are therefore less amenable to being easily addressed. Indeed the issue of racism did not seem to emerge as a very significant issue in the data. This is somewhat surprising, given the increase in the levels of racist hate crime at the time the interviews were undertaken, described earlier, and a concurrent rise in media coverage of it.

Narratives and Visions

The focus in the data on promoting a vision that inspires action prompts an interesting question. What is the interface between 'selling' a vision and 'selling' a dominant narrative? It is arguable that if leaders do not develop and promote, or 'sell', a vision, they will by default almost certainly be buying into the dominant narrative. Perhaps we can posit community owned vision as an antidote to dominant narrative? Examples of dominant narratives which fit with

current neoliberal thinking emerge in the data. The previous quotation is interesting as there appears to be a lack of critical thinking and an arguably surprising degree of empathy with the dominant narrative of 'logical', market driven solutions to complex social problems. Here the role of leadership seems to be one of containment rather than of mobilising resistance.

Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector discussed the concept of governmentality which describes power as operating along a continuum extending from political government through to forms of self-regulation, or 'technologies of the self' which can be seen to influence individuals' opinions and wishes (Lemke, 2001, p.201). As noted earlier, this connects with the third dimension of power and, as such, is less susceptible to easy observation. Sometimes it can evidenced by what is *not* thought or said as much as by what is. Reservations concerning the under theorisation of power in DL theory in relation to deeper systematic issues of ethnicity and gender, rather than the more obvious – or overt – power in the service of the State can be seen to refer to this aspect of it (Hatcher, 2005; Gordon, 2010; Lumby, 2013; Youngs, 2009). Debate can be delimited by assumptions of what ought to be expected of those with power, such as local politicians:

> God forbid I never thought I would say this, but I sympathise with our politicians because I don't think people and communities know what it is they want. And how can you lead if you haven't got anything to lead with and you don't know? You're not having any direction, so how can you lead? (Female community development practitioner working in a PUL area)

This quote provides an interesting insight into how some people think about leadership. The implication is that if the community does not know what it wants, then their elected representatives cannot be expected 'to know', nor, perhaps more significantly, be expected to work with them to co-create a vision. This seems to place much of the responsibility on communities themselves to not only experience the effects of iniquitous neoliberal policies but to also know how to resolve these. Given the historic and ongoing levels of disadvantage

within so many communities in Belfast, this seems like an unrealistic and unfair expectation. It can also be seen as an example of a 'regime of truth' – where 'the dis-advantaged' sympathise with 'the advantaged'. The quote is also interesting in that it begs the question as to the role of local community leaders in this context. Data discussed earlier clearly identifies a leadership role as helping communities identify what they want, and co-creating alternatives or visions of change and transformation, what Macmillan and McLaren (2012) term 'strategic narratives'.

Another example of a narrative which seems to work as a 'technology of the self' is illustrated by the following example, also considered earlier in the discussion about the possibility of change within the current system. This relates to a recent development beginning to be seen in a small number of mid-size community organisations which now have more influence as *they* administer a number of funding programmes which they have bid successfully for:

> So we'll be seeking [local groups] to come together to put a bid in. It should win any tender or any process because it's grounded locally, but it'll have to be based on collaborative working. Now, there's a reason for people to come together because they've identified an issue and they need to come together to solve it. We can now influence because we've got resources. We can now influence collaborative working for the right reasons, not because it's cheaper to do or because it ticks a box. And secondly, we can deliver change. (Male community development practitioner working in a CRN area)

It is interesting that the wider consequences of this do not seem to be explored and the extent to which this development will offer real opportunities for change and/or for doing things differently remains to be seen. Leadership that coerces people to work in particular ways, through linking the method of working with access to resources, is fraught with difficulties. If we are to consider this from the perspective of distributing power, it could be framed as a cynical exercise on the part of the State whereby it distributes some resources and therefore, arguably, some power to local groups, but nonetheless, retains control of the agenda. This can also perhaps be seen as another example of influencing people in local communities to work within the confines of a type of

'regulated freedom' (Rose and Miller, 1992), as well as concealing where power lies, by giving people the illusion of agency and choice (Lukes, 2005). An alternative reading of this example is that the organisation involved is taking back at least some control in a context where it otherwise has little. In turn, by supporting smaller groups to come together and access funding, it can be seen as attempting to take, and re-distribute, power. Perhaps both these analyses can co-exist. This example highlights the complexity of community development and related leadership roles; there can be a fine line between transactional and transformative actions.

Staying with the theme of narratives, some theorists view leadership as part of a struggle for competing narratives and suggest that leadership needs to take account of the wider social and cultural context within which the construction of narratives takes place (Kay, 1996; Macmillan and McLaren, 2012). What are some of the current leadership narratives in the community sector? There appears to be a range of narratives which, interestingly mirror three of Ife's (2013) four perspectives on community development: those that suggest communities need to take responsibility for their own disadvantage; those that are transactional and concerned with working within the system; those that recognise the system itself needs to be changed. Here a number that emerge in the data are considered.

An example of replacing the welfare state with a narrative of personal responsibility is seen in the following comments:

> I think community development has taken on a whole completely different mantle, and where you thought it was something that the whole community needs, now it's about looking at individuals and looking at families and looking at the individual needs of each member of your community.
>
> Nobody takes responsibility for their own. They [parents] are not providing the conditions to allow education to take place. (Female community development practitioner working in a PUL area)

The narrative here is one that places responsibility on individuals and the community rather than on the State or the system that perpetuates inequalities. Here again, we see 'techniques of power' through the framing narrative of 'personal responsibility' (Lemke, 2001, p.202). This narrative also aligns with Ife's 'individual perspective' which sees the source of 'blame' as the 'victim' (Ife, 2013, p.59).

Positive narratives which counter these and focus on motivation and 'holding out hope' within and for communities, also emerge in the data. As discussed earlier, it seems to be important that leaders give people, what one participant described as, 'faith that stuff is happening' because this can help build momentum around an issue or activity in the community:

> Whenever you're out engaging with people I think part of our job is always to be positive…Because if we show a defeatist attitude then how are you going to bring people with you? How are you going to get people engaged? (Male community development practitioner working in CRN area)

Similarly, the need to create alternative narratives to the dominant ones emerges in the data:

> [we need to] create not only a physical space for people to actually come together and address issues and respond to issues…[but] create this kind of mental space where people think: 'Well, we can do this…' (Male community development practitioner working in mixed area)

As discussed earlier, leaders are increasingly feeling pressured to adopt more transactional approaches in order to secure the local organisations and groups they serve, rather than support communities to engage in reflection and analysis. It appears from the data that no one single narrative is dominant. Macmillan and McLaren's (2012) suggestion that leadership is concerned with the struggle between a number of competing narratives, both within the community sector, and between it and the wider neoliberal context it finds itself operating in, resonates.

