

Community Supported Agriculture as a Model for an Ethical Agri-food System in North East England

**A Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy at the Centre for Rural Economy,
Newcastle University**

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April 2012

ABSTRACT

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) has not spread rapidly in the UK, and in the north east of England its growth has been particularly slow. The purpose of this study was to develop an action research programme into CSA in this location to discover if it could be animated using a community-based participatory action research approach and to find out what benefits would accrue to participants of such a scheme. Participatory action research (PAR) with local collaborators took place between 2006 and 2009. Some data collection relating to the global CSA movement continued through to 2011.

The thesis documents how two research groups adapted to restraints and opportunities to achieve their aims through the iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The benefits to participants are understood and analysed in terms of community development and care theory. The thesis also includes an in-depth examination of action research and a comprehensive account of the history and development of CSA.

The distinctive contribution to knowledge is in two regards. First, the use of PAR in facilitating stakeholder collaboration to develop CSA schemes enables an analysis of the role of PAR in animating rural development initiatives. Second, the specific socio-economic characteristics of Weardale mean that this research provides a highly original and distinctive contribution by examining how PAR might animate local food initiatives in a deprived area.

The analysis demonstrates how the structure, form and practice of CSA reflect an ethic of care. PAR also stems from motivations of care and concern and is a search for knowledge and action that can contribute towards addressing situations that are deemed to be socially, economically or environmentally unsatisfactory. It is claimed that, although individual CSAs may focus their attention on achieving their immediate goals and tasks, nevertheless, CSA contains within it the potential to effect wider transformational change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First place must go to my co-researchers from Growing Together and Weardale CSA who worked tirelessly and with great enthusiasm to develop their respective projects. Most of them remain involved in these projects, growing good food and building good relationships in their communities. Thank you all.

I would not have even considered embarking on this project was it not for discussions with Prof. Neil Ward following the completion of my MSc. His encouragement and interest persuaded me to build on my work around CSA and action research. He was my first supervisor until he moved to UEA in mid 2008 and our sometimes animated discussions were enjoyable as well as challenging and helped to develop my thinking. He was assisted for a short while by Dr Tom Wakeford whose skills as a participatory facilitator and action researcher were much appreciated.

Dr Elizabeth Oughton took over from Prof. Ward with support from Dr Andrew Donaldson. They make an excellent team and together have brought much experience, support, advice and perspective that has been invaluable. As a CASE studentship, I also had the additional support of a non-academic supervisor from the CASE partner, One North East (ONE). Frances Rowe acted as a conduit to ONE and brought yet another perspective from the world of rural development policy and regional development, areas where she has long experience. The germ of the idea for the follow-on work on local food policy in County Durham arose initially from conversations with Frances about making policy links.

The writing of a Thesis involves some technical skills and know-how that I did not always possess. Moira Bent (Faculty Liaison Librarian and National Teaching Fellow) has demonstrated superb professionalism in dealing with all my enquiries and calls for help when EndNote did not behave as expected or Word decided my formatting was not to its liking. Working remotely, rather than on University premises, I could not have managed without her prompt responses and determination to find the solution. Thanks Moira!

The decision to undertake a PhD inevitably has implications for other people as well as one's self. I am not inclined to use this space to indulge in detailed expressions of gratitude towards all those so affected by this endeavour: they are not the sort of people who need public acknowledgment. I have family and friends and hobbies and interests, all of which have taken some not inconsiderable stress and strain over the years of study balanced with part-time work commitments. Life is full of surprises and I had not anticipated the arrival of two grandchildren during the course of the study, or indeed the joy and delight this new experience brings. I am looking forward to spending more time with them.

This research is the result of a collaborative studentship sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Regional Development Agency, One North East.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE

1. INTRODUCTION

This study emerged from a particular set of circumstances involving the coming together of people, ideas, policy, and interests in 2006. First, there was an increasing interest amongst academic researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in the potential for the development of more locally embedded systems of food production and distribution in the UK (e.g. Defra, 2003a; Winter, 2003). Second, the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University was undergoing discussions with the Regional Development Agency (One North East) about research priorities to inform policy on the future of rural areas, and third, I had recently completed a dissertation on the feasibility of community supported agriculture (CSA) in Wear Valley (Charles, 2005). This study identified considerable potential for, and interest in, CSA, and pointed to the need for a larger programme of action research to facilitate the development of schemes in the region. So it was that this PhD became a collaborative CASE studentship, with One North East as the non academic partner. The approach of community-based participatory action research (PAR) which I adopted resulted in two collaborative research groups and the establishment of two initiatives: Growing Together and Weardale CSA (see snapshots).

During the lifetime of the programme there have been considerable changes in the political, cultural and economic landscapes that have relevance to this study. Most notably, the change of Government in 2010 resulted in the demise of regionalisation and the imminent closure of One North East (March 2012). Any anticipated contribution to regional rural policy strategies therefore became redundant. The alternative has been to develop a proposal for a follow-on project to stimulate activity around local food systems more widely by the production of a Sustainable Local Food Strategy for County Durham. This project received full funding in June 2011 and commenced in November 2011, hosted by Durham Rural Community Council (where I was already employed part-time). Interest in more locally embedded food systems has continued to rise with enhanced media coverage bringing food issues more obviously into the public domain covering topics such as

genetic modification, rising food prices and food security (see chapter 5, 2.4). Academic interest continued to grow (e.g. Dowler and Caraher, 2003; Dowler, 2004; Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006; Ricketts Hein and Ilbery et al., 2006; Maye and Holloway et al., 2007; Maye and Ilbery, 2007; Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008) and a new multi-million lottery funded programme ('Making Local Food Work'¹) provided a platform for new projects.

CSA is a loosely defined term that encompasses a broad range and scale of agri-food enterprises founded on direct partnerships between producers and consumers. It is a membership model, with consumers 'joining' a CSA² and committing to a relationship which, to a greater or lesser extent, represents more than a simple economic transaction with a producer. The research was driven by a desire to test the potential for CSA to be animated in the NE region of England and to explore the benefits it might bring to participants. CSA was slow to develop in the UK as a whole, but in the North East there was even less activity and knowledge than in other areas (see chapter 3, 2.2.3). Using the conceptual frame of care theory, I bring together CSA and action research as ethical caring practices that foreground relationships, both between people and between people and the non-human world, as a foundation for action and reflection. CSA can contribute towards developing a more locally embedded food system, with potentially transformative power, and at the same time benefit participants by providing them with a means to begin to move towards a greater degree of food democracy and provide a platform to act upon their concerns (care) about the conventional food system.

My choice of care theory arose initially from the observation during the early stages of the research that I was continually making choices about competing loyalties and practice (chapter 6, 5.3) and that I was framing them as ethical choices. In addition, once the two research groups were established, I was surprised at the prominence of care issues in both settings. I began to see the relevance of care theory both to my PAR practice and to CSA, especially with the emphasis in care theory on situated knowledge and relationships (Curry, 2002) and the proposition that "caring

¹ www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk

² Although a grammatical anomaly, it has become the convention for a farm adopting the CSA model to be described as 'a CSA'.

agricultural systems are context bound, not translocatable. They involve a level of attentiveness that leads to elegant solutions predicated on the uniqueness of place” (Curry, 2002, p125).

I also link this work with my professional identity as a community development practitioner and demonstrate how participating in a CSA project offers opportunities for personal and local development that meshes with the values and purposes of community development (chapter 3, 3.3).

In the remainder of this chapter I lay out the aims and objectives of the study, provide an overview of the UK policy context, and explain the structure of the thesis as a whole.

2. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the study was to build upon the results of an MSc feasibility study (Charles, 2005) and to develop a full-scale action research study into CSA development in the north of England. The four broad objectives as laid out in the project proposal were to:

- Examine the development of CSA in the US, Japan, and EU and its early translation in the UK.
- Trace the development of local/alternative food networks in the North East region and characterise the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘local food economy’ within regional development.
- Develop detailed action research activities in County Durham to facilitate local stakeholder discussion and collaboration around local CSA schemes.
- Reflexively monitor and assess the experience of facilitating CSA schemes in Durham and review: (i) the transferability of lessons; and (ii) the strengths and weaknesses of an action research approach.

During the course of the research the emphasis moved towards an understanding of CSA as ‘caring practice’ that operates within available interstices of hegemonic discourse, practice and policy, and a broader analysis of CSA and its future potential. Therefore a modified list of objectives was agreed:

- Examine the development and characteristics of CSA in the US, Japan, and EU and its early translation in the UK (chapter 3).
- Trace the development of local/alternative food networks in the North East region and characterise the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘local food economy’ within regional development (chapter 4).
- Develop, critically appraise and reflexively monitor detailed action research activities in County Durham to facilitate local stakeholder discussion and collaboration around local CSA schemes (chapters 4, 5 and 6).

The practical question to be answered was: “Given the low level of CSA activity in the NE, can CSA projects be animated here through an action research approach and how might participants benefit in this context?” During the course of the research, many subsidiary questions about specific aspects of the project development were raised by the research groups as part of the research/action cycle e.g.: How can we achieve our aims? What land is available? What legal form should our new group adopt? Should we buy-in produce? How can we overcome adverse weather conditions? Where will we get finance from? These and other questions were the drivers of the specific actions taken in each context.

In approaching the third objective (developing action research activities) it was initially proposed (in a short statement on project criteria and rationale) that in order to explore a number of different approaches to initiating CSA I would attempt to develop work with three diverse groups:

- a) a community level scheme (small, very local, volunteer run);
- b) a farmer-led scheme (an existing farm or group of farms marketing all or part of production via a CSA) and
- c) a consumer initiated scheme (non-farmers accessing resources, including land and labour).

The proviso was written in that as AR is a democratic and participatory process the actual trajectory may diverge from the initial proposal. I explain in chapter 4 how and why in practice the research came to deviate from this initial suggestion.

The objectives are met in the study in the following ways:

- situated knowledge gained by the research groups about how to develop CSA in their particular circumstances;
- a distinctive re-telling of the history and development of AR;
- a new comprehensive account of the global history and development of CSA;
- an analysis of the role of PAR in animating local food initiatives in a deprived area using the conceptual frame of care theory and identifying links to community development.

3. THE RESEARCH IN UK POLICY CONTEXT: Relevance and Spaces of Opportunity

This next section provides an overview of the policy context in which the research took place. Food production and consumption has implications for many policy issues, most obviously health and well-being (especially obesity reduction), carbon emission reductions, and employment. Poor diet contributes to 30-40% of cancers (World Cancer Research Fund, 1997), and eating the recommended five or more daily portions of fruit and vegetables helps in preventing Coronary Heart Disease (Department of Health, 2000). Obesity levels in County Durham (12.8%) are higher than the North East as a whole (12.3%) and England (9.2%) (Durham County Council and NHS County Durham, 2010, p139).

The Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001, although not a direct hazard to human health, focussed attention on the parlous state of conventional agriculture. The story hit the front pages of the press and photographs of piles of burning carcasses became a familiar sight in TV and newspaper coverage. At the request of the Government Sir Donald Curry chaired the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food (2002) which reported to Government in January 2002. Often referred to as 'The Curry Report', it recommended that 'reconnection' should be the key objective of public policy, including reconnecting "consumers with what they eat and how it is produced" (p6). It also stated that "one of the greatest opportunities for farmers to add value and retain a bigger slice of retail price is to build on the public's enthusiasm for locally-produced food, or food with a clear regional provenance" (p43).

Interest in food policy at national level continued to rise, driven by concerns about the impact of global warming on food production, the contribution agriculture makes to greenhouse gas emissions, issues of food safety, diet related health problems, and uncertainties about longer term food security. This was accompanied by the appearance of a plethora of publications from think tanks and Government departments (Lucas and Jones et al., 2006; Cabinet Office, 2008; Defra, 2008; Midgley, 2008; Ambler-Edwards and Kiff et al., 2009; Bridge and Johnson, 2009; Midgley, 2009; Steedman and Schultz, 2009). These documents represent a search for new policies and practice to respond to the multiple environmental, social and economic forces currently threatening the stability of the food system.

This mood was also reflected by the appointment by the Government of a Council of Food Policy Advisors, which held its first meeting in January 2009, producing its first Report in September 2009³. This activity contributed to the production of a national Food Strategy, *Food 2030*, in 2010 (HM Government, 2010). The key policy drivers are identified as climate change and diet related health problems, particularly obesity, and the vision for 2030 is that consumers will be choosing healthy, sustainable food produced by profitable, competitive and resilient food businesses. Reference is made to the mounting interest in self provisioning through ‘grow your own’ projects and activities, and the benefits these can bring in the form of improved mental and physical health, bringing people together and improving skills. The positive impact on diets of learning more about how food is produced is also referred to, and eating foods in season is encouraged. CSAs often incorporate educational activities into their structures and offer opportunities for practical growing experience. In addition, by bringing together consumers and producers in partnership they can educate ‘by default’. The devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have also produced Food Strategies (The Scottish Government, 2009; DARD. and DETI, 2010; Welsh Assembly Government, 2010). Whilst sharing some principle goals regarding promoting a sustainable and competitive food industry, they vary considerably in style and content. The example from Wales takes the most comprehensive and integrated approach and is likely to provide more obvious support for the emergence of models such as CSA that are exploring alternative ways of working within the food system (often referred to as ‘alternative

³ <http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/food/policy/council/pdf/cfpa-rpt-090914.pdf>

food networks' or AFNs). *Recipe for Success* in Scotland builds on a reputation as a “land of food and drink” whilst trying to address the paradox of also having “one of the poorest diet-related health records in the developed world” (p6). The emphasis on tackling quality, health and well-being, environmental sustainability, and access and affordability also provides some possible justification for AFN support. The approach in Northern Ireland has been to encourage the food industry to play a significant role in policy development and the resulting strategy unsurprisingly has a narrower focus, with a strong emphasis on economic performance.

The emerging policy is based firmly on a belief in the ability of the open market to produce food security and fairness (Cabinet Office, 2008) and a strategic move to a more localised food economy is not featured. However, the efforts of social enterprises and local groups in working on food issues have not gone unnoticed. The Cabinet Office Report (ibid) acknowledges that “community engagement on food is a success story” (p66) and is contributing to tackling some ‘big problems’ through projects such as food-coops and community allotments. This is echoed in “*Food 2030*” where access to affordable, healthy food is considered to be being addressed by “small scale local initiatives, including food distribution charities and community food growing initiatives” (p13). This policy approach of using local projects to tackle issues of poverty and poor diet is critiqued by Dowler and Caraher (2003). They argue that whilst these projects may have real positive impacts at the local level they should not be used as the main policy instrument for addressing such issues as they avoid engagement with wider (and more difficult) structural issues. They make the point that these food projects “continue to exist within a policy framework dominated by models or ideologies of consumer and individual choice, as opposed to public health and citizenship approaches” (ibid, p63). With the advent of the Coalition Government in 2010 it would appear that this policy framework will become even more focussed on individual choice.⁴ Therefore, in the current political climate where a more regulated approach is highly unlikely, reliance on innovative local projects to tackle inadequate or poor diets is likely to grow rather than diminish. Focussed policy support for growth in the local food sector is unlikely to emanate from central government, but may be forthcoming from some Local Authorities concerned with economic regeneration, environmental, and health issues. It is with

⁴ E.g. see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2010/jul/07/no-anti-junk-food-laws>

this in mind that the proposal to develop a local food strategy for County Durham was made.

4. THESIS STRUCTURE

Because action research differs from conventional research in its approach and overall purpose, action research reports also generally take on a different structure from more conventional accounts (Stringer, 1999; Herr and Anderson, 2005; McNiff and Whitehead, 2009). The choice of action research was new to the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University and a relatively unusual approach for a PhD study (and still is). Therefore it was deemed appropriate for this study to incorporate a reasonably detailed exploration of this approach to research (chapter 2). An early draft of this chapter was condensed by my then Supervisor (Neil Ward) into a discussion paper (Charles and Ward, 2007).

The thesis is divided into three main sections:

Part 1: Context and Background (chapters 2 and 3);

Part 2: Animating CSAs (chapters 4 and 5); and

Part 3: Analysis and Conclusions (chapters 6 and 7).

Between Parts 1 and 2 I have inserted ‘snapshots’ of the two CSA projects that tell the key parts of the story simply and in the order that they happened. These are marked by coloured paper at each end for ease of location and are intended as an aid to comprehension for the reader that can be referred to at any point during the reading of the whole. They are illustrated with photographs to give a more intimate feel and to allow the reader a glimpse of the landscape and people involved.

In Part 1, chapter 2 serves as a literature review of AR and also to bring together the many and diverse forms and to attempt a simplified typology. Within this I am then able to locate and name my research as ‘community-based participatory action research’. Its sometimes problematic relationship with more conventional approaches is discussed and one section tackles some of the thorny issues that are thrown up by participatory approaches. Chapter 3 meets the first objective of the research proposal and provides an original account of the global CSA movement from its inception to the present day. The conceptualisation of CSA as an expression of an ‘ethic of care’ is introduced in this chapter, and CSA is placed alongside other AFNs as operating

within the interstices of the prevailing discourse, policy and practice. I also consider its transformative potential, and coming from my perspective as a community development professional, I interrogate the linkages between CSA and community development, stating that its potential to contribute to the restoration of agency to local communities provides a strong link to the values and practice of community development.

Part 2 presents the detailed narrative account of the PAR process and its results. To provide a picture of the local context, chapter 4 begins with an examination of local food networks in north-east England (the second research objective) and I proffer some explanations for the relative lack of AFNs (including CSAs) in the region. The key stages of the research are then covered explaining the processes and choices that were made and why. Chapter 5 then examines in more detail the factors that helped or hindered the development of the projects and critically reflects on their significance.

In Part 3 the research is analysed and conclusions drawn. Chapter 6 presents an analysis of the research through the lens of care theory, an approach to ethics that places relationships at the core of moral reasoning. Food production and consumption are inherently bound up with ethical choices and CSA can be conceptualised as an attempt to engage with ethical issues in the food system. PAR is also a value laden approach that requires a care-full and reflexive attitude if it is not to be manipulative rather than emancipatory. It is unsurprising, therefore, that ethical dilemmas form a central topic of concern for this study. CSA is portrayed as ethical ‘caring practice’ in its form, structure and practice and PAR as having an ontological and epistemological orientation of care. The topic of unequal power relations is dealt with here and I examine some specific ethical issues relating to the research process. Finally, chapter 7 brings together the insights from the research and discusses their implications for CSA research and practice. The process of doing an action research PhD is discussed and some criteria for evaluating the quality and validity of the research are broached.

Any form of participatory research undertaken in collaboration with academic institutions will raise the thorny issue of participation in the interpretation and

documentation of the research, and this is widely discussed in the literature (e.g. Stringer, 1999; Herr and Anderson, 2005). The ideal for PAR is considered to be co-ownership and production, but in practice this is probably rarely achieved, as participants are understandably less interested in this aspect because the rewards of this endeavour are largely for the researcher and research institution. Alternative forms of representation are sometimes used such as video, policy papers, or posters, aimed at a non-academic audience and participants are likely to have more involvement in these representations. When the research is part of a PhD study however it has to be accepted that the main work of documentation in the form of the thesis will be the researcher's alone, and that therefore there exists an inevitable hierarchy and distinction of roles. Whilst this might not meet the ideal I consider it not to be insurmountable as long as it is understood by all participants. In practice I have not found it to be a problem for anyone involved. I have tried to mitigate this lack of involvement in representation by including participants in presentations about their projects and by making my writing available to them for comment and feedback. They have also been free to present material themselves if they wish, and Tony from Weardale CSA, for example, gave a presentation about CSA to a local agricultural society with my only involvement being to provide him with some of my existing PowerPoint slides. Klocker (2012) dealt with this issue by conceptualising "two separate, but overlapping, bodies of work" (p155) by distinguishing between the shared PAR project and its practical outcome, and the thesis project, for which she alone was responsible. Nevertheless, I agree with Klocker (ibid) that the collaborative nature of the research relationship must necessarily result in a different style of writing, one which reflects the collaborative nature of the research process and is careful to convey the 'voice' of participants and acknowledge their status as co-researchers. I hope that is what I have achieved in this instance.

5. THE MEANING OF 'LOCAL FOOD'⁵

CSA is part of a wider family of 'local food' initiatives that, at the most basic level, shorten the distance between production and consumption. Local food is a fuzzy and highly contested term however, and contingent on a number of factors including geography, population distribution, and identity with a specific place. Therefore it is necessary to focus attention on this term in a little more detail to explain how it is used in the text.

Local food is a popular term in the UK but there are as yet no nationally agreed criteria that define precisely what a 'local food' product is. There is a measure of consensus around the need for a clearer definition, but reservations about negative effects if this was not flexible and pragmatic (Defra, 2003a). In the UK, the terms 'local food networks and links' are often used, emphasising the social and economic ties between food system actors and allowing for a range of formal and informal interactions. In the US, the term 'local food systems' is more prevalent. 'Systems' implies a comprehensive view, and practitioner-researchers often discuss local food systems in terms of sustainability goals across environmental, economic and social arenas (Feenstra, 1997). As is the case in the UK, the term as yet has no legal definition (Martinez and Hand et al., 2010).

A distinction has been made between 'local food' and 'locality food'. The former is food that is produced and consumed within a given geographical area, and the latter is food that has a specific geographical provenance (e.g. Welsh Lamb, Cornish Ice Cream) but can be marketed anywhere (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002; Action for Market Towns, 2002). Allen and FitzSimmons et al (2003) describe this as two understandings of 'locality' (p64). Defra (2003b) add the concept of quality ("exceeding the legal minimum requirements in some aspects of production" (p1)) to the definition of locality food. There is clearly an overlap between 'locality' and 'local' food when locality food is also marketed locally. The National Association of Farmers' Markets specify recommended distances

⁵ Material in this section appears in a co-authored book chapter:

Hinrichs, C. and Charles, L. (2012) 'Local Food Systems and Community Development in Rural UK and America', in Shucksmith, M., Brown, D., Shorthall, S., Vergunst, J. and Warner, M.(eds.) *Rural Transformations and Rural Policies in the UK and US*. New York: Routledge.

depending on context (30/50/100 miles). Some schemes use other geographical markers such as County boundaries to define local (e.g. www.directfromdorset.co.uk).

The issue becomes more complex when additional non-geographic criteria are introduced. Two distinct features of local food have been identified (Defra, 2003a). First, a short-chain food system, relates to the geographic criteria above. Second, “a way of delivering a range of social, environmental and economic benefits” (p85) summarises the additional features often associated with the local food sector. Some commentators consider a more useful terminology to be ‘sustainable food’, defined by Sumberg as “food associated with high levels of well-being, social justice, stewardship and system resilience” (2009, p2), where proximity of production and consumption is just one element in a more holistic approach. This is the approach taken by Sustain, the Alliance for Better Food and Farming⁶.

I generally use the term ‘local food’ in this text to refer to food that is grown or reared by the seller and primarily sold directly to consumers living within a distance that they would normally travel to purchase food (e.g. farmers’ markets, farm shops, box schemes run by independent growers), processed foods (e.g. bread, cakes, preserves, cheese) sold in this way that use mainly locally sourced ingredients, or food which is grown largely by consumers themselves (community allotments, city farms).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research arose out of a particular, situated set of circumstances. Its evolution was played out against the broader context of a rapidly changing external environment, changes that on the whole resulted in an increasing interest in issues pertaining to food systems. The research has left a legacy of two small CSA initiatives and a follow-on project to develop a sustainable local food strategy for County Durham.

⁶ www.sustainweb.org

Care theory is the conceptual frame that provides the scaffolding for the thesis. It is a lens through which both CSA and PAR are viewed, placing relationships at the core of both theory and practice.

CHAPTER 2

ACTION RESEARCH

*Action research ... can help us build a better, freer society.
(Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p3)*

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the history and practice of action research (AR) in order to gain a clearer understanding of where it has come from, what essential characteristics define it and set it apart, and how it has emerged as an important approach to social science research.

First, I trace the origins of AR and identify the influential philosophical traditions, origins in practice, and the sometimes difficult relationship with more traditional approaches to social science. I then undertake an overview of the main forms of AR and attempt to consolidate these into three ‘wide and deep’ strands based on the context and purpose of the practice. I then position and name my own research within this typology as ‘community-based participatory action research’. Having explored the diversity of origins and practice I move on to ask what are the essential features of AR and how it is defined and explained. Finally I address some of the more problematic issues thrown up by the AR approach.

AR is an umbrella term covering a variety of approaches to research but having a single idea at its heart: that the research should be directed at achieving some form of social, economic or organisational change. It has two key features. First, it is action-oriented and is underpinned by the belief that “the study of society is not worth the trouble if it does not help its members to grasp the meaning of their lives and to move to action for progress, peace and prosperity for all” (Fals Borda, 1995, p6). Second, it is participatory and thus involves researchers working *with* and *for* research subjects. It has been described as “a diverse and often divergent set of practices centered on putting social research to use for democratic social change”

(Greenwood and Levin, 1998). In essence, AR is value based and therefore tends to have a more overt political and often emancipatory purpose.

There has been increasing interest in AR over the past two decades (e.g. Reason and Bradbury, 2001a; Pain, 2003; Dick, 2009; and see comments in Dick, 2011). A simple search of the Web of Science⁷ provides a simple illustration of the exponential growth of the AR literature:

Table 1: The growth of AR Literature

WEB OF SCIENCE dates	NUMBER OF DOCUMENTS
1970 – 1979	106
1980 – 1989	151
1990 – 1999	762
2000 - 2009	2,465

The rising trend accelerated in the second half of the 1990s, with 531 of the total of 762 documents appearing post 1995. According to the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex “the 1990s may become known as the decade of participatory development” because of “an explosion of participatory methods”⁸. Chambers (2006) makes a similar observation and both sources remark on the spread of participatory rhetoric and methods from Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to Government and donor organisations at multiple levels. In his regular reviews of AR literature (e.g. 2009; 2011) Dick remarks on the continuing growth of AR literature, including special issues of journals devoted to AR or participatory research, a growth that he describes as ‘explosive’ in his latest review (Dick, 2011).

⁷ The Web of Science is an online academic database

(http://thomsonreuters.com/products_services/science/science_products/a-z/web_of_science/). Search conducted 17/10/11.

⁸ www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particp/research/index.html accessed 13/10/06

2. ORIGINS, ROOTS, AND BRANCHES

Accounts of the history of AR paint a complex picture of multiple origins and influences that have emerged in different geographical, historical, political and intellectual spaces. The focus of the histories often differs according to the tradition of the author (e.g. educational AR, AR in industry, emancipatory AR). More recently there have been attempts to compose a more holistic account (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001b). One point of agreement is that there is no definitive narrative (Masters, 1995; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Stringer, 1999; Reason and Bradbury, 2001b; Herr and Anderson, 2005) and no one person or group can lay claim to being the sole architect of this approach. It is possible, however, to identify some key philosophical and theoretical underpinnings and also some moments in time when a particular event, person or movement had a distinctive influence in the story of the growth of AR. One such person who is frequently cited in the literature on the origins of AR is Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist working in the US in the 1940s. It is not clear that he was the first to use the term AR (as some claim) but he represents the first example of the development of an AR programme that is well documented.

Greenwood and Levin (1998) explain the absence of any generally agreed story of the development of AR by the fact that the practice of AR is both multi-disciplinary and takes place in a plethora of organisations and practice contexts (e.g. social services, health, international development, industry). As might be expected, this results in limited cross sector sharing of information with AR practitioners reading different literatures. This situation may have improved with publications such as *The Handbook of Action Research* (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a).

The picture is further complicated by the terminology for the various branches of AR not always being consistent so that, for example, a reference to Participatory Action Research may equate to a reference to Participatory Research or Collaborative Action Research. Some practitioners have introduced terminology to describe their own particular practice, for example, Community-Based Action Research (Stringer, 1999) and Pragmatic Action Research (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). This trend has continued according to Dick who recently commented on the growing number of

labels for participatory research (Dick, 2011). Whilst helpful in clarifying a stance and to separate a particular praxis out from the crowded arena, this tendency to individualise approaches by nomenclature does not assist in constructing an agreed taxonomy.

Reason and Bradbury (2001b) record diverse origins for AR from philosophy, social science, psychotherapy, critical theory, systems theory, education, spiritual practices, critique of positivism, feminisms, indigenous cultures, liberationist thought, and complexity theory. I briefly consider below some of the roots most commonly cited in the literature. I have structured this account in three sections, dealing with philosophical roots, origins in practice, and lastly looking at the relationship of AR to conventional social science. The split between philosophical and practical origins is purely functional and there are many overlaps.

2:1 Philosophical roots

A number of key themes appear repeatedly in the literature. These can be associated with the writings of particular scholars or appear as a common thread found in the writings of many authors. For example, a concern with the nature of democracy is found in the works of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jürgen Habermas, and Paulo Freire, and the imperative that research should not be just about finding out about society, but about doing something to improve it appears in Critical Theory, and the writings of John Dewey and Fals Borda.

Greenwood and Levin (1998) place great emphasis on pragmatic philosophy as a rich source of inspiration for AR. They cite the work of John Dewey (1859-1952) in the 1920s as being of special relevance. Dewey's ideas are also frequently associated with AR in educational settings. Dewey studied with the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) who is widely regarded as the founder of pragmatic philosophy. Dewey was an academic who had a lengthy career as an educator, psychologist, and philosopher. He was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago, and later at Columbia University, and promoted his pragmatic principles in professional philosophical journals and applied them in social and educational settings. Pragmatism has been defined as:

a method of philosophy in which the truth of a proposition is measured by its correspondence with experimental results and by its practical outcome ... (it) stands opposed to doctrines that hold that truth can be reached through deductive reasoning from a priori grounds and insists on the need for inductive investigation and constant empirical verification of hypotheses. (The Columbia Encyclopaedia 6th Ed, 2001-05)

This idea provides the underpinning theory for the research/action cycle (plan, observe, act, reflect), versions of which are common to all forms of AR, and a rationale for the practical outcome of AR being used as a test for validity. In particular, Dewey's concern for participative democracy and the generation of knowledge by all members of society through action and experimentation provides a foundation for the AR approach. He believed that the subject for philosophy should be the 'problems of men' and that a worthwhile philosophy should be practical (Gouinlock, 2000). The emphasis on study that seeks to solve common problems sits comfortably with the goals of AR which strives to achieve positive change in the lives of research participants.

The work of Paulo Freire (1921-1997) is widely recognised as being influential in the development of the AR movement. Freire worked in the field of adult education, particularly with illiterate and disenfranchised classes. He began his career as a progressive educator in his native Brazil, receiving his Doctorate in 1959. His thinking was strongly influenced both by Marx, and by the writings of Catholic intellectuals (Collins, undated); he had no difficulties in reconciling the political philosophy of Marx with his Catholic faith. Following the military coup in 1964 he was arrested and imprisoned on account of his literacy work with the rural poor, and forced into exile. He worked for five years with adult literacy programmes in Chile before being invited to become visiting Professor at the Center for Studies in Education and Development at Harvard (1969-70). He then moved to Geneva to work for the World Council of Churches. During this time he travelled widely, lecturing and advising Majority World⁹ governments. He returned to Brazil in 1980.

⁹ I use the term 'Majority World' to refer to countries where technological and industrial development is poor in comparison to the industrialised nations. These countries have a high Human Poverty Index (HPI) and low Human Development Index (HDI). They were traditionally referred to as the 'Third World' but alternative terms such as the Global South, developing countries, and the Majority World

Freire developed an educational methodology designed to enable previously illiterate people to understand and articulate a critical view of the world. He refers to a process of '*conscientização*', which involves learning to understand one's social, political, and economic context and taking action related to this knowledge (Freire, 1972). He maintains that knowledge and action are both necessary for transformation to occur and he argues strongly for the right of everyone to be able to participate in the process of transformation, and to be heard and respected. His work inspired the growth of the Participatory Research movement in Latin America (Herr and Anderson, 2005), an overtly political and emancipatory approach which viewed research as being closely linked to social action.

Some of his ideas that have particular relevance to AR are articulated in his best known book, '*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*', first published in 1970. He believed that the 'ontological and historical vocation' of men and women is 'to be more fully human' (Freire, 1972, pp 40-41) and that a pedagogy which could help oppressed people to regain their humanity 'must be forged *with*, not *for*,' them (ibid, p33). This resonates with the methodology of AR being research *with*, not *on*, people. He emphasised the importance of both reflection and action, and the necessity for the oppressed to actively participate in the process through dialogue, rather than be given information ('education') by well-meaning outsiders. This insistence that knowledge and understanding must be created with people and not imparted to them ('*co-intentional* education' ibid, p56) underpins the AR approach to the co-production of knowledge by participants and researcher. Similarly, the idea that subjectivity and objectivity are in a 'constant dialectical relationship' (ibid, p 35) and are both necessary for transformative action, supports this relationship between researcher and participant.

Critical theory also provides a strong theoretical foundation for AR in general, and in particular to a strand named Action Science. Critical theory was initially developed by a group of philosophers, sociologists, social psychologists and cultural critics working at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, established in 1922, and became known as the 'Frankfurt School of critical theory'. Critical theory disputed

have come into use. I choose the latter term as it reflects the distribution of population (approx. 80% in the Majority World).

the objective, value free stance of the empirical approach to social science and argued for recognition of the role of values and beliefs. It proposed that the objective of theory should be not only to develop understanding of the social world, but also to offer practical ways of improving it in order to promote human flourishing (Finlayson, 2005).

Jürgen Habermas (1929 -) is a prominent member of the second generation of the Frankfurt school and is frequently cited as an influential theorist for AR. He built on the work of the first generation and he has produced a large volume of interdisciplinary work. Herr and Anderson (2005) draw attention to his publication *'Knowledge and Human Interests'* (1971) in which he argues that knowledge production is always driven by human interest and that they cannot be separated. They consider that this theory can contribute to “guarding against the potential for AR to unreflectively reproduce current practices” (p27). This tendency is most likely to occur in settings where the researcher is positioned within his/her own organisation, or is employed by the organisation with which he/she is working. The need to un-mask taken for granted assumptions is central to Action Science as developed by Chris Argyris. Action Science gives importance to ‘theories-in-use’, described as “strategies of unilateral control, self-protection, defensiveness, covering up” of which users are largely unaware (Argyris, 1991, p86). Argyris argues that these strategies can serve to undermine attempts to implement change arising out of research if they are not addressed.

There is much evidence to suggest that during the final quarter of the twentieth century and up to the present day, the most influential philosophical perspective underpinning AR is postmodernism. This could possibly account for the growth of AR in the 1990s as postmodernism took root in society more widely. In David Harvey’s analysis of postmodernism (Harvey, 1980) he acknowledges that it is a contested term, as is modernism itself. However, modernism is generally associated with positivistic, rationalistic linear progress and seeks unifying truths, regarding impermanence and fragmentation as a necessary stage in the transition to a better world produced by the application of reason and science. Postmodernism on the other hand rejects any idea of a unifying theory or narrative and embraces fragmentation, heterogeneity, the ephemeral and chaotic and accepts this “as if that is

all there is” (p44). Harvey also comments on the re-emergence of pragmatic philosophy as being linked to the development of postmodern thought. In a world with no unified theory pragmatism becomes “the only possible philosophy of action” (p52).

Harvey locates the emergence of postmodernism in the early 1970s, with the counter cultural movements of the 1960s being a forerunner. This parallels significant activity in AR during the same period. Fals Borda, describing the developments in Participatory AR (PAR) at the time, comments that “With the advantage of hindsight we can now say that we somehow anticipated postmodernism” (Fals Borda, 2001, p28). New research approaches being explored in this context were questioning accepted meta-narratives and allowing the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices. Reason and Bradbury (2001) also trace the link between AR and postmodernism. In particular they draw attention to the complex web of linkages and diverse origins from both theory and practice that AR has drawn upon and conclude that “In its refusal to adopt one theoretical perspective it can be seen as an expression of a post-modern sentiment” (p3).

Although postmodernism by its very nature is almost impossible to clearly define there are some key aspects that do seem conducive to the creation of a climate in which AR can flourish. The undermining of the positivist worldview with its clear distinction between subject and object and pursuit of universal laws and unifying theories opens the way for AR’s participatory approach, which is inclusive of local and contextual knowledge and perspectives. Another strong theme within the postmodernist perspective is its concern with ‘Otherness’ and the importance of understanding difference. Harvey describes this as “the most liberative and therefore most appealing aspect of postmodern thought” (op cit, p47). Whereas modernism attempts to find a unified voice for all groups, postmodernism respects the right for diverse groups to have a voice of their own and for that voice to be accepted as legitimate. This is the pluralistic view of postmodernism that does not demand consensus. In many types of AR the voices of marginalised, oppressed, or under-represented groups are sought as part of the research process. In these ways AR and postmodernism sit comfortably together.

Whilst postmodernism has enabled decentring of hegemonic ideas and thereby legitimised a whole raft of diverse voices, the downside of this in my view, has been the creation of a philosophical void, with no framework upon which to secure ideas and constructs. I share the concern expressed by Reason and Bradbury (2001b) that “the deconstructive postmodern sentiment will exacerbate, rather than heal, the modern experience of rootlessness and meaninglessness” (p6). They assert that despite the abandonment of the grand narrative, all thinking *is* based on a worldview, which in the case of postmodernism is the metaphor of the world as text. They proceed to propose an alternative “participatory worldview” that attempts to bridge the gap between positivist science and postmodern deconstructivism by embracing the existence of an external reality but accepting that this is necessarily subject to a process of interpretation which is culturally constructed.

Having explored some of the philosophical grounds for AR I now consider the work of some early practitioners.

2:2 Origins in Practice

The work of the social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) gives us the first well documented example of the development of an AR programme. Histories of AR in the industrial West all refer to his work as foundational. Burnes (2004) (2004) quotes Edgar Schein:

There is little question that the intellectual father of contemporary theories of applied behavioural science, action research and planned change is Kurt Lewin ... (p978).

Some scholars question the assumption that Lewin was the originator of the term ‘action research’ (e.g. Neilsen, 2006; Bradbury Huang H., 2010), referring to an article by John Collier published in *Social Research* in 1945, a year before Lewin’s first publication.¹⁰ Lewin grew up as a Jew in Germany in a climate of hostile anti-semitism and this undoubtedly influenced his subsequent choice of study and work. He was awarded a Doctorate at the University of Berlin in 1916 but when Hitler was

¹⁰ Lewin, K., 1946, Action research and minority problems. In G. W. Lewin (Ed.), *Resolving social conflicts* (pp. 201–216). New York: Harper and Row. For a discussion of this issue, see Neilsen, 2006.

elected as Chancellor in 1933 he moved to America, first to Cornell University, and then in 1935 to the University of Iowa where he remained for 10 years. It was during this time that he developed his work in Field Theory, Group Dynamics, Action Research, and the 3-step model for change. His main interest was conflict resolution, especially in regard to the problems faced by minority groups. He held strong views about democracy and believed that in order to prevent social conflict, democratic values must penetrate all levels of society (Burnes, 2004). According to Burnes (ibid) Lewin's work on AR is closely linked to his other areas of work, all of which are concerned with implementing change. He used his work on Field Theory to identify the external forces that are working on a group. His ground breaking work on group dynamics, which examined how the group shaped the behaviour of its members, was used to understand the behaviour of group members. He recognised that for change to occur there needs to be 'felt need', a realisation that change is necessary. In this he was influenced by the Gestalt school of psychology "which stresses that change can only successfully be achieved by helping individuals to reflect on and gain new insights into the totality of their situation" (Burnes, 2004, p984). He produced a theory and practice of AR that included the now well rehearsed iterative spiral of 'plan, act, observe and reflect', which could be used by groups to undertake their own research and solve their own problems within their real-life situations (McNiff, 1988). According to Greenwood and Levin (1998) Lewin's work is foundational in three significant ways. He introduced the practice of knowledge production in real-life situations, created a new role for the researcher (from distant observer to involved participant), and developed criteria for judging theory based upon its ability to deliver solutions to problems in real-life situations.

In the US his ideas were taken up and used by external consultants paid for by commercial companies. In this context it was used as a positivist approach and lost the fundamental goals of democracy and participation and was instead a tool for organisational development in the interest of the powerful (Herr and Anderson, 2005). In the UK Lewin was very influential post World War II in the work of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, which adopted AR and committed to undertaking experiments in real-(work) life settings. They co-operated with a Norwegian academic on an experiment in industrial democracy which closely followed Lewin's approach, the results of which challenged the dominant Tayloristic

scientific management system. Although this project had a strong participatory and democratic dimension these elements did not survive in the long term either in Norway or in other countries where the industrial democracy ideas were taken up (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). The political and cultural climate for a real flourishing of AR was not yet present.

AR in the UK was invigorated in the 1970s by Lawrence Stenhouse working in the field of educational research at the University of East Anglia. He advocated and promoted the idea of ‘teacher as researcher’ as opposed to the conventional model of research being undertaken by the outside expert. He believed that teachers were best placed to judge their own practice and as a consequence he valued their interpretations of their own practice above that of an external researcher. He proposed that research undertaken by teachers could improve their educational practice. His work influenced that of subsequent workers in the field of educational action research who refined and developed his initial ideas (McNiff, 1988).

Changing approaches to worker participation in decision making in industry and agriculture are observed by Whyte (1991a) to be another source of growth in AR. In industry he cites the introduction of worker participation in improving quality of work life in the 1960s followed by participatory methods used in the 1980s to solve problems of efficiency and production. According to Whyte, the change in approach to agricultural development work in the Majority World started later but grew faster. Robert Chambers describes the development of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) in the 1970s (Chambers, 1983) and the subsequent development and spread of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in the late 1980s (Chambers, 1993). Chambers describes RRA as a method that is “fairly-quick-and-fairly-clean” (1983, p199). It moves away from the conventional approaches of extensive survey or intensive anthropology in favour of an approach that will produce timely, useful information that can be utilised by policy makers and practitioners. When faced with the problems of the rural poor in the Majority World the need for easily accessible, up to date information was regarded by RRA practitioners as more important than sticking rigidly to conventional research methodologies. In the late 1980s the use of the word ‘participatory’ began to be used to describe some RRA projects in India and Kenya. The term ‘Participatory Rural Appraisal’ soon appeared and spread quickly,

especially in Southern Asia (Chambers, 1993). The key difference between RRA and PRA is the extent to which the local rural population produces, analyses and owns the information. In his writings Chambers (1983; 1993) challenges the hegemony of research directed by the rich and powerful, supports a multidisciplinary or pluralist approach, and advocates for research that involves the rural poor as participants in the production of knowledge. Although he does not use the terminology of AR, the ideas he develops have a strong resonance with AR thinking. In a more recent publication (Chambers, 2006) he says that the term ‘Appraisal’ is no longer appropriate as PRA should not be a one-off event and should be about a lot more than appraisal. He supports the change in usage in Pakistan where PRA has come to mean ‘Participation – Reflection – Action’. He defines PRA and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) as:

*a growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes, behaviours and relationships to enable and empower people to share, analyse and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to **plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect.** (ibid, p3) (my emphasis)*

The correspondence with Lewin’s spiral of ‘plan, act, observe, and reflect’ is clear.

In parallel to the growth in RRA and PRA and activity in the US and UK, the 1970s saw the growth of an emancipatory, activist, Participatory Action Research (PAR) movement in Latin America and some other countries in the Majority World. According to Maclure (1991) PAR emerged in the Majority World context in order to “make development assistance more responsive to the needs and opinions of local people” (p190). Fals Borda (2001) traces the origins of AR in Latin America to a growing concern amongst academics in the 1970s about the living conditions in communities. This concern had a strongly political flavour:

We took it for granted that these conditions were produced by the spread of capitalism and universalistic modernization which were destroying the culture and biophysical texture of rich and diverse social structures well known and dear to us. (p27)

A radical critique of social theory and practice emerged that abandoned the remoteness of academia, and some people left the traditional academic institutions altogether. A research agenda arose that was focused on local and regional problems,

was participatory, and had action as its end result. The publication of Paulo Freire's '*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*' in 1970 was also an influential factor. The movement was critical of a science that was capable of putting men on the moon but could not tackle the issues of poverty and injustice, and believed that knowledge production was needed for the poor as much as for economic improvements: science was seen to be "in need of a moral conscience" (Fals Borda, 2001, p29).

Table 2 highlights some of the key influential people, events and institutions in the history of AR. This illustrates how in the 1970s there was increased networking and collaboration between people actively engaged in participatory research methods culminating in the First World Symposium of AR in Cartagena, Columbia in April 1977. Since that time eleven further Symposiums have been held in various locations around the globe, with the most recent held in August 2006 in the Netherlands. The gathering at Cartagena provided a new impetus for the worldwide spread of AR (Fals Borda, 2001) as indicated in the table by the number of organisations adopting participatory approaches in the 1970s. In his account of the Majority World origins of participatory research Fals Borda describes 1970 as 'a crucial year' (Fals Borda, 2001, p27) for a group of 'concerned scholars' who were beginning to question conventional social theory and practice: "Our conceptions of Cartesian rationality, dualism and 'normal' science were challenged, as we could not find answers or support from universities and other institutions which had formed us professionally" (p27). He provides examples of how during this year efforts to create new alternative institutions and ways of doing research and action that were more locally focussed were taking place independently in different locations in the Majority World: "It was like telepathy induced by the urgency for understanding the tragic, unbalanced world being shaped, and by the stimulation of recent revolutions" (p28). The political, cultural, social and economic climate of the time was influential in the growth of AR in the 1970s, as I believe it to be in the present day also. As Herr and Anderson point out "what constitutes valid ways of creating knowledge will vary" in "different times and in different social contexts" (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p10) and the emergence of emancipatory approaches to research from the Majority World is not surprising.

Budd Hall (first International Co-ordinator of the International Participatory Research Network (IPRN), 1977 – 1980) describes how as a visiting fellow at the

Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex in 1974 – 75 he discovered researchers in other countries were also developing participatory approaches (Hall, 2005). Similarly, Fals Borda discovered that “we were not alone in this practical struggle for social transformation” in the 1970s (Fals Borda, 2001, p30). It would appear that at this time there was both a growth in participatory research approaches and that the people involved were finding each other and developing networks and communication channels which solidified into the IPRN and the ongoing world symposiums. Reflecting on this process in the time period between 1970 and 2005 Budd Hall observes that:

Participatory research and its sister concept participatory action research have in the past 15 years been taken up in many universities around the world both as a teaching subject and as a research method for graduate studies. One might say that, participatory research has come “in from the cold”, that it has come in from the margins to become an accepted member of the academic family. (Hall, 2005, p2)

He argues that the best evidence for this was the publication of the Handbook of Action Research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a) which encompasses both streams of AR.

Table 2: Key Institutions, Events and Influences in the history of AR

Date	Event/Institution	Key Influences
19 th Century		Hegel Marx
1920s		John Dewey
1940s	Tavistock Institute (UK)	Kurt Lewin
1960s	Civil unrest Student riots	Lawrence Stenhouse
1969	Community Studies course starts, University of California, Santa Cruz	Michel Foucault Postmodernism
1970s		Paulo Freire Jürgen
1976	International Participatory Research Network, Toronto	Habermas/Frankfurt School of critical theory
1977	Collaborative AR Network, Manchester Metropolitan University	Orlando Fals Borda/Majority World
1978	First World Symposium of AR, Cartagena, Columbia	PAR
1979	European Association of Development Research and Training (EADI) adopted PR UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) started series of studies on People's Participation Research Committee on Social Practice and Social Transformation of the International Sociological Association opened section on PR. P(A)R centres established in e.g. Toronto, New Delhi, Colombo, Santiago, Caracas, Amsterdam (Fals Borda, 2001)	
1980	Teaching at Universities started, including Bath (UK),	

	<p>Deakin (Australia), Cornell (USA), Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) (Fals Borda, 2001)</p> <p>Society for International Development (SID) organised an International Group for Grassroots Initiatives</p> <p>World Bank formed a Participatory Development Group</p> <p>Centre for AR in Professional Practice, Bath Uni.</p> <p>Participatory AR Network website (sponsored by Cornell Participatory AR Network)</p>	
1993		
2001	<p>Publication of the Handbook of AR (Reason and Bradbury, 2001a)</p>	

2:3 Action research and traditional social science

AR challenges many of the basic assumptions and values of traditional social science (Herr and Anderson, 2005; Bradbury Huang H., 2010). The critique of positivism that gave rise to grounded theory and interpretivism is well documented (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and AR can be viewed as one branch of this post-modern genre. The most distinctive challenge is epistemological. All types of AR involve some level of co-production of knowledge by both participants and professional researchers. It is explicitly not research done *on* people, but *with* them (Herr and Anderson, 2005). The inclusion and recognition of local and tacit knowledge as part of the research process challenges the concept of the ‘researcher-as-expert’. It questions the assumptions about who can do research, taking it beyond the realm of the professional academic. This is well illustrated from the development of AR in education. The traditional approach to professional development for teachers was one of linear transfer of knowledge from the academic, outside researcher. A criticism of this approach is that sole dependence on academic educational theory can result in knowledge that is divorced from practice (Whitehead, 1988). The 1980s saw a shift in emphasis towards a more teacher-centred approach, which encourages teachers to undertake a form of self-reflective inquiry in order to improve their own practice – the ‘teacher as researcher’ model of AR (McNiff, 1988). The validation of local

knowledge is also most obvious in the forms of AR associated with the writings of Freire and the PAR and emancipatory AR movement, which explicitly challenge the idea that local problems can be solved by outside experts (Herr and Anderson, 2005).

The role of the researcher in AR differs from that in traditional social science research in two fundamental respects. In AR the researcher becomes a co-participant to a greater or lesser extent because the research participants are either fully in control, or have a shared input into the process (Herr and Anderson, 2005). The researcher may have specialist expertise and knowledge but his/her role is not as 'expert' but more as a facilitator and 'resource person' (Stringer, 1999). In addition, in mainstream social science, research and action take place separately, with any change in policy or practice as a result of the research process being undertaken by practitioners; the researcher does not get involved in linking research to action (Whyte, 1991a). In AR there is no such distinction and the researcher is involved, together with participants, in the spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

Stringer (1999) criticises the gap between theory and practice in conventional research and questions the usefulness of generalised theories in addressing local problems and situations. He argues that because these theories are not applicable to all individual circumstances (i.e. they have "probabilistic implications for specific cases" pxi), they have limited use to the grassroots practitioner. They are useful in explaining social change on the macro level but a different, more locally situated, form of knowledge is required to address the detail of lived-out situations.

The emancipatory and more overtly political arm of AR has also been critical of some social science research for serving to support prevailing power structures and hegemonies. AR itself has also been scrutinised in this respect. AR conducted in the industrial settings of large corporations for example, has been suspected by some of not challenging the underlying organisational values and norms (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003).

Some attempts are being made to overcome some of the apparent conflicts inherent in the differing approaches to social science research. Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) regard as a positive challenge the multi-faceted and non-specialised ways of

seeing the world which enter the arena once participants are full partners in the research process. They suggest that this requires a view of practice which is both reflexive and dialectical, that things need to be seen inter-subjectively, to include both the inside and outside points of view. They regard as false the dichotomies of the individual/social and the objective/subjective (external/internal perspective). These can be viewed as dialectically related and both part of the complete picture ('both/and' rather than 'either/or'). Reference has already been made to Reason and Bradbury's (2001) proposal for a new 'participatory paradigm' as a foundation for AR. Drawing on and integrating the positivist approach of modernism and the deconstruction of postmodernism, this worldview is founded on the understanding that the reality we experience is a co-creation of a cosmos that is a genuine external reality, and our interpretation of this reality through language and cultural expression. Humanity is understood as a full participant in the world, "the place of humans in the web of life is as embodied participants" (Reason, 2005). This worldview helps to fill the gap left by postmodernism which has a lot to say about the nature of knowledge but very little on how this relates to action (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b). Reason argues that if we are fully part of the world then we are already acting in it and AR will help us to judge the quality of our actions. He describes many dimensions to the participatory worldview including methodology, democracy and power, ecology and sustainability, and spirituality (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b; Reason, 2002, 2005). He challenges us to examine the need for a new way of thinking, made more urgent by the impending ecological crisis. He acknowledges that the modern worldview has resulted in "extraordinary contributions to human affairs and in the flourishing of culture, scientific endeavour and material wellbeing" but adds that it has also produced "human alienation, ecological devastation, and spiritual impoverishment ... and the twin global crises of justice and sustainability" (Reason, 2002, p3). He argues that without a radical change in thinking "our civilisation will decline and decay" (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b, p4). The participatory worldview is offered as an alternative paradigm for both social science and ecological sustainable living.

The question remains as to whether or not there is a movement towards a 'participatory turn' in social science. Action Research is being used by a number of organisations to discover and support best practice in various arenas (e.g. Carnegie Rural AR programme, F3, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Department for

international development¹¹). Specific approaches to inquiry would appear to develop and flourish contingent on the prevailing political and social conditions. Reason quotes the philosopher Stephen Toulmin who maintains that the rise of the rationalist worldview was directly related to the “political, social and theological chaos” that arose as a result of the Thirty Years War (Reason, 2002). Herr and Anderson (2005) observe how emancipatory approaches flourished where there was oppression and disenfranchisement in both the US and Majority World, and positivism dominated in the US during the mid-twentieth century during a time when social engineering was regarded as the method to solve social problems. Dick (2011), noting the continuing rise in interest in AR, states that in a ‘turbulent world’ where, with some prescience¹², he discerns “a groundswell ... of opposition to undemocratic power” (p134), AR is “an apposite research approach” because it involves direct engagement and a commitment to change. In the UK the decline in voter participation in representative democracy has birthed a movement towards participative democracy and localism. Citizenship and involvement in local decision making is pro-actively encouraged (e.g. HM Government, 2005a) and both local and central government hold regular consultations on policy changes. Whilst the quality and effectiveness of these activities is open to question, there is no doubt that there has been a change in the rhetoric around community participation and in the proliferation of attempts to achieve it. Reason and Bradbury’s (2001b) participatory worldview takes this much further and deeper and they argue strongly for a new participatory paradigm to underpin social science. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) predict that the evolution of qualitative research is heading towards a more participatory approach:

The concept of the aloof observer has been abandoned. More action, participatory, and activist-orientated research is on the horizon. The search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small-scale theories fitted to specific problems and particular situations. (p28/9)

There are differing views on the position AR currently holds within the research community. Some consider that it remains very much on the margins (e.g.

¹¹ www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk; www.localfood.org.uk/policy.htm; www.jrf.org.uk; www.dfid.gov.uk

¹² Because this was written prior to the ‘Arab Spring’ and the News Corps and banking ‘scandals’

Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Herr and Anderson, 2005) whilst others, like Budd Hall, would claim that it has “come in from the cold” and is now a respected member of the academic family (2005, p2). However, he qualifies this by acknowledging that AR does not fit comfortably within the academic structure where knowledge production is closely related to career progression, leading to pressure to produce knowledge in more traditional ways. Collaborative research with non-academic partners having equal ownership of the direction and results remains a challenging proposition. Nevertheless, he strongly believes that academia needs to rise to these challenges:

The academic community deserves to discuss and challenge and be challenged by these and other ideas which raise questions of the role of knowledge and power. (ibid, p22)

Bradbury Huang (2010) considers that AR “lives more or less happily on the margins of conventional social science departments” (p95). In her Keynote speech at the 2006 PAR World Congress Wadsworth described the situation as a paradox. On the one hand AR continues “to be marginalised, contested and delegitimised”; on the other hand, the principles of AR are appearing in numerous different guises and have been mainstreamed in such diverse areas as “health, human and community services, agriculture and ecology-environment, education, business and industry”, in fact, “the growth in variants of our paradigm is phenomenal” (Wadsworth, 2006). Like Denzin and Lincoln (2003), Wadsworth also sees the principles of AR being adopted by mainstream social research. Maybe the explanation for this paradox stems from a general attitude of indifference to democratic social change (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). Wadsworth (op cit) observes that resistance at the ground level can arise because the process of AR can provoke strong feelings; it upsets the status quo and as with any change process, there are losses as well as gains. Power, status, resources, and simple “comfortable familiarity” can be threatened. This may explain the *feeling* of AR practitioners that they remain on the margins, whilst evidence suggests a widespread acceptance of many of the principles and approaches of AR amongst a broad diversity of settings.

In an article examining the power of social science and its methods Law and Urry (2004) make the case for a re-examination of methodology. Drawing on developments in chaos and complexity theory they argue that social reality has changed. In particular, globalisation has led to a situation where “phenomena (including the horrors) of the social are less about territorial boundaries and states and more about connections and flow” (p403). They describe social science methods as being ‘performative’, that is “they have effects; they make a difference’ they enact realities; and they can help to bring into being what they also discover” (p393). They argue that in a complex world “there are no innocent methods; all involve forms of social practice that in some way or another interfere with the patterns of the physical or social. *They are all part of that world*” (p402, my emphasis). Law and Urry’s call is for a review of social science methodology in response to the changing world. They comment that “in a complex world, research that uses observations taken at a single point in time-space will be representationally inadequate” (p402). AR is situated in a given local context but does not claim to generalise findings from the particular to the universal. It is emergent and developmental, responsive to change and to new discoveries during the research process. And it acknowledges the ‘presentness’ of the researcher(s) and their influence on the process. Law and Urry observe that “if methods are not innocent then they are also political. They help to *make* realities” (p404, emphasis as in original). If this is accepted they are asking if it is possible to develop methods which will produce some forms of social reality and erode others. AR is openly political and concerned with the promotion of “human flourishing” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b) and making the world a ‘better place’ (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). There would seem to be opportunities for some fertile discussions here and AR has something to contribute to this debate and could maybe find its place within a twenty-first century invigorated social science.

3. CONTEMPORARY FORMS OF ACTION RESEARCH

It is hardly surprising, given the multiple origins and histories of AR, that there are also numerous different institutional, sectoral, and cultural types being practised in different locations. Fals Borda (1995) identified 36 strands of PAR represented at the world congresses. AR in its broadest sense can encompass such diverse practices as Action Learning (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003), Future Search (Janoff and Weisford, 2006), and Citizens’ Juries (Wakeford, 2002). Table 3 summarises three

classifications attempted by different authors; this is by no means exhaustive but it serves to illustrate the multiple ways in which AR has been described.

In their book “Introduction to AR” Greenwood and Levin (1998) observe: “the dilemma of this book [is] the diversity and complexity of AR approaches” (p232). There are differences in philosophical, intellectual and historical roots, epistemologies, positionality (insider or outsider) of the researcher, setting and context of the research, and focus of the research. Whilst acknowledging this diversity and complexity, I think it can also be helpful to identify some broad categories within which most practices could sit, if not comfortably, at least without too much conflict and contradiction. With this in mind I have grouped the different classifications in Table 3 into three ‘wide and deep’ categories: AR and organisational change, AR in education, and Emancipatory/Participatory AR and Evaluation.

Table 3: Examples of Types of Action Research

Herr and Anderson (2005)	Kemmis and McTaggart (2003)	Greenwood and Levin (1998)
AR and ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AR in Organizational Development/Learning <i>(Kurt Lewin, organisational development and workplace democracy)</i> • Action Science <i>(Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, organisational change)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industrial AR <i>(Kurt Lewin, organizational development and workplace democracy)</i> • Soft Systems approach <i>(organisational development, generation of systems models to facilitate change)</i> • Action Science <i>(Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, organisational change)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AR and industrial democracy <i>(Kurt Lewin, organizational development and workplace democracy)</i> • Action Science and organisational learning <i>(Chris Argyris and Donald Schön, organisational change)</i>
AR in EDUCATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AR in Education <i>(John Dewey, insider research, the reflective practitioner, teacher-as-researcher (Lawrence Stenhouse))</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom AR <i>(teacher as researcher)</i> • Critical AR <i>(roots in critique of classroom AR, includes broad social analyses, involves mixed group of participants)</i> • Action Learning <i>(action learning sets – learning from each other’s experience)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational Strategies <i>(John Dewey, educational reform, Paulo Freire, “numerous, diverse, and even contradictory” strategies (p232))</i>

EMANCIPATORY/PARTICIPATORY AR and EVALUATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory Research <i>(Paulo Freire, research as social action, co-operative inquiry)</i> • Participatory Evaluation <i>(Collaborative and participatory approaches to evaluation, including PRA – Robert Chambers)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory Research <i>(Roots in ‘Third World’, neo-Marxism, liberation theology)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory Action Research and contemporary feminist analysis <i>(PAR and PR, critical, liberationist, neo-Marxist roots, poor countries and/or communities)</i> • Participatory Evaluation and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) <i>(Collaborative and participatory approaches to evaluation, PRA – Robert Chambers)</i> Human Inquiry, Co-operative Inquiry, and Action Inquiry <i>(Peter Reason, John Heron, William Torbert; 3 approaches emphasising experience and engagement)</i> • Pragmatic AR <i>(Greenwood and Levin, roots in pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey, emergent process, multiple methods)</i>

3:1 Action research and organisational change

The use of AR in organisational development and learning can be traced back to the work of Kurt Lewin and a Western/Industrial nation tradition of AR. The Lewinian idea that knowledge should be created from solving problems in real life situations is a strong theme (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003). It gave birth to the Industrial Democracy Movement, which flourished in Scandinavia from the 1960s onwards. This was linked to a critique of the school of Scientific Management, developed by F. W. Taylor and others, with its emphasis on hierarchy, “command and control”, and the fragmentation of work. The AR approach of collaboration in the research process between workers, management and outside researchers placed the emphasis on a democratisation of the workplace. In some contexts AR in an industrial/workplace setting has been appropriated by organisations as a tool to achieve goals set by the management, losing the key features of collaboration and an open inquiry process (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Herr and Anderson, 2005)

Action Science is a discrete branch of AR associated with Chris Argyris and Donald Schön. Its main focus is organisational learning and it seeks to produce “knowledge that can be used to produce action, whilst at the same time contributing to a theory of action” (Argyris, Putman & McClain Smith, quoted in Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p188). It claims to use a scientific methodology and Argyris is critical of much AR practice which he considers to focus too much on problem solving whilst giving insufficient attention to theory building and testing (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Action Science has also criticised AR for too often being based on “foggy epistemologies and incoherent or careless methodology” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p195). A central theme is that social science research does not produce valid descriptions without the intervention of the researcher to enable participants to confront and analyse defensive behaviours, particularly when faced with the prospect of change or a perceived threat. The gaps between ‘espoused theory’ (explanations given by the participant – the emic view) and ‘theories in use’ (the researcher’s interpretation – the etic view) are used as the point of departure for the intervention. Greenwood and Levin consider Action Science to be a major and important strand in AR but question the unexplained assumption that the researcher’s knowledge and interpretation is always superior to the espoused theory of the participant. They also

point out that this methodology tends to simplify group behaviour and does not take sufficient account of factors such as power differentials, gender and ethnicity (Greenwood and Levin, 1998).

Soft Systems is another approach to organisational change, which usually involves an outside consultant being employed to work with participants with the aim of finding solutions to a problem situation. The researcher and the group develop systems models that are then used to analyse the situation and develop actions to overcome the problem. The main weakness of this approach is considered to be the potentially dominant influencing role of the researcher/consultant and their relationship to the management of the organisation who have engaged them to problem solve (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003).

3:2 Action research in education

AR has a long history and has been widely used in many fields of education. One such field is what Kemmis and McTaggart term 'Classroom AR' (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003). This practice is used for professional development and professional and institutional change (Herr and Anderson, 2005) and is perhaps most clearly illustrated by the (previously referred to) teacher-as-researcher movement promulgated by Lawrence Stenhouse in Britain in the 1970s. In the 1960s and '70s both empirical and interpretative research tended to be divided into disciplines (psychology, philosophy, sociology, and history). Teachers found that it did not always give answers to the questions they were asking (McNiff, 1988). The teacher-as-researcher movement developed as 'insider research' and marked a "devolution of power from the universities to the classroom, from the external researcher to the teacher as researcher" (McNiff, 1988, p20). It derived its theoretical foundations from John Dewey and his ideas about knowledge generation being rooted in human experience (Herr and Anderson, 2005).

One criticism of Classroom AR is that it does not pay sufficient attention to broader influences and the critical analyses of power differentials created by social class, gender and ethnicity. In response, the approach of Critical AR described by Kemmis and McTaggart was developed. Typically this involves a much wider range of

stakeholders in the research process and places a strong emphasis on participation (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003).

Kemmis and McTaggart also include Action Learning in their overview of key approaches to AR. Action Learning is attributed to the work of Reg Revans and typically involves bringing people together in ‘action learning sets’ to learn from each other’s experience. It is used in both private and public sector settings to facilitate problem solving. It does not usually involve a diverse range of stakeholders as participants and this can be viewed as a serious limitation, preventing other voices from being heard and not encouraging critical thinking.

Greenwood and Levin (1998) take a very different perspective when considering the practice of AR in education. They make no reference to the teacher-as-researcher movement but choose instead to focus on diverse practices in adult education across the globe. They acknowledge that “Educational strategies relevant to AR are numerous, diverse, and even contradictory” (p232) and that these have included excellent examples of AR but have also included examples of co-optation and repressive practices. They include as examples the Scandinavian Folk High Schools, Trade Union education, Popular education (as developed by Myles Horton at the Highlander Centre, Tennessee), and Popular education in the South (based on the work of Paulo Freire, Budd Hall, and Orlando Fals Borda). They observe that education has been one of the most important and common routes to the practice of AR.

3:3 Emancipatory/participatory action research and evaluation

This category includes those practices which are more closely associated with the concerns of political economy such as power structures, class, and democratisation. Many such approaches can be regarded as “action research as emancipatory practice” (Herr and Anderson, 2005) that work with oppressed groups to develop actions to improve their situations and challenge unequal power relations. The term Participatory Action Research (PAR) has been attributed to Orlando Fals Borda (Hall, 2005) to whom Greenwood and Levin also attribute the most clearly developed account (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). It is associated with the legacy of Paulo Freire and grew out of the strong concerns of practitioners in the Majority

World with issues of knowledge, power and justice. Referring to his work in Columbia in the 1960s and '70s Fals Borda talks about how there was a perceived need to find an alternative to the positivist approaches taken by social science and to look for alternative explanations of social processes (Fals Borda, 1995). For himself this led to a move out of academia to work with the poor, which rewarded him with several prison sentences and rejection by some of his former academic colleagues in the US (where he had gained his Doctorate in sociology in 1955). In an address to the Southern Sociological Society in Atlanta in 1995 – an event which marked a “homecoming” and recognition of acceptance – he identified the specific contribution of Majority World participatory researchers as the concept of “committed research”. By this he means research which combines “horizontal participation with peoples, and wise judgement and prudence for the good life” (phronesis) (Fals Borda, 1995, p5). In spite of the difficulties he faced he declared that “I could not consider myself a scientist, even less a human being, if I did not exercise the “commitment” and felt it in my heart and in my head as a life-experience” (op cit, p5). He outlined four guidelines for PAR practice and report writing:

- *Do not monopolize your knowledge nor impose arrogantly your techniques but respect and combine your skills with the knowledge of the researched or grassroots communities, taking them as full partners and co-researchers. That is, fill in the distance between subject and object;*
- *Do not trust elitist versions of history and science which respond to dominant interests, but be receptive to counter-narratives and try to recapture them;*
- *Do not depend solely on your culture to interpret the facts, but recover local values, traits, beliefs, and arts for action by and with the research organizations; and*
- *Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary*

and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals. (Fals Borda, 1995, p3)

Both Greenwood and Levin (1998) and Herr and Anderson (2005) make the connection between PAR and feminist analysis. Greenwood and Levin accredit renewed interest in PAR and AR in part to contemporary anti positivistic feminist critique. They note the shared commitment of feminism and AR to democracy and social justice and their joint interest in issues such as critiquing positivism, analysing power relations, respecting “silenced” voices, and transformative praxis (1998).

Equally concerned with participation and local knowledge but less politically overt are three approaches which have been associated through the work of Peter Reason (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). Co-operative Inquiry (associated with John Heron), Human Inquiry (Peter Reason), and Action Inquiry (William Torbert) all place emphasis on experience and engagement and recognise the emotional and ethical dimensions of relationships, and that social transformation requires self-transformation (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). They place less emphasis on political economy.

A significant influence of AR has been in the field of evaluation. As a critique of the model of evaluation undertaken by an objective and impartial outsider, Participatory Evaluation questions the assumption that project participants and recipients cannot be trusted to provide an honest or good quality evaluation of themselves (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). It also extends the purpose of the evaluation to include contributing to the project by using the results of ongoing evaluation to feed into the project and help the participants to achieve their goals. The practice of Participatory Evaluation typically involves all interested parties, including project recipients, in all or some stages of the evaluation process.

The growth in PRA in the context of development in the Majority World has been sketched out in a previous section (2:2). Developed to meet the need to collect baseline information for proposed projects it involves local people in the process through the use of various participatory techniques. Greenwood and Levin point out

that because it had been adopted by large development agencies it has been vulnerable to miss-use and co-optation by powerful elites. It is by definition a short-term intervention and can therefore also be criticised for failing to take into account the complexities of local communities in terms of gender and other power relationships.

Finally, I also include in this category the Pragmatic AR of Greenwood and Levin (1998). They give prominence to allowing the interaction, or conversation, between the researcher(s) and participants to determine the direction of the research so that “the ongoing and purposive redesigning of the projects whilst they are in progress is a key principle of practice” (p151). It is therefore a strongly participatory model drawing on a wide variety of methods and approaches as applicable to a local situation. It is underpinned by epistemological arguments from pragmatic philosophy well laid out in their book “Introduction to Action Research” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). This approach would seem to have some parallels to Freire’s approach and in particular his reference to ‘generative themes’ whereby the researcher works with the community to discover issues that they consider to be of greatest importance (Freire, 1972).

Within this three pronged typology I position my own approach with this third category and name it specifically as ‘community-based participatory action research’. Community-based describes the location as embedded within a local setting and ‘participatory’ reflects the centrality of collaborative working.

This attempt to simplify the plethora of accounts of the diversity of approaches to AR runs the risk of criticism from all quarters, and in particular by those whose particular brand has been omitted altogether. However, for a general overview of AR approaches rather than a detailed examination of individual approaches and differentiations, these three categories can contain the majority of practices. AR is a large ‘extended family’ composed of unique individuals who none the less share a strong family resemblance. For all the heterogeneity found in AR there are sufficient solid commonalities to justify its differentiation as a discrete branch of social

science. The following section addresses the question ‘What is AR?’ and seeks to identify the family traits that distinguish it from conventional social science.

4. THE HEART OF ACTION RESEARCH

Having examined the various origins in theory and practice, and summarised the main approaches and types of AR, I now consider definitions and descriptions of AR to draw out the key principles and characteristics that help to define it. As Reason and Bradbury observe: “There is no ‘short answer’ to the question ‘What is AR?’” (2001b, p1).

In attempting to answer this question some writers use a descriptive style to identify what they consider to be the main characteristics, others attempt a succinct definition, whilst others list a number of tenets which they see as the distinguishing characteristics.

The main points of agreement revolve around the *process* (which Reason and Bradbury (2001) argue is as important as the outcome), and the *goals* of AR. They can be summarised as:

- AR is *participatory*; it is undertaken *by* or *with* insiders, but never by an outside ‘expert’ researcher *on* people who are research ‘subjects’. AR is *collaborative* and ideally should involve all those who have an interest in the outcome of the research (stakeholders).
- AR involves the *democratisation of research* by changing the role and relationship of the researcher to the participants; responsibility for, and ownership of, the research is shared and participants are involved in all or most of the processes. *Knowledge* to inform practice is *co-generated* by participants and researcher(s).
- AR is a *reflective, systematic process* adopting some form of a reflective cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection. This involves ongoing *intervention* in the research setting; it is an *emergent* and flexible process.

- An important goal of AR is to *effect change or action* which is agreed or desired by the participants. This is usually associated with issues of social justice and/or improving the quality of life of the participants. AR is “research practice with a social change agenda” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p4).

Sources: (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001b; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003; Herr and Anderson, 2005)

Attempts at succinct definitions tend either to be short and thereby over simplistic, or lengthy and maybe better expressed in a list or descriptive style. An example of the first is from McKernan, cited in Herr and Anderson:

a form of self-reflecting problem solving, which enables practitioners to better understand and solve pressing problems in social settings (2005, p4)

Reason and Bradbury offer a more complex “working definition”:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (2001b, p1)

This definition begs the question of what is to be defined as a “worthwhile human purpose” and who is to define it. Greenwood and Levin clarify this point in their definition by introducing the concept of justice:

AR is social research carried out by a team encompassing a professional action researcher and members of an organization or community seeking to improve their situation. AR promotes broad participation in the research process and supports action leading to a more just or satisfying situation for the stakeholders. (1998, p4)

Practitioners of PAR have constructed more in depth and prescriptive lists of key characteristics. It is worthwhile giving a brief consideration to some of these here to illustrate some of the more detailed points. McClure and Bassey (1991) identify

three attributes that they consider distinguishes PAR from more traditional research strategies:

- Shared ownership of research.
- A method of community based learning as groups learn to critically analyse their situations and find solutions, and researchers learn from the process and reformulate their research questions.
- It aims to stimulate community initiated action.

This brings out the aspect of learning that occurs for all participants as an ongoing part of the AR process. Budd Hall suggests seven key characteristics of PAR:

- “The ‘problem’ originates within the community or workplace itself.
- The research goal is to fundamentally improve the lives of those involved, through structural transformation.
- The people in the community or workplace are involved in controlling the entire research process.
- The focus of PAR is on oppressed groups whose issues include inaccessibility, colonisation, marginalisation, exploitation, racism, sexism, cultural disaffection, etc.
- Participatory research plays a role in enabling by strengthening people’s awareness of their own capabilities.
- The people themselves are researchers, as are those involved who have specialised research training.
- The researchers with specialized training may be outsiders to the community, but are committed learners in a process that leads to militancy (fighting for change) rather than detachment.”

(cited in Hagey, 1997, p1)

Most of these could be applied to AR in general, but this list illustrates the emancipatory and political economy aspects characteristic of the PAR branch of AR. Even more detailed lists are proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) who name eight key features of PAR, and McTaggart’s (1989) list of 16 Tenets of PAR

presented to the Third World Encounter on Participatory Research in 1989. In contrast to these more prescriptive descriptions are Greenwood and Levin's Pragmatic approach outlined above, which leaves decisions about specific methodologies to be determined by the local situation, and the five 'broad and wide' characteristics provided by Reason and Bradbury (2001b), which are applicable to all forms of AR. A summary of these categories provides a useful conclusion to this discussion:

- *Human Flourishing*: AR aims to contribute through practical knowledge to the increased well-being of human persons and communities.
- *Practical Issues*: AR produces practical outcomes and new forms of understanding, "action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless" (p2).
- *Participation and Democracy*: AR is participative research, with, for and by persons and communities. All stakeholders should be involved.
- *Emergent, Developmental Form*: The process of inquiry is as important as the outcomes and it is an evolutionary and developmental process over time, starting with everyday experience.
- *Knowledge-in-action*: in AR "knowledge is a verb rather than a noun" (p2) as knowledge creation is an ongoing process of coming to know and is not defined in terms of hard and fast methods.

The different approaches to AR might each give a different emphasis or priority to these categories. For example, Action Science may be most concerned with point 2, PAR with 1 and 3, and Pragmatic AR with 4 and 5, but all could subscribe to these broad categories.

In spite of its complex and sometimes fragmented history and philosophical roots, AR has sufficient cohesion to be recognisable as a distinct branch of social science.

Some view it as the way forward for social science in the present cultural, political and environmental context of the 21st Century. The key points of departure from mainstream social science are its purposes, relationships, and ways of conceiving knowledge (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b).

5. THORNY ISSUES IN THE PRACTICE OF ACTION RESEARCH

The practice of AR throws up many contested issues and participatory practices have been the topic of some heated debates and critiques. Some of these arise out of the differences between AR and conventional social science, others from the complexities arising from the practice of participatory techniques. The issues identified are often interrelated, but are considered separately here to reduce complexity.

5:1 Positionality of the Researcher

This issue is dealt with in detail by Herr and Anderson who see it as fundamental to framing issues of methodology, ethics and epistemology (2005). This is in contrast to some other accounts which either do not address the issue or make assumptions about the position of the researcher vis-à-vis the setting (e.g. McNiff, 1988; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Stringer, 1999). Herr and Anderson (2005) describe a continuum of positionality from Insider to Outsider, identifying six categories described as:

1. Insider (researcher studies own self/practice).
2. Insider in collaboration with other insiders.
3. Insider(s) in collaboration with outsider(s).
4. Reciprocal collaboration (insider-outsider teams).
5. Outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s).
6. Outsider(s) studies insider(s).

They acknowledge that it is not always easy to define a researcher's position and that it may change throughout the course of the study or differ for various parts of the study. Awareness of this is important as it raises issues related to the tacit knowledge that an insider gains (which is useful but may be biased and unexamined), power

relations, control and ownership of the research process, and what each party wants out of the research. They also cite other ways that positionality could be considered:

1. Hierarchical position or level of informal power within the organisation/community.
2. Position vis-à-vis dominant groups in society – class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age ability/disability, religion etc.
3. Position within colonial relations within and between nation states. (2005, p44).

These are issues that need to be considered in the self-reflection of the researcher, recognising the multiple positionalities that are held and their relationship to the research process. I address these issues in my research in chapter 6 (4.2).

5:2 Ownership of the Research

Collaborative research, co-production of knowledge and joint action, ideally means co-ownership. In reality the extent of shared ownership will be related to the position of the researcher in the setting, the origin of the research project (researcher or participant initiated), and the main source of funding for the project. The problem of co-optation by powerful external organisations or elites within organisations is frequently mentioned in the literature. Even for the apparently community-led processes such as village appraisals there can be accusations of manipulation by external bodies so that “this subtle approach converts participation into covert manipulation. It results in local people being involved in activities imposed upon them by powerful external groupings” (Boyd, 2000). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (cited in Herr and Anderson, 2005) raise the issue of the danger of co-optation by university based researchers when collaborating with insiders as they have a stronger interest in publication.

Ownership can have more than one meaning and it is important that there is an open dialogue about this between the researcher and other participants. Ownership of the purpose, process, and outcomes of the AR project should ideally be shared. Ownership of the resultant documentation also needs to be negotiated and understood by all parties involved. How this issue was navigated in respect to my research is explained in chapter 1 (4 and 3.4).

5:3 Research Quality and Validity

In the ongoing debate around how to assess the quality of AR there is general agreement that there needs to be a different set of criteria from those applied to both positivist or naturalist social science (Fals Borda, 1995; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Bradbury and Reason, 2001; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003; Herr and Anderson, 2005). This is because, as has already been noted, AR differs in terms of purposes, relationships, and ways of conceiving knowledge (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b). For Greenwood and Levin the crux of the validity issue is that:

The conventional social research community believes that credibility is created through generalizing and universalizing propositions of the universal hypothetical, universal disjunctive and generic types, whereas AR believes that only knowledge generated and tested in practice is credible. (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p81)

They argue that this necessity for knowledge to be tested in practice is what makes AR ‘good science’.

There is also general agreement that the quality of the action is an important criterion for AR. So questions should be asked such as: Did it solve the problem initially posed? Did it satisfy the participants? Has it contributed to human flourishing? What was achieved, and for whom? It is also considered important to obtain the views of all the participants. For Fals Borda, these are paramount (1995). For internal validity it is also important to ask if those who provided the data agree with the interpretation (Herr and Anderson, 2005).

Kemmis and McTaggart (2003) argue that there is a trade-off between rigour and relevance in AR and that sacrifices in methodological rigour are worth making if it means that gains can be made in more relevant and timely knowledge. In AR knowledge is needed in order to further the process of change and move the research on to the next cycle in a “real-time process of transformation” (p375). They contend that the criteria for what is judged as ‘good’ research should not be defined solely on methodological issues but should also consider epistemological concerns - “what counts as good evidence in terms of what participants - using the evidence critically – think is accurate, relevant, appropriate, and pertinent to their purposes” (p375).

Herr and Anderson (2005) suggest five indicators of quality for AR, whilst qualifying this by saying that “it is too soon to formulate criteria for quality in the absence of significant dialogue and in the context of multiple approaches to action research” (p54). They base their system on what they consider to be a general agreement about the goals of AR, and the quality indicators match one or more of these goals as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Anderson and Herr's Goals of AR and Validity Criteria (2005, p55)

Goals of Action Research	Quality/Validity Criteria
a) the generation of new knowledge	Dialogic and process validity
b) the achievement of action-orientated outcomes	Outcome validity
c) the education of both researcher and participants	Catalytic validity
d) results that are relevant to the local setting	Democratic validity
e) a sound and appropriate research methodology	Process validity

Their validity criteria can be summarised as follows:

1. *Outcome Validity*: the extent to which actions occur that result in a resolution to the initial problem posed. This is termed ‘workability’ by Greenwood and Levin (1998) and is a common theme in discussions around validity for AR.
2. *Process Validity*: the extent to which problems are framed and solved in a way that enables ongoing learning. This includes a cycle of reflection and action, examination of underlying assumptions, what counts as evidence, and the quality of relationships with participants.
3. *Democratic Validity*: the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all stakeholders.
4. *Catalytic Validity*: “the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to

transform it” (Lather, cited in Herr and Anderson, 2005). In AR researchers should also be open to revising their view of reality and their role.

5. *Dialogic Validity*: Peer review.

These criteria are offered as a contribution to the ongoing debate around assessing the quality of AR. Until there is a more widely agreed set of criteria Herr and Anderson agree that it is necessary for each researcher to establish the most appropriate criteria and be able to explain why.

Bradbury and Reason (2001) conclude the Handbook of Action Research with a discussion on this issue. Rather than attempting to provide a new set of criteria for validity they pose questions based on their five characteristics of AR (see above, section 4) and present these as ‘choice points’ which will differ in priority in different AR projects and offer a framework for the researcher to examine quality issues. The starting point for this examination is summarised in five questions:

Is the action research;

- Explicit in developing a praxis of relational participation?
- Guided by reflexive concern for practical outcomes?
- Inclusive of a plurality of knowing?
 - ensuring conceptual-theoretical integrity?
 - embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?
 - intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
- Worthy of the term significant?
- Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure?