In relation to the exercise of power, a number of key findings have emerged in

the data. Those attempting to lead change are increasingly caught up in bureaucracy and a resulting 'attack' on time to think is evident. The effects of the current neoliberal agenda, which is characterised by austerity and cuts in public spending, make it increasingly difficult for community leaders and groups to exert influence on this agenda. However, it can be argued that, at a micro level, there is 'quiet, behind the scenes' leadership being enacted and making a difference in local communities at a smaller scale. In relation to distributing leadership, there is a lack of attention paid to structural barriers such as sexism and racism and, in the absence of such a focus, there is a danger that leadership is simply distributed to more traditional power holders, and in effect may not challenge or change existing imbalances of power. Some of the most significant leadership tasks can be framed as transformational ones such as, for example, building and promoting alternative visions or agendas within the community. There is less evidence of overt willingness on the part of participants to address conflict openly, which some theorists (Githens, 2009; Reynolds, 1994) suggest needs to happen for groups and communities to be strong and well functioning. Transactional leadership tasks, more closely associated with the current resourcing context of community development, seem to predominate.

The work of creating alternative narratives is under threat as the space for transformative work shrinks and it becomes increasingly difficult – and, in some cases, unacceptable - to engage in such work. It may also be that some of those playing leadership roles do not recognise the work of developing a shared vision and/or an alternative vision as theirs to undertake. It is as though there is a concurrent shrinking of the understanding or definition of community development in relation to its empowerment and social change focus (Pyles, 2014) and, instead, a reformulating of it as administering funding. As one participant commented:

> I started out as a community worker. I'm a bureaucrat now. (Male community development practitioner working in a mixed area)

5.4 Concluding Comments

This chapter has presented findings on the nature and status of spaces for collaboration and social change in Belfast communities and the kind of leadership currently enacted, and required, to promote collaboration and social change. Here conclusions in relation to the findings in four critical areas are discussed, in turn: the problematic and contested nature of collaboration; the shrinking space for change in the current neoliberal context; the need for leadership to be shared or distributed, whilst paying attention to issues of power; and the limitations of leadership language.

5.4.1 Problematising Collaboration

The data suggests that the term collaboration can be problematised, given its multiple meanings and responses it can arouse. The terms 'organic' and 'forced' have been posited to differentiate between two different conceptions of collaboration identified by participants; the former a means of building solidarity and pursuing progressive social change, while the latter indicates an element of a State-led requirement for the acquisition of funding. Organic collaboration can be seen as means of promoting community empowerment, whilst forced collaboration directly attacks it. It appears that collaboration has become an approach used by the state to implement its austerity measures and reduce resources available to the community sector.

The data suggest that the role of collaboration in relation to community development is a significant one; organic collaboration that is initiated and pursued by groups as a means of building solidarity in local communities is necessary for social change. The data also suggest that the current neoliberal environment is having a negative impact on the community sector and on leadership within it. In this context, the role of collaboration in the community development sector is increasingly one of containment rather than of co-operation. Spaces for critical thinking and for change are contracting and the number and nature of opportunities for organic or authentic collaboration within and between communities are curtailed. This is achieved by the redirecting of energies towards a narrow and arguably, transactional agenda of

meeting contractual and other funding requirements. Participants suggest that, in this way, it serves to prevent the sector from focusing on its social change work. As a consequence, examples of anarchic misalignment, or, as one participant termed it, 'lack of coherence', are to be found in the community sector. Thus the role of community development can be seen to be directed away from a progressive social change agenda and more towards one of control.

5.4.2 Space for Change

However, the findings also appear to confirm that organic collaboration is still evident, through participants' leadership practices such as convening people and creating spaces for critical debate, developing alternative economic initiatives, promoting the value of joint action, supporting people to address issues collaboratively, highlighting issues of injustice and inequality and attempting to influence policies and agendas on matters of concern. That said, the chapter outlines how the work of creating alternative narratives is in danger as the space for transformative work shrinks and it becomes increasingly difficult or unacceptable to engage in such activities. This includes the opportunity or freedom to challenge the more dominant neoliberal narratives by supporting communities to create their own. The current context appears to be impacting negatively on leadership within the community sector through increasingly enmeshing leaders in bureaucracy. This appears to be resulting in what can be described as an 'attack on thinking', as the effects of the current neoliberal agenda continue to be felt. It is ever more difficult for leaders locally to exert influence on this broader agenda. However, things look more positive in local contexts. As noted above, the chapter shows that, at a micro level, participants are involved in enacting 'quiet, behind the scenes' leadership and making a difference in local communities on a smaller scale. Examples of the impact that creating connections between people within communities, and between communities, can have attest to the sense of agency such action can generate among local people.

5.4.3 Distributing Leadership

The study suggests that the type of leadership that is required for social change

is one which takes cognisance of the complexity inherent in community contexts and is centrally concerned with engagement and involvement of others. The data suggest that this kind of leadership is thought by participants to exist, as evidenced by the very terms they used to describe their core leadership tasks and approaches including: *involve; consult; negotiate; educate;* and *build relationships*. In this regard, the evidence suggests that there is not a substantive difference in the kind of leadership required in leading within a single organisation or in collaborative contexts: both require leadership to be distributed among a greater number rather than among the few. Whilst the degree of complexity is arguably greater in a collaborative context, the enactment of leadership itself does not appear to be substantively different.

While at least some aspects of leadership are distributed, the data suggest that there is a lack of attention paid to structural barriers such as sexism and racism and, in the absence of such a focus, there is a danger that leadership is simply distributed to more traditional power holders, and in effect does not challenge or change existing imbalances of power in local communities and further afield. This suggests that the kind of leadership required to promote social change is one which is cognisant of, and address, different levels of exclusion and marginalisation of particular groups based on diversities such as sex, ethnicity and age etc..