These and other discussions provide useful guidelines to researchers when considering quality criteria for AR. Whether any normative criteria will ever be arrived at (as predicted by Connelly and Clandinin, cited in Herr, 2005) is debatable given the diversity in approaches and scope of AR.

The question of whether or not the findings of AR can be transferable or generalisable frequently occurs in critiques of AR. Dick (1993) refers to a trade-off between local relevance ('responsiveness') and global relevance ('generalisation'). He argues that if local change is an intended outcome, then this is a sensible trade-off. Herr and Anderson (2005) cite Lincoln and Guba's ideas about transferability whereby the responsibility is given to the receiver to examine the contextual evidence before deciding if there are sufficient similarities to merit application of the knowledge. The duty of the researcher is simply to ensure that sufficient contextual information is provided in the account of the research. Greenwood and Levin (1998) endorse this view and argue that situated knowledge can be usefully transferred providing that there is sufficient understanding of the contextual factors in both locations to enable judgements to be made about whether or not there are sufficient similarities to merit transfer of knowledge. As they point out, this is not the same as making universal generalisations about truth based on situated knowledge. Ladkin (2005) suggests that it is the process knowledge (explanations of how the inquiry has been conducted) more than the results, which can usefully be transferred to other researchers.

AR is strongly linked to democracy and challenging existing power structures (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). It is inevitable therefore that AR often has a more political dimension than other forms of social science research and this is sometimes seen as a threat to validity (Herr and Anderson, 2005). Herr and Anderson identify several levels where AR interacts with political agendas: the micro-politics of the institutions where the research takes place, the political implications of first person action researchers in redefining their professional roles, the politics of knowledge creation (who, how, and who uses it), and the wider macro-politics that impact upon any local setting.

The potential for unintended or unexpected outcomes as a result of AR needs to be understood by agencies supporting an AR programme and to be prepared for possible uncomfortable challenges to their existing culture. An example of how things can go wrong if organisations are not prepared to accept the outcomes of the AR process is illustrated by a case study in drugs prevention described by Todhunter

(2001). In this case the AR activity started to produce results that were not compatible with an existing regeneration agency who regarded the research as “merely serving to stir-up and magnify unjustified hostility towards its role in the area”. As a consequence other agencies withdrew their support and the project was abandoned. The residents involved in the research had challenged the existing power structures by questioning the legitimacy of some key agencies. The commissioning agency had not anticipated this and was unable to respond to their views. This case study illustrates how AR can successfully enable the voices and actions of local people but that this will not necessarily result in change if the existing power holders are not open to engaging with the results. It is a cautionary tale for those commissioning AR and demonstrates the need for thorough groundwork and honest reflection about how to respond to any unexpected or contentious outcomes.

5:4 Subjectivity and researcher bias

The questions of subjectivity and researcher bias need to be addressed in all scientific research. However, AR sits at the end of a continuum of views on the place of subjectivity in that it openly accepts the involvement of the researcher in the research process and does not demand that he/she takes the stance of an objective outsider. Other branches of social science that acknowledge subjectivity include ethnography and phenomenology. AR works from a paradigm “in which subjectivity is acknowledged as unavoidable and in fact the basis for truth” (Ladkin, 2005, p123) and bias and subjectivity are “natural and acceptable in action research” (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p60). There is, therefore, an imperative to acknowledge and critically examine the position of the researcher, to look for methods to continually question the subjective perspective, and examine underlying assumptions. From the perspective of a participatory worldview (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b) the researcher is already embodied in the world/social system and already active within it and cannot be detached or separate from it. As such, it is necessary to be both “situated and reflexive” (p7). The researcher must consciously reflect on and be aware of his/her own perspective, and be willing to try and stand outside of it. Ladkin (2005) uses insights from phenomenology to challenge the dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity. She quotes Moran’s view that

the whole point of phenomenology is that we cannot split off the subjective domain from the domain of the natural world as scientific naturalism has done. Subjectivity must be understood as inextricably involved in the process of constituting objectivity. (Moran cited in Ladkin, 2005, p122)

In other words, we can only know ‘objectively’ through our ‘subjective’ viewfinder.

Ladkin (2005) refers to a number of methods that action researchers can use to critically examine the positions they bring to the research process and to enable an enhanced appreciation of other perspectives. One of these is to adopt an approach of ‘critical subjectivity’ (Heron and Reason, 2001) whereby the researcher acknowledges, for example, their political and cultural roots, and observes and questions their habitual responses, especially those that seem inappropriate to the present event or situation. This way of working can facilitate learning and change for the researcher and enable them to develop a clearer view of the ‘other’ as they present themselves at that moment.

Another safeguard against bias is the collaborative nature of AR. The researcher is only one of a number of participants in the process and is not taking the role of ‘expert’ but rather of facilitator or enabler. Hence the perspective of the researcher is only one amongst many in the process of the co-generation of knowledge. Knowledge produced in this way will be meaningful to the actors involved and will be emergent and situated (Ladkin, 2005).

5.6 Critiques of participatory research

The literature on AR appears shy of direct engagement with critiques of the participatory process, although this is changing (e.g. see comments in Dick, 2011). Maybe because of the struggle to become accepted in mainstream social science, authors have tended to focus on its strengths more than any dilemmas it may throw up. In the wider literature on participatory research and participatory approaches generally much of the discussion revolves around a dissonance between the claims of theory and the reality of practice, and around issues of power and control. The practice of PAR is located within a complex milieu of local ‘community politics’, individual personalities, hidden and partially hidden histories, power inequalities, assumptions, expectations, and external influences. In other words it has to operate

within the ‘messes’ and the ‘swamps’ that characterise the social world (Ackoff, 1974; Schön, 1983). In each research setting the details of this environment will be locally contingent and derive from the particular mix of culture and society that the setting presents. It is hardly surprising therefore that the ideals of participation are rarely, if ever, enacted fully. This has been long recognised, as for example in Zakus and Lysack’s (1998) review of participation in health care in which they explain that “Community participation is a complex and fragile process there are many factors that operate to diminish its success” (p6). Challenges can arise from within and without the participant group. In an analysis of a community based PAR project Jacobs (2010) notes that factors such as externally imposed timescales and other peripheral pressures are the features most frequently mentioned in the literature as serious impediments to conducting participatory research.

In the UK the critique of participatory approaches was taken to a deeper level of analysis by the publication in 2001 of the somewhat controversially entitled book “Participation: The New Tyranny?” (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), which addressed issues raised by participatory approaches in the field of international development. The editors’ acknowledge prior critiques of practice (e.g. regarding ‘community’ as homogenous and ignoring power relations, biases, gender, age, class, ethnicity, religion, political co-option) but assert that the potential for the misuse of power is systemic in participatory development approaches, i.e. that “the discourse itself ... embodies the potential for an unjustified exercise of power” (p4), and this is the justification of their use of the description ‘tyranny’. The book exposes weaknesses in reflexivity and practice and provoked a response in the form of a second publication (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), which provided an answering narrative. This recognised the problems but argued that the evidence presented indicated overall that “there are good reasons for remaining optimistic concerning the potential of participatory approaches to development and governance to effect genuine transformations at a range of levels” (p. 20).

One early exception to the lack of engagement of the AR literature with these issues is Schafft and Greenwood (2003) who, despite being fully committed to participatory approaches, acknowledge a gap in critical perspectives. They use two Future

Search¹³ (Lewis and Walker et al., undated) case studies in which they were involved to illustrate three particular dilemmas. The first was the problem experienced in practice of involving a broad spectrum of people from the community, especially the difficulties of including “hard to reach” groups (e.g. unemployed, low income, disenfranchised youth). As a result it was realised that certain concerns and issues were never addressed by the Search process. They concluded that the difficulties of achieving a sufficiently broad representation to make participation meaningful should not be underestimated. The second difficulty was related to the first and was the observation that the “pre-existing dynamics of power continued to structure community interactions and planning efforts” (p27). The core groups of existing community activists that the researchers worked with initially were fairly homogenous and middle class. In spite of their willingness and efforts they were not able to fully involve ‘other’ groups and deep divisions and differences were not overcome. Schafft and Greenwood conclude that participatory methods may help to “level the playing field” but that existing and historical power relations will still play a significant role (p21). The third dilemma highlighted in this study was the initial failure of the community members to take forward the actions identified in the Search process. A criticism of much literature on participation is that it assumes that people have the will, time, and energy to commit to these processes (Schafft and Greenwood, 2003). In practice, as anyone who has experience of working with these methods can testify, this is often far from the case. The Action Teams formed to take forward the ideas generated by the Search process quickly collapsed due to lack of volunteers and time pressure on those involved. This was eventually overcome by the employment of co-ordinators to provide an organisational structure and liaison between the different groups and the core groups. Both Search programmes had identifiable positive outcomes, in spite of the difficulties identified. The analysis of the problems encountered very usefully draws attention to some of the limitations of the approach. Participatory processes and AR are often promoted in an idealistic or purist way that ignores the practical difficulties encountered in practice. In my narrative account of the research process in chapters 4 and 5 I raise some of the difficulties experienced in this research programme.

¹³ Future Search is a technique for bringing together large groups of diverse stakeholders (60-80) to create a shared vision for the future. See also: www.futuresearch.net

Mosse (2001) suggests that participatory methods can result in external interests being represented as local needs, and dominant interests as community concerns, thus using ‘participation’ as a tool for promoting agency led programmes as community led. A similar point is made by Greenwood and Levin (1998) in their remark that “The best way to blunt a reform is to co-opt it, to state approval of it, and to act in the opposite way” (p73). The AR literature recognises that this can and does occur and frequently make reference to the dangers of co-optation.

The focus on visible, formal groups is criticised by Cleaver (2001). Used as the source of local knowledge they can overlook and marginalise more informal structures and networks (which may well represent greater numbers of people). He does not argue that these socially embedded groups are superior to more formal groups as they can themselves be sources of inequality and exclusion. This view resonates with the difficulty experienced by the core groups in the work of Schafft and Greenwood described above in successfully involving a diverse range of people. A serious critique of participatory methods can be found in social psychology and the notion of group dysfunction. Interestingly, the roots of the study of groups within the field of social psychology can be traced back to Kurt Lewin (Cooke, 2001), often referred to as the founding father of AR. Work within this field also demonstrates the value of group processes and this research is summarised by Shaw (cited in Cooke, 2001) and includes evidence “that group membership motivates individuals, that groups usually produce more and better solutions than those working alone, and that they learn faster than individuals” (Cooke, 2001, p105). Cooke’s concerns revolve around research about what can go wrong in groups and he chooses four examples of group dysfunction to illustrate his point:

a) Risky Shift

Studies of group decision-making have found that members tend to take more risks than they would as individuals. Cooke gives this as an example of how the process of participation can influence outcomes (in an unintended way).

b) The Abilene Paradox

This analysis suggests that groups can make decisions that no-one in the group actually agrees with because members may say what they think everyone else wants to hear.

c) Groupthink

This theory is proposed by Janis and describes a set of group dynamics that can lead to decisions which are obviously bad or wrong to the outsider but which appear correct to members.

d) Coercive Persuasion

Schein's model of coercive persuasion describes a three stage mechanism by which group processes can be shaped to achieve a particular outcome or decision. In this case the group is 'manipulated' towards a particular decision.

Cooke's analysis contains some suggestions as to how these potential dysfunctions can be limited. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine these examples in detail, but each one poses a challenge to the AR practitioner. What is maybe surprising is the lack of AR literature which confronts these and other insights from social psychology. Reflecting on practice in the light of this knowledge has the potential to generate new insights into participatory practice and how it can be improved. A useful summary of the potential negative effects of participatory approaches is offered by Kesby and Kindon et al (2007), providing a stimulus to continual examination of the processes and outcomes of participatory processes in all contexts (Box 1).

Box 1: Some negative effects of participatory research

1. De-legitimisation of research methods that are *not* participatory.
2. Production of participants as subjects *requiring* ‘research’/‘development’.
3. Production of suitably disciplined subjects as *participants* expected to perform appropriately within participatory processes.
4. Retention of researchers’ control whilst presenting them as benign arbiters of neutral or benevolent processes.
5. Re-authorisation of researchers as experts *in* participatory processes.
6. Romanticisation or marginalisation of local knowledge produced through participatory processes.
7. Reinforcement of pre-existing power hierarchies among participating communities.
8. Legitimisation of elite local knowledge simply *because* it is produced through participatory processes.
9. Legitimisation of neoliberal programmes and institutions (such as the World Bank) that also deploy participatory approaches and/or techniques.

Source: (Kesby and Kindon et al., 2007, p21)

6. SUMMARY

In this chapter I have traced the history of AR from its beginnings in the first half of the 20th Century, through the growing momentum in the 1980s and 1990s, to the wider adoption of its principles and practice outside academia. Its focus on generating change through research using participatory approaches poses challenges and opportunities for academic researchers. The dilemmas for traditional research approaches have been reviewed and it is acknowledged that AR does not always fit comfortably within academic structures where knowledge production is closely related to career progression. This is not always an impediment as “many students who take up the action paradigm do so as professionals who are also students, that is, they are not looking for an academic position” (Bradbury Huang H., 2010, p107).

The AR literature is sometimes prone to idealism (Klocker, 2012) in its defence of its methods and values and has not always been actively engaged with valid critiques. The critiques highlighted by Cooke and Kothari (2001) have brought the debates out into the open and stimulated a more critical and robust dialogue (e.g. Hickey and Mohan, 2004). The continuing growth in interest and practice of AR both inside and

outside of academia suggests that it is becoming more widely accepted, despite the many difficulties resulting from research that is deeply embedded in social relations, and that it is performing an important role in offering a means for academic researchers to work closely with non-academics to work out solutions to pressing problems. It is shot through with genuine ethical concerns and a desire to “contribute to making a positive difference” (Bradbury Huang H., 2010, p97) and this fundamental motivation underlying AR will, I believe, ensure its continued growth and development as the world faces what is in recent history an unprecedented combination of major environmental, economic and social problems.

Having examined AR in some detail I now move in the following chapter to a study of CSA. I discovered an account of CSA and its various (global) forms that was fragmented and incomplete and I attempt to provide a more comprehensive account, linking it to the practice of community development.

CHAPTER 3

CSA AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

It's hands on. It's something practical. It's something positive. It builds community. It's nurturing. It gives people life. (Noah, a small CSA farmer in Iowa, quoted in Bell, 2004, p216)

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter traces the origins and growth of 'agri-food producer – consumer partnerships' from their beginnings in Japan and Europe, their growth in the US and their place in the UK and other European countries today, so fulfilling the first stated objective of the research programme and constructing a fuller account of CSA than has previously appeared. As a community development (CD) professional, I naturally approached the research from this particular standpoint and community-based PAR enabled me to adopt a CD approach to CSA. In section 3 I interrogate the linkages between CSA and CD.

When exploring the narrative relating to the UK I turn to the growing body of literature around what is loosely termed 'alternative food networks' (AFNs) and identify the philosophical roots and other forces that influenced the emergence of the movement and its distribution. In particular I am interested in the arguments about the wider transformative potential of CSA and other AFNs and in this context I suggest that they be usefully conceived as activities that take place in the interstices of hegemonic policy, discourse and practice. Using theories of change that suggest global reach can be achieved through the proliferation of small scale, embedded activity, I argue that there is a possibility of future food system change that is structural and global, whilst recognising that this appears highly optimistic from the present viewpoint.

Finally, in investigating the linkages between CSA and CD in the UK I show how CSA is intimately linked to the values and purpose of CD practice and that CSA has the potential to promote more vigorous community involvement around food

production and consumption. The focus of the connection is the encouragement of increased citizen involvement in decisions that have a direct impact on livelihoods. I provide a brief introduction and history of CD in this section because it is a term that is easily misunderstood and different meanings can be attributed by those outside of the profession.

In deciding upon an umbrella term to use for agri-food consumer producer partnerships I prefer to turn to the description created by the global network URGENCI¹⁴. However, the anglicised name for these partnerships (i.e. CSA – as used in the US, UK and Australia) is increasingly being adopted as the global umbrella term, but this does not reflect the origins of the movement and could unwittingly suggest superiority. The international network URGENCI uses the phrase “Local Solidarity Partnerships between Producers and Consumers” (LSPPC) to include all such partnerships including CSA, AMAP (France), ASC (Quebec), Teikei (Japan), and Reciproco (Portugal). As the focus of this study is CSA, I often adopt this term for consistency and convenience, but do not imply any primacy for CSA above other forms by doing so.

CSA is a ‘grassroots’ movement: it emerged entirely from the actions of individuals and groups of concerned people. Therefore there is no one definition and no one organisation or group that can claim ownership or define boundaries; it has arisen in different contexts producing a wide diversity of form and scale. There are differing views about exactly what enterprises should be included and some grey areas, for example at either end of the scale spectrum. The key feature that distinguishes it from other models that have a direct relationship between producers and consumers lies in the nature of that relationship. Consumers ‘join’ a CSA and become ‘members’; they enter into some form of partnership arrangement with the food producer and offer a level of commitment that represents more than an economic transaction. In many cases, some or all members engage in additional activities to support the enterprise by helping with food production directly or with the

¹⁴ www.URGENCI.net

administration or other activities. In some community initiated schemes all the food is produced by volunteer members.

2. COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE: ORIGINS AND GROWTH

This section examines in some detail how the LSPCC model arose independently in different locations and how it has now begun to come together as a fledgling global movement under the auspices of URGENCI. There is a lack of any such comprehensive account in the literature and although there are many gaps in this account (due to lack of access to literature in languages other than English for example) it is an attempt to fill this gap.

2.1 Beginnings

2.1.1 Japan

“In the beginning was Teikei” (JOAA, 1993). The story of Teikei as the cradle of producer-consumer organic food partnerships appears in many accounts of CSA (e.g. Henderson and Van En, 1999; Wells and Gradwell et al., 1999; McIlvaine-Newsad and Merrett et al., 2004; Lamine, 2005). These accounts usually describe how in the early 1970s groups of ‘housewives’, concerned about levels of chemical contamination in their food, approached farmers with a request that they grow a selection of vegetables without artificial fertilisers or herbicides. In return they promised to purchase the entire crop, thus forming producer-consumer partnerships. This consumer initiation did happen (e.g. Box 2) but there was also early engagement by farmers experiencing health problems from the over use of agricultural chemicals, and academics, also questioning the trajectory that Japanese society was taking.

Box 2: An account of the beginnings of Teikei

“we stormed our way into Miyoshi village...on October 3, 1973.....more than 20 consumers went there together. There were 60-70 people, both farmers and consumers...We made presentations to the farmers...to explain not only about the problems of detergent usage, hazardous food additive, oil protein, pesticide and other agro chemicals, chemical fertilizers and ready-made livestock feed blend but also extreme climate changes, emergency energy supplies and the low rate of self-sufficiency in Japan. We earnestly pleaded that we ourselves had to stand up, when food was industrialized and our lives and health were being threatened. We requested farmers to grow rice, fruits and vegetables without using any chemical fertilizers and agrochemicals...” (JOAA, 2010b, p81)

Iyo Toya, interviewed by Hiroko Kubota, Nov 29 1995. Translated by Ayako Hirakata and Louse Burford, Jan 2010: *“Organic Agriculture Movement Supported Also by Consumers”* Kobe 2010 Conference book, p81.

Following World War II Japan needed to re-invigorate its agriculture and national economy and successfully initiated rapid industrialisation, economic growth, and intensification of agriculture. By the 1960s, as Japan began to take its place at the table of the powerful nations, awareness of some of the negative impacts of this path began to be felt (Hashimoto, 2009). In particular, Minimata disease¹⁵, Itai-itai disease¹⁶, Polychlorinated Biphenyl (PCB) poisoning and the discovery of pesticide residues in breast milk, began to cause waves of public anxiety (Yasuda, 2010). In 1971 the iconic Japanese White Stork (*Ciconia boyciana*) became extinct in Japan, largely as a result of pesticide use (Naito and Ikeda, 2007). It was in this context that

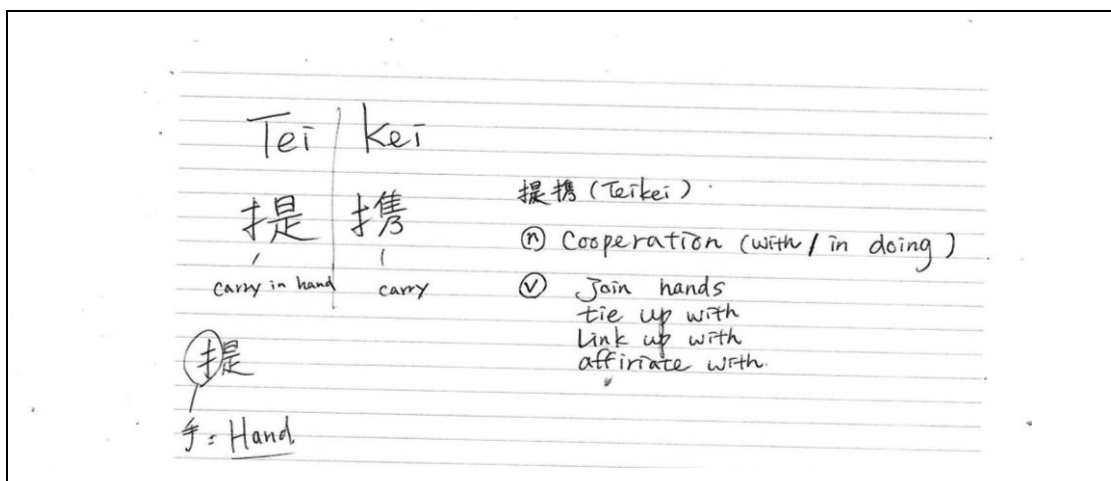
¹⁵ Minimata disease was caused by Mercury poisoning from industrial pollution first appearing in the town of Minimata. See e.g.

<http://www.unu.edu/unupress/unupbooks/uu35ie/uu35ie0c.htm#iv.%20the%20discovery%20of%20minamata%20disease%20and%20the%20difficulty%20in%20determining%20its%20cause> accessed 05/05/10

¹⁶ Itai-itai disease - Cadmium poisoning. See e.g. <http://www.kanazawa-med.ac.jp/~pubhealt/cadmium2/itaitai-e/itai01.html> accessed 05/05/10

Teruo Ichiraku initiated the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) in October 1971. Members include producers, consumers, and academics. From the outset, organic agriculture in Japan was conceived in much broader terms than simply converting to alternative production techniques. Teikei was the chosen vehicle to develop the production and distribution of organic products. Teikei is often given the meaning of “food with a farmer’s face”, which correctly conveys the emphasis it puts on consumer-producer relationships. The precise meaning of the Japanese term is more accurately translated as ‘co-operation’ and contains meanings such as ‘joining hands’ (see Figure 1). According to the JOAA, “true Teikei is a warm relationship between people” (JOAA, 2010c p72).

Figure 1: The meaning of Teikei



Source: Eri Oharta, personal communication February 2010

The message that Teikei and organic farming are not simply alternative production and distribution systems is repeated by many authors, and especially by the founders and early members (e.g. Hashimoto, 2009; Murayama, 2009; Epp, 2010b; JOAA, 2010c; Furusawa, undated). The origins of the movement are rooted in Asian philosophy and nature (Hill and Kubota, 2007) and for its most committed followers, Teikei seems to be construed as an answer to the question “how can I live a good life?” Concepts such as co-existence, symbiosis (Furusawa, undated), co-operation, self-reliance, and mutual support appear frequently. Consumers may initially join purely out of concern for food safety but the experience of belonging to a Teikei

PART 1: CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Chapter 3: CSA and Community Development

group can lead to wider learning and a broadening of understanding to include economic and environmental issues (Epp, 2010a). This is supported by the words of Iyo Toya:

In the beginning the movement was all about food and its safety, but...I now believe that it has to be setting the world right by changing current economic priorities, changing the way we disrespect life to enhancing the importance of life, and to change from the tendency to consider science as all omnipotent, to a science that is nature centered, and respectful of life. (JOAA, 2010b, p85)

The JOAA places organic agriculture in opposition to the market driven economy and is overtly anti-capitalist. Their 1971 statement of purpose declares:

The so-called modernization (of agriculture) has been promoted primarily from a capitalist viewpoint, and from which it is extremely difficult to hold out hope and positive expectations for the further of our Nation's agriculture. (JOAA, 2010a, p92)

This wider vision that encompasses a protest against the dominant neo-liberal, consumerist paradigm and calls for a complete change in lifestyle appears to be held most strongly by the leaders and initiators of Teikei (see Box 3). These views are encapsulated in the Ten Principles of Teikei that were agreed by the JOAA in 1978 (see addendum).

Box 3: Understandings of Teikei

“The essence of Teikei is not a “transaction of merchandise” but a partnership to work closely together to co-produce and sustain healthy farms and people as friendly equal partners helping and understanding each other even as a family. This must be preceded by a total review of the lifestyle on both sides, both the producers and consumers.” (JOAA, 2010c, p73)

“It is the new relationship that can save humanity and nature and is a quiet revolution to build an everlasting stable society in place of the capitalist economy.” (JOAA, 2010c, p75)

“It is the self sufficiency based on human relations that is essential to world peace. That is why I say the organic agriculture conducted as a way of eating and as a way of farming had broad implication for human survival on this earth and is the only solution for this issue.” (Teruo Ichiraku quoted in JOAA, 2010c, p73)

“Teikei system stresses in the ecologically [sic] way of life rather than technical emphasis on sustainable agriculture. We think that the problems of the present agricultural condition will not change by just converting conventional farms and farmers to organic.” (Hashimoto, 2009, p2)

“my deeply held conviction that our movement will succeed in building an alternative society in a world of peace where, instead of bullets and missiles, we will exchange seeds and recipes.” (Henderson, 2002)

“CSA is an experiment in creating an “oikonomia” – a household that nurtures the life of the people on the land ... in which people share life together, that’s what an economy is, what culture is, a shared life. It’s not about money.” (Epp, 2010b)

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An example of one of the first Teikei groups is Hashimoto Farm in Ichijima (established 1975). Shinji Hashimoto's farm comprises 0.8 ha on which he grows 40-50 varieties of vegetables and keeps a flock of 4-500 hens in a barn. He belongs to a group of five farmers who between them supply approximately 400 households in Kobe. At its peak in the 1980s this group consisted of thirty farmers supplying around 1,500



households. There is a managing committee and two meetings are held each year between producers and consumers to agree prices, varieties, and quantities of vegetables to be produced etc. Distribution is organised and paid for by consumers and shares are delivered to each family¹⁷. As is the case in other countries, Teikei groups are quite diverse, ranging in size from less than 10 members to over 5,000 (JOAA, 1993). There is some disagreement around the status of the larger groups that take the form of consumer co-operatives, which some consider to fall outside of the spirit of Teikei. Others regard them as “applications of the Teikei philosophy in larger scales” (Murayama, 2009). There has been no accurate records kept of numbers of Teikei groups (and this is further complicated by disagreements over which groups should qualify as such). The peak is assumed to have been reached in the 1980s and 1990s with an estimated 832 groups in 1990, with declining numbers from the mid 1990s (Parker, 2005).

Japan is not the only country to have faced the environmental and social problems of the industrialisation and intensification of agricultural production, so why did Teikei develop here in particular? Without more detailed research any answer to this

¹⁷ I visited Hashimoto farm and Takagi Organic farm (another from the group of 5, producing rice) in February 2010 as part of the IVth International Symposium of the Network URGENCI (www.URGENCI.net)

question is purely speculative but it is likely that the social and historical context was an important factor. Three factors seem particularly relevant. First, farm sizes in Japan are very small by Western standards with 80% being 1.5ha or below (JOAA, 1993), larger properties having been redistributed to tenant farmers as a result of land reform in 1946 (Parker, 2005). Second, there is a strong tradition of co-operative working. Mainly as a result of the small farm size most farmers belong to regional producer co-operatives and since the 1950s there has developed a very strong consumer co-operative movement (Parker, *ibid*). According to the Seikatsu Club website there are around 600 consumer co-operatives with 22 million members¹⁸, many of which deal with food as well as other products and services. The Seikatsu Club Consumers' Co-operative Union is relatively new having started in 1990 and is an association of 29 consumer co-operatives. It boasts 307,000 members, most of whom are women. It shares many of the environmental concerns of Teikei and is involved in promoting recycling, food safety, eco-friendly packaging, and campaigning against GMOs. A key difference to traditional Teikei groups according to Hatano (2008) is that these co-operatives are also interested in obtaining lower prices for consumers as a central motivation. So although the founders of Japanese organic agriculture and Teikei initially experienced opposition from some farmers¹⁹ and academics (Yasuda, 2010) the experience of and familiarity with farmer and consumer co-operatives may have paved the way for consumer-producer partnerships. Third, particular features of Japanese development may have contributed to the strength of consumer concern about the chemical contamination of food. The speed at which Japan transformed itself into a modern industrialised society resulted in substantial environmental, as well as social and economic changes. A culture of silence and denial seemed to surround some of the worst examples of food chain contamination (e.g. Minimata disease) so that the problems were not addressed for many years (Ui, 1992). In 1975 Sawako Ariyoshi published a book entitled 'Fukugouosen' (Complex Pollution) that was the Japanese equivalent of Rachel Carson's 'Silent Spring' and provided consumers with more information

¹⁸ www.seikatsuclub.coop/english accessed 11/03/10

¹⁹ As described by one such farmer (name unknown) in a workshop at 1Vth International Symposium of the network URGENCI, Kobe Gakuen University, Japan 18-22 February 2010

(Hashimoto, 2009). In this context, it is not surprising that women (who were mostly occupied in the role of housewife at this time) acted together and sought the co-operation of producers to provide them with safe food for their families.

Many of the more recent models of consumer-producer partnerships look to Teikei for inspiration, yet paradoxically, Teikei has been in decline for a decade and is now looking to the US and France for possible answers to stem the decline, and in particular to attract younger participants. This decline is occurring at the same time as interest in organic products is growing. The deeply held philosophical underpinnings of the founders are not necessarily shared by a generation with no experience outside the current capitalist neo-liberal society and who have grown up enjoying all the benefits of industrialisation with its attendant choice and availability of products from around the globe. Yasuda Shigeru, one of the academics involved in the early days of Teikei, is concerned that the “underlying philosophies” are being lost (Yasuda, 2010). Hatano (2008) also observes that some Teikei farmers have concentrated on production and not embraced the wider aims by, for example, encouraging the establishment of new groups or adopting a more wholly ecological lifestyle. Hatano also describes the causes for the stagnation of Teikei as being a result of changes in the nature of participants, changes in the organic market, and changes in society. He observes that other examples of co-operative systems are also stagnating. Both farmers and consumer members are ageing and are not being replaced by younger members. The reliance on the voluntary work of housewives, who were the “driving force of the Teikei movement” (Hatano, *ibid*, p32) has resulted in a fall in volunteer availability as women have increasingly joined the labour market. When Teikei started in the 1970s organic produce was not available in shops and there was no certification system or standards. Today, organic produce is much more widely available and standards have been introduced²⁰. The introduction of standards has not been universally welcomed by producers and many Teikei farmers remain uncertified. There is an ongoing debate about the future of Teikei in Japan with some pressing for adaptation and change (e.g. Hatano, 2008),

²⁰ JAS – Japanese Agricultural Standards introduces a standard for plant products in 2000 and for livestock products in 2005

and others wanting to find ways of retaining the traditional form. The younger generation can find this unwillingness to change difficult to understand. One young person I met in Japan expressed the opinion that Teikei was locked in the past and too attached to its roots in the protest movement of the 1960s and 1970s when pollution was a serious problem. She felt it was also “too inward looking and family focussed” and not necessary now that organic food was easily available through more conventional outlets²¹. The future for Teikei is difficult to predict. The growth of CSA and other consumer-producer partnerships around the globe is providing support and encouragement. The global connections being forged via the establishment of URGENCI is resulting in renewed impetus and solidarity and a respect for Teikei as the earliest example of the model.

2.1.2 Germany/Switzerland – the biodynamic connection

Germany and Switzerland are usually also credited with early examples of consumer-producer partnerships (e.g. McFadden, 2003; Miles and Brown, 2005) and it is well documented that the first two examples of CSA in the US were influenced by farms in these countries. Trauger Groh spent 15 years at Buschberghof Farm in Northern Germany before starting Temple-Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire (Henderson and Van En, 1999) and Robyn Van En was influenced by Jan Vander Tuin, who had been working at Topinambur, a biodynamic farm near Zurich (Henderson, 2010). Groh and others established Buschberghof in 1968 on land acquired through a community land trust. They were strongly influenced by Rudolph Steiner (1861-1925) and adopted a biodynamic approach to agriculture (Groh and McFadden, 1997). Biodynamic farming is “a unified approach to agriculture that relates the ecology of the earth-organism to that of the entire cosmos”²² and was the first example of an intentional organic agricultural movement to develop in response to the increasing use of chemicals in agriculture (Miles and Brown, 2005).

Steiner was a multi-disciplinarian and his achievements spanned many fields including philosophy, theology, education, architecture and agriculture (Hilmar,

²¹ Hiromi, personal communication February 2010

²² <http://www.biodynamics.com/biodynamics> accessed 18/05/10

1997). His many influences include the idea of “associative economics” that encourages collaboration between different players and situates economics within a social and environmental framework. It encourages interaction between stakeholders (producers, traders, consumers) and explicitly addresses human needs, fair price, poverty eradication, equity and environmental impact²³. It is an approach that places meeting human needs and caring for the planet above profit as the primary motivating forces for economic activity; profit is still important, but is viewed as a necessary by-product rather than the primary driver of economic activity (Karp, 2008). Both Karp (ibid) and Lamb (1994) link this approach with the present day sustainable food movement, and with CSA in particular. The partnership and collaboration between producers and consumers inherent in CSA provides a foundation for building the sort of economic relations envisage by Steiner. In the case of these early producer-consumer partnerships in Europe, and later in the US (see 2.2.1), the connection seems clear. Associative economics provided an underpinning approach to an attempt to create an alternative market for agricultural products. Buschberghof was initially financed by a network of members (an “Agriculturally Cooperating Community”) who provided loans to farmers (Miles and Brown, 2005). It was only following the establishment of Temple Wilton Farm CSA by Groh in 1986 that Buschberghof began to move towards being a fully fledged CSA. By 2009 they were supplying 92 households with vegetables, a selection of red meats, poultry, eggs, milk and dairy products, and 13 types of bread baked at the farm’s bakery. According to Henderson (2010) there are now eleven similar farms in Germany modelled on Buschberghof, which has also helped start three in Norway. The formative influence of biodynamic farming and the link to associative economics is not often acknowledged in accounts of CSA, but it was clearly important in early developments in both Europe and the US. Whilst biodynamic farming no longer dominates CSA farming these formative ideas, especially those of associative economics, remain relevant to debates about the future direction of CSA.

²³ http://www.cadi.ph/glossary_of_terms.htm accessed 18/05/10

In Switzerland, Les Jardins de Cocagne²⁴, a consumer co-operative near Geneva was started in 1978. This enterprise has grown and is still operating, supplying produce to 400 members from 17ha (Henderson, 2010). Jan Vander Tuin travelled in Switzerland and Germany learning about associative economics and in 1984 was one of the founders of Topinambur, a biodynamic CSA farm near Zurich (Miles and Brown, 2005; Henderson, 2010). Henderson (2010) reports that there were only three CSA farms in Switzerland for many years but that six new ones have formed more recently, inspired by the success of the model in France since 2001 (see below).

There is no evidence of any communication taking place in the developmental stage between Teikei in Japan and the European projects. The major influence in Europe seems to have been Steiner, and also learning from the co-operative movement in Chile during the Allende administration (1970-73) (Miles and Brown, 2005; Henderson, 2010). That the concept spread from Europe to the US is undisputed and it found fertile ground amongst groups seeking alternative ways of living and producing food.

2.2 Growth

This section traces the global growth of the movement. Beginning with its establishment in the US, it turns to progress in Europe and finishes with an account of its introduction and establishment in the UK.

2.2.1 United States

It was Robyn Van En and colleagues who first used the term ‘CSA’ to describe their new venture at Indian Line farm, Massachusetts, in 1986. Van En was trained as a Waldorf kindergarten teacher and was therefore familiar with the ideas of Rudolph Steiner on whose philosophy of anthroposophy Waldorf schools are built. She was looking for a cooperative model for her newly acquired farm and responded readily to the ideas that Jan Vander Tuin brought with him from his experiences in Switzerland and Germany (Van En, 1996). The Schumacher Society was located nearby and the Director, Susan Witt, was involved in the early discussions. All of those involved were knowledgeable about anthroposophy and biodynamic farming.

²⁴ <http://www.cocagne.ch/Histo.htm> (in french)

Witt commented that they perceived CSA as a way of bringing together Steiner's associative economics and Schumacher's promotion of local economies (McFadden, 2003).

At around the same time (and not too far away) Trauger Groh, together with Lincoln Geiger and Anthony Graham, was setting up Temple Wilton Community Farm in New Hampshire. Strongly influenced by Steiner, they were motivated by a desire to establish a local biodynamic farm with and for the community and they gathered together a group of around twenty families willing to form an association, the Community Farm. Some members had land available, others farming skills, and others would contribute financially. The radical model adopted for financing the farm demonstrates the practical application of the concept of associative economics. Groh explains it as having "the human being and his or her needs at the heart of our economy This attitude ... is the basis of associative economy" (Groh and McFadden, 1997, p35). Each season, the annual budget is presented by the farmers to the members who then say how much they can contribute to the total amount. The amounts are not fixed so that those who can afford more make a higher value pledge, (Groh and McFadden, *ibid*). Buschberghof farm in Germany adopted this approach, as does Elizabeth Henderson's CSA farm, Genesee Valley (they operate a sliding scale for a full share and invite members to pay what they can afford²⁵), deliberately severing the connection between food and money: each member takes as much food as they need, regardless of the amount of their pledge. This rejection of the conventional economic transactions of the market place reflects the philosophical foundations as set out in the original "Aims and Intentions" of the founders. These are categorised as "Spiritual, Legal, and Economic" Aims, the primacy being given to the spiritual or visionary aspect rather than economic aims: "Individual profit through farming is not an economic aim of the farmers."²⁶ These farms are making an attempt to de-commodify the production of food as far as possible; as Groh says: "Farming is so essential that one has to do it at any cost. We can stop making sewing machines or VCRs and life will go on, but we can't stop farming" (Groh and

²⁵ <http://www.gvocsa.org/index.html>

²⁶ <http://templewiltoncommunityfarm.com/a-brief-history-of-the-farm/> accessed 19/05/10

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McFadden, 1997, p107). This system depends for its success on the building of relationships of trust and shared responsibility. If a member does not fulfil their obligations it is made clear that no action will be taken against them and any potential loss must be mitigated by the efforts of the other members. The farm celebrated its 25th anniversary in June 2010. It now provides vegetables, milk, yoghurt, eggs, and meat for 100 households from 130 acres. It has survived several crises and has had to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. It has succeeded in maintaining its core values and the original Aims and Intentions as laid out in 1986 remain.

Most CSAs in the US have not adopted such a radical approach but these two pioneering farms inspired a wave of new CSAs so that by 1990 there was an estimated 37 CSA projects throughout North America and Canada (Lamb, 1994). Growth continued and DeMuth (1993) records around 400 in the US by 1993, and Van En 500 by 1995 (Van En, 1995). By 1999 the number had grown to around 1,000 (Lass and Stevenson et al., 2003). The latest estimate (2010) for the numbers of CSAs in the US is 2,500 (Martinez and Hand et al., 2010) or between 3-4,000²⁷. Almost all CSAs practice some form of organic or near-organic agriculture (Lass and Stevenson et al., 2003; McIlvaine-Newsad and Merrett et al., 2004; Adam, 2006); the connection with the Biodynamic Association remains and it lists 600 CSAs on its database²⁸. The Spring 2008 edition of its magazine “Biodynamics” is entitled “Associative Economics and Community Supported Agriculture”, celebrating the success of CSA and exploring the future development of the associative economy. A typical feature of LSPPCs is their diversity and CSAs in the US are no exception although the majority of CSAs in the US are farmer led (Lass and Stevenson et al., 2003; McIlvaine-Newsad and Merrett et al., 2004; Adam, 2006) and members are often referred to as ‘Subscribers’. Attempts to categorise CSAs have been made based on whether they are farmer or consumer directed, single or multi farm based,

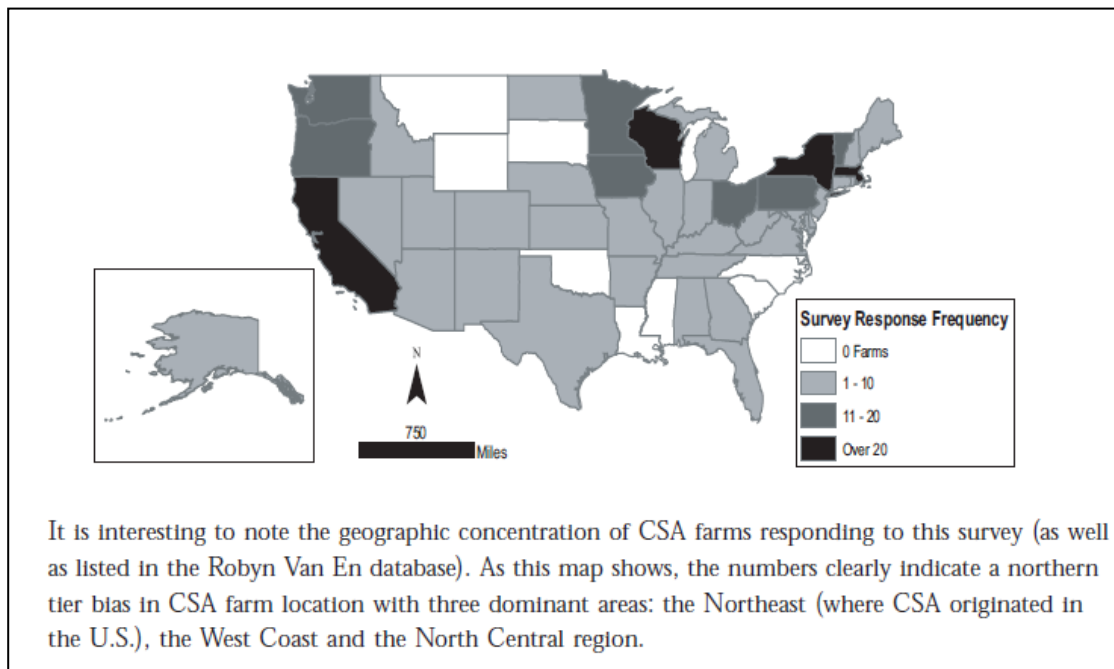
²⁷ Jim Sluyter, Michigan Land Use Institute. Personal communication (22/02/10). There is no agreement on the exact number, Robyn Van En Center states 1,430 (personal communication 15/12/09), and the figure of 12,549 for 2007 recorded on the USDA website is disputed by my other sources.

²⁸ <http://www.biodynamics.com/csa1.html> accessed 20/05/10

and the land ownership and decision making arrangements (Greer, 1999; Soil Association, 2001a; Lyson, 2004; Adam, 2006). The most obvious broad distinction in the US lies between ‘subscription’ CSAs where the farmer is in control of most decision making and does not require subscribers to participate practically in the farm, and ‘shareholder’ CSAs that are consumer driven, where typically the farmer is hired by the organising group who also make most of the decisions (Adam, 2006). According to Adam (ibid) more than 75% of CSAs in the US follow the former model. Some of these subscription farms can be large and at some distance from their members and, as with the larger cooperatives in Japan, the question arises as to whether they should be included in the CSA family as the connection between the farmer(s) and the members is no longer ‘face to face’ (Schnell, 2007). However the majority of CSA farms are smaller than US farms in general and many have other outlets for their production and do not devote their entire acreage to CSA. Lass and Bevis et al (2003) consider that the best indicator of the typical size of farms with CSA enterprises is the median figure of 15 acres, with a median of 7 acres of cropland, with CSA typically being just one of several farm enterprises (such as also selling at a farmer’s market, farm gate etc).

Twenty five years after the first CSAs appeared in the US in New England a noticeable spatial clustering has developed, particularly in the Northeast, West Coast and Northern Central States (Figure 2) (Lass and Stevenson et al., 2003; McIlvaine-Newsad and Merrett et al., 2004; Qazi and Selfa, 2005; Schnell, 2007).

Figure 2: Distribution of CSA Farms in the US



Source: (Lass and Stevenson et al., 2003, p3)

Lyson and Guptill (2004) observe the same phenomena for the more generalised category of ‘civic agriculture’²⁹, with highest concentrations appearing in the Northeast, concluding that “direct marketing/civic agriculture is associated with ... specific social, economic, and demographic characteristics of localities” (p382). All these authors observe that clustering appears close to metropolitan areas where there is easy access to urban residents. Schnell (2007), noting the lack of any in-depth studies of the geography of CSAs, identified other characteristics of counties with CSAs. He found that in addition to proximity to metropolitan areas, CSAs tended to be in places where there are more and smaller farms, higher incomes, higher levels of education, a low African American population, and where there is stronger support for the Democratic party (equated with ‘progressive politics’, although he tempers

²⁹ Civic Agriculture is a term adopted by Lyson in his book of the same name to refer to the “rebirth of locally based agriculture and food productionactivities (which are) tightly linked to a community’s social and economic development” (Lyson, 2004, p1). Examples given are CSA, farmers’ markets, and community gardens.

Lyson, T. A. (2004) *Civic Agriculture: reconnecting farm, food, and community*. Medford: Tufts University Press.

this with the view that it may be more accurate to describe CSA farmers and members as often sharing a ‘libertarian streak’ (p557), rather than a particular political affiliation). The idea that the prevailing political ideologies in a location play an important role in the adoption and spread of CSAs and other AFNs is supported by Qazi and Selfa who take a political ecology approach to exploring the uneven spatial distribution of alternative food networks (including CSAs). They argue that the social history and social constructions of agriculture, together with the natural environment, influence both the type of alternative that emerges and the underlying rationales. Several University towns have attracted clusters of CSAs (e.g. Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, Madison) suggesting that more highly educated populations are more likely to have concerns about industrial agriculture (Schnell, 2007).

Research on CSA in the US has elicited some information about the characteristics of producers and members and their motivations. The producers (farmers/growers) are more likely to be younger and more highly educated than their non-CSA peers and many have moved into farming from other professions, bringing non-agricultural skills and knowledge with them (Cone and Myhre, 2000; Lass and Bevis et al., 2003; McIlvaine-Newsad and Merrett et al., 2004; Schnell, 2007). More of them are women compared to conventional farmers, prompting some scholars to investigate CSA in relation to gender (DeLind and Ferguson, 1999; Wells and Gradwell, 2001). Active members of CSAs are also more likely to be women (DeLind and Ferguson, 1999) and Cone and Myhre (2000) found that the farms in their survey depended heavily on the participation of women who were not in full-time employment. The motivations for choosing to become a CSA farmer are inclined to be moral, thoughtful, and indicative of a desire for change in the food system (Cone and Myhre, 2000; Wells and Gradwell, 2001; Worden, 2004). Worden discovered farmers had multiple goals that could be summarised as marketing, community, education and environment, but also found “important philosophical dimensions to growers’ motivations” (2004, p323) that could not be captured in these categories. These deeper motivations include a philosophy of “right livelihood” or meaningful work, and building an associative economy. Wells and Gradwell (2001) interpret farmer’s motivations as an expression of ‘care’ – care for the environment, people,

communities, and the future. This conceptualisation of CSA as being founded on an ethic of care is explored in greater depth in chapter 6. Their conclusion that “CSA is a system of marketing but not just that” (ibid, p117) echoes the sentiments expressed by the founders and practitioners of Teikei in Japan, a resistance to the suggestion that CSA is purely an alternative form of marketing within the conventional food system.

The reasons given by members for joining a CSA are to source fresh, organic produce, support local farming, traceability, and concern for the environment (DeLind and Ferguson, 1999; Cone and Myhre, 2000; O'Hara and Stagl, 2001). O'Hara and Stagl (2002) also observed that CSA members demonstrate an above average interest in environmental issues and the local economy and tend to be better educated than non-members. Factors influencing the probability of consumers joining a CSA have been identified as existing shopping habits (people who shop outside of supermarkets some of the time are more likely to join) and a preference for buying locally (Stagl and O'Hara, 2002). People who hear about CSA by word of mouth and who are more highly educated are also more likely to join (Kolodinsky and Pelch L.L., 1997). Neither of these two studies found income levels to be a significant factor, although studies report contradictory evidence on this point (Stagl and O'Hara, 2002). Cone and Myhre (2000) were surprised to find that only 35% of respondents in their survey of members said that “a sense of doing something with a community” was a motivating factor. This finding is corroborated by O'Hara and Stagl who concluded that “Members seem to be strongly motivated by social goals, but most of them do not look for community ties through their membership” (2002, p522), and by Ostrom, who found farmers' expectations of member involvement were rarely met. Members rated community building and learning about agriculture less important reasons for participation in a CSA than obtaining fresh, organic, local produce (Ostrom, 2007).

Government policy in the US has influenced the development trajectory of local food systems (Hinrichs and Charles, 2012). Post World War II, agricultural policy has strongly driven US agriculture towards intensification and specialisation, resulting in increased yields, larger farms, fewer people employed in agriculture, and largely

negative impacts on the environment, animal welfare, and rural communities. It has also disconnected farmers and consumers (Lyson, 2004). In contrast to this overall trend there have been a growing number of initiatives that support local and regional food system development. These include the Farmer-to-Consumer Direct Marketing Act (1976), the USDA's³⁰ Farmer's Market Promotion Programme, and several provisions within the 2008 Farm Bill including the Value-Added Producer Grants Programme, and the Local and Regional Food Enterprise Guaranteed Loan Programme. The USDA recognises and supports CSA as an alternative marketing strategy and describes it as:

*a community of individuals who pledge support to a farm operation so that the farmland becomes, either legally or spiritually, the community's farm, with the growers and consumers providing mutual support and sharing the risks and benefits of food production. Typically, members or "share-holders" of the farm or garden pledge in advance to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmer's salary. In return, they receive shares in the farm's bounty throughout the growing season, as well as satisfaction gained from reconnecting to the land and participating directly in food production. Members also share in the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavorable weather or pests.*³¹

Links to research and information about CSA are also provided on the USDA website (<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml>).

More recently, President Barack Obama has voiced his support for local food systems:

Barack Obama and Joe Biden recognize that local and regional food systems are better for our environment and support family-scale producers. They will emphasize the need for Americans to Buy Fresh and Buy Local, and they will implement USDA policies that promote local and regional food systems. (Obama and Biden, undated)

In September 2009, in response to Obama's challenge to reinvigorate local food systems the USDA launched a new initiative, 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your

³⁰ United States Department of Agriculture

³¹ <http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml> (accessed 01/10/11)

Food’ (www.usda.gov/knowyourfarmer). The emphasis is placed on the economic benefits of connecting consumers with local producers and includes a grants programme for funding ‘Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food’ projects. This would appear to be a move towards a more favourable and co-ordinated policy environment for CSA and other local food system models such as farmers’ markets. However, the vast majority of food production remains within the control of corporate business and turning around this dominant system will require change on a much deeper and broader scale.

CSA in the US then, has its roots in progressive and radical philosophies, but as it has developed over the past 25 years, it has taken many and diverse forms and is interpreted differently by different actors. Many authors describe it as a conscious opposition to a globalised, industrialised, commodified agriculture and an example of a deliberate ‘alternative’, forming one of a number of experiments in forming alternative food networks (e.g. Cone and Myhre, 2000; O’Hara and Stagl, 2001; McIlvaine-Newsad and Merrett et al., 2004; Schnell, 2007; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007; Feagan and Henderson, 2008). Early adopters, pioneers, many CSA farmers/growers and some members express motivations that support this more radical model and view CSA as an agent of social change, whether this is limited to the food system, or a broader vision for the creation of an associative economy, or a more person centred, caring capitalism. But it is also clear that for others it is regarded simply as a production or consumption choice. As several surveys show, for some CSA members it is primarily a means of obtaining a source of fresh, organically grown food with maybe the added values of supporting local small farms and more environmentally friendly production methods (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995; Kolodinsky and Pelch L.L., 1997; Cone and Myhre, 2000). As in Japan, there appears to be a tension between these perspectives, although in the US this is not a generational division. There is some evidence that joining a CSA can result in broader lifestyle changes and a growth in critical consciousness that might result in wider food system activism (Allen and FitzSimmons et al., 2003; Ostrom, 2007; Russell and Zepeda, 2008) and this is discussed more fully in section 3. Some authors suggest that if CSA is to spread into more culturally conservative locations the link with progressive or anti-capitalist politics will need to be severed and it

would be more successfully viewed through the lens of more traditional values of promoting self-reliance and hard work (Qazi and Selfa, 2005; Schnell, 2007). Others stress the potential for CSA (and other alternative sustainable agriculture models) to be a driving force for change in the wider society and economy (Lamb, 1994; Karp, 2008). In practice the diversity of CSA enterprises in the US seems to reflect this tension with the biodynamic farms such as Temple Wilton at one end of the spectrum and the larger subscription farms at the other. These questions are discussed further in section 2.2.4.

2.2.2 *Rest of Europe*

Examples of LSPPCs in the rest of Europe are widespread and uneven. I have only an incomplete picture due to language constraints and the unavailability of any detailed research. The case of France, where the idea has “spread like wildfire” (Henderson, 2010), is particularly interesting. Despite arriving in France later than in the UK there are now around 1,500 groups³², known as ‘AMAPs’ (*Association pour le Maintien d’une Agriculture Paysanne*). The first group was established by farmers Denise and Daniel Vuillon, near Aubagne in Provence on their 10ha farm, in response to increasing financial difficulties selling to supermarkets and at the farm gate. They learnt about CSA from a visit to the US and they set up their group in 2001, naming it an ‘AMAP’ and distributing 40 shares. By 2003 they were selling all their produce this way to three AMAP groups, each comprising around 70 households. They now employ four full-time staff. The success of the model in saving their farm from economic failure prompted them to share the idea across the country, a mission that appears to have been very successful. They initially set up Alliance Provence (2001) to assist other farmers to set up AMAPs in the locality, and this organisation received support from the regional government of Provence-Alpes Côte d’Azur.³³ There are now many regional Alliances and also a National AMAP network providing information about AMAPs (including a Charter produced by the Provence Alliance setting out the values, principles, and commitments of AMAPs), information and resources for setting up new AMAPs, and a facility to locate

³² This figure was given to me by Jérôme Dehondt at Kobe 2010; also see <http://www.reseau-amap.org/>, website of the national network

³³ This story of the establishment of France’s first CSA is taken mainly from Henderson, 2010.

existing groups. The Vuillon's were also instrumental in the establishment of the international network URGENCI, which held its first meeting in Aubagne in 2004 with representation from 15 countries (Vuillon, 2009). Aware of the rapid emergence of CSA in France, I asked a university colleague fluent in French to send an introductory email to the national AMAP organisation to circulate to their members, explaining who I am and asking if anyone would be willing to answer some questions in English. I sent out a short questionnaire to the 15 members who responded and received three completed forms, one from a producer in the Rhône-Alpes region and two from members of another AMAP near Grenoble (also in the Rhône-Alpes region). Both these examples were consumer initiated. One was started because of a waiting list for the four existing AMAPs in the area. Both began by linking a vegetable grower with a group of consumers. One has now expanded to include five producers and a diversity of products (vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, cheese, yoghurt, and bread). In both cases some produce is sold outside of the AMAP. One respondent describes what belonging to an AMAP means to her:

On top of the fact that I have weekly fresh organic products at low cost, it has just decrease [sic] by half the time spent in food shopping. I just have to pick the basket once a week (may take less than 5 min. when I'm in hurry, but most of the time, I'm spending over time with people talking....) in a pleasant place without any aggressive marketing to make me buy things I don't need. The overall spent for food has decrease also as I'm not getting into mall for shopping, removing the temptation of buying extra not needed things or throwing away products of poor quality that the children were not eating. The food is healthier at home; children are eating vegetables with pleasure as they are tasty (when whittling carrots, half of them are eaten by the children before managing to get into the pan 😊). Every week, I'm seeing the farmer that is growing the vegetable for us, having discussion with him. Human relationship is back. I have also discover a lot of new recipe for cooking vegetable (I've got a terrific recipe of pumpkins gnocchi...) and start back to eat some I was not cooking for ages as they were not available in common market.

These sound like the words of a very satisfied customer, who has identified economic, health, and social benefits and is gaining a level of enjoyment and probably increased quality of life from her engagement with the group.

Some possible explanations for the rapid growth of AMAPs were suggested by Anita Aggarwal following her attendance at the 1st URGENCI conference in 2004 as a representative of the Soil Association. She proposed that the prevailing economic climate for producers (rising land prices and falling produce prices), consumer awareness of environmental and social justice issues, consumer preference for local foods, support from local Government, and the enthusiasm and drive of the early AMAP farmers as probable contributory factors (Aggarwal, 2004). She quoted a conference participant: “People join AMAP for political, idealistic, financial etc. reasons and stay because they make friends.” There is little available academic research to back up these suggestions. However, a study undertaken in the Dijon and Dole areas in France investigating the characteristics of members who join community supported farms found that member households tend to be younger, have higher incomes, and belong to other associations (in comparison to non-member households). They also concluded that they care more about environmental and social attributes and less about cosmetic and price attributes (Bougherara and Grolleau et al., 2009). This would seem to support the assertion that consumer awareness of environmental issues is a contributory factor. Lamine (2005) undertook three case studies of alternative schemes linking producers and consumers in France, one of which was an AMAP. She argues that the emergence of local producer-consumer partnerships is directly linked to the food crises of the 1990s and the multiple concerns and uncertainties that consumers experience around food, concerns which she classifies as ‘concern for self and concern for the environment’ (p330). It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that the rapid growth of AMAPs was the result of the equivalent of ‘the perfect storm’ in the form of challenging economic conditions for producers, early adopters who became enthusiastic activists and promoters, institutional support in the form of Local Government endorsement and financial support for network development, and a cultural environment conducive to consumer support for local organic production. The response from the Local Government of supporting an initiative that was emerging from the community, rather than from within their own structures, is particularly important and worthy of further comment. A frequent critique of participatory social change is that it is usually led by professionals and institutions who then invite the community in to ‘participate’ (Eversole, 2012) but “bottom-up change still needs formal institutional allies to help

overcome barriers that communities cannot shift for themselves, and to access resources not available any other way” (ibid, p9). The role of local Government in the spread of AMAPs by offering resources to set up networks such as Alliance Provence was critical in enabling rapid dissemination of the idea and knowledge of how to set up new groups. An example of political action and involvement by AMAP members is the case of a producer from Haute-Normandie who stood for election to her local government and was elected in 2010 and is now promoting sustainable agriculture and AMAP development. This partnership between local action and institutional support is lacking in the UK and may go some way to explain the differences in the pattern of the development and spread of LSPPCs in the two countries.

Examples of LSPPCs in other European countries demonstrate varying levels of activity, with much slower expansion where there has been no formal institutional support. The early examples from the 1970s and ‘80s in Germany and Switzerland (Buschberghof Farm and Les Jardins de Cocagne) remain but the model has not spread widely within their own countries. In Belgium, two models have developed. In Flanders (Dutch speaking), groups of consumers are linked to a local farm by an organiser, a system known as Voedselteams (Food Teams). In 2005 there were 90 such groups (Henderson, 2010). In the French speaking areas Groupes d’Achat Solidaire (GAS) are developing around Brussels, with the five groups present in 2008 having grown to around 30 by 2010³⁴. This is a consumer driven initiative and farmers deliver produce to drop off points in the city. The second International Symposium held by URGENCI in 2005 was in Portugal when Reciproco, the Portuguese version of LSPPC, was just forming, supported in part by LEADER funding³⁵ (Henderson, 2010). At the 2010 URGENCI conference, Andrea Calori from Milan University described the Italian version, Gruppo di Acquisto Solidale (GAS), translated as ‘solidarity based purchasing groups’. They began in 1994 in

³⁴ Alexandre Dewez, Co-ordinator GASAP, personal communication 5/08/10; and see www.haricots.org/en/csa accessed 5/08/10

³⁵ LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l’Economie Rurale) is a European Funding stream that operates through committees of local people

Moderna and there are now around 600 registered groups, with maybe the total figure being nearer to 1,000. They trade mainly in food but also include other goods. Calori described how they were forming into Regional networks and seeking to influence policy from below. He conceptualises them as “no state public space” with a strongly political function (Calori, 2010).

The international network URGENCI³⁶ was initiated by AMAP actors from Provence in 2004 and continues to be supported by funding from French regional Governments and two French Foundations. Information about their objectives and activities can be found on their website (www.urgenci.net). Whilst acknowledging the wide variations both within and between countries, members of URGENCI have identified four fundamental ideas that underlie LSPPCs (Table 5).

Table 5: URGENCI'S "Fundamental Ideas" underpinning LSPPCs

Partnership	Characterised by mutual commitment to supply (the farmer/grower) and up-take (the member) of the food produced each season.
Local	Promoting local exchange. An active approach to relocalising the economy.
Solidarity	Sharing the risks and benefits of healthy production that is adapted to the natural rhythm of the seasons and is respectful of the environment, natural and cultural heritage and health.
Producer/Consumer tandem	Based on direct person-to-person contact and trust, with no intermediaries or hierarchy and no subordination.

Adapted from www.urgenci.net

Led by the French AMAPs they have embarked on a programme of world-wide dissemination targeted initially in Eastern and Central Europe and North Africa. The visiting team consists of one producer and one consumer from an existing AMAP. In some cases return visits have also been arranged to experience AMAPs first hand. As

³⁶ URGENCI is “Urbain – Rural : Générer des Engagements Nouveaux entre Citoyens” (Urban - Rural Network: Generating new forms of Exchange between Citizens)

a result there are new projects being established in a number of countries including in Latvia, Bulgaria and Morocco. The response in the former communist block has often been sceptical with a general suspicion of any form of collective action or language perceived as idealistic, a lack of consumer social movement initiatives, a low level of concern for environmental impacts of conventional agriculture, and little appetite to support small family farms³⁷.

2.2.3 United Kingdom

The first examples of CSA in the UK appeared in the 1990s. EarthShare, near Forres, Morayshire (Scotland) started growing vegetables and fruit in 1994 and is the longest running CSA in the UK³⁸. They operate a four course rotation on four 3-acre plots and contract out salad production to a nearby site. In 2009 membership stood at 170, a little below the 200 they need to have sufficient income and volunteers. Food Shares come in three sizes: single, 2/3 person, and family. Family shareholders are expected to do nine hours voluntary work/year (and proportionally less for the other two categories). Vegetable shares are supplied all year round, with at least seven varieties available in the 'hungry gap,' some of which (e.g. beet) are lifted and stored. An important customer base is the nearby community of Findhorn³⁹.

Perry Court CSA (1992) and Flaxland Farm (1996), both in Kent, are other early examples but do not appear to have survived as CSAs. In 1997 the new owners of Wester Lawrenceton Farm (a near neighbour of EarthShare), established a cow share CSA. Members loan money to the farm in units of £500 and receive interest payments in the form of cheese at a rate of 8%, based on a price between the wholesale and retail price. The scheme was set up to address both economic and social issues: "The farmers believe in the need to reconnect with the rest of society

³⁷ <http://blog.urgenci.net/?p=191> and <http://blog.urgenci.net/?p=195> accessed 12/08/10

³⁸ Details about EarthShare are from an informal interview conducted with the main Grower on site, 24/08/09. EarthShare ceased to trade in October 2010 due to the lease running out on their land.

³⁹ www.findhorn.org

and to educate the public about farming.”⁴⁰ Events are held on the farm, newsletters produced, and work days organised for members.

Dragon Orchard⁴¹ Cropsharers is a grower-led scheme in Herefordshire and was started in 2001 to protect the future of their apple and pear orchards. For an annual subscription of £352 they supply apples, pears, cider, perry, apple juice, and preserves. Members are also entitled to attend quarterly farm events.

In contrast to EarthShare and Dragon Orchard, Stroud Community Agriculture was set up by a group of consumers who rented land and employed a grower. Their first growing season was in 2002, renting a one acre walled garden supplying up to 30 households. They now employ two full-time farmers and rent 50 acres of land, supplying around 200 households with vegetables, with the option to purchase meat raised on the farm too. Rather than expand further they chose to help establish a second CSA on a nearby farm (Stroud Slad Farm Community). A broad diversity in the detail of structure, produce, and organisation can be observed even amongst the early UK examples, demonstrating sensitivity to local conditions.

Unlike in the US, CSAs did not spread rapidly in the UK, but other direct marketing models such as Farmers’ Markets, and Box Schemes grew faster. The Soil Association⁴² played a significant role in the promotion of these models via initiatives such as Food Links and the Food Futures project (La Trobe, 2002). Food Links UK was established in 2002. Members of Food Links UK shared the following vision: “Systems of producing, processing and trading, foods from sustainable production systems including organic where the physical and economic activity is controlled within the locality or region where it was produced, which delivers health,

⁴⁰ <http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=KOVp4x0Ho3I%3D&tabid=208>
accessed 01/10/11

⁴¹ <http://www.onceuponatree.co.uk/about-us/dragon-orchard/community-supported-agriculture.html>
(accessed 30/08/10)

⁴² The Soil Association is a Charity and the main organic certification body in the UK. See www.soilassociation.org. They promote ‘planet friendly food and farming through education, campaigns and community programmes’.

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economic, environmental and social benefits to the people in those areas”⁴³. They merged with Sustain's⁴⁴ Food Access Network in 2008, which has subsequently been superseded by the network ‘Local Action on Food’. The first Farmers’ Market started in Bath 1997 and there are now more than 500⁴⁵. Box Schemes appeared in the early 1990s and there are now well in excess of 500⁴⁶. Farm shops are also popular and there are over 1000 across the UK⁴⁷. In contrast, the number of CSAs remains low: the availability of local and organic food via these other outlets, and increasingly through supermarkets, could be one explanation.

The Soil Association has also taken on the role of promoting and assisting CSA development. It ran a three year programme (2002 – 2005) to promote CSA entitled “Cultivating Communities” with the stated aim of developing “community support for low-income farmers who are severely disadvantaged as a result of foot and mouth disease, BSE, swine fever, flooding and agricultural recession” (Cultivating Communities, 2005b). A very broad definition of CSA was adopted:

A partnership between farmers and consumers where the responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared. (Soil Association, 2001b p6)

This could accommodate a wide diversity of enterprises and projects where there is evidence of mutual support between producers and consumers. Although an initial investigation identified over 100 existing enterprises that were considered to fall into this category (Soil Association, 2001b), at the end of the three year project only 23 initiatives describing themselves as CSAs appeared in their final report (Cultivating Communities, 2005a). In 2008 the Soil Association was enabled to enhance its support to CSAs as a partner in Making Local Food Work, a five year project funded by the Big Lottery that “aims to help people take ownership of their food and where

⁴³ http://www.sustainweb.org/localactiononfood/archive_food_links_uk/ (accessed 28/06/10)

⁴⁴ Sustain is the Alliance for Better Food and Farming. It is a registered Charity.

⁴⁵ www.farmersmarkets.net (accessed 15/01/10)

⁴⁶ <http://www.soilassociation.org/Farmersgrowers/Routestomarket/Localfood/tabid/155/Default.aspx> (accessed 15/01/10).

⁴⁷ <http://www.farmshopping.net/> (accessed 29/06/10)

it comes from”⁴⁸. Through this project the Soil Association are assisting in the establishment of new CSAs and developing a CSA network through providing information on their website, support and advice from Regional Officers, and holding training and networking events⁴⁹. There is some evidence that interest in the model is growing. According to the Soil association, there were 80 trading CSAs in September 2011⁵⁰. The geographical spread is very uneven. Of the 90 entries on the Soil Association website (trading and developing projects), 29 are in the South West Region, 13 in Yorkshire and Humber (three of these being associated with one farm, plus one which is a Bakery), and 12 in the South East, with far fewer numbers in other regions. This distribution is similar to that found for AFNs in general (see below). A quick trawl through the list indicates an approximate equal division between producer and consumer led enterprises, and includes two school projects, and two bakeries. One project (in development at time of writing) is on National Trust (NT) land and a further five NT sites are identified (all in the South West) as suitable for CSA initiatives (these are counted as one out of the 29 listed projects in the South West).

An evaluation of the impact of CSA in the UK was commissioned by the Soil Association in 2011 and headline findings released in August (Provenance, 2011b). The results on member profiles indicate some similarities with the US with members more likely to be female (74%) and younger (25-34 years). Members come from all income brackets with 12% from households with an income of £15,000 or below, and a slightly higher number from middle income households than the national average. Just over a third (36%) of members say they volunteer regularly or occasionally. The highest impact on personal lifestyle is recorded as being a change in eating and cooking habits with 70% of members reporting such changes, mainly by increasing consumption of local, healthy and seasonal food.

⁴⁸ <http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/who/index.cfm> (accessed 29/06/10)

⁴⁹

<http://www.soilassociation.org/Takeaction/Getinvolvedlocally/Communitysupportedagriculture/Theproject/tabid/374/Default.aspx> (accessed 20/06/10)

⁵⁰ Helen Browning, Director Soil Association, presentation given at CSA conference: “Farming Together: The future of CSA in the UK”, Bristol 16th September 2011

Cultivating Communities, the first project set up by the Soil Association specifically to support CSAs, set out with the intention of supporting existing small farmers in a difficult economic climate. However, existing farmers may find CSA too challenging. They may not want to provide members with access to their farm, and can be more comfortable working independently (Soil Association, 2001b). They may also lack the necessary communication skills. There are examples where existing farmers have adopted CSA as a strategy to improve financial security, such as the Cropsharers scheme at Dragon Orchard and Wester Lawrenceton Farm (see above). However, it has been more common for CSAs to be new ventures, often involving people new to farming, and led by community members. Stroud Community Agriculture is an example of this, and as such is motivated more by an oppositional stance to conventional farming.

The academic literature specifically focussing on UK CSA is sparse, but interest in ‘food relocalisation’ and distinct ways of producing, marketing and purchasing food has spawned a rich literature around so called ‘alternative food networks’ (AFNs) (e.g. Goodman, 2003; Renting and Marsden, 2003; Sage, 2003; Holloway and Kneafsey et al., 2005; Watts and Ilbery et al., 2005; Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006; Ricketts Hein and Ilbery et al., 2006; Maye and Holloway et al., 2007; Cox and Holloway et al., 2008; Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008). The ‘alternative’ in AFNs generally refers to practices that “differ from those typical in industrial food systems” (Cox and Holloway et al., 2008 p204; see also Renting and Marsden, 2003). CSA is usually referred to as an example of an AFN, and is sometimes the site of a case study (see Cox and Holloway et al., 2008). AFNs are usually associated with the (contested) concepts of ‘local’, ‘embeddedness’, ‘quality’, and ‘short food supply chains’ (SFSCs). The circumstances that have fuelled the burgeoning AFN literature has undoubtedly been the survival and growth of these networks in the face of an increasingly dominant conventional agriculture (Whatmore and Stassart et al., 2003). As previously explained, in the UK this trend can be observed in the emergence and growth of Farmers’ Markets, Box Schemes, Farm Shops, and more recently, CSAs. Explanations for this phenomenon usually refer to the negative effects of conventional agriculture leading to what Renting and Marsden (2003)

describe as a ‘crisis’, exacerbated by a squeeze on profits and rising consumer distrust. From a producer perspective they interpret AFNs as a strategy to recapture a higher proportion of the product value. Research by Kneafsey et al (2004) suggests that public anxiety about food is one of the key factors driving the growth of AFNs in the UK. They document a lengthy list of ‘food scares’ dating back to the Salmonella outbreak in 1988 that served to create a more general mistrust and uncertainty in the public mind regarding the safety of food. Finding ways to ‘reconnect’ consumers with the producers of their food via various forms of AFNs is proposed as a response to consumer anxieties.

Research undertaken in 2006 demonstrated that the distribution of AFNs is uneven with the south of the country showing the highest numbers, and the strongest region being the South West; the Northern areas generally score poorly, with the exception of North Yorkshire and Cumbria (Ricketts Hein and Ilbery et al., 2006). This is similar to the distribution pattern of CSAs listed on the Soil Association website. It is noted that these two northern counties have National Parks within easy reach of urban populations, indicating the probable influence of tourism. A related study examined the distribution of local foods within two Regions (South West and West Midlands). They found a flourishing but unevenly distributed local food sector (Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006). Although speculative, they offered some possible explanations for the distribution patterns, suggesting that influencing factors might include proximity to urban centres, access to trunk roads, landscape designations, the geography of farming types, and the pre-existence of a pattern of ‘alternative’ culture and lifestyles.

In the remaining paragraphs of this section I scrutinize in more detail how the AFN literature has sought to categorise and define ‘alternatives’ and their place in regard to wider rural development and political economy goals. A complex and dynamic picture emerges and I suggest that conceiving of them as activities that take place within interstices of policy, discourse and practice allows for diversity and complexity of form and motivation.

The emergence of AFNs is often explained as a response to a ‘mainstream conventional agriculture’ that operates across global markets within a neo-liberal paradigm of market driven economics. O’Hara and Stagl (2001) draw attention to the detrimental effect of this dominant system on relationships of trust and shared values, a situation they describe using Polanyi’s concept of ‘disembedded’ markets. They observe that “Social theory suggests that in situations of increasing distrust, alternative movements will emerge as consumers get organized to overcome their sense of unreliability and insecurity” (p544) and therefore propose that the emergence of AFNs in the global north is not surprising. Mainstream agriculture is generally characterised by specialised farming and monoculture replacing mixed farming (driven by the theory of comparative advantage), increased farm size, large reductions in farm labour, a reliance on chemical fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides, strong vertical integration with large multinational retailers and suppliers, a redistribution of power from farmers to retailers, and more recently, declining farm incomes. Initially driven largely by the laudable motive of increasing yields, it is now widely recognised to have also resulted in a raft of unintended consequences and ‘hidden costs’ or externalities (Pretty, 2002) such as environmental degradation, health risks, a loss of consumer trust, poor animal welfare practices, a loss of traditional farming skills and knowledge, a disconnection between food producers and consumers, and peculiarities in trade whereby countries export and import identical products. This scenario is described in varying levels of detail by many authors (La Trobe and Acott, 2000; La Trobe, 2002; Pretty, 2002; Renting and Marsden, 2003; Lang and Heasman, 2004). This dominant agricultural model is variously describes as ‘conventional’, ‘industrial’, ‘commodity’, ‘globalised’, ‘productivist’, or a combination of these terms, which refer to some of its generalised features. As it largely remains the dominant agricultural policy driver in the global North I choose the term ‘conventional agriculture’.

As might be anticipated the crude dualism suggested above between conventional agriculture and AFNs is a huge simplification; in reality the situation is far more complex and nuanced (Sonnino and Marsden, 2006). There exists a wide range of types within both the conventional and AFN categories and areas of overlap where categorisation becomes difficult. The case of organic agriculture is one such area.

The roots of the organic movement are firmly embedded in ideas that go beyond a commitment to particular farming techniques (e.g. support for ‘local food’ (Soil Association, 2001b)), but there are now many examples of organic farms that are distinguished only in their method of production and in all other ways are typical of conventional farms (see Watts and Ilbery et al., 2005; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006). The literature spars with this conundrum and seeks for new theoretical concepts to better interpret the phenomenon and the recognition of the complexity of the ‘alternative’/‘mainstream’ divide (e.g. Holloway and Kneafsey et al., 2005; Sonnino and Marsden, 2006; Jackson and Russell et al., 2007). Holloway, Kneafsey and Cox et al (Holloway and Kneafsey et al., 2005; Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008) problematise the use of the term ‘alternative’ but admit to retaining a use for it as a means of differentiating from the ‘conventional’, despite acknowledging it as a ‘vague and indeterminate’ term (Holloway and Kneafsey et al., 2005, p3). They fear using a simple term to describe such a complex reality and concede that this may lead to ‘romanticising’ of the ‘alternative’ with the assumption that it is always ‘good’ as opposed to the conventional being construed as ‘bad’. Together with Sonnino and Marsden (2006) they turn to Leyshon and Lee et al’s (2003) exploration of discourses and practices that are oppositional to neo-liberal global capitalism and who suggest “that within what they present as a fragile and susceptible capitalism there is the possibility for a proliferation of economic spaces and practices which are centred less around capital accumulation, and more around social, ecological and ethical concerns” (Holloway and Kneafsey et al., 2005, p10). Leyshon et al describe these spaces as ‘practical, day-to-day experiments in performing the economy otherwise’ (Leyshon and Lee et al., 2003, p16).

In the attempt to understand the nature and scope of the diverse array of AFNs UK scholars have suggested various categorisations. Watts et al (2005) distinguish between ‘weaker’ and ‘stronger’ AFNs depending on their vulnerability to co-optation by conventional food supply chains. Whatmore et al (2003) identify some common characteristics as being food markets that “redistribute value through the network against the logic of bulk commodity production: ... reconvene ‘trust’ between food producers and consumers: and that articulate new forms of political association and market governance” (p389). Renting and Marsden (2003) use the

term short food supply chains (SFSC) as a more specific term (referring to actors directly involved in production, processing, distribution and consumption) and define three sub categories of organic, quality production, and direct selling. Holloway et al (2005) choose to employ ‘analytical fields’ in an attempt to retain complexity and avoid simplification that necessarily accompanies any attempt at categorisation. Kneafsey and Cox et al propose that the only feature that AFNs share in common is the aim of reconnecting producers and consumers (2008).

In the following section I complete the story of the history and development of CSA with a discussion about their potential, along with other AFNs, as drivers of wider structural change within the food system.

2.2.4 AFNs/CSA: a force for change or marginal activity?

AFNs are interpreted by some European scholars as “one of the key dimensions of new rural development patterns now emerging” (Goodman 2004 in Watts and Ilbery et al., 2005, p24) (see also Renting and Marsden, 2003), but lack of empirical data and the fact that many initiatives are still relatively young persuade Sonnino and Marsden (2006) to conclude that “it is still too difficult to judge the viability and efficiency of alternative food networks in delivering goals of sustainable agriculture and rural development” (p182). Goodman (2003) observes that the UK and US literatures have emphasised different meanings to ‘alternative’ with the UK literature suggesting that these practices are something that takes place on the margins of the mainstream/conventional but that do not necessarily challenge or seek to change it, in contrast to US literature that interprets ‘alternative’ as more oppositional and politically radical. This would seem to be an over simplification, at least in terms of the aspirations of participants, with evidence of a wide spectrum of motivations in both the US (section 2.2.1) and the UK. Allen and FitzSimmons et al (2003) use Raymond Williams’ concepts of ‘alternative’ and ‘oppositional’ and David Harvey’s related concepts of ‘militant particularism’ and ‘global ambition’ to explore in greater depth whether alternative food initiatives actually succeed in moving towards new structural configurations, or if they are “limited to incremental erosion at the edges of the political-economic structures” (p61). They explore the tension between local (‘alternative’) initiatives that are embedded within “social circumstances in

place” (p68) and which often fail to challenge hegemonic structures, and aspirations for a more oppositional movement with global ambition for broader food system change. Their research with what they term ‘alternative food initiatives’ in California indicated a preference for the ‘alternative’ rather than the more political ‘oppositional’ stance, especially in those which had started in the 1980s or later. This observation that the growing dominance of neo-liberalism has made strongly oppositional stances more difficult to maintain in the running of AFNs is supported by a number of other scholars (e.g. DeLind, 1999; Hinrichs, 2000; DeLind, 2002; Ostrom, 2007; Feagan and Henderson, 2008). In the UK there is some evidence of more political and oppositional motivations amongst some CSA participants. For example, some of the founder members of Stroud Community Agriculture, a successful CSA based in the South West, are seeking to construct an alternative to supermarket shopping and to wrest some control from corporate power. One founder is described as being “involved in non-violent direct action against local supermarkets – encouraging supermarket shoppers to find more local sources of food” (Weir and Pilley et al., undated). Cox et al (2008) found that although the (farmer) initiators of EarthShare CSA in Morayshire expressed no political motivations, the membership displayed a far broader set of philosophies including community development, and political and environmental goals. Dilley’s research with local food consumers in Scotland unveiled a complex mix of motivations, most of which emanate from ideas that could be considered ‘oppositional’ (Dilley, 2009), and at a CSA conference in September 2011⁵¹ one participant articulated the view that CSA would become the dominant model for agriculture in the future. Other enterprises present as primarily motivated by the need to find the means to remain economically viable as a small enterprise (e.g. Dragon Orchard Cropsharers).

Attempts at deciding whether AFNs represent ‘alternative’ or ‘oppositional’ activities can be prone to producing an over simplified description of a somewhat fluid and relatively young movement. The picture is probably more complex than the concepts contained in either category suggest, with a mixture of motives that change

⁵¹ Soil Association Community Supported Agriculture Conference: *Farming Together: The Future of CSA in the UK*, Bristol, 16th September 2011

over time in response to individual learning and the external political and economic context. I prefer to use a concept of ‘activities that take place in the interstices.’ These fissures can be in policy, neo liberal economic discourse, or the market place. They may be seen as weaknesses in the dominant system, or niche market opportunities, or ‘unfilled spaces’ where mainstream policy is struggling to be effective, but they offer opportunities for innovation and experimentation, a chance to ‘do things differently.’ Coming from the perspective of economic geography and well before the global economic crises of 2008, Leyshon and Lee et al observed that “Cracks have begun to appear in the edifice of global capitalism” (2003). They then offer some examples of both ‘thinking ... and performing the economy otherwise’ drawing particularly on the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham and her idea of the ‘proliferative economy’. Citing an article written in 1996 they support her proposition that it is the *discourse* of capitalism that is hegemonic, whereas the social world is in practice differentiated and complex. In a similar way that feminism exposed the marginalisation of difference, it is argued that this dominant economic discourse hides the many expressions of non-capitalist economic activity. In other words, capitalism is not as all pervading as it at first appears. CSAs in the UK can be interpreted as examples of ‘performing the economy otherwise’, whether this be in order to overtly oppose conventional agriculture (e.g. Stroud Community Agriculture), to seek financial security for a small farm or small-holding by engaging the direct support of consumers (e.g. Dragon Orchard; Wester Lawrenceton Farm), to generate a supply of locally grown food for the nearby community (e.g. Loxley Valley Community Farm; Weardale CSA), or to provide opportunities for disadvantaged groups to engage in food production and have improved access to healthy food (e.g. The Green Patch; Growing Together). What these diverse examples have in common is that they are experimenting with different ways of producing and consuming food that do not depend entirely on conventional market relations based solely or primarily on principles of price, supply and demand. To a greater or lesser extent, they embrace the social and environmental impacts of food production and consumption as an integral part of their business and adopt an ethical/care-full approach to praxis. In parallel to Taylor’s (2003) pragmatic response to opportunities for community development (see section 3), they are making best use of the niches and fractures that appear in the dominant discourse and practice to

carve out ‘spaces of hope’ (Harvey, 2000) within the mainstream economy. They often work with the mainstream system where possible, practicing different levels of compromise or partnership and using conventional sources of support where it can be found (e.g. funding, policy linkages). They are above all places of action, practically getting on with doing something that makes a difference. In contrast to Harvey’s pessimism regarding the long-term viability and effectiveness of such localised activity, Leyshon and Lee et al hope that such developments might foreshadow “a more diverse, proliferative and inclusive economic future.” (op cit, p23). The LSPPC model is being adopted by some small Bakeries in the UK, and France has a fish and seafood AMAP and one for the small scale production of natural soaps and detergents.⁵² As an alternative means of performing economic transactions it has potential to spread into other sectors of the economy outside of agriculture.