It is argued that some of the most significant leadership tasks that emerge in the data can be framed as transformational ones such as, for example, building and promoting alternative visions, narratives or agendas within the community; clearly tasks that are concerned with promoting social change. However, the impact of the neoliberal context is significant and can be seen in the seeming predominance of transactional tasks, more closely associated with the current resourcing context of community development. The chapter argues that transactional leadership tasks are less amenable to being distributed than are transformational ones, as they are likely to be constrained by legal agreements relating to fulfilling contractual obligations. It is also argued that leadership tasks which can be broadly described as transformational, such as setting

direction and building solidarity, can only be accomplished by groups of people working together, though crucially requiring the actions of an initiator or catalyst. These tasks have, therefore, been reframed as ones which not only can be, but must be, enacted collectively. The kind of leadership required to promote collaboration and social change within the community sector seems, then, to require a catalyst or initiator playing what, in DL theory, is described as a hierarchical role. The implication seems to be that leadership will not spontaneously distribute itself but, rather, someone has to play an initiating role to ensure that this happens. In relation to the hypothesis of a hybrid of types of leadership – which some proponents of DL theory argue for – the data seem to suggest that leadership in local communities in Belfast is indeed a hybrid, but a hybrid of heterarchical and persuasive types of leadership, rather than of heterarchical and hierarchical types, a kind of *catalysing* leadership.

5.4.4 The Absence of a Leadership Language

This analysis suggests a theme not present in the thesis thus far, that of the language of leadership. The study revealed a relatively high degree of discomfort amongst those playing a leadership role in using the term leader to describe themselves. This highlighted what is described as a tension between how leaders understand leadership as they wish it to be enacted and how it may be more commonly understood. It is argued that they reject the term leadership as it connotes a traditional, command-and-control approach, which does not resonate with the kind of leadership they extol others in their organisations and communities to enact. This, in turn, is reflected in a lack of conceptual and practical language with which to talk about leadership, as well as an under-theorisation of leadership for collaboration and social change in a community context. The implications of these findings are explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Six: Concluding Comments and Implications of Findings for Leadership to Support Collaboration and Social Change in Local Communities

6.1 Introduction

This study has explored the nature and status of spaces for collaboration and social change in Belfast communities. It has also investigated the kind of leadership in the community sector that is currently enacted, and required, to promote such collaboration and social change. Continuing high levels of poverty, disadvantage and inequality are experienced in these communities, and community development is seen by many as a means to bring about social change and address these systemic issues. The wider socio-economic context of neoliberal polices makes this an increasingly complex and challenging task. This study set out to identify the role of community development in promoting progressive social change, explore the part collaboration plays within this, examine the relationship between leadership and collaboration in community development and consider the impact the current neoliberal context has on leadership and collaboration within the community sector. This final chapter begins by assessing the extent to which the research aim has been met and considers the implications of the findings for contemporary community development practice and related policy issues. This is followed by an examination of the theoretical implications of the findings, commenting also on how they relate to the discussion in *Chapter Two: Community Development, Collaboration and Leadership - What the Literature Tells Us*. The limitations of this study are explored as a prelude to a discussion on further research required in relation to leadership that promotes collaboration and social change in community contexts. The chapter comments briefly on methodological and ethical issues before ending with a number of concluding final comments.

6.2 Achievement of Research Aims and Implications of Findings for Community Development Policy and Practice

6.2.1 Achievement of Research Aims

This research has accomplished its aims of critically exploring and analysing the experiences and perceptions of those playing leadership roles in the local community sector in Belfast in relation to the kind of leadership required to support collaboration and promote social change. A particular strength of the study is its focus on areas of community development activity largely neglected in the research literature to date. Its original contribution to knowledge is its exposition on the nature of leadership and collaboration required in local communities; whilst theorists and researchers have produced substantial bodies of work in areas of leadership and collaboration in a wide range of contexts, none appear to have linked these areas and focused on their enactment specifically within a community development context. The study has found that the role of community development seems to be increasingly directed away from a progressive social change agenda and more towards one of service delivery. This is brought about through the channeling of energies in the direction of a transactional agenda of meeting contractual and funding requirements. Organic collaboration has been identified as a necessary means of building solidarity to promote community empowerment and bring about social change. The type of leadership that is required to support this is one which takes account of the complexity inherent in community contexts and is centrally concerned with the engagement and involvement of others. Such leadership challenges existing dominant narratives and attempts to build and promote alternative progressive visions or agendas within local communities. It is also a type of leadership that can, to a large degree, be distributed amongst others in the community, including those without formal positional authority. Leadership also requires a catalysing role to be played and it seems that this aspect of leadership is less susceptible to being distributed – at least in the sense that whilst it can be nurtured, and the conditions to foster it can be created by those playing leaderships roles, it cannot be commanded.

However, the research reveals that the concept of leadership and language are contested. Those playing leadership roles in communities display an ambivalent attitude towards, if not leadership itself, then towards the terms *leader* and *leadership*. This links to the limitations of the language surrounding leadership; the terms leader/leadership are often assumed to connote a more traditional, hierarchical approach. It also, arguably, reflects the under-theorisation of leadership for collaboration and social change in a community context. This connects in interesting ways to Bhattacharyya's (2004) description of how people can be excluded from participation by silencing a language. Following her line of argument, a limited language of leadership to promote social change is likely to prevent it being known, explored or developed and also will limit the development of leadership practice. People playing leadership roles need to be supported to address this through the creation of opportunities for debate, exploration and learning about leadership, what it means, the language surrounding it and its role in relation to promoting social change.

In addition, the research has found that the role of collaboration in community development is complicated, with forced collaboration becoming increasingly tied to a state lead agenda of rationalising and controlling the community sector. Efforts within community development to counter this are evident through attempts to create space for discussion and dialogue, develop alternative economic projects, convene and support people to address issues collaboratively, highlight issues of power and attempt to influence agendas on issues of relevance to them. However, making progress with these efforts seems to be increasingly challenging as the current neoliberal context is curtailing such transformative efforts through restriction of resources, and by circumscribing how leaders spend their time, what is 'on the agenda' and the terms of reference for debate. More focused critical attention needs to paid to these spaces and to structural barriers if existing imbalances of power in local communities and further afield are to be challenged. This will require greater awareness on the part of those playing leadership roles, as well as the space and time to explore these issues and the implications for communities taking action in relation to them. Developing such awareness and creating space and time for

critical reflection appear to be critical tasks for the enactment of leadership for social change in local communities.

6.2.2 Problematising Collaboration

The role of collaboration as currently practiced within community development appears to be contradictory; it can promote community empowerment and it can serve to constrain such empowerment. The term collaboration is problematised, with differences between 'organic' and 'forced' conceptions of collaboration significant. The former is connected to a sense of promoting community empowerment, whilst the latter appears to undermine it. It seems that forced collaboration has come to constitute an instrumental tactic used by the state to implement its austerity measures and reduce resources available to the community sector. The curtailment of the number and nature of opportunities for organic collaboration within and between communities is effected by a redirecting of energies towards an agenda characterised by transactional rather than transformational activity. This, therefore, prevents the sector from focusing on its social change work. The implications of this, given the worsening domestic and global economic climate, include an increasing pressure on community sector organisations to prioritise transactional rather than transformative work. This in turn is likely to serve to undermine the very *raison d'etre* of the sector. *Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion on Leadership to Promote Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast Communities* suggests an 'attack on thinking' resulting from increased bureaucratisation and pressure of seeking resources. Perhaps we can similarly posit a parallel attack on what the scope and purpose of community development is, could be and should be. This includes the opportunity or freedom to challenge the more dominant neoliberal narratives, such as 'the private sector can do it better and more cost effectively' (Simms and Reid, 2013), 'we are where we are', 'lower corporation taxation in the only way' and so forth. If those playing leadership roles in local communities do not challenge such dominant narratives and promote alternative ones, then who will? This would seem to be a function of organic collaboration, as described above.

The lack of what one participant termed 'coherence' in the community sector is another significant issue. As Pyles (2014) and others have noted, for community development to be effective, solidarity needs to be built between, as well as within, communities. Given the divided nature of society locally, this is especially important. This research suggests that organic collaboration could be described as 'thin' in some respects, in so far as it seems to be practiced more internally, within groups and communities, than externally with a wider range of other groups and communities. The building of solidarity appears to be critical and it would seem that local efforts need to be scaled up and connections made with external others in order to build movements with the capacity and power to bring about change. Local communities in Belfast cannot do it on their own. The appropriation of the concept of collaboration by the state militates against this, but so too does the lack of awareness and/or attention paid by those playing leadership roles to the wider potential of organic collaboration in building solidarity to pursue social change within communities in Belfast. This supports the contention of others such as Acheson (2013) and Morrissey (2012) that, unless such solidarity is developed, the loss of potency of the community development sector is likely to continue and worsen. Linked to this is a pressing need for more debate about the resourcing of the community sector; how it is funded, by whom, and for what, will have a significant impact on its potential, as discussed in Chapter Five, to adopt a more transformational approach and build greater solidarity.

6.2.3 Space for Change

The study has found that organic collaboration, characterised by many of the values and practices of community development, is still evident. It can be seen in actions such as convening people and creating spaces for critical debate, developing alternative economic initiatives, promoting the value of joint action and supporting people to address issues collaboratively, highlighting common issues of injustice and inequality and attempting to influence policies and agendas on matters of concern. Through such activities communities can be sustained and reminded of the potential power of collective action. However, the findings also identify pressure on developing such spaces and engaging in

these kinds of activities. It seems that an ongoing and future challenge for the community sector will be how to protect, and increase, that space given the current and increasingly neoliberal environment. Nonetheless, whilst it is undoubtedly difficult for leaders locally to exert influence on the broader neoliberal agenda, there are possibilities for positive action in local contexts.

As discussed in *Chapter Five: Data Analysis and Discussion on Leadership to Promote Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast Communities*, at a micro level 'quiet, behind the scenes' leadership is being enacted and making a difference in local communities on a smaller scale. Specific examples shared by participants in this study include what could be considered 'routine' activities, for example: bringing young mothers together to discuss issues that affect them; organising opportunities for local people to meet with others in neighbouring communities to share experiences and learn from each other; convening people to address a housing issue or to campaign on a local matter; calling meetings to share information and raise awareness; and communicating 'consistent' and 'positive' messages in difficult times. Such work needs to be supported to continue and to grow, but the question of how to scale up such 'quiet, behind the scenes' leadership for greater impact at a wider level is raised.

It seems that a particularly important task for those playing leadership roles in local communities is to be freed from the tyranny of bureaucracy and instead to focus on facilitating the co-creation and promotion of alternative narratives and visions of fairer and more equal societies. This implicates not only those who play leadership roles in local communities but also those who support community development activity through policy development, research and provision of resources etc. In relation to support for a transformational agenda, a clear need exists for provision of at least some unrestricted resources which are not tied to transactional objectives, as well as for more critical research with, and within, the community sector. However, the question of where such resources can be accessed in the current context of austerity remains. There may be potential through philanthropic and/or charitable funds but these are scarce and difficult for smaller, locally based community groups to access. The

other source of unrestricted funds is potentially through independent social-economic initiatives which, if they make a surplus, can potentially underwrite such activity. Whilst a small number of examples of such initiatives emerged in this study, it seems that groups need to have particularly high levels of capacity and skill to undertake these kinds of projects successfully.

Another finding of this study has been that whilst some of the most significant leadership tasks enacted in local communities are transformational ones, such as building and promoting alternative narratives or agendas within the community, transactional leadership tasks still appear to predominate. Interestingly, it is also those leadership tasks which are on the *transformational* end of the continuum that can only be accomplished by groups of people working together and these crucially, it would seem, require the actions of an initiator or catalyst. However, there is a danger that with the 'busyness' associated with keeping organisations and groups afloat, the resulting lack of time to engage in critical reflection can lead some leaders to internalise the dominant narrative. By implication, successful community development requires leadership in communities that understands and acts upon transformational tasks in ways that are congruent with the values of participation and inclusion; and such leadership needs to be resourced.

6.2.4 Distributing Power

A further important finding relates to the importance of augmenting institutional arrangements, new or otherwise, by putting power 'at the centre of the concept and practice of participation and engagement' (Gaventa, 2006, p.23) in order to inculcate greater inclusion, as discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*. Unless those playing leadership roles 'own' their roles and use them in conscious ways to name and discuss power, it is unlikely that this will happen. Whilst we can see that there is good intention around distributing leadership, the lack of attention paid to power and structural barriers, such as sexism and racism, means that leadership may simply be distributed to more traditional power holders, and as such may not challenge or change existing

imbalances of power within local communities and further afield. Given the disproportionately low numbers of women playing formal leadership roles in the community and wider voluntary sectors, and the almost total absence of reference to ethnic minority groups in the data, this is an area of concern. For community development to grow and achieve its goals of building solidarity and agency by adhering to the principles of self-help, felt needs and participation (Bhattacharyva, 2004), the interplay of diverse groups and their experiences has to be at the centre of this. Thus it would seem that raising issues of power, catalysing such interconnection and fostering a sense of interdependence are important requirements of those playing leadership roles in community contexts.