Allen and FitzSimmons et al (2003) share David Harvey’s view that localised action on its own cannot bring about major shifts in structure without the power of a broader social movement that raises the wider structural issues such as rights and entitlements. This may be the case, but it does not automatically follow that this requires some form of centralised organising to bring it into being. The global ambition goals might still be achieved by an oblique route if we listen to the theories of authors such as John Kay (2010) and Chia and Holt (2009). Both argue for an adaptive approach and an oblique route to achieving high level objectives and in chapters 4 (4) and 5 (3.2 and 4) I liken this to the process of action research. In thinking about the potential for CSA and other AFNs to bring about larger food system reform the work of Chia and Holt is particularly interesting. In *Strategy without Design: The Silent Efficacy of Indirect Action* (2009) they demonstrate that there are many examples of successful strategies and social phenomena that have emerged inadvertently, unplanned and undirected. Strategy can arise in this way through “the exercise of local coping actions”, and in particular, “actions that are inconspicuous and that may appear peripheral or tangential to the primary concerns of a strategic situation can often turn out to be more efficacious in bringing about desired and sustainable outcomes” (p24). This suggestion, that we only “know as we

⁵² <http://blog.URGENCI.net/?p=94>; <http://blog.URGENCI.net/?p=90> accessed 5/08/10

go”, also described as “way-finding”, opens up the possibility that the many diverse initiatives currently making up the wider AFN family may hold within them the potential to effect more strategic outcomes even as they concentrate on working in their own situated contexts.

Returning to the work of J.K. Gibson-Graham provides yet another perspective that supports the assertion that activity at the local level may have wider impacts. She has championed the efforts of small scale initiatives in the face of persistent criticism and derision from fellow academics (e.g. see Gibson-Graham, 2002). She challenges the widely held view that globalisation requires local struggles to ‘scale up’ if they are to have any substantial impact, asking “where is the space of hope and effectivity for those of us who wish to enact a local economic politics?” (ibid, p34), and points out that feminism initially achieved global spread without any formal organisation, coordinated actions or alliances. She also argues that because the dominant discourse has the effect of creating subjects with a particular economic identity, a process of ‘resubjectivation’ is required by offering new discourses and thereby “creating alternative economic identities that subjects can take on” (ibid, p36). This assertion seems to make sense in explaining some of the difficulties that CSAs have in establishing a new way of working within the dominant system, as exemplified in a study by Ostrom (2007), whose conclusions nevertheless complement the ideas put forward here. Ostrom carried out participatory research with 24 CSA farmers in Minneapolis and Madison to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of CSA and to ask the question “*Community Supported Agriculture as an Agent of Change: Is it working?*” She discovered that the farmers had strong ideals and desired to contribute to a larger social cause. However, their aspirations were limited by the motivations of members who tended to put personal benefits ahead of the common good and in practice were not willing to cover the full cost of production through a combination of price and voluntary labour. However, she observed that all members had made lifestyle changes to one degree or another as a result of belonging to the CSA and citing Melucci, suggests that as “Some social movement theorists would argue ... it is through doing, through such small changes in everyday life habits, that evolution in meanings eventually occur. Accordingly, part of the power of CSA as a social movement lies with its ability to gradually forge a new understanding of what

it means to eat” (p114). And echoing Leyshon and Lee et al, she argues that in restoring a level of agency to local communities it foreshadows an economic system “driven by local needs rather than international markets” (p118).

So the picture is fuzzy and chaotic but not without hope. CSA remains a small and apparently fragmented and insignificant movement. But it is beginning to collaborate at global level via URGENCI, has allies in the wider AFN family, and contains the political potential for effecting change at a far wider scale.

3. CSA AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

So far in this chapter I have traced the global history and development of CSA and examined AFN literature as an aid to understanding CSA in the UK. I suggest that the diverse forms of CSA can be conceived as activities that take place in the interstices of policy and dominant discourse and practice. In this next section I introduce my professional background of community development and show how CSA, or some expressions of it, are intimately linked to the values and purpose of community development practice, which is also often concerned with localised attempts to ‘perform the economy otherwise’ and challenge existing power structures.

In chapter 6 I reflect on how my choice of both research topic and approach (action research) are closely linked to my biography, interests, beliefs, and professional experience (i.e. the factors that influence my identity). Having spent many years as a practitioner in the field of rural community development (CD) I could easily make connections between the values and principles of CD and the potential of CSA to promote more vigorous community involvement around food production and consumption. Community-based Participatory Action Research served as a vehicle for me to adopt a CD approach to CSA. In other words, I approached my research from a specific *standpoint*.

Globally and nationally, food systems have become increasingly concentrated and centralised, leaving very little power in the hands of consumers, despite the rhetoric

of consumer sovereignty (Lang, 1999a). Lang has developed the concept of “food democracy” and “food citizenship” which is “about citizens having the power to determine agro-food policies and practices locally, regionally, nationally, and globally” (Hassanein, 2003) and describes the spaces where voices ‘from below’ put pressure on food policy. Encouraging citizen involvement in decisions about issues that have a direct impact on their livelihoods is central to the practice of CD. Here I explore how CSA has the potential to create some of these spaces where people can begin to regain some control over their supply of food. These spaces may be small and only apply to a proportion of the overall diet but they can be spaces of “resistance and creativity in which people themselves attempt to govern and shape their relationship with food and agriculture” (Hassanein, 2003, p79). Local food initiatives with a high level of citizen involvement might be expected to build social capital, empower groups and individuals, strengthen networks, and encourage community action. People become actively involved in their community when they *care* enough about something to take some action, and for some, the issue they care about will be the state of the dominant food system, or some aspect of it.

I suggest that there are many commonalities between the underlying values and purpose of CSA and the practice of CD and that some forms of CSA enterprises can be interpreted through the lens of CD theory and practice. CD has a specific history and body of theory that influences the understanding of what it is and what it is for. The profession has come together to form national bodies to formulate practice standards, definitions, values and principles. I briefly review the various meanings of CD and include a brief history of CD in England in order to clarify what I mean by the term and the tradition I am working in. I include examples from my research that demonstrate how the projects initiated by this study might be viewed as examples of CD practice.

3.1 What is Community Development?

The term ‘community development’ assumes a variety of meanings depending on the context and the speaker. It can refer to community development practice as in the activity of professional community development workers employed by statutory or voluntary sector agencies; it can mean the effects of such practice; or the

development that occurs in a community arising from the actions of independent community activists without outside intervention; it can refer to community economic development, where the emphasis is on improving economic activity in an area by, for example, increasing the number of social enterprises or small businesses in a formerly economically stagnant area. It has been a contested term within the profession itself with debates about what CD is, what represents good practice, and how outcomes can be measured. Ongoing attempts to bring more agreement and clarity to the profession were spurred on by the (Labour) Government's stated intention "to give local people and local communities more influence and power to improve their lives" (DCLG, 2006). This was codified and strengthened in the 'Empowerment White Paper' in 2008, which "aims to pass power into the hands of local communities" (DCLG, 2008, p1)⁵³. The essential role that community development has to play in making this intention a reality is recognised in another Government sponsored document, *The Community Development Challenge* (CDF, 2007). The Community Development Foundation (CDF), working with partners, produced a definition that acknowledges some of this complexity:

Community development is a set of values and practices which plays a special role in overcoming poverty and disadvantage, knitting society together at the grass roots and deepening democracy There is a CD profession, defined by national occupational standards and a body of theory and experience going back the best part of a century. There are active citizens who use CD techniques on a voluntary basis, and there are also other professions and agencies which use a CD approach or some aspects of it. (CDF, 2007, p13)

A set of agreed values is found in the National Occupational Standards for Community Development Work (PAULO, 2003) (Box 4). These values are underpinned by a set of practice principles that explain them in more detail⁵⁴. CD is inherently political in nature and issues of power – who has the capability to

⁵³ The replacement of New Labour with a Coalition Government (May 2010) has created a situation of rapid change in policy and direction. The concept of localism is being re-framed in terms of David Cameron's 'Big Society' and it is too early to comment on the impact of this change.

⁵⁴ Practice principles can be viewed at: <http://www.cdx.org.uk/values-and-practice-principles>

influence decisions – are central to its processes. Alison Gilchrist describes the role of a CD worker as being “fundamentally about working with people in communities so that they have more influence over decisions that effect them, whether this is about their own lives or about what happens in the world around them” (Gilchrist, 2004, p23). Whether this work is facilitated by a CD worker, a local volunteer activist or project initiator, or a university researcher as part of a community based participatory research programme, the outcomes will most likely include elements of building social capital, empowering individuals and groups by building confidence, skills and knowledge, strengthening networks, and some form of community action.

Box 4: Community Development Values

Equality and Anti-discrimination: Community development practice challenges structural inequalities and discriminatory practices. It recognises that people are not the same, but they are all of equal worth and importance and therefore entitled to the same degree of respect and acknowledgement.

Social Justice: The aim of increasing social justice is an essential element of community development practice. It involves identifying and seeking to alleviate structural disadvantage and advocating strategies for overcoming exclusion, discrimination and inequality.

Collective Action: Community development practice is essentially about working with and supporting groups of people, to increase their knowledge, skills and confidence so that they can analyse their situations and identify issues which can be addressed through collective action.

Community Empowerment: Community development practice seeks the empowerment of individuals and communities, through using the strengths of the community to bring about desired change.

Working and Learning Together: Community development practice promotes a collective process which enables participants to learn from reflecting on their experiences.

Source: Community Development Exchange (www.cdx.org.uk)

3.2 A Brief History

CD in the UK has its roots in both community initiated action in the form of informal self help and mutual aid, and a more paternalistic philanthropy (Popple, 1995; Gilchrist, 2004). Different approaches dominated according to the prevailing political power, and social and economic conditions. Funding for community workers has derived primarily from the State. During the post-war social-democratic consensus

and into the early 1960s CD was closely linked to the profession of social work and community workers were employed to encourage community cohesion by involving people in welfare services and educational, recreational and cultural activities (Gilchrist, 2004). A radical change occurred in the late 1960s coinciding with the social upheaval epitomised by the events of 1968 and led to what Popple (1995) has named the ‘golden age’ of community work that lasted until the mid 1970s. Two government funded programmes, the ‘Urban Programme’ and ‘Community Development Projects’ resulted in thousands of new CD initiatives during this period. The latter had unexpected outcomes for the State: it was established on the premise of a consensus model of society and the failure of disadvantaged communities to flourish was attributed to internal problems rather than to existing structures of power and influence (Popple, *ibid*). Workers employed by the scheme adopted a different view and took a radical approach based on a Marxist analysis. The results proved too disturbing for Government (Taylor, 2003) and funding was withdrawn in 1976. However, the roots of a more critical approach to CD had been laid and there was general agreement within the profession that it had an important role to play in promoting participation and increasing people’s capacity to influence decisions affecting their communities. It is to this tradition that I align myself and which sits comfortably with CSA. The economic turmoil and depression of the 1970s, the rise of the New Right and coming to power of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1979 produced the conditions that led to the end of the ‘golden age’ for community work and the beginning of a period characterised by reduced public funding and increased state control. Generic CD posts largely disappeared to be replaced by short-term project activities with pre-determined targets that were closely monitored. Support to communities to develop their own ideas and skills was not provided “The community worker’s role in helping to organise community-led collective action all but disappeared” (Gilchrist, 2004, p19).

The 21st Century is seeing the beginnings of a reversal and “ ‘community’ has been brought back in from the cold” (Taylor, 2003, p8). The New Labour Government (elected in 1997), concerned with a democratic deficit and lack of progress on tackling long term social issues, produced a continuing stream of rhetoric about the importance of public participation and involvement (e.g. Home Office, 2004a,

2004b; ODPM, 2005) culminating in the so called ‘Empowerment White Paper’ entitled “*Communities in Control: real people, real power*” in 2008. The new coalition Government that replaced New Labour in May 2010 is attempting to re-invent this theme with David Cameron’s promotion of the “Big Society”⁵⁵ and the Localism Bill⁵⁶. The Community Development Challenge (CDF, 2007) specifically acknowledges that “The implementation of policies on community involvement and engagement depends fundamentally on community development” (p3). Marilyn Taylor (2003) approaches this renewed commitment to participation and its potential opportunities by offering three perspectives on the potential effectiveness of community action – pessimistic, optimistic, and pragmatic. A pessimistic scenario derives mainly from a structuralist analysis and views any moves towards increased support for participation as purely cosmetic and controlled by existing power holders, serving their interests. The optimistic perspective sees real opportunities opening up for communities to influence policy and for civil society to occupy a new political space. The pragmatic view lies somewhere in the middle of the two, recognising the strength of powerful institutions but also observing the windows of opportunity that can be found because policy making is “a process of paradoxes, balancing acts, irresolvable tensions and contradictions that can be exploited in favour of those who have been marginalized” (p14). A pragmatic approach adopts a positive attitude to small, localised change processes and looks for opportunities for these to develop into more widespread effects. This resonates with the arguments explored above in section 2.2.4. These sometimes apparently isolated and small efforts at change can be viewed as ‘spaces of hope’ and may lead to unforeseen wider effects.

⁵⁵ See e.g. <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572> and <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/407789/building-big-society.pdf>

⁵⁶ The Localism Bill seeks to “devolve greater power and freedoms to councils and neighbourhoods, establish powerful new rights for communities, revolutionise the planning system, and give communities much more control over housing decisions.” Eric Pickles MP, full Ministerial written statement, 10 December 2010
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/statements/corporate/localismbill> (accessed 09/10/11)

3.3 CSA as a site for Community Development

In considering the links between CD and CSA there are two areas that are touched upon by studies involving CSAs that are important to CD viz. community building (i.e. building new relationships and alliances, strengthening ties of reciprocity and social norms, co-operative working, strengthening ‘social capital’), and the potential for CSAs to be transformative, which in this case means the long term goal of moving towards a more “ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just system of food” (Hassanein, 2003, p84) and providing a site for empowerment and community action at the local level.

The evidence around community building is mixed and this must partly be because of the breadth of diversity in CSA models. Most research to which I have access relates to CSA in the US; the story may be different in other cultural contexts. The nature of CSA would indicate that it would be a natural site for community building with its emphasis on shared risk, collaboration and co-operation, and opportunities for members to work together in groups participating in various ways to support the enterprise. Indeed, the early adopters of the model hoped that it would play a role in “building a sense of community rooted in place” (DeLind and Ferguson, 1999, p192) and initial research supported this view (e.g. Sharp and Imerman et al., 2002). In their study of gender and CSA DeLind and Ferguson (1999) also found that women tended to view CSA as a place for community building. Many CSAs also offer opportunities for social interaction outside of the routine of collecting shares or helping on the land that would suggest that new relationships are forming as a result of participating in the CSA. Hinrichs (2000) considers that the emphasis on building community is the distinguishing feature of CSAs and Russell and Zepeda (2008) argue that belonging to a CSA in itself involves an element of community building as members “sacrifice some control over individual well-being and choose to act within a group, a hallmark of community building” (p137). In the first evaluation of CSAs in the UK to be carried out, 45% of respondent members agreed that their project was having an impact on the wider community by “bringing people together or providing a focal point for community activity” (Provenance, 2011a, p5) and most provided volunteering opportunities with an average of 44 volunteers/CSA (ibid, p2).

Some examples of community building from Growing Together and Weardale CSA are given in Box 5.

Box 5: Growing Together and Weardale CSA: examples of community building

Growing Together

- New alliances formed with outside agencies and organisations
- Increased integration of service users with the wider community through partnership working

Weardale CSA

- New alliances formed with outside agencies and organisations
- New relationships formed within the local community
- Social gatherings (meals)

However, several studies found that members do not rate community building very highly as a motivation for their joining and belonging to a CSA (Cone and Kakaliouras, 1995; Cone and Myhre, 2000; Ostrom, 2007; Feagan and Henderson, 2008; Russell and Zepeda, 2008) and this can be interpreted as an indicator that CSAs are not meeting initial expectations in this sense. Ostrom (2007) observed that some farmers who set up CSAs in the US have been disappointed in the level of member commitment and have discovered that social capital is hard to build. If initial expectations were of an ideal where all members engage and participate with equal commitment and enthusiasm, then it is not surprising that the reality falls short. There is no doubt that some, maybe many, members of CSAs, are not active participants beyond committing to buying a share of the harvest in advance, but even this step can be considered a signal of commitment to mutual benefit in as far as purchasing a produce before knowing exactly what it is “requires some measure of trust” (Hinrichs, 2000, p301). As is the case in many collaborative community efforts, there will be a gradation of interest and participation, with some at the centre who are very active and others at the margins. An evaluation of UK CSAs recorded 36% of members involved as regular or occasional volunteers (Provenance, 2011a, p5). In their study of CSA members, Cone and Myhre (2000) noticed that the group which had the higher levels of participation also rated community belonging higher,

and that for this group in particular relationships of trust replaced impersonal exchange and “The farm can bridge the gap between the global and the personal and allows the shareholder to re-embed the sense of self-identity into a community, into a rural place, and into a spiritual connection to the natural cycles of life” (p195). Around half of the members in this study did not participate other than to collect their share, but this means that half *were* more involved, and this could be interpreted as a good level of engagement: anyone with experience of community level activity will be accustomed to dependence on a relatively small, committed group.

This picture of differing levels of participation and diversity reflects the open nature of CSA. It may often be driven and initiated by people with deep political, social or environmental motivations, but it is open to all and therefore members are welcomed from all political persuasions. It is not necessarily a community composed of like-minded social activists. There is therefore likely to be a “rich diversity of motivations and perceived benefits” as found in EarthShare (Cox and Holloway et al., 2008, p211). Some authors describe what is created as a “community of common interest” (Cone and Myhre, 2000) or a “conceptual community” (Russell and Zepeda, 2008) acknowledging that a sense of community is valued but that it is not necessarily based upon a network of relationships, social norms or reciprocity.

The idea that CSAs can be a vehicle for empowerment and community action at the local level (i.e. that they are potentially transformative) has been suggested by a number of authors (Getz, 1995; Groh and McFadden, 1997; Wells and Gradwell et al., 1999; Ostrom, 2007; Cox and Holloway et al., 2008). Particularly in cases where there is a high level of involvement of local people in the development and running of the scheme there are numerous opportunities for learning and co-operation that could subsequently be used for wider local activism. “It may not be too much to assume that managing a locally self-reliant food supply provides an important vehicle for communities to deal with larger issues, including those which have ramifications beyond the food system” (Getz, 1995, p329).

Various claims have been made about the link between local food and community building and community action. Pretty (2001) says that belonging to a CSA

encourages social responsibility and strengthens bonds between farmers and consumers, and community gardens and city farms can include educational value for children and offer meaningful and beneficial work for unemployed people or people with mental health problems. A study investigating the contribution made by city farms and community gardens to the well-being of individuals and communities produced evidence for positive impacts in the areas of social inclusion and cohesion, building of social capital, skills development, and health benefits. The projects were deemed to enable participants “to take a more active role in their community” (Quale, 2008). The literature from research on CSA in the US provides many examples of the community action potential of CSA. Wells and Gradwell et al (1999) observe that “CSA offers a home for visionaries and a focus for action ... and empowers people to create by their own actions an alternative economy, one in which what they do makes a difference to their immediate lives and the lives of others in the community” (p44). O’Hara and Stagl (2001) found that people interested in joining a CSA were more likely to be interested in collective action and society as a whole, and not just in maximising individual utility. The case of Teikei in Japan, (section 2.1.1) could be considered as a very successful example of volunteer led CD. Some examples from Growing Together and Weardale CSA are highlighted in Box 6.

Box 6: Growing Together and Weardale CSA: empowerment and community action

Both groups

- Set up new expressions of community action by working collaboratively (see snapshots)
- Use of participatory techniques (Chapter 4, 3.4.2)
- Agreeing values

Growing Together

- Became more independent, making own decisions and running own budget
- Learning about e.g. setting up and running a small organisation

Weardale CSA

- Individuals brought together and enabled to become agents of change within their local community (snapshots; chapter 4, 3.4.4; chapter 6, 4.4)
- Learning from this project taken and used in other areas e.g. as Director of another CIC (Louise)
- and applied to lifestyle (e.g. eating more seasonally (Tony))

However, a more critical analysis has revealed that for many participants in CSA the paradigm of the market and the dominance of economic considerations still prevail (e.g. see DeLind, 1999; Hinrichs, 2000; Feagan and Henderson, 2008) and this is now evident in the difficulties being encountered by Teikei. Belonging to a CSA requires at least a minimum level of changed behaviour around purchasing, cooking, and eating habits (Cone and Myhre, 2000) and those who cannot make these changes tend to leave (Russell and Zepeda, 2008). Stagl (2002) utilises the concept of ‘endogenous preferences’ (preferences that change over time as a result of influences *within* a particular market or economic system) to explain behavioural changes of CSA members observed over time. These changes included an increase in support for local farms, concern for the environment, eating seasonally, reducing the use of packaging, and for some, beginning to question aspects of the conventional food system. So, members who initially joined to e.g. access fresh, organic, local produce are shown to develop changing preferences as a result of their participation. Research by Russell and Zepeda (2008) produced comparable results. Similarly, a study of EarthShare CSA members (Cox and Holloway et al., 2008) described a “graduation effect” whereby participants begin to address other aspects of consumption or lifestyle. They found that the initiators of the scheme had set “modest and achievable goals” for supplying seasonal, local, organic produce and were not aiming for broader political or social goals. The members on the other hand, understand their participation in much broader philosophical and political terms and many described how they had subsequently made changes to other aspects of their behaviour as a consequence of participating in the CSA. In observing these changes the researchers suggest that it is not unreasonable to see the beginnings of a process that supports the claim made by some authors that alternative food networks have the “potential to challenge social and economic inequality and to support an agenda for radical social change” (ibid, p216). The link with the values and principals of CD are clear; participating in a CSA creates a space for personal learning and transformation and presents a means for transferring a modicum of control of food production to the local community. The potential for CSA to have wider transformative impact has been discussed previously in section 2.2.4. The restoration of a ‘sense of agency’ to local communities is fundamental to the purposes of CD. The opportunities afforded by CSA for learning by experience, exchanging ideas with a wide mix of people,

learning together, and being faced with issues of social justice (both in terms of affordability and in a just reward for the farmer/grower), of the environmental impact of food production, and the struggle to secure a measure of local agency (power and influence) around the food that we eat means that despite the many contradictions and short comings, CSAs that encourage active member participation are fertile spaces for CD to operate.

4. SUMMARY

In this chapter I have traced the development of CSA, identified linkages with CD, and discussed the transformative potential of CSA and other AFNs.

The history of LSPCCs from the 1970s to the present day demonstrates strong links to particular “social, economic and demographic characteristics” (Lyson and Guptill, 2004). Spatial distribution is associated with particular demographics (Schnell, 2007), social history, cultural influences, and the natural environment (Qazi and Selfa, 2005; Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006). Changes in these characteristics are therefore likely to influence future developments and have been influential in the struggles experienced by Teikei in Japan to maintain the founder’s values. The origins of the movement were strongly influenced by philosophies and politics that opposed the conventional agricultural system, and also by consumer and producer anxiety about the safety of food produced by this system, a factor that Kneafsey and Cox et al found to be important (2008). It was and remains a ‘grassroots’ movement, initiated by concerned individuals and groups and displaying a broad spectrum of diversity of form, approach, motivation, and practice, and defying any attempts to box it in to neat definitions. Today’s participants do not all share the more radical views of the early adopters but CSA has shown an ability to accommodate a broad range of motivations amongst its members. There is also some evidence that the early idealism of the founding members is in practice difficult to enact fully in a culture that remains dominated by individual consumerism. In the early days there was not much contact between different branches, especially in the case of Japan, now considered to be the cradle of the LSPCC movement. Since the formation of URGENCI in 2004 this is beginning to change and there is growing cooperation and mutual support across the globe. This marked the start of a phase of deliberate

outreach to new countries. It is clear that Government policy at national and regional levels can provide valuable institutional support, as evidenced in the US and France, even though the primary thrust of policy very much remains in support of conventional agriculture.

CSAs are generally viewed as being part of a wider family of so called ‘alternative food networks’. I have suggested that one way of interpreting them is as enterprises that operate ‘in the interstices’ of the prevailing hegemonic discourses. They can be viewed as examples of “performing the economy otherwise” (Leyshon and Lee et al., 2003), even though not all members would see themselves in this way. They can also be conceptualised as an expression of an ethic of care (Wells and Gradwell, 2001), an idea further developed in chapter 6.

I argue that within CSA and other AFNs there lies a latent potential for more widespread global change. Drawing on theories and ideas from Kay, Chia and Holt, and J.K. Gibson-Graham about the nature of change processes and neo-liberal capitalism, I argue that this diverse, small scale, often fragmented movement has a possibility of being a driver of wider food system change.

Finally, the potential of CSA to contribute to the restoration of a ‘sense of agency’ (Ostrom, 2007) to local communities links it strongly to the values and practices of community development. In some manifestations of CSA there is evidence that members begin to take more control over decisions about their food supply, experience learning and increased awareness of the politics of food and other food related issues – in other words CSA introduces a degree of ‘food democracy’ (Lang, 1999a).

ADDENDUM: THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF TEIKEI (1978)

1. Principle of mutual assistance

The essence of this partnership lies, not in trading itself, but in the friendly relationship between people. Therefore, both producers and consumers should help each other on the basis of mutual understanding: this relation should be established through the reflection of past experiences.

2. Principle of intended production

Producers should, through consultation with consumers, intend to produce the maximum amount and maximum variety of produce within the capacity of the farms.

3. Principle of accepting the produce

Consumers should accept all the produce that has been grown according to previous consultation between both groups, and their diet should depend as much as possible on this produce.

4. Principle of mutual concession in the price decision

In deciding the price of the produce, producers should take full account of savings in labor and cost, due to grading and packaging processes being curtailed, as well as of all their produce being accepted; and consumers should take into full account the benefit of getting fresh, safe, and tasty foods.

5. Principle of deepening friendly relationships

The continuous development of this partnership requires the deepening of friendly relationships between producers and consumers. This will be achieved only through maximizing contact between the partners.

6. Principle of self-distribution

On this principle, the transportation of produce should be carried out by either the producer's or consumer's groups, up to the latter's depots, without dependence on professional transporters.

7. Principle of democratic management

Both groups should avoid over-reliance upon a limited number of leaders in their activities, and try to practice democratic management with responsibility shared by all. The particular conditions of the members' families should be taken into consideration on the principle of mutual assistance.

8. Principle of learning among each group

Both groups of producers and consumers should attach much importance to studying amongst themselves, and should try to keep their activities from ending only in the distribution of safe foods.

9. Principle of maintaining the appropriate group scale

The full practice of the matters written in the above articles will be difficult if the membership or the territory of these groups becomes too large. That is the reason why both of them should be kept to an appropriate size. The development of this movement in terms of membership should be promoted through increasing the number of groups and the collaboration among them.

10. Principle of steady development

In most cases, neither producers nor consumers will be able to enjoy such good conditions as mentioned above from the very beginning. Therefore, it is necessary for both of them to choose promising partners, even if their present situation is unsatisfactory, and to go ahead with the effort to advance in mutual cooperation.

(JOAA, 2010d)

SNAPSHOTS: AN INTRODUCTION TO PLACES, PEOPLE, AND PROGRESS

The purpose of this section is to give the reader a snapshot of the two projects as a reference point and anchor. You will get to know a little about the place and the people involved and a sense of where they started from, the key events, and what they discovered and achieved. This section is purely descriptive, is sequential, and talks about each project separately.

GROWING TOGETHER

This scheme arose from a gardening group for people with learning disabilities based at a Day Centre on the outskirts of the town of Bishop Auckland. They were renting some nearby allotment plots from the District Council. The Centre is located within an area dominated by social housing and low income families.



Meet the main participants: these are the individuals who were research participants for some or all of the project's development:

Andy: Centre staff member and key driver of the new project. Andy is an enthusiastic gardener who loves to share his skills and enthusiasm with the service users. He treats them with respect and they regard him as a friend. Andy likes to be out on the land with his team. He does not like paperwork, but nevertheless, took on the role of Secretary of the Committee.





Dave: another staff member who helps with the garden. Dave is an experienced gardener bringing his knowledge of growing to the project. Dave is relatively new to care work having previously been a coach driver, but has taken to it well. Dave became Treasurer.

Donna: also a staff member at the start of the project but moved to work at another location later on. She maintained contact and continued to attend some meetings for as long as she was able. Donna is full of ideas and enthusiasm. She was very excited by the project and planned to use surplus produce to make preserves with the service users. She organised the cooking when they held open days and she facilitated the group planning sessions.

The Locality Manager: she was very supportive of the project and participated fully in the meetings of the steering group, acting initially as an informal Chair. Due to reorganisation she had to move on a few months into the planning stages. Her replacement was supportive but not actively involved.

BTCV Officer: sat on the steering group from June 2006 until her funding ran out and she moved to another job in August 2007.

Ana: joined the steering group in November 2006 and became the Chair.

Alan, Michael, Peter, Gerald: (names have been changed) service users who regularly attended the steering group meetings. Alan was awarded a Community Champion grant that he used to make a soft fruit garden.

a) Beginnings (February – August 2006)

I first met with Andy, Dave and the Centre Manager, in February 2006 to discuss their ideas about transforming the gardening group into a community supported growing project. An introductory follow on meeting was held in April with the Locality Manager and this group continued to meet with me to discover if it was going to be legally possible to run a membership CSA on the allotment site and if the County Council would agree to the formation of an independent group.

Permission was granted by September 2006 following discussions with council officers and formal approval by district councillors.

In the meantime the group began to clarify their aims and plan visits to a couple of existing CSAs to learn more about the model and how it worked in practice. Everyone was highly motivated about working towards a structure that would enable service users to integrate more with the community and to produce enough food for all members. For Andy in particular it was working out how to realise his personal vision. We also began to talk about organisational structures so that they could start the process of becoming independent, and in July we worked through a series of questions as described in section (e) (*knowledge input*). It was agreed that for the present it was sufficient to be an unincorporated organisation; there were low financial risks and a more complex structure was unnecessary whilst the support staff were employed by the Council. Later that month we worked on the first draft of a Constitution under which the group became the Management Committee.

b) Learning and Growing (September - December 2006)

In order to publicise the garden in the local neighbourhood the committee organised an Open Day in September to which members of the public were invited. I had no involvement in this apart from dropping in as a visitor on the day. Using the idea from British Food Fortnight, an 'Ugly Veg Competition' was held, and food from the garden cooked and served up on site.



Also in September Andy, Dave, Donna, the Green Gym Co-ordinator and I visited The Green Patch (Kettering Community Supported Agriculture). It had been intended that some service users would accompany us but this was not possible due to other commitments.

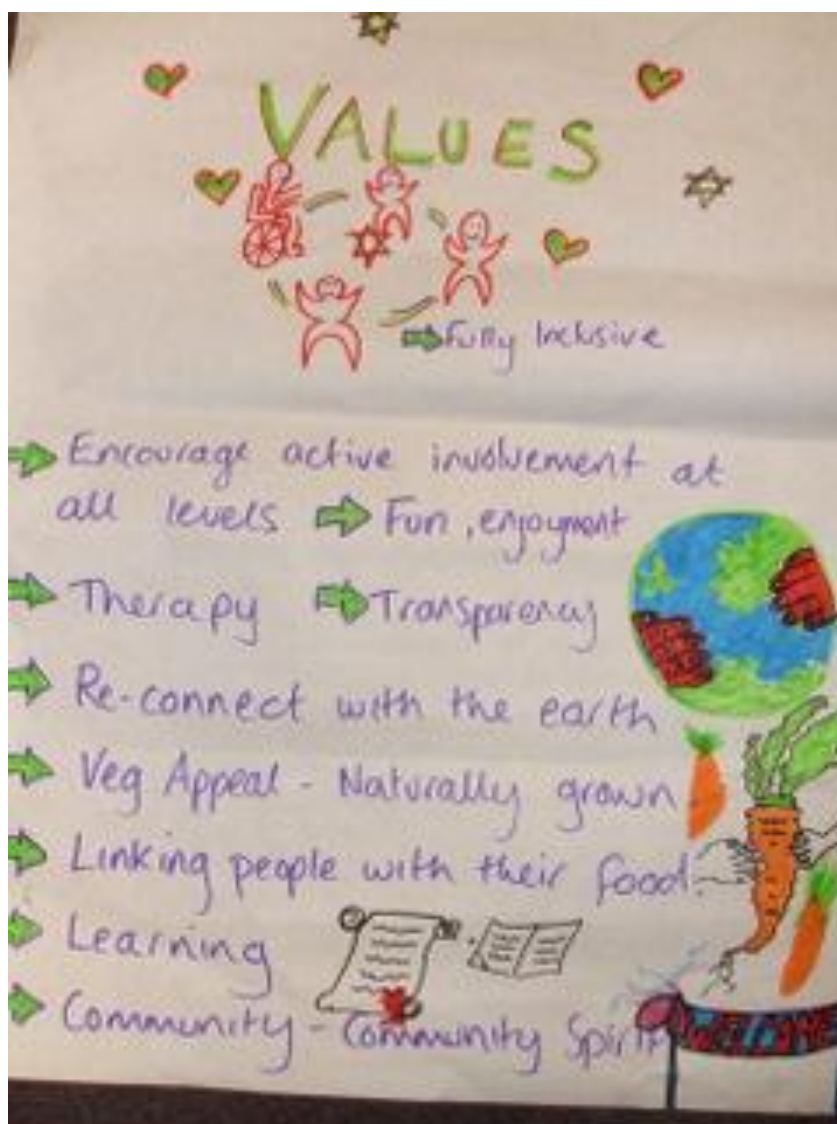
Planning continued using participatory techniques as more service users joined in the meetings.

A second visit was made in November to a small CSA near Durham, the only CSA already operating in the county.

Following the approval of the project by the District Council the meetings became very busy and action orientated. A small amount of funding was needed to purchase seeds and essential items and various potential sources were approached. Efforts were also made to contact prospective partners including the Primary Care Trust, the local school and college, and Sure Start. This stage was about exploring what additional assets were available to support the project and to influence how it would be shaped. The college started using the garden for two student placements for two hours a week; this was to grow into a much bigger partnership, eventually growing to 10-12 student placements and additional work being undertaken out of term time.

Sure Start also eventually became involved, with regular attendance from a staff member at committee meetings and events for parents and children on site.

At the November meeting we held a 'brainstorming' session about values:



Values exercise: artwork by Donna

A second meeting in November found them in a more sombre mood as they discussed the challenges that lay ahead. The learning from the two visits had helped them to see the difference between the garden as it had been running and what it would need to become in order to provide a more consistent and extended supply of produce. Andy was very confident about the demand side and said he could think of around 30 people who were interested in becoming members and taking a share of the harvest. This number was considered to be too ambitious for the first year. More problematic was finding sufficient members willing to help with the production side and it was therefore decided to give preference to members who could also offer practical help. It was also agreed to strengthen the committee by inviting more people to join.

In December five new people attended and a committee comprised of three staff members (Andy, Donna, Ana), three service users, and one volunteer from the Green Gym, was formally elected. This marked a handing over of roles and responsibilities to the group. Prior to this meeting I had written up all minutes and, after the departure of the Locality Manager, had informally steered the meetings. We now had a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer in place. A project name was needed for the Constitution and it was agreed that the formal name would be “Tindale Community Supported Allotment Gardens” with a choice of a more friendly ‘working name’ to be made by opening it up to more service users for suggestions, with the decision to be brought to the following meeting. Thus it was that Growing Together became the working name of the project. I agreed to provide a template for the Business Plan and to write the introductory sections, with various members inputting other sections. Another member agreed to draft a membership leaflet. So by the end of the first year, after a slow start, they had obtained permission to go ahead and develop their ideas, agreed a Constitution, written a Project Path (action plan) that would form the basis of the first Business Plan, agreed values, elected a committee, visited two CSAs, and begun to develop partnerships with other organisations.

c) Moving Forwards (January 2007 – December 2008)

The first season’s vegetable growing as a new organisation commenced in 2007. Work was based upon a growing plan that set out where, when, and how much of each variety was to be planted: an essential tool for observing rotations and spreading production out across the season.

The Business Plan was completed with a clear statement of aims and objectives:

Aims

To work in partnership with other organisations and the local community to improve the quality of life for local people through:

- i. the production and sale of local 'home grown' food and horticultural products involving participation of the community;
- ii. the promotion of healthy lifestyles and citizenship through diet, exercise, training and education, leisure, and inclusion.

These will be achieved by

- i. developing a weekly box scheme for seasonal vegetables and fruit for members of the CSA
- ii. encouraging local residents to become members and to be actively involved
- iii. using excess produce to make preserves to be included in the offer in the box scheme
- iv. partnership with BTCV Green Gym
- v. developing partnerships with local schools, colleges, and health providers to promote healthy lifestyles.

An updated version (2008) and membership leaflet can be seen in appendices v and vi.

Members paid an annual fee of £5 and signed up for a year's 'share of the harvest'. Funding was received from Local Agenda 21 (LA21) and one of the service users was awarded a Community Champion Grant from the Scarman Trust that provided £2,000 to set up a fruit growing plot. Ongoing resource needs continued to be met from small grants from various Local Authority/Town Council pots and from in-kind donations from partners (e.g. a lock up shed from Groundwork and a hand propelled tractor from the College).

We worked together to prepare presentations for LA21 and the network of Local Strategic Partnership Leads. They also joined Weardale CSA in promoting their project at a local agricultural show, attended an information fair at a local youth and community centre, hosted an event for a local Arts Festival on site, and held another Open Day for the local community.

The first Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held in October 2007. Partnership working had expanded, with Sure Start becoming more involved on the site, Groundwork helping with some planting projects, and the local college placing three students with a tutor on site for weekly sessions as part of a course in horticulture. This number increased to 10 – 12 students and three staff the following year.

Andy describes their experiences in his Annual Report (2006-2007) produced for the AGM:

Our first year of growing only vegetables was a learning curve. For much of the time we were experimenting with different varieties, times of sowing (e.g. successional sowing) and growing under different conditions (e.g. using a no-dig system and planting potatoes under cover). Due to the unusual amount of rain this summer we did lose a fair amount of produce ... What we lacked in quantity we certainly made up for in taste! We managed to produce approximately 80 boxes of vegetables ... Some ... were used for the Open Day and some used to give people a taste of what we grew e.g. children from Sure Start, students from ... (the) College. Overall we have learnt a lot from this year and will take lessons learnt into this next year and beyond.

In December 2007 Growing Together moved out of the Day Centre to a nearby Youth and Community Centre.

Heavy storms early in 2008 caused severe damage to fencing and polytunnel covers. Money to repair the damage had to be found and the polytunnels were not ready for early sowings, resulting in reduced overall production in the second season.