6.2.5 Leadership and Language

The study suggests that the type of leadership required is one which takes cognisance of the complexity inherent in community contexts and is centrally concerned with the engagement and involvement of others. This chimes with the thinking of writers such as Gray (2007) and Williams (2013). Gray's (2007) description of the types of tasks that constitute leadership includes visioning, convening, handling conflict and brokering, tasks which are part of engagement and involvement of others; these were identified by participants in this research. However, despite this, the research suggests that there is a lack of adequate language with which to conceptualise and think about leadership and an unwillingness, on the part of leaders, to fully acknowledge the role that they play. This unwillingness can also perhaps also be read as a focus on the goal of empowerment through emphasising what *others* are doing. This has a number of implications for how social change is pursued. The discomfort in using the term 'leader' has highlighted a tension between how leaders understand leadership as they wish to enact it and how the term may be more commonly, and traditionally, understood. It seems that a new leadership language is needed. The study suggests a need for expanding our understanding of leadership in community contexts, thereby providing a scaffolding for the articulation and development of leadership practice that is consonant with core values of community development, such as equality, social justice and

community empowerment. If such leadership cannot be described or codified, how can it be known, understood, taught, improved and shared? Finding a way of talking about it is vital if collaboration and social change are to be progressed locally.

6.3 Theoretical Implications of the Findings

A number of theoretical models and concepts, discussed in *Chapter Three: A Theoretical Framework for Understanding Leadership and Collaboration in the Community Sector*, were used to analyse the research data and the wide variety of factors implicated in leadership as enacted in local community settings. DL theory, theories of power and current theories on narratives were extremely helpful in identifying overlapping and significant themes to structure the data analysis. The research did not set out to use DL theory; rather, it was suggested by the literature review undertaken. However, neither it nor any of these theories individually offers a complete account of the complex nature of leadership for collaboration and social change. For example, this research found that the absence of a sufficient focus on structural dimensions of inequality such as gender and race in DL theory can render these important dimensions hidden; the data show that attention to these dimensions was largely absent among leaders who seek to distribute leadership in local communities. This supports the concerns of a number of theorists (Bolden, 2011; Lumby, 2013; Youngs, 2009) that DL theory and research 'is tending towards an uncritical position and remains largely silent on how power relations […] shape leadership activity' (Youngs, 2009, p.377). However, the research has attempted to overcome these limitations by developing an original theoretical framework for examining leadership for collaboration and social change in a community sector context. This was achieved by drawing on elements of different models in a case of methodological *bricolage* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011) and combining them to serve as useful tools in anlaysing the data. In particular the marrying of a more overtly critical dimension to DL theory is not only useful, but arguably, essential if we are to understand leadership as enacted in practice. This supports calls for the development of a more critical perspective to augment the descriptive and normative approaches which, it is suggested, dominate the DL literature

(Bolden, 2011; Youngs, 2009). Theories of Lukes, Gaventa and Foucault were particularly helpful in enabling structured and analytic perspectives on power to be brought to bear. Whilst this research has fruitfully drawn on these concepts of power as well as on the idea of narratives in order to overcome the limitations of DL theory, further work in this area would enable a deeper understanding of how and why leadership can be distributed in ways that promote social change. So, for example, who decides which aspects of leadership are distributed and how needs further exploration, as does the issue of how to ensure power is distributed to groupings which are marignalised on the basis of gender, race, sexuality etc.

6.3.1 Contribution to the Literature Reviewed in Chapter Two

The findings appear to support Himmelman's (1996) argument that for a transformation of power relations to occur there is a need to move beyond a focus on service delivery and efficiency to a focus on social justice, and engage in the kind of collaboration that challenges inequality and imbalances of power. The current focus on provision of services is precluding attention to wider systemic issues of structural disadvantage and oppression. Similarly, Ife's (2013) argument for the value of a postmodern perspective, with its focus on power and disadvantage, in conjunction with a structural understanding of class, race and gender, helps make sense of the different participant perspectives. For example, whilst many participants playing leadership roles display an awareness of structural institutions of disadvantage such as class, and gender and race to a much lesser extent, not all seem to be attuned to the ways in which narratives around power and disadvantage operate and how leadership might respond to these.

Just as the findings seem to broadly support Chrislip's (2002, p.ix) collaborative premise they also highlight its key limitation, that is, its uncritical or apolitical nature. This limitation is also to be found in a good deal of the literature on leadership and collaboration. Whilst Huxham and Vangen's (2005) thinking on structural complexity and ambiguity, Williams' (2013) categorisation of structural and agency-related challenges and Gray's (2007) pragmatic focus on

dealing with diverse points of view, all offer useful lenses that illuminate particular aspects of leadership and collaboration, they arguably fail to account substantively for these as practices situated within a context of unequal power relations.

The findings also seem to confirm Macmillan and McLaren's (2012) contention that leadership is part of a struggle for competing narratives and involves the creation of alternatives to those that predominate. Clearly, an important task for people playing leadership roles in local communities in Belfast is catalysing the creation of narratives that present alternative ways of seeing the world, as well as visions for a more fair and just society. In particular, Macmillan and McLaren's (*ibid*.) distinction between the concepts of *illustrative* and *strategic* narratives is helpful in this study because it draws attention to the degree of focus on constructing and reinforcing a case for the role, value and impact of community organisations themselves, versus a focus on narratives in relation to broader policy, advocacy and campaigning work connected to what local organisations stand for and do. It appears that while there is an increasing awareness of the need for attention to be paid to developing illustrative narratives, there is arguably less focus on strategic narratives. Whilst the threat to the community sector posed by lack of resources no doubt accounts for this, it is ultimately problematic as developing narratives that focus on organisational survival, without a concurrent focus on the broad mission of such organisations, may render the arguments weak and seemingly self-serving to some extent. In this sense, Morrissey's (2012) contention that community development needs to support communities to co-create a vision for the kind of future they want and how it can be achieved appears to be borne out by this study.

Finally, this study supports Sullivan *et al.'s* (2012) findings that structure and agency combine to shape leadership outcomes, approaches and behaviours. Despite the fact that the context within which leadership is enacted in local communities is both complex and challenging, those playing leadership roles nonetheless have a degree of agency which is 'influenced but not determined by

structures' (*ibid*., p.56). This accounts for differences in how various participants viewed community development, its potential and their own roles in relation to it. These ranged from those who see community development as intrinsically connected to challenging and changing the current system to those who appear to view it as more to do with making the current system work more effectively. Linked to this, Pyles' (2014) contention that critical thinking is a key skill for social change appears to be supported by the data. Certainly it seems that a re-examination within the sector of what community development is in the current neoliberal climate, and the kind of leadership required to promote it, is overdue. It is arguable that greater clarity surrounding the sector's role, purpose and modus operandi would, in turn, help strengthen the confidence and agency of those playing leadership roles within it.

6.4 Limitations of this Study and Further Research

6.4.1 Limited Data

This study has highlighted how contemporary community development in NI is under researched and that the quantitative data pertaining to the sector are inadequate and out of date. There is little in the way of reliable databases on the extent of voluntary action in NI and it is unlikely that there will be until be until the recently established Charity Commission's registration process is completed, and even then it is anticipated that there will be sizable gaps. This absence of accurate and up-to-date data on the CVS in general, and on the community sector in particular, is a significant limitation to undertaking research in the area. Given the rapidly changing context within which the sector is operating it is imperative that this be addressed; in its absence, it is difficult to monitor and analyse what exactly is happening currently and to identify future trends.

The impact of involuntary or forced collaboration requires further attention. The literature on collaboration appears to be for the most part uncritical with, for instance, little discussion on the increasingly compulsory nature of collaboration in the area of voluntary activity. Whilst this study has begun to redress this, it continues to be an area that merits more attention. Further

research is required to explore the ongoing and anticipated future impact of making collaboration compulsory, a policy that government policy seems intent on pursuing, as evidenced in its funding policies and practices with CVS groups.

6.4.2 Ethnocentric Divisions

Belfast is a city divided along political and religious affiliation lines and, as discussed in *Chapter One,* these divisions have influenced the origins and uneven development of the current phase of community development in the two majority communities. Apart from acknowledging this distinction, this study did not use ethno-political differences as an analytic construct to explore leadership in community development. This decision was influenced by a number of considerations, discussed earlier. The scope of such an undertaking would have been too large given time and resource constraints. In addition, there was a desire to avoid essentialising differences between the two majority communities, as such debates can tend to be circular and not particularly illuminating in terms of wider, structural determinants of inequality and injustice. Also, pragmatically, for me as a practitioner working in the field locally, there can be difficulties, along with sensitivities in highlighting differences along such lines.

6.4.3 Issues of Diversity

Whilst attempts were made to pay attention to gender balance within the research participant cohort, a limitation of this study was that an emphasis on issues of diversity would have required greater focus and resources than could be offered. However, there is a clear need for further research in this area. Critical theorists' (Bolden, 2011; Gordon, 2010; Lumby, 2013) concerns regarding DL theory's insufficient attention to imbalances of power and hidden structural aspects such as gender and race, resonate in this study. The enactment of leadership in ways that support the distribution of power requires as awareness of, and commitment to, addressing issues of disadvantage as experienced by diverse groups in society. However, there was not much evidence of significant critical reflection on issues of diversity in relation to leadership and its distribution within this study. As argued earlier, leadership

within local communities, if enacted uncritically, may privilege more traditional power holders and, in this way, operate to maintain status quo rather than achieve progressive social change. This is an arena that would certainly merit further investigation.

6.4.4 A Rural Dimension

In a similar vein, as noted earlier, communities in rural areas were not included in this study as to do so would have introduced additional variables which time would not allow a full exploration of. Disadvantage is experienced as much in rural areas as in urban although it may take somewhat different forms (Brown and Cromartie, 2004). Questions of how leadership to support collaboration and social change is enacted in rural areas remain. Again, future research into leadership in rural communities would be invaluable in adding to our broader understanding of the potential of the community sector in NI, within the wider range of such contexts.

6.4.5 Intergenerational Focus

Another area requiring further research is that concerned with issues of generational differences and whether younger community development workers and people playing leadership roles are more or less politicised, given that their experience of community development will be of that enacted almost exclusively in a neoliberal context. Such research would shed more light on whether and how neoliberal policies and narratives shape conceptions of community development and social change. The roots of the growth of community development in the North in the early 1970s were in securing and promoting equality and rights, resulting directly from the prevailing political situation at the time. When such an equality and rights discourse is absent or less pressing what kind of community development, with what kind of underpinning ethos, might manifest?

6.5 A Note on Methodological and Ethical Issues

The research questions outlined in *Chapter Four* guided the sampling strategy and data collection in this study. In making decisions about research design, it is

inevitable that certain specific research questions are not investigated. As noted previously, areas of research that would build on this study and that have been suggested in the course of this PhD programme include research into gender, ethnic minority and age identities and how these intersect within leadership in community contexts.

The research participants were open in their contributions and generous with their time. Theirs is a particular, and valuable, perspective on the role and potential of leadership in promoting collaboration and social change. Other actors would have different, and equally valuable, perspectives to offer. Further research to build on this could include a focus on those who do not hold formal leadership positions in the community by virtue of their paid work or otherwise. A weakness noted in DL research is its predominant focus on the testimonies of key actors who are in formal leadership or management roles and a concurrent lack of focus on other perspectives elsewhere within and/or outside the organisation (Bolden, 2011). Bolden suggests that identifying and understanding tensions and contradictions which may exist between such different actors can help us understand how leadership is enacted and the significance of various social identities in shaping attitudes and behaviours (*ibid*.). The absence of focus on those who do *not* play a formal leadership role in my research was undertaken for what were considered, at the time, to be good reasons. The CVS locally is a small sector, in a small city, and therefore people can be fairly easily identified. It was felt that seeking views about leadership from those not holding some kind of 'formal' leadership position, in this particular context, would be difficult as it could be seen as a request to comment on the practice of individuals known to the research participant – particularly if the participant were to find it challenging to separate leadership as enacted from the holder of a formal leadership role. This could skew comments made, either intentionally or otherwise. Looking ahead, future research in this field could usefully take a broader view by including a wider range of actors, such as 'followers', and not only those holding formal positions of leadership. This would raise interesting issues such as the extent to which understandings of leadership differ among 'leaders' and 'followers' and the

kinds of impact the 'pressure' to be accountable to, for example, funders or employers has.