Partnership working with the college and Sure Start continued to expand. The BTCV Green Gym co-ordinator's job had finished and although the sessions were planned to continue to be run by Green Gym volunteers, this quickly petered out as it proved to be too much for them to do unsupported. New partnerships were being developed: a local charitable training organisation had two 13 week training placements on the site, with the promise of more to come (both trainees were successful in obtaining employment on leaving their courses), and the Princes Trust carried out some maintenance work. Another learning disability Day Centre began weekly visits so that on Thursdays there were sometimes up to 30 people working on site. Relationships with neighbouring allotment holders were good, with one waiting to

become an official volunteer once all the necessary checks were processed. Events for the local Arts Festival again took place on site and they were included in a video about the allotment site to be made for the following year's festival. The outlook for the future was optimistic. Having spent the first two years following an iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, and having to repeatedly change tack, they now anticipated that in the following season they would be in a better position to concentrate on producing more: "Over the winter we will be building the last of the raised beds. We will then be able to concentrate on growing as all the building work will be finished." (Annual Report, 2007-2008).



d) Summary

Milestone	Date	Relevance
Approval of project by District Council and County Council management	Sept/Oct '06	Project has the official sanction to progress
Visits to other CSAs (The Green Patch/Abundant Earth)	Sept/Nov '06	Sense of belonging to something; valuable learning; it can be done
Adoption of Constitution and new name, and election of Management Committee	Dec '06	First step to independence; transfer of roles and responsibilities

		from facilitator to group members; new identity
Production of Growing Plan	Spring '07	Evidence of learning; clear practical plan for the season's growing
LA21 funding and Community Champion award	May/Aug '07	Finance available for essential items and to develop fruit patch
Production of Year 1 Business Plan	May '07	Conclusion of lengthy planning and learning process
First AGM	Oct '07	Mark of achievement; reflection on the year and lessons learnt; action planning for next year
Move to new premises	Dec '07	Increased independence from Centre
Majority of infrastructure work completed	Dec '08	Free to concentrate on production
Consolidation and growth of partnership working	2008	Established relationships providing more security and consistent labour

WEARDALE CSA

The decision to research a possible project in Weardale was made after several other avenues had been explored. There was no pre-existing group in this case and it started with a single contact, a farmer who had been previously interviewed for my MSc dissertation (Charles, 2005).

Meet the main participants: these are the key individuals who were research participants for some or all of the project's development.

Chris: the farmer referred to above. He runs a 360 acre mixed arable farm with an associated bed and breakfast business and caravan site. He also opened a farm shop and café in 2007. He is well known in the local community and was an active member of the project in the early stages, offering free use of the café to hold meetings.



Chris (holding leeks) and Andrew

specialising in mental health, could also be involved in. He had considered options for acquiring land but could not afford to buy it himself. Andrew was the first chairperson of the steering group.

Andrew: Andrew was a part-time non-stipendiary Minister in the Church of England when the project started. He worked an allotment plot and was considering his future direction when we first met. He had a vision of a horticultural project involving people with mental health problems, which his wife, who works as an occupational therapist

Tony: works for Natural England and joined the steering group following the public workshop event in September 2007 (see below). Tony's interest in local food is closely aligned to his broader concerns around sustainable lifestyles. He brought valuable skills and experience to the group in making



funding applications, financial planning, **Tony (right) and Lance** and setting up the company structure. He said that involvement in the project had “reinforced my belief and faith in sustainability/permaculture principles (and) I have already started to eat more seasonally.” Tony took over the role of chairperson when Andrew resigned.

Victoria: a mother of four children, she became involved in the early stages and was very enthusiastic. She has a successful allotment and works as a volunteer at the local



primary school where she has built some raised beds for the pupils to grow vegetables. She found the meetings quite difficult and the delays in getting access to the land frustrating as she was really keen to start growing food. Victoria was treasurer until Julia joined the group.

Louise: like Tony, joined the steering group following the workshop event, although she was initially surprised to receive an invitation having put ‘possibly’ on her expression of interest form! She soon came to take on a central role being an active participant in meetings and eventually becoming company secretary. She is a self-employed photographer and used her skills to set up the website and provide a photographic record of progress. She came with little experience in growing food but she also spent a lot of time working on the land.

Julia: joined the steering group in September 2008 following a recruitment drive. She volunteered to take over the role of treasurer from Victoria (who did not want to continue) at her first meeting. Julia is an academic involved in the arts (film and new media). She moved to the area relatively recently and set up a bed and breakfast business with her husband **Lance**, who also became involved as a volunteer. Julia “want(ed) to be involved with the area where I live and to grow my own food.” Lance said “Since Julia and I moved to Weardale it has been



frustrating not being able to grow lots of fruit and vegetables. The CSA appears to offer the opportunity to take part in a real ‘small’ holding.”

Cathy, Jennie, Angie, Rachael and Bev: all played important roles at the beginning. Three of them left when new babies arrived. Cathy decided to leave in August 2008 because she did not enjoy working as a group member. Jennie left in December 2008.

a) Beginnings (November 2006 – September 2007)

I arranged a meeting with Chris in November 2006 to find out if he was still interested in CSA. He expressed an interest in developing a project on the farm and suggested I contact Andrew, who he knew was interested “in this sort of thing.” Andrew in turn gave me other contacts to follow up and I conducted a number of exploratory meetings with individuals, as well as meeting with Chris and Andrew and with other local organisations and agencies.

A small planning group was formed in July 2007 with Chris, Andrew, Victoria and one other. Two others joined later. At this stage the proposal was to develop an independent community enterprise that would rent land from Chris’s farm and supply the Farm Shop in addition to running a CSA for local people.

This group organised a public workshop event held in September 2007 to explain the idea of a CSA, gauge the level of interest in the wider community and find out what questions and ideas people had. They publicised the event at two Agricultural shows and via a leaflet drop. They also visited a small CSA near Durham, and two local food projects in the neighbouring county of Cumbria, in order to see for themselves what could be achieved, and learn from others' experiences.

b) Learning and Growing (September 2007 – May 2008)

Fifty adults and 11 children attended the workshop, which was funded by a local enterprise grant. It included presentations from existing CSAs, and sessions designed to elicit responses and ideas that could inform future development. The level of interest indicated that it was possible to move forward and a steering group of 11 members was formed, with a total of 30 people interested in joining a CSA.



The Steering Group started by conducting a skills audit, and agreeing ground rules, aims, objectives, and values. Sub groups were set up to work on specific tasks such as funding and finance, growing and land issues, communications, and choosing and setting up a legal structure.

Aims

To sustainably produce and sell healthy, naturally grown food to the local community. To enable local people to re-connect with growing food by creating inclusive opportunities to take part in and learn about all aspects of food production, and to promote the involvement of people who could benefit therapeutically.

Principles and Values

- We will attempt to make the experience fun, fostering community spirit and reconnecting local people with food production.
- We aim to be accessible to all irrespective of their circumstances.
- Decision making will be transparent, with any member able to express an opinion. Wherever possible we will seek to achieve consensus.
- We will work within a spirit of cooperation, in a mutually supportive no-blame culture.
- To support Weardale's local economy while creating a pleasurable and co-operative working environment with a fair return to all involved.
- We will aim to produce a diverse harvest of fresh, high quality food.
- We will agree the value of shares [or any other agreed measure] in advance, accepting that value when the food is produced.
- We will maintain an appropriate membership to fit the anticipated level of food production.
- We will minimise our negative environmental impact, ensuring that the scale of growing is sustainable.
- The food we produce will complement existing provision, ensuring that the local economy benefits.

The initial intention was to attempt to start growing a limited number of crops in 2008. An intensive period of activity followed with steering group meetings being held fortnightly and sub-groups meeting in between. Prior to securing funding from charitable trusts a governing document and organisational policies were required. A business advisor was found to help with these processes, and this came with some start-up grants that would pay the legal costs of incorporation, insurance, and drawing up leases for land. Working through these issues and making decisions was difficult and often frustrating, but without a source of private finance it was necessary to cover all these aspects early on in order to access funds to pay for the more practical requirements such as tools, seeds, manure, and fencing. All members were learning new skills and knowledge as most had never had any involvement in project development prior to this.

The goal of starting to produce food in 2008 might have been met were it not for a big change of direction that occurred in early December 2007 when it was decided that an alternative site was needed. It came as a surprise to the steering group to find that the rent for the proposed land at Chris's farm would be too high to make the CSA an economically viable enterprise. A whole new set of problems and questions appeared and just as the group was moving towards more of an 'acting' phase they were thrown back into focussing on planning. Alternative land was identified quite quickly but it did not have some of the advantages of the original site such as the close connection to the Farm Shop (giving visibility), a water supply, and the availability of storage facilities. It was also located in Frosterley, a village 3.5 miles to the west of the original location. The landowner wanted to support the CSA and offered a 10 year lease on the site (approximately 3 acres) rent free, with the option of possible expansion to neighbouring land in future years following its restoration to agricultural land from quarrying. The group had to weigh up the pros and cons of this site, including having the soil tested for heavy metals, before opting to take it up.

By the end of January 2008 it was becoming clear that any food production during this year would be minimal. Local sources of funding were being actively pursued but were dogged with communication problems. Eventually a start up grant of £10,000 was secured (approved in April), plus a couple of smaller grants.

In February a decision to become a Community Interest Company (CIC) co-operative (limited by shares) was made and the registration process commenced. Andrew began negotiations about obtaining a second parcel of land in the form of an unused garden of around 0.5 acre, attached to the vicarage in Stanhope, 2.7 miles west of Frosterley. This was a sheltered site in contrast to the more exposed site at Frosterley. Two leases thus had to be negotiated and agreed before access to the land was permitted.

In April 2008 an open meeting was held to provide an update on progress and to ask for input on details of what to plant, harvesting, distribution, and paying for shares.

Access to the land on both sites was delayed further by the time taken to obtain the leases. There appeared to be unnecessary delay from the land-owner's land agent and it was the middle of June 2008 before the lease at Frosterley was finally signed.

c) Moving Forwards (June 2008 – December 2009)

A farmer was employed to plough some strips of land at Frosterley and a work day held in July when some potatoes were planted.



Volunteers outside of the steering group were not allowed on site until warning signs had been erected on top of the bunds separating the site from the adjacent quarry. The first full volunteer day took place in October 2008 when broad beans were planted, which grew to produce the first crop for the CSA.

Work at the Stanhope garden commenced in June 2008.



Further delays in accessing the £10,000 grant money meant that the fence for the Frosterley site (to protect against deer and rabbits) did not get erected until February 2009.

In 2008 the Big Lottery had launched a Local Food Grant, administered by the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT). Weardale CSA matched the eligibility criteria very well, so it appeared to be the right grant at the right time. A first stage application was submitted in July 2008 and they heard that they were invited to submit a full application in September. The grant offered the potential to secure significant start up funds that could cover both capital costs and the wages for a grower for three years whilst the project established itself.

Additional ongoing training took place in the form of informal training organised by the Soil Association at an organic horticultural business and at a CSA, both in Yorkshire. A days training on site was also arranged to look at how the land might

best be used, and a session run about the roles and responsibilities of company directors.

Following many hours of work by the steering group a full application for funding from the Local Food Grant was submitted at the end of November 2008. This was to provide for a part-time grower for three years and for capital costs such as polytunnels, a composting toilet, storage facilities, and equipment. A grant of £5,000 from a local source was also secured around this time.

Numbers attending steering group meetings started to fall off and over the ensuing months members left the group due to changes in family and other commitments or because they found group relationships difficult. Three members left as a result of having a new babies and one because the family was moving away from the area.

In February 2009, six months after the initial application was submitted, the Local Food Grant (LFG) wrote to say that the application had been declined on the grounds that they did not fund CICs limited by shares. Tony was able to use his experience with grant funding to negotiate an agreement that the existing application could progress if the company type was changed to one limited by guarantee.

Regular volunteer days at both sites commenced in the spring of 2009. A hedgerow and a fruit and nut orchard was planted at the larger Frosterley site and a temporary lean to 'green house' to grow tomatoes, peppers and other plants needing protection was constructed at Stanhope, and various crops sown.



News that the LFG application was unsuccessful arrived in early May 2009. They had the option to reapply, attempting to address the areas of concern, although the feedback was sparse and understanding how to make an application that was more acceptable with so little guidance and dialogue was challenging.

A summary of progress given at an open meeting held in June 2009 listed the following as the main achievements to date:

- 2 plots of land leased
- CIC Co-op set up
- 15K funding secured
- Fencing erected and hedge and orchard planted at Frosterley
- Materials for greenhouse and wood for raised beds at Stanhope obtained
- Purchased water cubes, seeds, and manure
- Legal fees and insurance paid
- Beds ploughed at Frosterley and Broad Beans, onions and brassicas planted. Squash planted at Stanhope
- Tomatoes and peppers being grown on windowsills to be put in greenhouse when completed (nearly done)
- Website up and running (www.weardalecsa.org.uk)
- LFG applied for and refused



The first harvest of four crates of broad beans was picked in June, with some being sold to Chris's farm shop.

By April 2009 the steering group was being run by a solid core of four people (Andrew, Tony, Louise and Julia). Then in June Andrew gave the group prior notice that he would be resigning in the near future due to the possible offer of a full-time position as a parish priest, for which he needed to prepare. Since his resignation and appointment the CSA has been run by Tony (who took over as chairperson), Louise and Julia (with members and others helping with practical work on the land).

With little time to devote to publicity, this took the form of a wide scale leaflet drop that included a short questionnaire (available on the website).

Groundwork and BTCV were approached to find out if they would be interested in working with and supporting the CSA. One reason given for the LFG application being refused was a perceived lack of resources in terms of paid staff, and gaining the input from well established organisations such as these was seen as one way to bolster the resource base. Both organisations committed to being involved. Groundwork subsequently organised some volunteer days using their Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) workers and BTCV agreed to provide some match funding towards running volunteering and health related activities (“Green Gym”) on site, with a volunteer co-ordinator. A first stage application to the LFG was re-submitted in August 2009.

New volunteers, mainly recruited by Tony from his contacts in the community, became involved in working on the land. A student from the county’s horticultural college produced a growing plan for both sites, and sometimes helped with growing.

Crops planted this season included squash, beetroot, potatoes, onions, garlic, celeriac, cabbage, leek, tomatoes and peppers.

The temporary greenhouse proved to be far more temporary than anticipated. The lease for the garden made no mention that the garden and wall were designated as Grade II listed. As a consequence, the CSA were instructed to dismantle it in the summer by the planning department but were able to gain an extra few months to allow the crops to mature (although they refused to fruit, despite looking healthy).

Despite the many setbacks and obstacles the CSA has continued to develop. The first stage application to the LFG was again successful, keeping open the option to submit a full application by the deadline of September 2011. Over the winter of 2009 – 2010 raised beds were built at the Stanhope site and planted up in the spring, providing a good harvest from the garden that year. My formal involvement ended in December 2009 following an independent focus group held by Dr Nicola Thompson (Newcastle University) and Professor Sarah Banks (Durham University) providing a quick evaluation of the impact of my intervention.

<i>d) Summary</i>		
Milestone	Date	Comment
Agreement with farmer to rent land for CSA	March '07	The nature of the project decided
Community Champion awarded to Victoria	Aug '07	Funding for visits, training and some seeds etc
Workshop event	Sept '07	Widespread publicity; indication of level of local interest; decision to go ahead
Visits to CSAs	Sept '07	Inspiration and learning
Establishment of Steering Group	Oct '07	Detailed planning begins
Identifying alternative land	Dec '07	Big change in project plans
Agreeing legal structure (CIC co-op)	Feb '08	Incorporation can proceed
Start up funding secured	Mar '08	Ability to start growing as soon as leases and insurance in place
Lease at Frosterley signed	June '08	Access to site
Work begins at Stanhope garden	June '08	Focus moving to action and growing
First full volunteer day at Frosterley	Oct '08	25 volunteers turned out; broad beans sown
1st stage application to Local Food Grant (LFG) submitted	July '08	
2nd stage (full) application to LFG submitted	Nov '08	
Regular volunteering sessions commence at both sites	Spring '09	
LFG refused	May '09	A big bloc to progress
1st Stage application re-submitted with Groundwork and BTCV as partners (accepted)	Aug '09	Opportunity remains open to reapply
Raised beds built at Stanhope	Winter '09	



CHAPTER 4

ANIMATING CSA: WHO AND HOW?

1. INTRODUCTION

To set the context for the two research sites I begin with an overview of AFNs (and CSAs in particular) in the North East region, including some speculation about why they have been slow to emerge here. The scarcity of CSAs in the region was one of the drivers for this research: how might they be animated here and what benefits would it bring to participants? The bulk of the chapter is a narrative account of what I did in the process of animating two CSA projects in Weardale, County Durham between 2006 and 2009. The two research projects started from different points, one building on an existing project and the other being a completely new venture. By the end of my official involvement they were both still developing (a brief update on progress after that time can be found in the addendum). I begin by explaining the entry points, how I chose the research sites and why, and how I gained access and negotiated my role and established the two research groups. I describe how data were gathered and recorded and then take a closer look at my role as the academic researcher in the process.

2. CSA AND THE NORTH EAST REGION OF ENGLAND⁵⁷

The directory of CSAs compiled by the Soil Association and displayed on their website only records two CSAs located in the north east region, one being Weardale CSA (initiated by this research). In addition, a vegetable/vegan CSA operated for a number of years near Darlington (just to the south of Co. Durham) and was later taken over by an established organic box scheme. A successful meat CSA on the Cumbrian side of the region's border with the North West ran for a number of years, but due to changes in personnel is not operating as a CSA at the time of writing.

⁵⁷ From 1994 – 2011 England had nine administrative regions, each with a Government Office and a Regional Development Agency. GOs closed in 2011, and RDAs close in March 2012.

2.1 Local food in north east England

The following paragraphs provide a brief summary of the socio-economic profile of the region and the nature of the local food and drink sector. This is followed by some suggested explanations for the slow development of CSA in the region. The North East is a 'lagging' region of England. Although there have been some indicators of improvements (for example rates of rises in employment and business survival) it remains the region with the lowest GDP, has a lower level of economic participation and the highest proportion of the 10% most deprived wards in England⁵⁸. It has the lowest gross household income per head of the English Regions and the lowest proportion of adults qualified to degree level in the UK (Worthy and Gouldson, 2010, p93). Much of this can be explained by the rapid decline of heavy industry in the twentieth century, and particularly coal mining. The legacy of the end of this industry has been high levels of worklessness, a low skill base and poor health. In the former coalfield areas there are many settlements in rural areas that grew up around the local mine and whose initial function has disappeared. The North East also has the most rapidly ageing population demographic of all the regions and if trends continue over 40% of the population will be over 50 years old by 2013.

The region has many assets and strengths of which one of the strongest is the natural and cultural heritage. There are two World Heritage Sites (Durham Cathedral and Hadrian's Wall), a National Park, and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The area has a strong reputation for hospitality and the friendliness of its residents that the Regional Development Agency (One North East) attempted to capture in its tourist promotion of the region with the strap line "Passionate People, Passionate Places". Linking local food to tourism is one potential area for expansion and has already been activated by the Hadrian's Wall Country branding⁵⁹ for example.

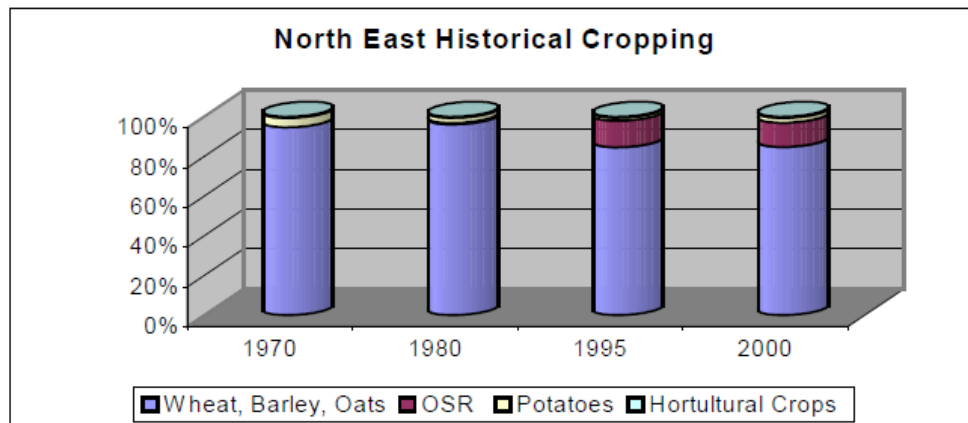
Agriculture in the North East is largely red meat production (beef and sheep), especially on the higher land: 12% of the national production of sheep is from the region. Arable has been dominated by cereal production for the past 30 years, mainly

⁵⁸One NorthEast (2006) *Leading the Way* Regional Economic Strategy

⁵⁹ See <http://www.hadrians-wall.org/page.aspx/Discover/Know-local,-buy-local> accessed 13/08/10

winter wheat, with only a small number of specialist growers in the vegetable, salad and fruit market (Figure 3). This small sub-sector is dominated by potato growing (40%) and yet this only comprises 1.6% of national output of potatoes (Economic Analysis Unit (EAU), 2009; Worthy and Gouldson, 2010).

Figure 3: Cropping patterns in the NE region



(ADAS, 2006a, p9) (OSR = Oil Seed Rape)

The great majority (72%) of primary agricultural production is sold outside of the region and 60% of sheep and 32% of cattle leave the region for finish and/or slaughter. In addition, 71% of purchases (inputs) by food manufacturers are sourced outside of the region and 73% of their sales are outside of the region (ibid).

The North East Regional Food Strategy defines locally produced food and drink as “distinctive or provenance food made by companies manufacturing within the region. It is accepted that not all ingredients will be regionally sourced but that a significant element of the added value takes place in the region” (ADAS, 2006b, p4). This definition clearly includes ‘locality’ as well as ‘local’ food and drink (see chapter 1, section 5 for definitions of these terms) and reflects an emphasis on processing (rather than primary production). This local food and drink sector in the North East under-performs relative to other English Regions, accounting for an estimated 4% of total food and drink sales against a national average of 6% (ADAS, 2006b). A Report commissioned by One North East (ADAS, 2006a) notes that changes in consumer purchasing trends towards a preference for locally grown produce (in particular

vegetables and fruit) could provide an opportunity for growth in this sector (p30). Research conducted with Fire-fighters working in the City of Newcastle found an interest in purchasing local foods in this group, albeit for reasons of ‘defensive localism’, that suggests that interest in local food is not necessarily confined to higher income groups in the area and that “northern UK diets could turn greener if availability and prices improve” (Scholten, 2006, p130).

There is no comprehensive database of local food businesses in the region. The Strategy for regionally produced Food and Drink (ADAS, 2006b) estimated that there are around 150 local food businesses in operation. Northumbria Larder (the Regional Food and Drink Group) has a membership of only 37⁶⁰. However, there is some evidence of growth in the sector. In County Durham, at least six new Farm Shops have opened in the previous five years and there are now 22 Farmers’ Markets in the region (the first one opened in 1999)⁶¹. Consumer activism in support of local food is growing primarily through the Transition Town groups that are forming in numerous locations. An example is the Durham Local Food Group, which has constructed a County Durham Local Food Website (www.durhamlocalfood.org.uk) and is undertaking a Fruit Project, with the goal of having a fruit tree for every citizen in Durham.

This profile would indicate that the very low numbers of CSAs in the region is not surprising when looked at alongside the results of a small number of studies in the US and UK which have investigated the uneven spatial distribution of AFNs (see chapter 3, 2.2.3, for a discussion of AFNs). Their findings provide some insight into the reasons for the relatively slower rate of development of the sector, and CSAs in particular, in the North East region. As Lyson and Guptill comment, “civic agriculture is associated with particular commodities, and with specific social, economic, and demographic characteristics of localities. [In contrast] Commodity agriculture is more sensitive to measures that tap the classic economic factors of production, namely, land, labor, and capital” (2004, p382), or more succinctly,

⁶⁰<http://www.northumbria-larder.co.uk/directory.html> accessed 13/08/10

⁶¹ Resource Briefing Paper 756 available at: http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/projects/rusource_briefings/rus09/756.pdf accessed 13/08/10

“place matters” (Qazi and Selfa, 2005, p47). There are a number of factors that could reasonably be considered to be relevant in this case:

a) The economic and educational profile

Research from the US indicates that AFNs are more prevalent where incomes and educational attainment levels are higher (Lyson and Guptill, 2004; Schnell, 2007). Research conducted with members of CSAs produces conflicting evidence around the relationship of income to membership, but there is consistent evidence that CSA members are more likely to have a higher level of educational attainment (see chapter 3, 2.2.1).

b) The socio-cultural and industrial history

The North East has a strong sense of local and cultural identity as a region, linked closely in some areas to its recent industrial past and to the political and class based battles that were fought, especially around the demise of the coal mining industry in the 1980s. Concern about conventional food production and consumption patterns is not a part of this legacy and has only entered the public sphere in more recent times in the form of regional policy and media interest. Schell (2007) noticed a link between CSAs and democratic/progressive politics in the US but also emphasised that it could be viewed in terms of self-reliance and strong entrepreneurial characteristics. Although the North East is traditionally the heartland of the UK Labour party, the dominance of large scale employers (e.g. coal mines, ship builders, and more recently the public sector) has not encouraged an entrepreneurial habit⁶². The influence of local culture is also raised by Ilbery and Watts et al (2006) who suggest that the concentration of AFNs in Devon and Somerset might be connected to “the presence of ‘alternative’ culture and lifestyles” (p220). This is also apparent in the case of Stroud Community Agriculture who note that Stroud is “a centre of independent enterprise and innovation” and that it has a thriving weekly farmer’s

⁶² The North East has a small private sector relative to the rest of the UK. For example, at the start of 2007 there were 237 enterprises/10,000 adult population, compared with the UK average of 399. The rate of business start-ups has improved since 2003 and is now out-performing the UK average, but there is a long way to go to catch up. (William Hayward, NE Research and Information Partnership. Personal communication (23/03/11) and Research Team Briefing Note.

market, a community allotment, food co-ops, a food hub, and was one of the first communities to adopt a Local Exchange Trading System (LETS) (Stroud Community Agriculture, undated). Qazi and Selfa (2005) make a strong argument for linkages between AFN development and the prevailing local culture and history. Their research in two conservative agricultural areas in Washington State demonstrates that the pathway to alternative practices has to be forged in a way that is pragmatic and appropriate in circumstances where there is little interest or support for organic produce or for what they describe as the more ‘countercultural roots’ of the movement (p48). Their observation that in order to establish AFNs it may initially be necessary to tap into the motivations of a ‘defensive localism’ (Winter, 2003) could be pertinent in the North East.

c) Dominant type of agriculture

Local food enterprises are more likely to trade in certain types of production such as fruit and vegetables, rather than bulk commodities such as grain (Lyson and Guptill, 2004) and are therefore more easily established in areas with a tradition of growing these sort of crops. In the UK, the lack of CAP subsidies for horticulture may also be a driver for producers to look for alternative ways of connecting with consumers (Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006). Ilbery and Watts (ibid) recorded a high concentration of AFNs in the horticultural landscape of the Vale of Evesham, a very different natural, social, economic and cultural environment from much of the North East region.

d) Tourism and landscape designation

The positive impact of landscape designations (such as National Parks) and tourism on the development of AFNs has been suggested by a number of authors (e.g. Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006; Ricketts Hein and Ilbery et al., 2006) the latter also commenting that it is most likely to be effective where the link between high quality landscape and quality local food is actively promoted. Although the North East boasts a number of high quality sites, the tourist industry is underdeveloped compared to other northern areas such as North



Yorkshire and Cumbria. An exception is Hadrian's Wall where local food is branded as 'Hadrian's Wall Country Locally Produced'.

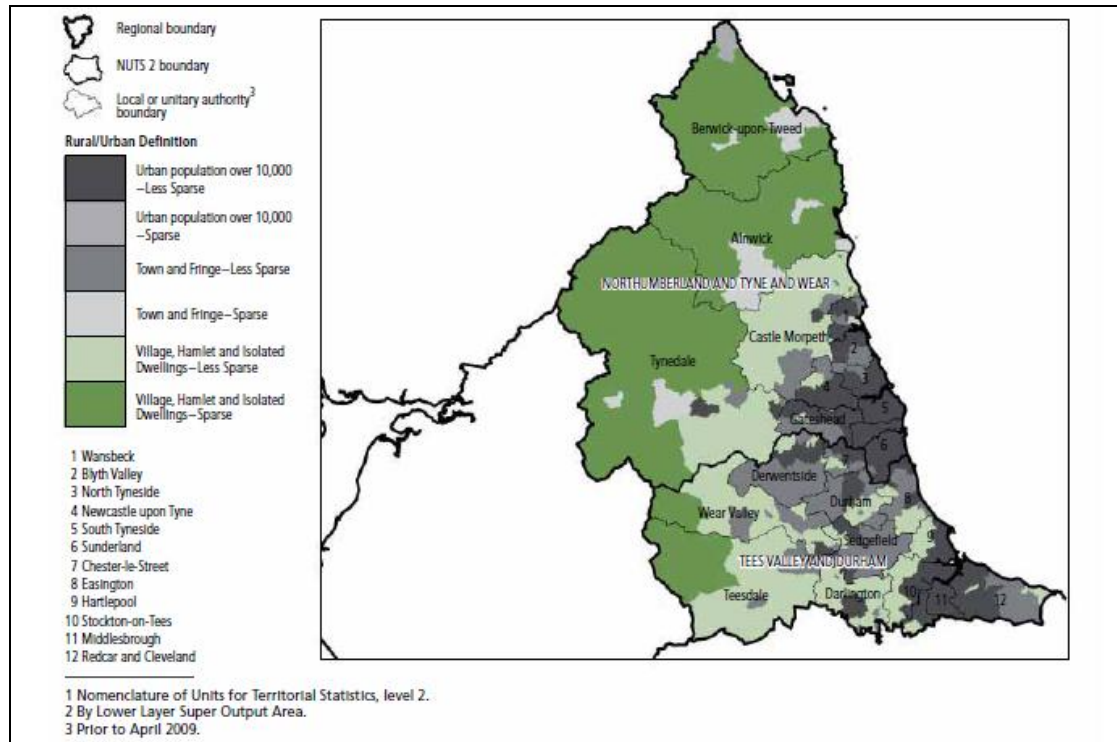
With the transition from an economy based on heavy industry complete, tourism is rapidly becoming a rising sector: in 2009 the industry grew by 2% overall in the North East, with the biggest growth being in Co Durham (5%, plus an 8% rise in expenditure)⁶³. Connecting local food to tourism could be one of the positive drivers for future growth in the local food sector as a niche marketing opportunity.

e) Pattern of Urban centres

The strong correlation between the location of CSAs and the existence of large urban conurbations in the US may not prove to be such an important factor in the UK with its far higher population density. Nevertheless, in their mapping study of local food in the South West and West Midlands Regions, Ilbery and Watts et al (2006) included proximity to urban centres and particular trunk roads as one of a number of factors possibly influencing the distribution of local food activity.

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http://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/business/8375534.North_East_tourism_enjoys_more_success/?dm_i=61F,8K31,JNN7U,M4WS,1 (accessed 11/10/10)

Figure 4: Local or Unitary authority, NUTS2¹ and Rural/Urban Definitions²

Source: (Worthy and Gouldson, 2010, p30)

Figure 4 illustrates the largely sparse population distribution in the region, but with a concentration of urban development along the mid and south east coastal area. Therefore there may be more potential for AFNs in these locations, although other influencing factors such as culture and traditions in what are former industrial areas may negate the urban effect.

2.2 Local policy

Local government policy in the region is in principle supportive of growth in the sector although the likelihood of any financial support is diminished following the introduction of public sector cuts by the Coalition Government in 2010. For example, in the Sustainable Community Strategy (County Durham Partnership, 2010) Durham County Council and partners envisage a future that includes a robust local food economy: “We worked with and strengthened the local food industry and ensured that food security was paramount so that this aspect of our economy flourished (p37); The

local economy is flourishing so that food security is not a worry for County Durham and rural and agricultural jobs have benefited (p75); The low carbon economy was at the heart of everything that the County achieved. A range of local food initiatives reduced food miles, improved health and supported the rural economy (p77).” A Regional Food and Drink Strategy was published in 2006 (ADAS, 2006b) with the aim of “maximising the potential for and development of regionally produced, distinctive and provenance-based food and drink within the North East, to increase value-added retained within the region” (ibid, Executive Summary). One of the actions to come out of this strategy was the establishment of the north east Regional Food and Drink Group (RFG) in 2007 with a remit to “drive growth in value-added food and regional profile” (ADAS, 2006b, p35). It received funding for four years (to March 2011) from One North East. In January 2010 Sir Donald Curry (who chaired the “Curry Commission” in 2002 (Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, 2002)) was appointed Chair of a new Board for the group. He believes that “one of the things that strategically is really important in the region is to ... expand the amount of food that we actually produce, process, and consume in the region” (Curry, 2010). He suggests that the main area of expansion should be the production of fruit and vegetables and that because of the policies of the supermarkets that “we’ve got to grow alternative markets for our produce in the north east” (ibid). When funding ceased for the RFG it became a limited company (Taste North East Ltd), and now operates as a support organisation offering a menu of services to food and drink businesses at every stage of the food supply chain.

2.3 A brief profile of Weardale

The two research sites are located in Weardale in Co Durham, which is situated in the western part of the former Wear Valley District⁶⁴ and is the northerly vale of the two Durham Dales (Weardale and Teesdale). Wear Valley is described as a ‘deprived’ area having an average ranking of 24 out of 354 districts in the 2004 Indices of Deprivation (GONE (Analysis and Performance Team), 2007, p14). The population is concentrated towards the eastern part of the District where coal mining was the major form of employment up to the early/mid 20th century. In Weardale,

⁶⁴ Wear Valley District existed as a 2nd tier local council administrative area until April 2009 when a unitary local authority was established across the whole of Co Durham, bringing all local government services under one administration.

agriculture, mineral extraction and limestone quarrying dominated, with the last of the Lead mines closing in the middle of the last century. Some quarrying activity continues but a major employer in the rural area, the Lafarge Cement Works in Eastgate, closed in 2002 with the loss of 150 jobs. Agricultural employment now accounts for only 1.5% of employment, although this remains higher than the North East (0.4%) and England (0.8%). The major employment sector is now “public administration, education and health” and tourism is identified as a growing sector, especially in Weardale (ibid, 2007, p9 & p4).

The rest of this chapter is a narrative account of the action research activities that occurred in the two research sites in Weardale.

3. WHAT I DID

Action Research is characterised by its use of autobiographical data ... [as] the facilitator or instigator of a change process, part of the research documentation is the researcher's roles, actions and decisions. (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p77)

3.1 Entry points

On commencing my PhD I decided to begin by following up positive contacts made during a feasibility study in Wear Valley, undertaken for a Masters Degree dissertation in 2005 (Charles, 2005). Although I did not need to focus on this location, and I simultaneously held conversations with contacts further afield, I had worked there for five years in a community development role and was well networked. This local knowledge can be an asset, although it also has the potential to create problems (e.g. conflicts of interest, confusion of role). Two farmers interviewed in the original study had said they would be interested to know more should I continue my research. I had also made a brief visit to an allotment project associated with a Local Authority (County Council) run Centre for people with learning disabilities towards the end of my research (this location is referred to as ‘the Centre’ in the following account). This was an informal meeting with one member of staff. I had explained about CSA and told him something about “The Green Patch” (Kettering CSA), an allotment based initiative situated in a similar

social setting. He was very interested and explained that they wanted to become an organisation that included all the community, rather than just the service users at the centre.

When I made contact with these individuals again the allotment project and one of the farmers both expressed a keen interest to become involved in exploring the idea further. At this point I had to make a choice: should I continue to investigate other possible entry points in different locations, or should I follow up these contacts first and find out if there was sufficient interest there? This was an example of what I shall call ‘key choice events’ where decisions taken strongly determined the future shape of the research. Peter Reason emphasised to me the importance of being aware and reflective about choices and consequences in AR: there is no “right way” but decisions should be based upon your perspective and primary aim (Reason, 2007). I decided to try and build on the contacts I already had for a number of practical and personal reasons. The local knowledge I had built up from five years of working in the area consisted of factual information in the form of the socio-economic profile and an understanding of the scope and role of different institutions operating in the area, and a network of relationships across different sectors of the community that gave me access to more nuanced and tacit knowledge about how the community functioned.

On a personal level, this choice enabled me to continue to support the community (in the wider sense) in the location where I had previously worked. The potential downside of this was that I had been employed by the local authority and although I was now seconded to a charity and was no longer working specifically in Wear Valley in my professional role, some people may still identify me as a local authority employee. However, I decided that the benefits outweighed the risks and that I could manage any confusion that might arise. This proved to be the case, especially as most of the individuals who became involved in the research were people with whom I had no previous contact. The relationships I had across the District and the proximity to my home (also my main research base) would save me time and reduce the transactional costs of the research. I also decided that adopting a ‘clean slate’ approach would entail a great deal of time if undertaken thoroughly and could not be

guaranteed to provide me with more appropriate research settings, in which case I could lose months of valuable research time.

3.2 Negotiating access and role

Having determined to follow up these contacts I was entering the important initial phase of inquiry, finding out if there was a sufficient group of assets to justify establishing a research site and then building relationships with potential participants. I agree that “PAR depends on a careful initial building of relationships and negotiation of roles” (Herr and Anderson, 2005) and regarded this phase as critical to the future shape of the research.

As explained in chapter 1, my initial plan was to try and work with three research groups exploring the establishment of one community level scheme (small-scale, very local, volunteer run), one farmer led scheme, and one consumer initiated scheme (consumers finding land, resources and employing a grower). This diversity would provide data on setting up different types of CSA (Greer, 1999; Soil Association, 2001a; Lyson, 2004). It was acknowledged by my supervisors from the beginning that this plan was flexible and contingent on many unknown variables. In addition, adopting PAR as an approach meant that it was not possible to determine the shape of the projects beforehand (see chapter 2), and indeed the possibility that no projects would be produced was accepted in discussions with my Supervisor.

I began my fieldwork by holding a number of conversations that I describe as ‘exploratory meetings’ with the aim of discovering possible entry points into establishing a research group. This process was lengthy and time-consuming and took place over a period spanning at least 12 months, overlapping with the commencement of work on the first project, ‘Growing Together’⁶⁵. Some of these meetings produced contacts and information that had potential to be followed up, and others were unproductive in terms of opportunities for further action. For example, a meeting with a leading member of a countywide Local Food Group produced an enthusiastic response to CSA and an invitation to make a presentation at their next

⁶⁵ The names of both groups were adopted during the course of the projects, but for the sake of clarity they are used at all stages of development.

meeting as they were at the point of deciding on a change in direction. However, by the time this meeting took place, they had made contact with the Slow Food movement and had already decided (informally) to take this route. This felt like a big disappointment at the time as it had looked like a promising group for a consumer initiated CSA. Other meetings that produced potential for further action were not always followed up as developments in Weardale (with what were to become the final projects) began to take up more time and choices needed to be made to concentrate efforts on what appeared to be the most likely sites. These were the ‘key choice events’ mentioned above that involved choosing to concentrate on building upon the first meetings held with Andy (allotment project) and Chris (Weardale farmer) and setting aside other potential avenues of investigation (e.g. from conversations held with interested people in East Durham and Teesdale).

In both cases progress was initially slow and the advantage of being a part-time, rather than full time, PhD researcher became clear. Working within a shorter time frame would have created a pressure to try and make things happen at a quicker pace than participants were ready for. My CD experience has taught me the importance of being able to work at the pace of the community and I agree with Smith and Bratini et al that “University based researchers must interrogate and resist their impulses to hasten, manage, or otherwise control the always evolving, frequently surprising process of PAR” (2010, p422). This way there is space for participants to fully own the activity and to fit their involvement around their other existing commitments. I also agree with Stringer that the “condition of *ownership* is an important element of community-based action research” (Stringer, 1999, p49): my intervention is of necessity temporary and it is essential that participants are working to answer the questions *they* are asking and working towards goals they support themselves.

From the first conversation held with Andy at the Centre (February 2006) it took two months to arrange the second meeting involving a Manager, necessary to begin the process of finding out if their plans to run a wider community project with an independent structure would be acceptable. The Centre had run a Gardening Group for service users on an allotment site adjacent to the Day Centre since 1999 and in

2003/04 had entered into a partnership arrangement with the local Sure Start⁶⁶. However, by the time that I had my first contact with them late in 2005 Sure Start's involvement had stopped and the only other users of the site were from the Green Gym, run by BTCV⁶⁷.

The Centre's interest in the CSA model stemmed from the desire to create an independent community project that integrated service users into the surrounding community. They aspired to eventually sell surplus produce, and the membership and support element of CSA appealed, rather than simply trying to sell to unconnected consumers. The first task was to determine if the management would broadly support the project idea being developed and whether the District Council (owners of the land) would agree to the new model.

The Area Manager's response was very positive and supportive but the initial reaction from the District Council was quite negative. By May 2006 it was still unclear whether or not the project could go ahead. Internal changes in the County Council also meant that the supportive Manager's longer term position was uncertain. It was not until September when the District Council approved a Report agreeing that a CSA could run on the site (with produce sold to members) and October, when a new Area Manager was appointed who also approved of the project, that it was really possible to have complete confidence that the development of the project could proceed, even though by this stage considerable time and effort had been expended on it.

This necessity to devote intensive resources at the beginning of the process whilst still being uncertain of its potential was a source of some anxiety (both to myself and my PhD Supervisor!) in the context of a resource limited research programme with the goal of producing some positive change. For myself the experience was a familiar one and not entirely unexpected, however I still wrote in my journal that "I

⁶⁶ Sure Start centres offer advice and support for parents and carers of pre-school children. See: http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Parents/Preschooldevelopmentandlearning/NurseriesPlaygroupsReceptionClasses/DG_173054

⁶⁷ British Trust for Conservation Volunteers www.btcv.org.uk

find this exploratory stage difficult” and acknowledged that I would feel more settled when I had a clearer idea of where my research would be taking place. Being aware of the choices I had made and reasons for them (given the information available at the time) gave a sense of a rational and systematic approach but with the recognition that knowledge of all the potential risks and influencing factors was incomplete and that serendipity sometimes seems a perfectly rational explanation for how things work.