An ongoing topic of debate in the field of qualitative research is that of generalisability, that is, the extent to which findings from a study apply to a wider population or to different contexts. Whilst some argue that it is not an issue in qualitative research, because such work aims to provide 'thick' description or to study particular rather than typical accounts (Green and Thorogood, 2013), nonetheless it is as aspect worth commenting upon. Arguably, this in-depth and comprehensive analysis of leadership and community development in one city somewhat limits the generalisability of the findings to other areas. A particular characteristic of Belfast, and NI more generally, is its post-conflict status, with a somewhat fragile peace process currently in place. However, the volatility of the local context sits within the much wider, seemingly monolithic, context of neoliberalism. A particular focus of this study has been the impact of that neoliberal context, a context that is shared more globally. It is contestable that, at least a number of, the findings of this study will have resonance in other disadvantaged communities elsewhere where such a neoliberal environment pertains.

The ethical approach adopted in this study was effective in honouring the contributions of participants, as well as in creating a safe and open space for discussion. This served to enable participants to think out loud and 'search' for their answers, which in turn lead to reflective and thoughtful responses. Because of the challenges in talking about leadership *per se* in a community context, as discussed earlier, future qualitative research on this might usefully consider the use of focus groups to help participants generate ideas and tease out their thoughts. Subsequent post-doctoral research projects could offer opportunities for further development in this direction.

6.6 Final Comments

The research questions which prompted this study have been answered, at least for now. Since the research commenced, the neoliberal context, with its

associated austerity and public spending cuts, has continued to put pressure on the community sector in a number of ways. The lack of resources for community development activity continues and is resulting in groups and organisations finding themselves unable to engage in activities and provide services and, in many instances, losing volunteers as well as paid workers. It is a volatile and changing context, with the reversal of recently threatened withdrawal of an Early Years Fund[43] and significant reductions in the Arts Council's budget[44], in the short term at least, as a result of lobbying campaigns by affected groups. However, such victories are few and public spending cuts are expected to persist and become more severe in the future.

Nonetheless the practice of community development continues in local communities in Belfast, attempting to address issues of concern and promote progressive social change. To enable and support the sector to maintain and further develop this work, a number of critical issues require attention. Leadership that focuses on creating space to develop new narratives and joint visions for local communities needs to be promoted and supported. The transformational purpose, values and practices of community development and collaboration must be recognised and reinforced in order to building solidarity. These are tasks not only for community development practitioners and those playing leadership roles within the sector, but also for policy makers, academics, funders and others who share the hopes and aspirations of the sector for a more just and equal society.

[43] http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news-de-090715-education-minister-confirms
[44] http://www.irishnews.com/news/2015/11/20/news/arts-funding-cuts-reversed-following-november-budget-328593/

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Appendices

Appendix i Outline of organisations/groups research participants were associated with

This table summarises the types of organisations/groups participants were associated with, and gives a quote about their organisation from each participant.

Type of organisation(s) (or community)	Age of organisation (where known)	Why org/group started, its role…	Participant quote
Locally based community development organisation, established in 1974. Serves a mixed community, with approximately 300 groups using the organisation annually.	40 years	Established in an attempt to maintain and develop the local community as a mixed community. Works with local people, groups and neighbouring communities to take action on issues of common concern.	*The organisation was established in 1974 - we're 40 years old this year - by local people around the issues that were happening in the city at the time. The city was splitting down sectarian lines because that was quite an intense period in the conflict.*
Community development organisation, also established in 1974. Serves communities within a CRN area.	40 years	Involved in delivery of programmes in response to local needs, and in advocacy work.	*[The organisation is concerned with] being the link between the identification of an issue and getting something done about it…*
A locally based residents association in a mixed area	15 years	Established as a spontaneous response to local anti-social behaviour in the area.	*At the time the Residents Association started things were not great on the street. There was a lot of tension…*
A resource and development centre established in 1993 in a PUL area.	21 years	Founded to combat social and economic problems, it provides a range of services including a playgroup, lunch club, training, Open Learning Centre, facilities for older people.	*We have an educational role, right from preschools, during school hours and after schools… [historically, local people] were more or less guaranteed a job when they left school either in the factories or the mills of the shipyard or the aircraft or the engineering factories, so they didn't put a great deal of store in the education system, they didn't need it.*
A large community based organisation, employing over 160 people, in a CRN area.	23 years	Provides services, employment, training and community development. Was established by local residents and is controlled by a voluntary Board. Profits are ploughed back into the organization to further its work.	*A lot of [the work] is around strategic stuff, trying to make things happen; discussions with different statutory bodies, other community volunteer organisations, and obviously then within the organisation that role as head of the senior management team…*

A community development support organisation based in, and serving, a PUL area. It has approximately 120 member groups.	44 years	Established over 40 years ago, and has gone through a number of name changes. Today its focus is providing resources, support and capacity building programmes for community groups locally.	*We've got over 120 members and we have everything there from bowling clubs that meet in churches to lunch clubs that meet once a week for two hours, to organisations that employ 4 and 5 staff. So we've a whole clatter of organisations… Its part of our role to try and get them to better define what it is they're doing in their communities.*
A local community group established in 1997 in a PUL area.	19 years	The group developed to address a range of issues at a time when there were riots in the local area linked to the Drumcree issue. Today it is concerned with the physical and economic renewal of a local area in a PUL part of the city and deals with employment, training, youth and education issues.	*Between the paramilitaries and the police and the community, if there are issues it's been this group that has been best able to pull those people together and to find a way forward… we try to explain to people that people have to become more engaged with ourselves and with different agencies in order to advance things.*
A locally based women's center that operates in a CRN area.	23 years	Operating as a social enterprise the centre provides services to meet the distinct needs of women and children living within the local area. Women are encouraged and supported to build self-esteem, confidence and develop skills through participation in the range of programmes and activities.	*Everything that we do, no matter what it is, we try to link it from grassroots action to having the opportunity to change policy. So we try to make a connection between what we're doing here and influencing policy. And people would be very conscious of that.*
A local community group in a CRN area, employing a staff team of 36 people.	17 years	The group evolved from an amalgamation of two local groups approximately six years ago, with an initial focus on housing issues which evolved into a wider agenda over the intervening years, including running a children's day care service.	*I think [about] 85% of people who work within this area come from [here], so they're all local to the area as well. There is a really good connection from our staff, because there has been a community development ethos about wanting to give a wee bit back.*
A community activist and a volunteer working in an interface area where cross community youth work and good relations work with young people is encouraged and		Development work to build relationships at different levels, and to work with shared space, cultural identity and inclusion in various ways.	*Every year we probably run about six inclusion events – and basically they're fun days with a meaning, and they're just really places for local community to come and have a couple of hours interacting with each other which they wouldn't normally do. It*

facilitated.			*doesn't entail them having to do anything other than turn up and have some fun. We think that is an intimate part of building relationships.*
A community center in a PUL area	22 years	The centre was established by a group of local residents to address a range of local needs and concerns. It runs women's groups, older people's groups, youth club, drama and dance groups.	*I come in every morning with a work plan and I know what has to be done. I can guarantee you by the time I leave that maybe one item on that plan has actually been accomplished. And it's not about time management; it's about what every day brings.*
A locally based women's center in a PUL area.	24 years	It was established to meet the diverse needs of women, and seeks to empower them to become proactive and vocal members of the community.	*[This] is a place where women can come to have educational training [and] obviously childcare's inextricably linked. We try to empower women and we are open to all women… within and outside the area we're trying to empower women to make changes in their lives [and] within their families.*

Appendix ii Research Consent Form

Research project being undertaken as part of a PhD Programme: ***Leadership, Collaboration and Social Change In Belfast Communities***

You have been provided with a description of the above research project. That information sheet has outlined the interviewing procedure and how the information gathered in the interview will be used. Giving your consent by signing this form confirms that you have read the information sheet but does not mean that you are bound to participate. You may decline or withdraw from the study at any time. Should you agree to be interviewed, your interview will be available only to the researcher, her supervisors and transcriber.

Your participation in the research will be kept confidential. To ensure anonymity, your name will not be used in the study. All other personally identifying details will, as far as possible, be removed from the data. A copy of the interview will be sent to you and if, on reading it, you are concerned about any section of the interview that might identify you or others, I undertake to delete these sections and not to use them in the PhD thesis. The recordings will be destroyed within 3 months of the final research dissertation being completed.

I…….. agree to participate in this PhD research study.

Signed…….. Date……..

Louise O'Meara

Contact details:
Tel: [given]
Mobile: [given]
Email: [given]

Appendix iii Description of Research Project

Leadership, Collaboration and Social Change in Belfast Communities

Research Project: This research project is looking at the links between leadership, collaborative working and social change in the community sector in Northern Ireland. The research is part of a PhD Programme I am undertaking

The research will include interviews with approximately 15 people who are playing a leadership role in their organisations/community.

Broadly, research participants will be asked to:

- describe their experiences of leadership and collaboration in the context of their community development work;
- consider the role of community development in relation to social change; and
- discuss leadership, collaborative working and social change.

The interviews will take the form of a guided conversation in which participants will explore their own views and discuss their experiences as people playing a leadership role in their organisation/community.

The interviews will be recorded using a digital recorder. Quotations from recordings (with the interviewees consent) may be used in the final research report. Confidentiality will be maintained and data will be anonymised in the collation and analysis stages. Participants will be sent a copy of their interview and invited to identify anything they want deleted and/or revised.

Findings from the research will also be made available to research participants.

Louise O'Meara
Tel: [given]; Mobile [given]

Email: [given]

Appendix iv Interview Questions

Introduction

1. Please describe you role in this organisation?

2. What does your day-to-day work entail?

Community development and social change

3. What do you think the role of community development is at a broad level?
   - What role, if any, does community development play in bringing about social change?
   - How has this role changed in the last 10 years?
4. What role does this organisation play in relation to community development and how has this changed over the last 10 years?

5. How do you describe "community"/what community do you serve? How has that changed in the last 10 years?

Leadership

6. To what extent do you use the term leader/leadership role in describing your work…?

7. How would you describe the role of leadership generally in community development work?

8. How would you describe your role as a leader? How do you play that role in practice?

9. How has you leadership style/your approach to leadership changed over the last 10 years?

10. What kind of leadership is required in the current context to bring about social change?

11. As a leader, how and where do you get your legitimacy or authority and how has that changed in the last 10 years?

12. It is said by some that, in a NI context, we "*lack leadership"*… What are your responses to that statement?

13. If you were to advise someone who was taking up a community leadership role, what would you say?

Collaboration

14. What does collaboration within the community sector in the current context mean to you?

15. What is the significance of collaboration for you in your leadership role?

16. Please describe an example in your work where your leadership has positively influenced collaboration.

17. And an example of where your leadership that has discouraged collaboration?

And finally…

18. What do leaders in local communities need to do to encourage people to work together to bring about positive social change in the current context?
    - To what extent do you think local leaders do this?
    - What would support it?
    - What do you see as the barriers or challenges to this?

Appendix v **Letter of Invitation Requesting Participation in this Research**

To:

Address:

Date:

Dear ----------,

My name is Louise O'Meara and I work as Regional Director of the Interaction Institute for Social Change. I was involved in the ----- ---- for a number of years and we met a number of times then! IISC is a Belfast-based voluntary organisation which teaches and supports people and communities to work more collaboratively together in order to bring about social change. Over the last 25 years I have worked as a community development worker, trainer and development consultant in Belfast.

I am currently carrying out research into leadership and collaborative working within community organisations in Belfast, as part of a PhD Programme I am undertaking. I wish to explore the links between leadership, collaborative working and community development.

I hope the final research findings will be of use, especially now as local community groups in Belfast struggle to continue with their work in the face of public spending cutbacks, and moves towards commissioning services via competitive tender against ever increasing levels of need locally. Findings from the research will also be made available to research participants and, more widely will support collaborative approaches to community development.

The research will be qualitative rather than quantitative and I am interviewing approximately 12 to 15 people who are playing a leadership role in their organisations/community. I am writing to you to invite you to participate in this research though the medium of a one-to-one interview. As a member of xxxxx Group/Centre, and with your experience in the field, I would very much value your input to this process. I appreciate that time is precious and would be happy to meet you any place and at any time that would be convenient for you.

Confidentiality will be maintained and your contribution will not be identified in any way as data will be anonymised when collated and analysis will be conducted at an aggregate level.

I will call you later this week to see if you are interested in participating. If you have questions on any aspect of this research initiative in the meantime please feel free to get in touch sooner.

You can reach me by email: [given] and/or telephone [given] .

Thanks for giving this your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Louise O'Meara