The entry process in Weardale was even more prolonged and uncertain as there was no existing structure to build upon. My first point of contact was the farmer (Chris) who I had interviewed in 2005. I met him in November 2006 and discovered he planned to open a farm shop and café the following year and could see the potential for CSA to complement this as he wanted to sell local produce, including produce grown on his own farm. The only suitable existing product from the farm was potatoes, which he already sold at the farm gate. At this meeting he said that he could supply land, machinery, and labour to grow a greater diversity of vegetables but that he lacked expertise in vegetable production and in growing for a regular supply throughout the season. He also lacked the time to manage a CSA project and would look to a committee of local people to organise member recruitment, distribution, etc. He would also want sufficient produce grown so that he could supply the shop. We discussed the implications of member involvement and he was happy for CSA members to utilise the café and shop for social events and meetings and showed a good understanding of the idea that members could come to see the farm as ‘theirs’ and develop a strong connection to it. He was also keen for local schools to become involved and we discussed possible developments such as a Green Gym and mental health referrals.

I describe this initial meeting in some detail as it appeared at this stage that there was a good basis for taking this further with resources of land, labour, machinery and a farmer who was comfortable with people coming onto his land and interested in trying out something new to the area. I anticipated that it would be the farmer-led example that I was looking for. He also told me about Andrew, a resident in the nearby village of Wolsingham who was “interested in this type of thing” and suggested that I should arrange to talk to him. This method of using existing

networks to find participants continued and provided an ‘entry’ into the community of people who had an interest in local food production. Stringer describes this type of networking as a ‘social tool’ that assists the process of including all stakeholders (1999, p49). It also has weaknesses of course; by limiting contacts to particular networks others will be excluded. However, it provided a means to identify a small number of people as early potential participants who would then go on to extend an invitation to the wider community.

At this time I also began to contact institutions that could be potential sources of support. Using my own networks I met with Jean⁶⁸, a regeneration officer from the District Council. This meeting provided some useful information regarding the unmet demand for local produce from the hospitality sector in Wear Valley. She also acknowledged that the Council had learnt from past mistakes and that a ‘top down’ approach to rural development in Wear Valley had not worked, one example being a failed attempt at setting up a red meat initiative. The lesson taken from this experience was that any public sector led initiative with farmers in the District was likely to fail and that any future projects should be led by local people. This experience predisposed her to favour my approach and she was very keen to support a more ‘bottom-up’ approach to development.

She also identified a fund, administered by the local Enterprise Agency, and suggested that it could be used to enable me to hold some form of marketing event. This is an example of serendipity: I received a favourable response due to previous events and a suitable source of funding just happened to be available at the right time. I had already been considering holding some form of public meeting if I got to the stage of having a core group of interested people, as a way of testing the wider market for interest and recruiting additional participants. Resources available from my research grant could have allowed me to stage an event but would not have been sufficient to enable me to bring in speakers from further afield, to produce and distribute thousands of leaflets, to offer free childcare and a free local food meal to participants, as I was subsequently able to do. The following February (2007) I received a call from the Enterprise Agency offering to discuss the grant. I later

⁶⁸ ‘Jean’ is not her real name

understood that the regeneration officer had used her influence to strongly support our application.

I met with Charlotte from the Enterprise Agency to discuss applying for the grant. She exuded enthusiasm for the project and responded from a personal, as well as a professional perspective, talking about how her mother belonged to an organic box scheme and saying that she would like a project to run in her own village (in Teesdale). She was instrumental in securing the grant, and also additional monies when requested, for the public meeting to be held in September 2007. At this point in my journal I reflected on how unanticipated events and circumstances can be of critical importance: “sometimes progress is made not through careful planning, but by an unintended sequence of events, a chance meeting, or a casual conversation.” The other side of serendipity is of course crisis, when the unexpected event works to block or impede progress towards the desired outcome. This happened on many occasions later into the project, but at this stage circumstances were working in our favour.

Experiences of the impact of unplanned circumstances is reflected in John Kay’s work on ‘obliquity’, which “describes the process of achieving complex objectives indirectly” (Kay, 2010, p3) and recognises “that we learn about the nature of the objectives and the means of achieving them during a process of experiment and discovery. Oblique objectives often step backwards to move forwards.” (ibid, p4). This could almost be a summary of the experience of the process of the cycle of AR.

Making contact with Andrew proved to be more difficult than I anticipated and I was not able to arrange a meeting with him before March 2007 (having had my first talk with Chris in November 2006). When we eventually met, I spent at least two hours with him as he articulated his aspirations to run some form of horticultural enterprise with his wife (an Occupational Therapist) that would also provide a place of rehabilitation for people suffering from mental health problems. This conversation was the first indication that this project would be centrally concerned with issues of care. They had discussed how they could obtain access to land but could not afford to purchase themselves. Andrew was engaged as a part-time non-stipendiary curate in a nearby town and thought that he would be able to devote two and a half days a

week for two to three years to the project. He had experience of growing food in his own allotment. Andrew could think of around half a dozen people he knew who might also be interested and he agreed to speak to them and then pass on their contact details to me if they agreed.

Later the same day I had arranged to meet with Chris again to discuss any next steps. In between our meetings he had taken part in a visit to Growing Well⁶⁹, a horticultural therapy project in the adjacent county of Cumbria that provides placements for people with mental health problems. He spoke positively about how the project worked and supplied the farm shop with produce. We talked about Andrew's ideas and Chris had clarified his thinking on the role of the farm. His main aim was to have a supply of fresh, local produce identified with the farm to sell at the shop. He wanted input on the production side to be limited to the use of heavy machinery (e.g. ploughing, muck spreading). He wanted to rent land to a social enterprise to run the project independently, and if this was a CSA, they would distribute (sell) shares of the harvest to members and also to the farm shop. The focus had moved from farmer initiated to a consumer driven project. I spent four weeks out of the country shortly after these meetings and Andrew and Chris met during my absence and agreed that production could start on a small scale in the Spring of 2008. This informal agreement was made without any discussion about the details of how this might happen and was based on assumptions about the amount of time Andrew could devote to the project, and, as it later became clear, other unspoken assumptions about the nature of the contract.

On my return in June I held meetings with the six contacts Andrew had provided, five of whom agreed to become involved in the planning of the project, and the mother of one also offered to do some administration. In order to bring some consistency to these encounters I prepared a 'discussion schedule' in the same vein that one would do for conducting a semi-structured interview (e.g. see Drever, 2003), a copy of this can be found in appendix i. I understood these encounters as a form of dialogue and conversation that allowed the meeting to be influenced by both parties

⁶⁹ www.growingwell.co.uk Growing Well have subsequently started a CSA project, but this was not the case at this time, or at the time of our visit later in 2007

and to build upon each person's contribution. It was useful to have prepared some questions/structure beforehand. I did not always keep strictly to the schedule as it was a conversational meeting, but I covered all the topics. This approach is in line with my values of treating all forms of knowledge as having merit and of viewing participants as equal partners in the research process. At these meetings I explained what I was doing, including a brief explanation of PAR. I gave a simple introduction to CSA and gave them a basic information sheet, previously prepared for focus groups held in 2005, and a leaflet from the Soil Association about their Cultivating Communities project that had promoted CSA from 2002 – 2005. This was the beginning of a learning process for all of us. From these early beginnings a small planning group emerged: in July, Victoria and two others joined Chris, Andrew and me to start the process of planning a public event and a stall at the two local agricultural shows to promote the event.

A number of other stakeholders had begun to appear around this time, gradually enabling a picture to be built of the potential local assets that might contribute towards the project and make it unique. There was potential future demand for local produce from the local primary school, which was soon to finish its contract for delivered school meals and would be looking for local suppliers. The secondary school was hoping to start a rural studies course that would require an environment for practical fieldwork experience, and the possibility of supplying produce to a local small soup company was also raised. A grant from the Scarman Trust to support training and learning was a real possibility and the District Council had indicated that some start-up funding may be available. At this stage I wrote that "I am encouraged by the resources that are becoming evident for this scheme."

In all the introductory meetings in both projects I explained my role as one of facilitation and enabling (e.g. Box 7). The question of positionality of the researcher is discussed in more detail in chapter 6 (4.2), where I describe my position as the 'friendly outsider,' and also discuss the multiple positionalities that arise as the research progresses. The important message for me to communicate in the early stages was that I was there to work *with* them, but that I would not become a permanent member of the group. This can be a difficult message to communicate, especially as I sometimes became heavily involved in a practical sense around

specific events when the resources of the group were stretched (due to lack of time, or skills, or knowledge etc).

Box 7: Paragraph from minutes of first steering group meeting, Weardale (written by a group member)

4. Action Research

Liz explained to the group about her role in the formation of the CSA. She was acting as a facilitator and enabler in the process. She was writing a PhD at present with CSAs as her main focus, but rather than just watch us and take notes, she was approaching from an Action Research point of view – that is, research which is Action Orientated in order to produce change. The research is participatory, which made everyone she was working with in the group her co-researchers. Everyone in the process was equal, and the work had relevance and was mutually very important. She had already worked with a group called ‘Growing Together’ in Bishop Auckland. She said all that we did as a group could be included in her thesis, so if anyone wanted it anonymised, they should let her know. She said there was also an agreement we should sign to say that she had discussed this with the group and we were all in agreement to work that way.

Most of the time my role was focussed on enabling a participative process of inquiry and action, providing links to sources of support and information, and providing knowledge of relevant local, regional or national policies or initiatives. Towards the end of my involvement researchers from the Universities of Newcastle and Durham⁷⁰ ran focus groups with members of both projects to evaluate my intervention. They asked questions about my role:

We had a couple of hours conversation, realised that we had a lot in common and basically the carrot was if you can get some people around here who are willing to get involved she would come and help support us in facilitating that.

⁷⁰ Dr Nicola Thompson, Newcastle University and Professor Sarah Banks, Durham University

We ran a series of meetings here looking at aims and objectives, approaches to working and trying to distil the thing down into a workable project and Liz was hugely instrumental in facilitating a great deal of that

The thing that struck me ... because I wasn't involved right from the beginning ... so when I came along to that event [the public event] I was aware that Liz had like a ... a facilitating role, I was aware of that. But it didn't actually click with me for a very long time that she wasn't actually on the steering group. (Weardale Focus Group, Nov 2009)

she kept breaking things down ... one bit at a time, because we would charge in ... she was like 'no, no, need to get this sorted', very structured, she kept us right in the steps we had to take.

She explained her role and they signed an agreement "that was champion, we had something to focus on then. Stuck to those roles." (Growing Together Focus Group, July 2009)

These comments provide some evidence that my role was understood, albeit not always immediately! The difficulty of new members joining and needing to catch up with events and processes is a common one. I formalised the relationship by drafting a Memo of Agreement (appendix ii) for each group that described the nature of our relationship and a copy was given to each participant when they joined.

3.3 Gathering and recording data

Embarking on a research study part-time and spanning several years with the requirement to produce a PhD Thesis that is a reflexive and analytical account of the process necessitated a systematic and regular recording of happenings. Many action researchers keep a journal or reflective diary (a 'vital piece of any action research methodology' according to Herr and Anderson (2005, p77)) and this is how I chose to record the story as it unfolded. There is no agreed 'correct' way to maintain such a record but general guidance and examples are available (e.g. Hughes, 2000). In my journal I wrote about what I did, what I thought and felt (my intellectual and emotional responses), what the participants did, reflections and observations on happenings (e.g. what was helpful/unhelpful, how we reacted to situations), and links to theory and literature. I also recorded questions about process, doubts about decisions and actions, and actions I needed to take following reflection. This was a

hand-written document which I subsequently summarised into an electronic version of two narrative stories about the projects that emerged. I then identified a number of themes which I coded and showed their locations in the document margins. Other sources of data are:

- a) notes from meetings with individuals and visits;
- b) email communications;
- c) notes from group meetings (my own, and minutes of meetings taken by a group member);
- d) records and information collected from the public event in Weardale. This includes transcriptions from recorded Workshops;
- e) notes from planned ‘reflective moments’ (see below): AGMs at Growing Together, an exercise undertaken with participants from Weardale, an interview with Sir Donald Curry (recorded and transcribed);
- f) notes from the external evaluation focus groups conducted with participants from both projects by two independent evaluators;
- g) documents produced by the projects (Business Plans, Policies, Publicity Leaflets).

I decided not to make recordings of regular meetings as this may have changed the behaviour of some people, and could have given the impression that my position as an academic researcher automatically carried a ‘higher’ status and role. It would also have produced an excessive amount of material to analyse when I had access to minutes and any personal notes I had made myself. I was often occupied during the meetings in making notes or participating in discussions and this precluded the capturing of more verbatim material from the participants.

Although the reflective cycle of planning, action, observation, and reflection took place at many levels, with agreement from participants I also built in some ‘reflective moments’ in order to ensure that the pressure and enthusiasm of action did not overtake us to the extent that we failed to put aside time for reflection. For Growing Together, this took the form of an agenda item on their AGM. In order to be accessible to all members this took the form of a simple exercise asking “What worked well? What didn’t work well?” This was facilitated by a staff member of the group who illustrated some of the answers with visual representations. In Weardale I

facilitated a ‘reflection evening’ in January 2009. This took the form of a meal (prepared by one of the group) followed by an exercise modelled on the ‘focused conversation’ method as described by Hogan (Hogan, 2003, p75ff). It is based upon Kolb’s experiential learning cycle (see Davies and Lowe, undated),⁷¹ which has strong links to the AR plan/act/observe cycle, and provides a framework to enable participants to reflect on a commonly held experience. I used a series of pre-planned questions under the headings Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decision (ORID)⁷² (appendix iv).

These combined sources provide multiple perspectives to balance my own reflections and analysis. Questions about validity and quality in AR might arise at this point, but this debate is discussed elsewhere (chapter 2); a reminder that PAR is overtly value based and takes an epistemological viewpoint that knowledge and understanding is constructed from a ‘standpoint’ will suffice here.

3.4 Performing role

As expounded in chapter 2, the role of an academic researcher in a community based PAR exercise is to work alongside a group of people who collaborate on an equal basis in the process and who are driving the purpose of the research to affect some form of change. The practice is more complex and nuanced than this statement suggests and even more so when there is an additional element involved, in this case the requirement to produce a PhD Thesis (see chapter 1, 4).

The requirement of producing the research proposal myself immediately precluded the involvement of participants in the first stages of planning. Operating within the necessary constraints of the university and funding systems often necessitates a level of compromise. This is not unusual (Jacobs, 2010) and does not necessarily have to seriously compromise a PAR programme. It is a dilemma felt by many researchers:

⁷¹ Also see http://www.ldu.leeds.ac.uk/ldu/sddu_multimedia/kolb/static_version.php accessed 04/11/10

⁷² For more information about this method see Stanfield, R.B. 1997. The Art of Focused Conversation <http://ica-associates.ca/Resources/AFC.pdf> and <http://www.topfacilitation.com/Docs/AFC.pdf> accessed 04/11/10

“we felt the tension of writing up a PAR project before the participation of older people was actually sought. This is not exceptional...” (Jacobs, 2010, p374).

These issues are eloquently discussed by McIntyre in her PhD Thesis, as quoted in Herr and Anderson (2005). Like her, as I explored the literature on AR (see chapter 2) I initially wrestled with the apparent contradictions inherent in *my* adopting a topic (CSA in north east England) prior to meeting any participants. As she so clearly states, “A recurring theme in the PAR literature is whether the researcher needs to be requested as a resource by a community or group, or whether the researcher can determine that a problem exists and then decide to engage with a group in a participatory approach to solving it” (McIntyre, A., in Herr and Anderson, 2005, p100). Like McIntyre, I concluded that as long as I was aware of the limitations of conducting such research, there were still sufficiently compelling reasons for me to choose this approach.

I also endeavoured to allow as much flexibility as possible in the research proposal to allow for the process to be an emergent and collaborative one. I was satisfied that there was likely to be sufficient interest in CSA through the feasibility study undertaken for my MSc (Charles, 2005), and one of the attractions of working with what was to become Growing Together, was that they were actively seeking change and already had many ideas about the direction they would like to go. When I introduced them to CSA it was as if they had discovered the structure that they were looking for. As the facilitator’s report from the focus group evaluation states:

In the early years the group were just pottering about but once [they] started thinking about CSA [they] started to have a goal, a purpose. They had expanded over the years but the site was pretty derelict and a mess ... [they] realised they could use the site and get more people involved.

Starting from just one contact (the farmer, Chris) in Weardale required more active involvement in the preliminary stages and I was constantly questioning my position in the process: was I facilitating or leading? When was it right to step back, and when to offer help by more direct intervention? Being aware of the many potential pitfalls of participatory processes (see chapter 2) I understood the importance of continual self reflection, although this in itself does not preclude the possibility of self

delusion. In the following paragraphs I provide examples of dilemmas that arose and explain why I chose to do what I did. Having worked for some years in the field of community development I was not surprised by these conflicts but in the context of a PhD study I was able to think through them in more depth.

In the case of Weardale I was particularly aware of the danger of imposing the model of CSA as a way to fulfil participant's desires to build a local food initiative. However, I argue that I presented CSA as a very flexible and loosely defined model, using the Soil Association definition (chapter 3, 2.2.3), which leaves a lot of room for local determination of process and structure. I also found that the idea was well received and easily understood and had the effect of providing a framework that people could fasten their ideas and dreams onto. That people took early ownership of the idea was demonstrated by, for example, a conversation with Andrew and Victoria that took place whilst travelling to visit other projects in the very early stages. I recorded this as follows: "Andrew did most of the talking ... I'd hoped that we could do some planning for the first full steering group meeting coming up the following week, but this proved impossible! Andrew had obvious ownership of the project and saw its conception as a meeting with Jill [*farmer Chris' wife*] rather than with my appearance."

The question of co-ownership of written material and analysis is referred to in chapter 1, 4.4. I followed the accepted practice of member validation by always circulating written material to the participants for comment – but rarely received any, even though I highlighted passages of particular relevance so that they did not need to read everything if they chose not to. I also deliberately adopted a writing style that I hoped would be accessible to most participants following Fals Borda's appeal:

Do not impose your own ponderous scientific style for communicating results, but diffuse and share what you have learned together with the people, in a manner that is wholly understandable and even literary and pleasant, for science should not be necessarily a mystery nor a monopoly of experts and intellectuals. (Fals Borda, 1995, p3)

I have to assume that they were broadly in agreement with what they read. The product of the research for them was the project that they had developed and the learning gained along the way.

In the early stages of negotiating access and role I explained my role in terms of facilitation – someone who would work with them to enable the process of the action research inquiry cycle. In analysing what took place I have broken this down into several categories of behaviour and actions: building relationships, participatory methods and techniques, direct interventions, promoting empowerment, knowledge input and questioning. I argue that all these roles are necessary in the complex milieu of the research settings and that accounts of community-based PAR that honestly address the messiness of the process are few.

3.4.1 Building Relationships

As discussed above (see Negotiating access and role), this is of paramount importance in the first phase of seeking research partners. This point is stressed by Gayá Wicks and Reason: “The success or failure of an action research venture often depends on what happens at the beginning of the inquiry process: in the way access is established, and on how participants and co-researchers are engaged early on. ‘Opening communicative space’ is important because, however we base our theory and practice of action research, the first steps are fateful” (2009, p243). Gaining the trust and respect of research participants is important not only for the success of the project, but also, according to Herr and Anderson (2005), in validating the data: “the trustworthiness of the data depends on effectively negotiating entry and building rapport with participants.” (p93). It continued to be a bedrock of the process throughout, which underlines the choice of the conceptual frame of care theory (chapter 6), which foregrounds relationships in moral reasoning.

The other group members needed to be comfortable with their relationship with me, to trust my motivations and to be sure that I had no ‘hidden agendas’. They needed to understand that “the researcher is a resource person whose role is to assist stakeholders, rather than to prescribe their actions” (Stringer, 1999, p53). Having previously worked in community settings as an employee of both a charity and a local authority I felt a certain liberation in my new position as I no longer had a label

attached to me that some may find problematic (representing a local authority for example brings with it the reputation of the organisation as perceived by the community and can be particularly detrimental if there has been dissatisfaction or conflict with the authority in the past). As a researcher I felt no obligation to represent any views other than my own and was able to be clear about my personal values and motivations – an important stance to take in research that is overtly value based and where there is no pretence of objectivity or disinterest.

This approach allows for the nurturing of more open and transparent relationships. As Herr and Anderson observe: “Whereas some research approaches have suggested that researchers keep their passions and themselves out of the process, we are suggesting that the questions we pursue in action research are often related to our own quandaries and passions” (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p72). This statement accurately describes my own position. That this was understood by research participants is shown by a comment made by a Weardale CSA participant in the independent focus group:

One thing is that Liz has a huge amount invested in this project and very much longs to see it succeed like we all do. And at one level ... if it all goes down that will all be just, you know, ‘information for my PhD’ as it were, you know we document failure just as we document success at that level. But she was also able to admit that it would be very, very difficult to be a dispassionate observer in a context like this when actually it’s so very, very close to her heart.

Building rapport with people was often helped by the sharing of common experiences. A casual conversation with Donna after a meeting at Growing Together about the pleasures of eating food grown or prepared by someone you know is an example of this. We talked about the contrasting experiences of eating home produced preserves and ones purchased at a supermarket. We enjoy the flavour more, thinking about who made it and the effort that had gone into it. Food then takes on a relational meaning. Donna said “it makes me tingle just talking about it” indicating a genuine emotional response to connecting food on the plate to the people who produced it. Similar conversations took place with a number of people about our enjoyment of gardening, sharing stories of successes and failure, laughing with Andy (Growing Together) about how we both retreated to our gardens in times of stress.

Sometimes opportunities arose to interact informally such as when I met with Andrew (Weardale CSA) to talk through the presentation he was to prepare for the public meeting (workshop event) we were planning. His wife was in the house and I also talked to her about our shared interest in playing music.

One of the few authors to lay particular emphasis on the importance of relationships in conducting community based PAR is Stringer (1999) (but see also special issue of *Action Research* (2009, 7, 3) on the topic of 'opening communicative space' including Gayá Wicks and Reason, 2009). He states explicitly that the quality and nature of relationships within the research setting will directly impact both the quality of people's experience and the outcomes of the process. I consider this to be an extremely important point, but one that is sometimes glossed over, or simply an unarticulated assumption, but if relationships can be the issue that 'makes or breaks' a research process then they should be given due attention in analysis.

Stringer draws attention to the importance of the agenda, stance and position taken by the researcher, and to the benefits of meeting participants in informal, everyday surroundings: "The more freely researchers are able to participate in the ordinary lives of the people with whom they work, the more likely they are to gain the acceptance crucial to the success of community based action research." (ibid, p56). In the initial stages of meeting potential participants in Weardale I usually met people in their houses and this setting is more conducive to conversations that enhance relationship building by exchanging stories and shared experiences in between more formal dialogue. As the project progressed I occasionally met informally with individuals in coffee shops or homes to talk through a particular area of concern because I considered this to be an important part of building strong relationships. However I was also aware of the tensions of time restraints (meeting like this with one participant can seem an inefficient use of time when there are many other demands to be met) and of the necessity of remaining equally available to and trusted by all participants.

It is of course difficult for me to fully understand how the relationship between myself and the other group members was perceived from their perspective. Some comments recorded at the independent focus group with Growing Together suggest

that overall the relationship was positive. I was described as “Very kind”, “happy”, “positive”, “she is really good”, and “she doesn’t mind the hands-on thing”.

3.4.2 Participatory techniques

I am using this term to describe a range of approaches and methods utilised over the duration of the research, which were chosen in order to facilitate (make easier) the full involvement of all participants in a particular stage of the process. Sometimes this meant using a technique that enabled the participation of people with learning disabilities (at Growing Together), or that aimed to minimise existing power inequalities within the group caused by differences in e.g. status, knowledge, verbal or cognitive skills, and confidence.

I make a distinction between methods and techniques. I use ‘participatory methods’ to refer to the whole spectrum of research methods that have been used in PAR: these would include participant observation, dialogue, group work and discussions, mapping, interviewing and many more (see e.g. Kindon and Pain et al., 2007, p17). I use the term ‘participatory techniques’ to mean specific tools such as decision making and planning tools, and techniques that “enable people to generate information and share knowledge on their own terms” (ibid, p17) such as ‘open space’⁷³ and the ‘focused conversation method’ (see section 3.3). The choice of which techniques to employ was often strongly influenced by previous experience combined with a judgement about its suitability for the task in hand. Tools were used flexibly to design a participatory process that fitted the scale and scope of the task. In this section I describe some of the processes used.

The action research cycle of plan, act, observe and reflect is iterative and not always sequential in practice. However the early stages of the projects were clearly focussed on investigation and planning and my role as facilitator was to try and harness every member’s contribution. During early discussions at Growing Together it became clear that some clarification was needed about the overall aims they wished to pursue. The planning group at this stage consisted of four members of staff from the Centre (Andy, Dave, Donna, and the Manager), the Green Gym co-ordinator from

⁷³ See <http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi?AboutOpenSpace>

BTCV, and one service user from the gardening group. Involvement of service users on the planning (and subsequent management) group was variable but grew throughout the project so that by 2007 there was a regular attendance of three to five service users. Ways of working therefore had to be inclusive for members with differing levels of ability and understanding.

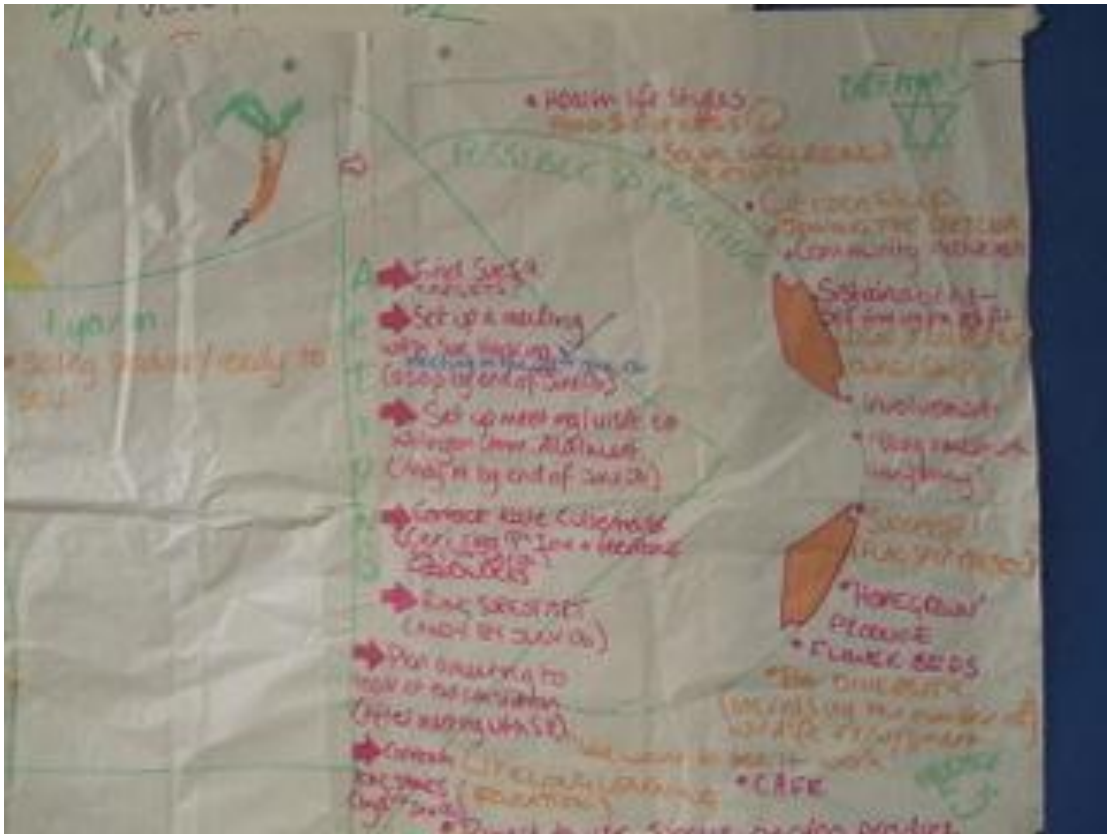
During discussions on how to develop and agree specific aims and objectives Donna suggested using a tool called Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH). This is a person centred planning tool developed in the USA by Jack Pearpoint, John O'Brien and Marsha Forest in the 1990s⁷⁴. Person centred planning had been adopted as part of the UK Government's Valuing People White Paper⁷⁵ as an alternative to 'system centred' planning. It was initially developed for people with disabilities but has subsequently been used with other groups. It enables people to choose their own services and supports, rather than attempting to fit within pre-existing support systems. One of Donna's roles at the Centre was to undertake person centred planning with service users and she agreed to facilitate the planning session using this tool. Starting with 'dreams,' and then actions, where they want to be in one year, six months, and where they are now, Donna used a template to elicit responses from everyone in the group. It proved to be an enjoyable and inclusive process that encouraged everyone to participate and articulate their ideas and aspirations. Much enthusiasm, excitement and fun was generated during this exercise, illustrated by the words and drawings that appeared on the completed diagram (photos 1 and 2). The results of this and subsequent PATH exercises provided the material for the aims, objectives and values (see Business Plan appendix vi) as well as being an ongoing action planning tool.

⁷⁴ <http://www.ont-autism.uoguelph.ca/PATH-jan05.pdf>

⁷⁵ Valuing People: a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century (2001). The proposals in the White Paper are based on four key principles: civil rights, independence, choice and inclusion. See:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4009153 (accessed 02/12/10)

1 Planning exercise with PATH



2 Planning exercise with PATH



Exercises such as this encouraged ownership and input from all members as well as building group motivation as individual members articulated their ideas and enthusiasms.

The newly formed steering group in Weardale (October 2007) was comprised of three members (Andrew, Chris, and Victoria) from the smaller planning group of five that had worked to organise the public workshop event (September 2007), and eight new members who joined as a result of that event. Most members of the group

had not met each other previously and therefore I built in 15 minutes of informal talking time at the beginning of the meetings (with a hot drink) and introduced a skills audit exercise (appendix iii). The group found this exercise very helpful and chose to extend the time they spent on it and postpone some other business so that they could all hear feedback from other members and learn more about each other. Because this was a new group I also introduced the idea of agreeing some ‘ground rules’ as a statement of ‘how we want to work together as a group’. Some authors have critiqued the use of ground rules (see chapter 6, 4.1) as having the potential to be controlling and to influence what is perceived to be ‘allowed’ if they are set by the facilitator. However, if they are proposed and agreed by the whole group the formation of such a statement provides a useful opportunity to talk about potentially sensitive topics before they arise. They can also act as a guide and assist in reflection on how the group is working and a reminder of how they aspired to work at the outset. I explained the principle and one of the group members recorded ideas on a flip chart. The final list agreed was:

Box 8: Ground rules agreed by Weardale Steering Group

1. Good timekeeping.
2. Space to give individual opinions.
3. Commitment to do what you have offered to do for the group, but also to ask for help and support when necessary.
4. Learning together, but being open about boundaries and what each individual is prepared to do.
5. Accepting the fact that we will disagree on occasions, and agreeing to disagree respectfully, whilst having tolerance for the opinions of others.
6. Having the courage to be honest.
7. Try to work towards consensus through sub-committees to steering group level.
8. Creating a positive atmosphere within the group to reach a mutually affirming goal.
9. Supporting the Chair and understanding their role.

Priority actions were agreed at the first meeting and the first of these was to agree aims and objectives. Some participants had some experience of project planning whilst for others this was a completely new activity so I designed a process that would offer everyone a chance to participate using their own ideas and ways of expressing them. A quicker way would have been to accept a draft document offered by one experienced member as a template but this would have stifled the contributions from less confident and experienced members. I used information collated from the public workshop as a starting point and also provided examples of aims from other projects. People were then asked to write words or phrases on post-it notes that they thought might be important to include in a statement of aims. Similar phrases were then grouped together and members asked to ‘vote’ on their inclusion by placing a tick or a cross next to each group. A similar process was planned to construct a basis for objectives but the participants decided that they had generated sufficient material and handed over the results to a group of three people to collate. Ideas for values and principles were collected using a ‘brainstorming’ exercise followed by answering the questions “Are there any additions you want?”, “Which ones can be combined?” and “Are there any you want to remove?” The material from these exercises appears in the Business Plan (appendix vii)

“the first exercise we did here, actually looking at all the post-it notes and trying to help us work out how that would translate into aims and objectives, ... and codes of conduct, how we relate to each other, how we agree what is acceptable behaviour and so forth. That was quite a helpful thing”. (comment from focus group evaluation)

At the public workshop event held in Weardale in September 2007 a number of participatory techniques were employed to facilitate everyone’s contributions to finding out what interested people might want a new local food project to look like and what they would be willing to contribute. I worked with the local planning group, local partners and two members of Stroud Community Agriculture (SCA) to plan the event. The agenda setting out all the activities can be found at appendix viii. The event was attended by 50 adults and 11 children. Three workshops ran simultaneously and were repeated once, allowing people to attend two. These were led by people running existing CSAs and the aim was to enable attendees to find out

about different CSAs, what they were and how they worked, and have an opportunity to ask questions. Nick Weir from Stroud Community Agriculture then led a plenary session based on the technique of ‘open space technology’ that allows participants to generate their own questions and topics for discussion (see detailed plan, appendix ix).

The results of the ‘open space’ session provided the material for the final plenary that took place at Bradley Burn Farm Shop whilst sharing a local food meal. This session was called a ‘conversation café’⁷⁶. Tables of no more than eight people were each provided with some basic ‘rules of engagement’ and one of the lists of questions around a topic generated by the open space session. Each table was allocated a facilitator (volunteers from the steering group) to guide the process. These sessions produced many ideas and a snapshot of what potential members would like to see happen, including what vegetables and fruit they would prefer, suggestions for involving local businesses, and what would be an acceptable membership fee, which was subsequently used by the steering group in their planning sessions.

Both Growing Together and Weardale CSA experienced some (very different) difficulties in running meetings and I sought to overcome these by suggesting processes that might help. Both groups appointed someone to chair the meetings once they were established and this was an important step in preventing dependence upon me. The members of the Growing Together steering group were well known to each other and meetings were informal and relaxed with few conflicts. Meetings frequently started late and were often interrupted by service users not directly involved, creating an atmosphere that was at the same time chaotic, relaxed, disruptive, informal and friendly. I made a choice not to comment or intervene as I observed the positive way in which the staff interacted with the service users and understood that their needs were more important than any concerns around the norms of punctuality, a concept that maybe would not be within their grasp anyway. I think my acceptance of this way of working is what was behind the responses to the

⁷⁶ For an explanation of these techniques see: : <http://www.openspaceworld.org/> and <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Conversation+Cafes>

question posed to members of the focus group evaluation (section 3.3) about what I learnt from working with them:

Working with our group, it is different. Some people are a bit fazed which is a bit ridiculous ... but she took to that really well and included everybody when she did the work.

Prior to the appointment of a Chair and Secretary I was providing the agendas and writing up minutes. Taking on these responsibilities was not easy for them as they lacked experience in the roles, disliked paperwork, and were more interested in working in the garden! To make it simpler I eventually suggested using a standard agenda for every meeting with any additional items to be agreed and added at the beginning of each meeting. This removed the necessity of producing an agenda for every meeting.

Weardale's main difficulty lay in controlling the length of the meetings and in setting some limits to the discussions so that decisions could be made without constant repetition of the issues. The propensity to revisit issues and wander from the main focus of the agenda was creating tensions within the group. Initially I discussed the problem with the chair and we met to clarify the key issues that needed to be addressed prior to a meeting. Later I suggested adding timings to the agenda, and this was partially successful but did not solve the problem. Eventually in November 2008 I suggested following a system of agenda setting⁷⁷ that classified each item as being 'Introduction' (5-10 minutes), 'Discussion and/or Feedback' (15-40 minutes), or 'Decision' (5 minutes), with each item being allocated an appropriate time and someone in the group watching the clock to ensure compliance. They agreed to adopt this method and it proved helpful in preventing circular discussions. A comment by a participant at the focus group evaluation reflects this:

What I found hugely helpful ... is the whole process of chairing groups with not only time limits ... but also how you divide your agenda such that those things which are introduced for discussion, time limits for those ... all those

⁷⁷ Adapted from B Briggs, International Institute for Facilitation and Change.

<http://www.iifac.org/index2.html>

*structures for actually chairing groups which was actually new to us.
(Weardale CSA member)*

3.4.3 Direct Interventions

Having established my role as a ‘resource person’ (Stringer, 1999, p53) and facilitator amongst a group of equal research participants I was sometimes faced with the question of deciding the limits of this role and when it might be appropriate or necessary to go beyond it. The paradoxes of the action research role are discussed by Gayá Wicks and Reason and one of these is identified as leadership: “animators and facilitators need to provide appropriate leadership and exercise social power in order to create the conditions in which participation can flourish; and they need to be able to relinquish power and step away from leadership so that participants can fully own their work.” (2009, p258). Particularly in the early phases of the projects, on occasions I chose to take a more direct and active role than I considered ideal. I justify this choice on the grounds that the participants did not have sufficient time resource to take on all of the tasks at times of concentrated activity, and sometimes it was simply that I was the person who had the flexibility to respond at short notice. Nevertheless, these choices were never easy and resulted in much self reflection in the pages of my journal.

An example from Growing Together occurred very early on following my first meeting with Andy. We agreed that the next step was for him to set up a meeting with a Manager and some other staff members. When two months had passed and nothing had happened I spoke to Andy on the telephone which resulted in me offering to contact the Manager direct and arrange the meeting myself. We held the meeting a couple of weeks after this and the process started properly. I reflected at the time on the value of someone who is not enmeshed in the everyday concerns and pressures of the situation and who can focus on the specific task. The other actors were very motivated to achieve change but they also had multiple responsibilities within that setting, which initially worked against making progress with something not central to their official role. This is substantiated by the comments made by participants at the focus group evaluation who said:

To be honest we wouldn't be here if Liz hadn't pushed us ... I mean she was pushy ... we are quite busy anyway so we needed someone to push us ... and it has worked, it's worked a treat.

Facilitator: you referred to her as pushy?

[laughter] ...in a good way, she knew our strengths, and we didn't have strengths in certain areas, and she helped us along with those things. Like organising ... we had to do a lot to set this up, legally wise, especially with the County Council, 'cause they were like 'we have never had this before ... this isn't a normal carer's role.

The facilitators of the focus group also recorded from participant comments that I “took some of the responsibility off, did things at busy times but did so in a way that [they] could do it for themselves ultimately”.

These comments could be interpreted as evidence that I was too directive or involved, but in the context of an enthusiastic group trying to research a way forward to meet their goals whilst continuing to fulfil their normal day to day obligations, I interpret my behaviour in terms of encouragement and building confidence in their ability to achieve these goals. There is a time to offer practical help and a time to step back.

Other examples of direct interventions were organising visits to other CSAs or similar projects and writing some sections of the Business Plans of both projects, and taking a lead role in organising the public workshop event in Weardale. The latter process engendered some tensions for me as having agreed on a date to hold the event the planning group found it difficult at times to prioritise tasks and I had to decide how proactive a role to play in ensuring that everything was in place in time. I noted at one meeting how there was “a tension between me trying to ensure that we dealt with all the agenda items, and individuals being distracted by children, phone calls, two people having to leave early, and dealing with random questions arising that were not on the agenda. I feel my role at present is more about driving through the agenda than being a facilitator of a communicative inquiry space.” I view this apparent fracture between theory and practice as part of the messy process of conducting research in a real world context. At this stage participants were planning, acting, questioning, learning and all alongside their usual domestic and professional

responsibilities. Visits to three other CSAs/growing projects were also being organised and taking place around this time as Victoria had been successful in obtaining funding from the Scarman Trust and had been awarded a Community Champion grant to spend on visits, training, and producing a Business Plan. Andrew was discovering that his initial expectation of being able to commit two to three days a week to the development of the project had been optimistic as he was being given more work to do in his role as a non-stipendiary curate. My choice was therefore to prioritise action at this point in time and be task focussed to enable the workshop event to go ahead and run smoothly, rather than to spend time on discussing issues that were not of immediate relevance even when raised by participants.

3.4.4 Promoting Empowerment

The topic of empowerment is covered in chapter 6 (4) where the wider subject of power in PAR is discussed and where I explain my use of the term ‘empowerment’ as being a process originating from *within* communities, albeit often facilitated by a professional outsider or local community activist. This covers both personal empowerment, where individual participants might develop a sense of agency and a belief that they have the potential and ability to make things happen (Rowlands, 1997) and the empowerment that arises from working together with others to effect change.

In my role as facilitator my concern was to interact with participants in ways that encouraged self-reliance, learning, and inclusion of diverse opinions. Examples included asking participants to think about and articulate the values and principles they wanted the project to be built upon, linking them with sources of funding, ideas, knowledge and support, supporting individual participants to be involved in formal presentations about the projects, and using participatory techniques that sought to give an equal voice to all.

3.4.5 Knowledge input

Individual participants contributed a wide variety of knowledge relevant to the development of the projects such as horticultural knowledge, knowledge about local assets, information about historical use of the land, information about possible funding sources etc, some of which came from their experience of living in the

locality, and some from professional or educational sources. Where there were gaps in information that I could fill I provided sources of information and tools where possible, so that individuals could follow up areas of particular interest or everyone could be involved in decisions. An example was the choice of an organisational structure. In order to engage the group in the process and for them to develop an understanding of the need and purpose of a governing document, at Growing Together I used a series of questions produced by the Soil Association (Pilley, 2005) in one of the meetings. Everyone present participated in the discussions that took place around each question in order to arrive at a consensual answer. The outcome was a group decision and understanding that they would become an unincorporated organisation, a voluntary sector body or community business, have democratically elected management, and common ownership. In Weardale I organised an additional evening workshop on organisational structures following on from the main public workshop event that was attended by seven people and involved being taken through a similar process by a facilitator from Stroud Community Agriculture.

I kept both groups informed of external events and organisations that might be useful to their development such as the Soil Association Making Local Food Work programme (promoting CSAs), the Year of Farming and Food, the Scarman Trust Community Champion grant (awarded to individuals in both groups), knowledge gained from my research on existing CSAs, British Food Fortnight (Growing Together got the idea to hold an ‘Ugly Veg Competition’ at their Open Day in 2006 from BFF), the National Association for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (which Growing Together joined), and the information available through Garden Organic⁷⁸. For specific issues and questions raised by participants in Weardale I arranged training sessions: a session on growing for a box scheme (organised through the North East office of the Soil Association), and a session on the roles and responsibilities of a Company Director. I was also able to access expertise from the University on occasions, with some help given on understanding the results of a soil analysis and a visit from a soil scientist to the Frosterley site to examine and comment on the soil structure, and some advice on expected water usage levels for the Frosterley site.

⁷⁸ www.gardenorganic.org.uk

The focus group evaluations indicate that these inputs were valued:

Where we have had queries and problems she has been able to give us examples of other people to get in touch with or been able to bring advice in. (Weardale CSA)

She certainly adds a network and a knowledge which we may not have 'in toto' but I think we have probably got the confidence to go forward with or without her. (Weardale CSA)

when I actually sat down and thought ... she has helped us an awful lot ... contacts, structure, just passing on the enthusiasm, making us aware. I mean she still sends us emails about green issues and things like that which I find really helpful. (GT)

3.4.6 Questioning

Part of the role of a facilitator is to prompt and encourage participants to question assumptions or the way in which situations are framed, an attitude that should pervade the facilitator's reflection on her own practice. Sometimes this occurred during one to one conversations outside of group meetings such as when I met with Louise from Weardale CSA (March 2008) to try to come to an understanding of what had caused a near breakdown in relations between herself and an officer in the District Council over a funding application. On this occasion I used a semi-structured interview and introduced some systems thinking theory to enable a re-framing of the situation and to encourage consideration of how to handle these situations in future and what can be learnt from them.

At other times I asked questions in meetings or checked to see if anyone had alternative views to ones being expressed. An early example came in the initial meetings with Growing Together when I asked if they were clear in their own minds about their overall aims. They laughed and agreed that it would be really helpful to spend some time discussing this and clarifying what they hoped to achieve and how they would plan to do it. Later on I questioned the assumption that all meetings needed to be held at the Centre, resulting in the first AGM taking place at a nearby Youth and Community Centre. This meant that there were no unexpected interruptions and physically moving away from the Centre assisted in creating a

more reflective atmosphere for undertaking their first formal session where they reflected on what they had achieved that year. They eventually moved to this premises as their office base. The reflection session itself was intended to prompt thinking and learning about the past year and resulted in a list of “what worked well” and “what didn’t work well.” From my perspective I had expected some views on how the committee was operating as there were some obvious weaknesses. I prompted a question on this but from the perspective of group members everything was working just fine: these procedural issues did not concern them at all and their focus was on growing food, relationships with partners, and with what they had learnt.

Another example from Weardale occurred when a decision had to be made about land. The original plan, to use land at Bradley Burn Farm, had had to be revised and an alternative plot at the neighbouring village of Frosterley had been found. This land was being offered rent free and Andrew came to the meeting with photos of the site on his laptop and spoke at some length about the advantages of the site. It lay adjacent to a working quarry with soil bunds along the boundary line. The owner expected the quarry to be closed and restored in around three years (using the soil in the bunds), at which time this area would also be available to the CSA. Nothing was being said about the disadvantages, and compared to the original site, there were many. I therefore asked people to speak about any concerns or questions they had about the site. A long discussion ensued with a number of unknowns that required further research before a decision was reached. For example, questions were raised about the possibility of high lead levels in the soil due to the site’s proximity to old lead mines and the underlying geology, about the response of the owner of some neighbouring land to the prospect of a CSA on their doorstep, and about the need to find out how long the surrounding bunds had been in place as soil stored for too long may be unsuitable for growing. All these were subsequently followed up but may not have been raised without prompting in the face of a very positive story from Andrew.

4. SUMMARY

In setting the context for the research I noted that since CSAs first appeared in the UK in the 1990s (chapter 3) they have spread slowly and unevenly, with very few examples in the north east region. Although there is a lack of any in-depth research

investigating the reasons for the pattern of development there is some evidence that there is a correlation with demographics, economic performance, local culture, levels of educational attainment, and the prevalent agricultural production systems (Lyson and Guptill, 2004; Qazi and Selfa, 2005; Ilbery and Watts et al., 2006; Schnell, 2007). This explains, at least in part, why the North East, with its relatively high levels of social, economic and educational difficulties and a cultural legacy of political unrest and industrial decline, has a weaker local food sector in general, as well as being slower to adopt CSA. However, this should not be interpreted as a lack of interest in local food; a strong tradition of allotment growing survives and, as in many other places, is experiencing a renewal. The North East also displays a passionate sense of local identity and support for local culture and place; this is what the tourism promotion “passionate people, passionate places”⁷⁹ tried to capture with its campaign launched in 2005. As Qazi and Selfa (2005) argue, pathways to alternative practices may have to be forged in a way that is appropriate to the local circumstances. In the case of the North East this will mean divesting local food and CSA of an association with affluent consumers and drawing on the strengths of local identity and loyalty. This could be interpreted as “defensive localism” (Winter, 2003), which is seen as being exclusionary of others and defending self-interest, a conservative rather than a radical force and unconnected with issues of environmental sustainability. An alternative interpretation might be that of an “offensive localism”, whereby a relatively deprived area uses its assets and strengths to grow and support its local economy in the face of the economic dominance of the more southern regions, in particular the South East. As Winter points out, defensive localism is “more to do with local-national politics than with personal politics” (ibid, p31).

A PhD using a PAR approach where the topic of research is decided prior to any contact with participants throws up some dilemmas about the level and scope of shared ownership of the research. I argue that as long as the process is transparent and defended and is flexible and responsive to participants’ views, this is acceptable. I also observed that the concept of CSA was readily understood and adopted and provided a useful framework for existing ideas to latch on to.

⁷⁹ See for example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tX9vUvLJR0>

The task of identifying potential research sites involved an exploration of several possible avenues and making choices about where to start to devote more effort into finding research partners. The decision to build upon prior research in Weardale was in the end pragmatic; it seemed to suit my circumstances and was an ‘organic’ growth that enabled me to utilise my existing networks and knowledge of the geographical area. It removed some of the uncertainties of moving into a less well known community and the likelihood of the primary stages taking longer to develop.

I defined my role broadly as that of facilitator and a breakdown of actual behaviour demonstrated a variety of ways in which this was achieved, sometimes including interventions that go beyond what might be considered a purely facilitative role. These cases are justified by an acknowledgement of participants’ limited resources of time and availability on occasions. I emphasise the importance of building rapport and trusting relationships as a bedrock of a successful group process in PAR. I shared my own personal values and motivations as part of this relationship building and working *alongside* the other participants in pursuance of their goals. Although I consider that attitudes and behaviour are more important than techniques, I employed a number of participatory techniques in order to facilitate a more equal involvement of everyone in a particular process and to try to iron out the inevitable variances in confidence, skills and status. These techniques can compensate for factors that contribute towards inequalities in influence and power, and serve to temporarily address the imbalance, and may even over time build confidence and be an aid to empowerment. It is not clear however, what impact, if any, they had outside of the immediate process.

Finding out how to establish and grow the two CSA projects involved operating in an environment of “complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts” (Schön, 1983, p14). Progress and problems were often unpredictable and arose out of unanticipated events. This condition is common to many social situations and is clearly articulated by Kay: “the objectives we manage are multiple, incommensurable and partly incompatible. The consequences of what we do depend on responses, both natural and human, that we cannot predict. The systems we try to manage are too complex for us to fully understand. We never have the information

about the problem, or the future, we face that we might wish for. Satisfactory responses in these situations are the result of *action* [my emphasis], but not the execution of design. These outcomes ... are the result of iteration and adaptation, experiment and discovery” (2010, p141). Several authors stress the importance of adaptation, responding to the sometimes surprising outcomes of actions or circumstances by reflexivity and change (Lindblom, 1959; Ackoff, 1974; Schön, 1983; Chia and Holt, 2009; Kay, 2010). Using the iterative action research cycle of planning, acting, reflecting and observing provided a certain level of stability: we were not anticipating simple solutions or that everything would work out as initially envisaged.

In the following chapter I examine in more depth some of the main factors that either helped or hindered the process and progress of the two projects.

CHAPTER 5

ANIMATING CSA: WHAT HELPED AND WHAT HINDERED?

1. INTRODUCTION

Having described the process of animation using PAR in the previous chapter I now examine in more detail the internal and external factors that either helped or hindered progress towards achieving the groups' goals.

The purpose of the chapter is to identify these factors that created opportunities and barriers, and to critically reflect on their significance: which ones were we able to exert an influence upon and which were outside of our control? What can be learnt from these experiences?

In identifying the particular situations and happenings that affected the way the projects developed I have grouped them loosely into the broad categories of 'resources' 'individuals', 'institutions', 'socio-political' and 'techniques'. Some could fall into more than one category and in these cases I make a subjective judgement where they fit most comfortably. I distinguish between internal and external factors that emanate from within or without of the group. The centrality of relationships and networks in this account, their quality and varied degrees of equality, illustrates the relevance and helpfulness of care theory as a conceptual lens (chapter 6) through which to view both this research and CSA in general.

2. WHAT HELPED

Many of the instances of situations that helped were often unanticipated and unexpected; a chance meeting, an individual with particular skills, interests or knowledge appearing at the right time, an external circumstance that supported the broad goals. Serendipity seemed the best way of conceptualising these occurrences. Others, such as the support of organisations with environmental interests, or the learning that resulted from early visits to similar projects, were more predictable.

2.1 Resources

Under this heading I include human, physical, and financial resources available at different times throughout the projects' development.

2.1.1 Human

Human resources, in terms of numbers of people involved, their availability, skills and knowledge, and their wider networks, formed the keystone of both projects. This includes people who were directly involved as research participants, those involved practically but more peripherally, and those individuals from outside who were particularly enthusiastic and supportive. Participants came with a variety of existing skills and knowledge relevant to the projects, including an awareness of the specific locality, its assets and institutions, its social relations and norms at the very local level: they knew 'how things are done around here', who to contact for certain information, who might be upset by their plans and who they needed to talk to before making certain decisions.

Knowledge of the existing assets shaped the detail of both projects, making them in some way unique to their settings. So at Growing Together an existing relationship with the Green Gym run by BTCV, and contacts formed with the local college, led to these two organisations making important contributions to the project. Until the funding for the Green Gym ended in March 2008 the co-ordinator was an active member of the steering group as well as running a weekly session that provided additional volunteer help on site. In Weardale, many of the early ideas were related to knowledge of existing assets and interests. It was hoped that a partnership might be formed with the local secondary school, which had plans to introduce a new rural skills course that would require access to land for students to undertake practical work. A teacher from the school joined the steering group until he retired (a replacement was not found). An officer from the District Council informed the group that some local hospitality businesses would be interested in buying local vegetables and this became part of the future plans. A micro business producing locally made organic soup had been running successfully for a number of years and I met with the proprietor in September 2007. She was extremely enthusiastic and wanted to be involved in the steering group but found that she did not have the time. However, she readily agreed to the suggestion that she may be able to use surplus produce from the

CSA to make a locally branded soup. She later contacted the CSA with a suggestion that they may like to take her vegetable peelings for composting. This would have been the ideal partnership, solving the problem of surplus produce for the CSA and enabling the waste products from the soup company to be recycled locally. Unfortunately she had to give up the business in 2009 for family reasons, demonstrating the vulnerability of small businesses that are embedded into family and social relations.

When the steering group was established for Weardale CSA in October 2007 a skills audit revealed a wide diversity of relevant skills, experience and knowledge covering horticulture, farming, administration, finance, business, legal issues, group working, communications, and practical skills (appendix iii). On paper, this was a strong and well equipped group and many of these attributes were utilised during the early development of the project. In order to be able to contribute these assets, the individual also needed to have time available to participate and in some cases due to changing circumstances, this did not materialize. Andrew, who chaired the steering group and was a strong driver of the group in its formative stages, initially had several days a week to devote to this work, but this soon began to diminish as other demands appeared on his time from work and family commitments. However, it helped to have one person with some dedicated time at the beginning. The participants at Growing Together had good horticultural skills, knowledge and experience, and communicated well as a group. I often observed that they were a pleasure to work with.

Additional learning was gained through visits to sites where similar activities were taking place, and specific training events organised for the participants. Other CSAs were very helpful in sharing information and advice. In September 2006 I joined a group from Growing Together (Andy, Dave, Donna, and the Green Gym Co-ordinator) on a visit to 'The Green Patch' (Kettering CSA), which at the time was growing vegetables and fruit for between 70 – 90 families on some ex-allotment land that they rented from the local Council. I chose this particular CSA to visit as it was located in a similar socio-economic setting as Growing Together. The visit was a source of inspiration, encouragement, ideas, and contacts (e.g. for ordering seeds), and would have been the beginning of a longer term relationship if the personnel had

not changed at The Green Patch not long after this visit took place. Similarly, both groups found a visit to the only other CSA in Co. Durham (Abundant Earth) equally helpful, with information on local contacts, growing in the northern climate, and offers of further advice being freely given. Andy and Dave (Growing Together) commented after this visit that they would be working ‘flat out’, including evenings and week-ends, once the growing season got started. The idea of using old five litre drinking water dispensers as cloches came from this visit, something Weardale CSA



Photo 3: Recycling water dispensers

took up and used to good effect on the Frosterley site. Andrew and Victoria and I also visited Low Luckens organic farm⁸⁰ and Growing Well⁸¹, in Cumbria in September 2007 and some participants from Weardale CSA also visited a CSA at Swillington near Leeds, and attended a training event at River Swale in

North Yorkshire (both of these

were events organised by the Soil Association). Beren Aldridge of Growing Well described the excitement of visiting projects before setting up Growing Well as “seeing your vision in front of you”; this was an apt description of the impact of these visits. Andrew described the visit as “very inspiring”. Participants often used their existing networks to lever resources for the projects with good effect. For example, Andy and Dave at Growing Together, as employees of the County Council, were visited by local councillors and gained their support in accessing small grants when they needed to make repairs to the polytunnels following the stormy weather of 2008.

⁸⁰ <http://www.lowluckensfarm.co.uk/>

⁸¹ <http://www.growingwell.co.uk/>

At Weardale CSA, Andrew proved to be very adept at using his various networks. In



Photo 4: Help from Sailors

some more unusual instances he arranged for a group of sailors from HMS Bulwark⁸² to spend a day at the Stanhope garden during their short stay on land when they generally included some volunteering activities. They made short work of up-

rooting some elder bushes in the snow. Another opportunity for publicity came when the Bishop of Durham was visiting Weardale and Andrew arranged for him to do some digging in preparation for the raised beds.

Both stories were reported in the local press. He also made use of his local networks to research land rents, find out about leases, recruit new volunteers and find replacement land when the original site had to be abandoned. Later on, when he took over as Chair, Tony followed Andrew's example and brought in new volunteers (mainly from contacts at his local pub) to work on the land, a professional architect to help and advise with a planning issue (a temporary greenhouse constructed at Stanhope), and a college student studying horticulture to help and advise on growing.



Photo 5: Help from the Bishop of Durham

2.1.2 Physical

The most obvious physical resource requirement for a CSA is the land to grow on. In the case of Growing Together, five allotment plots were already being used. As the project developed the District Council offered them the use of an additional two plots. They were also offered land by an adjacent tenant who only used part of his plot for keeping pigeons. Weardale CSA started with the understanding that they would be using a plot of land on Chris's farm but when this did not work out (see section 3.1) they were faced with finding an alternative site. Having already held a

⁸² HMS Bulwark is County Durham's 'adopted' Navy vessel; the crew undertake voluntary work for local organisations when it is docked in the North East. See:

<http://www.durham.gov.uk/pages/Service.aspx?ServiceId=6846>

public meeting (the workshop event in September 2007) that was very well publicised and attended they had the advantage of a certain level of public support. This probably helped Andrew in identifying the two sites that eventually became the home of the CSA. Finding the resources to enable them to purchase other large items such as polytunnels, a composting toilet, and an on-site storage facility proved much more difficult. Growing Together already had these resources on site as a legacy from their previous work and did not need any large grants.

2.1.3 Financial

Finance was a continual area of struggle for Weardale CSA but they were helped to set up by obtaining a new business support grant via the local Enterprise Agency. Without this grant it is difficult to imagine how they could have started. Both landowners required a formal lease, which involved legal expenses for the group. Other major expenses were insurance and fencing, all of which needed to be paid for before any work on the land could commence. They were also given financial support to hold the public workshop (September 2007). This fund again came through the Enterprise Agency, from a grant they were administering on behalf of the local Council. The fund was for the purpose of encouraging and developing local supply chains, and for the first time had an agricultural element attached to it. No projects had been identified as suitable for this element of the fund, and when I met Jean, a District Council officer, in November 2006 to explain the research project I was hoping to develop, this fund was mentioned as a possible source of support. It paid for speakers' fees and expenses, hire of the premises, child care facilities, refreshments (including a two course meal prepared using local ingredients), and colour leaflets distributed to all homes in the surrounding area. It enabled the group to hold a high profile event that attracted a lot of interest and provided new contacts and data upon which to build the project.

The Scarman Trust (now amalgamated into the Novas Scarman Group) awarded Community Champion grants to individuals in both groups. These grants were unusual in that they are awarded to individuals rather than constituted groups and provided up to £2,000 to enable a person to put an innovative idea into action. They were launched in 1999 by the Labour Government as an initiative of the Department for Education and Skills, "to support individuals who are already active in their

communities by developing their skills, and to encourage more community involvement in regeneration activity by supporting key individuals” (Duncan and Thomas, 2001). Regional Government Offices (GO) were given responsibility to administer them; in the North East the Scarman Trust was nominated by GONE to deliver the programme. The fund was withdrawn in March 2008. The application process was simple and quick and provided an accessible means of finance for individuals who had no previous experience of applying for public or charitable funding. A service user at Growing Together applied with help from Andy and was delighted to receive the grant to plant a fruit plot as part of the development of the project. I introduced Victoria to the scheme and helped her fill in the application form. The grant paid for the visits to Cumbria, production of the Business Plan, and for four people to sign up for a distance learning RHS course in horticulture.

Growing Together was supported throughout by Durham County Council (DCC) who continued to pay the salaries of the support workers (Andy and Dave). A Local Action 21 Partnership Project Fund run by DCC also allocated a £500 grant towards the initial set up costs (publicity leaflets and some new capital items). In 2009, when DCC became the Unitary Authority for the whole county, Area Action Partnerships were set up and had small grants schemes attached to them. Weardale CSA was awarded a £900 grant in 2010 to replant the orchard at Frosterley that had suffered badly from the heavy snows of the previous winter. Weardale CSA also received a grant of £5,000 from the County Durham Community Foundation. There are 57 of these foundations in the UK that “bring together local philanthropists and businesses who wish to give money to support their community with dynamic local organisations, enabling communities to work collectively to help themselves.”⁸³ Whilst this particular application encountered some difficulties in the process that delayed its outcome, it is generally a relatively smooth process, although the requirement to produce a full set of organisational policies can be a challenge to newly formed groups. Both groups also raised a small amount of cash by charging a small membership fee, and Weardale CSA was helped by not having to pay rent on either plot of land.

⁸³ http://www.communityfoundations.org.uk/community_foundations/

2.2 Individuals

There were instances in both projects where the attitude of particular individuals with whom the groups interacted had a notably positive impact on progress. The apparently whimsical nature of this (and its opposite situation where individuals blocked progress) serves to illustrate the difficulty of predicting specific outcomes or likely trajectories. Some examples are described here.

Jean, the official at the District Council referred to above, was very helpful in securing the two start-up grants for Weardale CSA (one grant for the workshop event, and one for start-up costs, as mentioned above). We already knew each other professionally when I first arranged to meet her to discuss my research and she responded enthusiastically and made every effort to identify potential sources of support. She also influenced her colleagues at the Council and the Enterprise Agency and encouraged them to be flexible with the administration of the grants, for example by allowing us to use volunteer time as match funding for one of them.

I received an invitation to meet Charlotte at the Enterprise Agency in February 2007 to discuss the possibility of gaining some financial support from the fund earmarked for developing local supply chains that Charlotte had identified. When I described the CSA model she immediately responded from a personal as well as a professional perspective and was very enthusiastic. She told me about her Mother who takes a weekly delivery of a box of organic vegetables and she was excited about the idea of fostering closer consumer producer relationships. She was keen for me to use the available funding for my suggestion of an event where we could invite members of the public to find out about CSA and to gauge the level of support for a local scheme from within the wider community. She was able to offer both funding for the event and professional marketing support from a consultant, who subsequently designed the promotional leaflets. Charlotte attended some planning meetings with the small group that was meeting prior to the holding of the workshop event and she volunteered in her own time to help in the promotion of the event at the agricultural shows. When we finally got access onto the land she was there on the first volunteer work day helping to spread manure and plant the broad beans in October 2008. Despite not living in Weardale, she was one of the first people to become a paying

member of the CSA and asked “when can we have one in (my village)?” I observed in my journal that “finding people who respond positively on an emotional/personal level, not just on a professional or intellectual level, is key to progress”. As one of the steering group members remarked later: “she’s inspirational”.

The success of the two applicants to the Scarman Trust Community Champions award was in part due to the support and encouragement given by a staff member from Scarman who I had previously worked with on a consultation exercise. It was from him that I learnt about the grant and that it would be suitable for individuals from the groups to apply for. He was always available to talk to by telephone to answer any queries about the application process (what was an eligible activity to apply for, for example) and encouraged the two applicants to apply.

During the initial discussions with staff at the Centre about the feasibility of setting up a small scheme based upon the CSA model the then Locality Manager played a crucial role in giving permission to go ahead. She considered that it fitted well with current Government Policy for people with learning difficulties as set out in the Valuing People White Paper that promoted the key principles of rights, independence, choice and inclusion (Department of Health, 2001). She was an active member of the group and took on a leadership role until she was moved to a different location in May 2006. Her replacement was verbally supportive but did not get involved or continue to attend meetings.

Permission was also needed from the District Council who owned the allotment plots used by the Centre gardening group. Although initial negotiations were not promising the manager responsible for allotments attended a meeting at the beginning of August 2006. He explained that allotments were not his ‘speciality’ and that he was new to this area of work and “open to new ideas.” He listened to the group’s ideas and was impressed with their enthusiasm and commitment. He was subsequently responsible for writing a paper supporting the project that was agreed by the Council’s Community Services Committee in September. I reflected at the time that if the person responsible for allotments had had years of involvement and fixed views, the outcome could have been very different. Even when negotiating with a relatively large organisation, an individual with power (capability to act) can

influence an outcome because of their own subjective motivations, attitudes or opinions.

2.3 Institutions

Both projects interacted with a number of external institutions including councils, educational institutions, charities, and private companies, building up what some theorists describe as ‘linking’ social capital (e.g. see Gilchrist, 2004; Dahal and Adhikari, 2008). Linking social capital refers to connections made between people or groups of differing status and power, allowing access to new resources and influence. Gilchrist (op cit) emphasises the role that community workers can play in helping to build these links. Some of these encounters were problematic but others were helpful. Benefits accruing from these institutions included funding, advice, training, and partnership working to provide additional human resources for the projects.

Locally based Enterprise Agencies provide support services to new and emerging businesses and manage a number of business support grants. Weardale CSA benefited from two grants that were administered by their local agency, including mentoring from a business mentor who advised on choosing a legal structure and setting up the new company and provided training for the board of directors of the CIC.

The District Council provided some level of support to both projects as described above: Growing Together was given permission to develop their project on the Council owned allotment site and Weardale CSA was supported by grant funding. The County Council provided a small grant to Growing Together via their Local Action 21 team and as the employers of Dave and Andy at the Centre, supported the project overall, at least until a change of policy direction that occurred after my involvement ended (see addendum).

Help from charitable trusts came in the form of grants (to Weardale CSA from the County Durham Community Foundation and to both projects from the Scarman Trust) and practical help. BTCV was an active partner in Growing Together, running a weekly Green Gym session, until their funding ran out in 2008. They also agreed to support Weardale CSA in their second application to the Local Food Grant by

including the running of a Green Gym on site for which they would apply for match funding themselves. A Green Gym effectively provides additional volunteer help on site whilst offering an opportunity for exercise and learning new skills to Gym members. In addition, the project benefits from the input of the employees from BTCV who run the Gym. Tony also approached Groundwork for help in 2010 after the Local Food Grant turned down Weardale CSA's funding application. They agreed to adopt the project on an 'at risk' basis (i.e. with no fees being charged) and organised some work days using their intermediate labour market scheme that provided experience to young people who are out of work. The Princes Trust, when they were working on general improvements to the allotment site, helped Growing Together with some maintenance work on their paths and other outstanding jobs.

Growing Together formed a number of working partnerships with local institutions that benefited both partners. The local college of higher education began using the site in September 2006 with two students coming for two hours a week. In 2007 they requested that the numbers be increased to 12 students and that they might work throughout the summer break. The college staff became so enthused that when an allotment became free on the site they took it over to grow produce for their own families. Sure Start, who had had some involvement at the site in earlier years, was approached from 2006 in an attempt to reinvigorate their involvement. Progress was slow as the staff member who was interested developing this was on maternity leave, providing another example of the influence of particular individuals on progress. She returned to work in early 2007 and attended a meeting in February. Some visits were made by Sure Start groups in 2007 and by June 2008 regular sessions were taking place involving parents and children. Several work placements were organised through another local charity, DISC⁸⁴, and these young people went on to successfully gain employment in horticulture.

I contacted the North East Organic Centre run by the Soil Association (now closed down), to find out what support they might be able to offer. They agreed to pay for a trainer to come to Weardale and run a session on growing for continuous supply.

⁸⁴ DISC provides a range of services "designed to help people make the changes that will enable them to live independent and fulfilling lives". See <http://www.disc-vol.org.uk/>

This took place in February 2008. I was unable to attend this event and received differing feedback about its usefulness.

I was occasionally able to harness the resources of the university in small ways. A couple of postgraduate students joined the rota for looking after the promotional stall at one of the agricultural shows in Weardale prior to the workshop event in 2007, and my supervisor handed out the promotional leaflets at a third show where there was no stall booked. Both projects were visited by students and by my supervisor and a visiting academic from France. The interest shown by these visits was encouraging to participants and provided an opportunity for them to talk about their work. A soil scientist provided a test for volatile compounds in a soil sample from the Frosterley site when the high levels of Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons (TPH) identified in the soil analysis was a cause of some concern: if it was from a natural origin there was no problem but if it came from other sources it could include volatile compounds that might be damaging to the health of anyone handling the soil. Another soil scientist visited Frosterley on a volunteer work day and examined the soil profile and talked about soil structure and fertility to the participants. Later on, when Tony was attempting to negotiate a water supply for the Frosterley field with Northumbrian Water, I was able to ask advice from a specialist in my School about figures for anticipated water use. A visiting professor from the US (Prof. Mike Bell) accepted my invitation to attend an open meeting Weardale CSA held in April 2008 where he gave a short presentation about CSA in the US. This was very well received and noted as an opportunity to learn more about CSA by a participant in the independent focus group in November 2009.

2.4 External socio-political factors

By this I mean the prevailing ideas, policies, and any specific events or circumstances that had potential to influence the way in which the projects developed. The most obvious direct impact of policy came from the Valuing People White Paper (chapter 4, 3.4.2) that provided strong policy support for the principles and values of Growing Together. Local Action 21⁸⁵ at DCC, that supported Growing

⁸⁵ The origins of 'LA21' (formerly Local Agenda 21) can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_21#Local_Agenda_21

Together with a small grant, was where the projects fitted most comfortably with the County Council, and the availability of a grant to support the development of local supply chains from the District Council reflected policy to support local economic regeneration. The national policy environment in areas of health, environment, and education meant that organisations working in these fields were happy to endorse the research (e.g. Weardale CSA's lottery funding application was backed by letters of support from three educational institutions, the Primary Care Trust, and the North Pennines AONB) even if they could not find resources to contribute directly.

Most striking was the rapid rise in the attention being paid to food issues at global and national levels during the lifetime of this research. Due to a complex mix of social and natural events – sometimes referred to as ‘a perfect storm’ (e.g. by John Vidal in 2007 and Prof. John Beddington in 2009) (Vidal, 2007; Sample, 2009) – numerous policy papers appeared culminating in the publication of food strategies for England and each of the devolved nations (see chapter 1, 3). This interest was also reflected in the amount of media coverage given to food related issues, which is more likely to have had an effect at the local level by raising interest in this research amongst the local community. When conducting research in 2005 on the same topic (Charles, 2005), whilst there was some interest in ‘home-grown’ food, the language of ‘local’ and ‘sustainable’ food production was not in common usage, at least amongst the people I was interviewing.

Reviewing a random collection of press cuttings from 2006 – 2009 gives a flavour of the exposure provided by the press, covering topics such as rising oil prices, Genetically Modified (GM) food, avian flu, rising food prices, and food security, as the following examples illustrate.

- In an article in the Guardian in 2006 making the link between diet and climate change, Jonathon Porritt predicted that “This year will undoubtedly be looked back on as the year when mass awareness (of climate change) at last kicked in ... it's been such a shocking year in terms of both disasters such as Hurricane Katrina and a spate of new research findings about accelerating impacts on both the Arctic and Antarctic, on the Russian and Canadian permafrost, on the acidification of the oceans, and so on” (p9). Referring to agriculture's reliance

on oil, he noted that the price of oil had reached \$60 a barrel and predicted that within a decade it would reach \$100: it peaked in 2008 at \$140.

- GM food was also becoming a contentious issue and was the topic of an article in the Daily Mail by Rosie Boycott who claimed that the anti-GM campaigns “gave rise to a profoundly significant trend: the start of a new awareness about the food we were putting on our plates. Customers now want to know more about the origins of their food – where it has come from and how it has been grown or reared” (Boycott, 2006, p40).
- In the same year the new strain of avian flu (H₅N₁) threatened free-range poultry farmers with the prospect of having to move their flocks indoors as the cause of the spread of the disease was attributed to wild birds and outdoor poultry. Joanna Blythman drew attention to an alternative explanation and cited reports suggesting that the real culprit might be intensive poultry production (Blythman, 2006b).
- At the same time, articles began appearing advocating diets based upon local and seasonal produce (e.g. Monks, 2006; Shiva, 2006).
- The following year saw rising food prices take over as the main issue and the phrase ‘the food crisis’ appeared regularly. For example, John Vidal in the Guardian coined the phrase ‘perfect storm’ to describe the combined impact of the use of agricultural land for growing biofuels rather than food, water shortages, natural disasters, and a rapidly rising global population, a situation he claimed was a “recipe for disaster” and would result in the end of the “era of cheap food” (Vidal, 2007).
- The local press in the North East also ran scare stories, for example, predicting that the rising cost of animal feed was a real threat to the region’s livestock industry (Bridgen, 2007) and a story in the Weardale Gazette stating that the UK may be facing a milk shortage in the near future (Anonymous, 2007). The latter article, on the front page of a community paper read widely in Weardale, concluded by encouraging readers to think about where their food comes from and “ensure that you buy local.”
- This theme continued in to 2008, exacerbated by the ‘credit crunch’. News of food riots and protest at high food prices in many countries (e.g. Egypt, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal, Uzbekistan,

Yemen, Bolivia, Indonesia) appeared in the news with Sir John Holmes, the UN's "top humanitarian official" warning that "escalating prices would trigger protests and riots in vulnerable nations" (Adam, 2008; McKie and Steward, 2008).

- News of a rise in interest in 'growing your own' began to filter through: in 2008 it was reported that sales of vegetable seeds had exceeded those of flower seeds for the first time since 1939, attributed to "the squeeze on household budgets (caused by rising food prices), and by the growing interest in the organic and slow food movements" (Anonymous, 2008, p4). This was described by one reporter, who also noted the growing waiting lists for allotments, as "an explosion in the numbers now growing their own" (Davies, 2008, p21).
- Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University, London was quoted in an article in the Telegraph: "If you depend on Tesco or Sainsbury's or Waitrose, you are a consumer. In other words your food supply is under their control. But if you garden and can grow at least some food to eat, however little, then you are injecting a little food democracy into your food supplies and asserting your food citizenship (Gray, 2008)."
- A couple of months later an article about CSA appeared in the same publication (Boase, 2008).
- The release of the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Report on the future of global agriculture (McIntyre and Heren et al., 2009) giving support to small scale and ecological farming methods as the way forward for agriculture, was reported on in the Guardian in April 2008 (Vidal, 2008a).
- In 2009 the key message changed from food crisis and rising prices to food security. In February the Chatham House report (Ambler-Edwards and Kiff et al., 2009) was published, prompting the headline "Britain risks food shortages 'unless farms are reformed' " (Doward, 2009). Defra's 2009 Food Security Assessment (Defra, 2009) similarly provoked articles entitled "How secure is our food supply?" (Colquhoun, 2009) and "Food crisis could force wartime rations and vegetarian diet on Britons" (Elliott, 2009). And in a move reminiscent of the wartime 'dig for victory' campaign, HM Queen Elizabeth

made the news by converting part of Buckingham Palace grounds into an allotment (Davies, 2009).

- These issues were also covered by radio and TV, with some notable examples of CSAs receiving coverage. Stroud Community Agriculture, for example, has “featured in the Guardian, The Times, The Independent, The Farmers’ Guardian, BBC TV’s Countryfile, Radio 4’s Food Programme and others” (Stroud Community Agriculture, undated, p29).

With all this, sometimes dramatic, coverage across diverse media it is not improbable that many more people became aware at some level of the complex issues surrounding our food system and that this created a more benign cultural background for undertaking this particular research. As Sir Donald Curry commented:

one of the interesting things ... is the fact that the media have picked up on this, I mean, we’ve now got Countryfile at peak viewing time on a Sunday evening, that’s incredible that the BBC are prepared to run a programme about the countryside at 7 o’clock or whatever it is on a Sunday evening. And so, you find all these documentaries ... a series of documentary films about farming, and so there is a public interest, a public mood swing, which we just need to build on. (Curry, 2010)

2.5 Techniques

In this section I document the various techniques, both the participatory techniques detailed in chapter four, and other practices used during the course of the research that I judged to have been successful in achieving goals or developing practical knowledge.

The first point to note is the effectiveness of the overall approach of action research as a constantly present guide that influenced how we interpreted our actions and responded to the often unanticipated events that occurred during the implementation of the research. Conversations about the meaning of AR in terms of its cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting were held in both groups. The approach carries within it an assumption that plans may not always turn out as expected when acted upon, that the observations and reflections may yield alternative pathways.

This helped in dealing with situations that did not work out, which other approaches might label as ‘failures’; in AR they can be accepted as learning opportunities triggering another planning stage. Examples are many and include the problems encountered by Growing Together in their first year of growing for the CSA due to poor drainage and stormy weather, and dealing with the need to find an alternative site for Weardale CSA.

An observation of how this way of thinking was absorbed by the participants is illustrated by a discussion at a meeting of Growing Together in February 2007. The group were considering the wording for a promotional leaflet to be delivered to houses in the surrounding area. The question arose as to whether or not to state that people with learning disabilities were involved in the project, with some members thinking that maybe people would need to know that they may be meeting individuals with learning disabilities on the site and others, Donna in particular, disagreeing. Donna thought that including this information risked ‘labelling’ and would not help in reducing the divide between the service users and the general public. Eventually she suggested viewing this approach as part of the AR learning cycle and to try it out and evaluate it with a view to changing it if it was not judged to be working. This was readily agreed and gave an outcome that all members could accept, thus smoothing the decision making process.

Similarly, the role of facilitator that I adopted in the research process (chapter 2, 2.3 chapter 4, 3.4) was effective in animating action in both cases. In the independent focus group evaluations both groups opined that neither project would have happened without this intervention. In answer to the question “How might the project have been different without Liz?” a respondent from Weardale CSA replied “I don’t think it would have happened” and from Growing Together “we wouldn’t be here ... probably still have about three plots.” Other comments about my role as facilitator throw some light on the usefulness of having this dedicated resource to assist and enable the other participants to work together and to contribute hands-on time and effort at busy times:

she was hugely supportive in and proactive in helping to facilitate those trips [to other projects]. I think the thing was that for many of us setting up an enterprise of this sort was completely new so she was hugely helpful in

suggesting material for the agendas and actually covering quite a lot of the introductory stuff herself. Bringing ideas which we then debated and when you look back through those agendas she was enormously supportive and proactive in helping us to begin to discern just what was going to be required for the thing to run. (Weardale CSA focus group)

being really supportive and using her networks if appropriate to answer questions (Weardale CSA focus group)

She has put us in a different direction. She has put us in touch with people who can help. We have visited a couple of other CSAs to see how they are run, which has been good ... we are quite busy anyway so we needed someone to push us ... and it has worked, it's worked a treat. (Growing Together focus group)

she knew our strengths, and we didn't have strengths in certain areas, and she helped us along with those things. Like the organising ... we had to do a lot to set this up, legally wise, especially with the County Council, cause they were like 'we have never had this before ... this isn't a normal carer's role'. (Growing Together focus group)

she kept breaking things down ... one bit at a time, because we would charge in ... she was like 'no, no, need to get this sorted', very structured, she kept us right in the steps we had to take. (Growing Together focus group)

The participatory techniques described in chapter four (section 3.4.2) all proved helpful in encouraging and drawing out each participant's involvement. The example that was probably least effective was the use made of the ground rules agreed by the Weardale CSA steering group. Although the exercise of developing and agreeing the list of rules was helpful in enabling the newly formed group to think about how they wanted the group to function and in bringing out some of the potentially problematic issues that may arise in any group, when I attempted to use the list at a later stage to provoke a discussion about some of the tensions that had arisen in the group, no-one was willing to admit publicly to any divergence from the agreed procedures, even though I had been made aware of some serious discomforts through private conversations.

The use of the PATH template (chapter 4, 3.4.2) for planning with Growing Together was particularly successful. It made the planning sessions fun and enjoyable for everyone, provided a clear and logical structure, and enabled the service users to

have a better understanding and involvement in the process. Andy reported that using the PATH “to set targets and actions ... highlighted the people we needed to help us to achieve the project’s goals and ... provided a time-frame within which to work” (Growing Together Annual Report, 2006-2007).

The Weardale CSA workshop event, held in September 2007, utilised a variety of techniques, including ‘open space’ and ‘conversation café’, to enable a relatively large group of people to learn, question, and contribute to the development of ideas. The three practitioner workshops run by leaders of existing CSAs provided inspiration and information and provoked animated discussions. Louise explained that her motivation for joining the group had come from what she heard at this event: “My aspirations would have come from that first meeting ... the chap from Stroud ... it was brilliant, ‘I want that, that looks great.’ That’s what I have had in my head all the time.” The careful planning of the event and consideration given to finding a venue and time suitable for most people also contributed to the overall success of the day, as did the provision of free crèche facilities and a free meal that used as much locally sourced produce as possible.

When I first started working with my fellow research participants none of them had any previous experience or knowledge of CSA so I decided to arrange some visits to enterprises that might broaden their knowledge, generate ideas, and provide an entry point into the loose network of CSAs that existed at the time. These visits are referred to above (section 2.1). They proved to be a rich source of inspiration and enabled participants to see what others had achieved. Making physical contact with people directly involved in comparable projects seemed to create a real sense of being involved in something bigger than just their own plans, an understanding that they were joining a wider community of activists who were also trying to find ways of growing and distributing food differently. Andrew acknowledged the value of the visits in his opening speech at the workshop event: “those of us who’ve begun to visit other similar projects have come back inspired, if a little daunted.”

There is a long standing tradition of local agricultural shows in a number of villages in Weardale. They are very popular and attract a large number of visitors, both from the local communities and further afield. In 2007 Weardale CSA decided to rent a

stall at two of the largest shows to promote the upcoming workshop event. Growing Together also shared the stall at one of the shows to publicise their project. The stalls attracted a lot of interest and bookings were made for the workshop and other people left their contact details to receive further information. My observation at the time was that this was “overall a very positive activity with lots of bookings for 15th and many conversations taking place with visitors to the stands.” Repeating this activity in future years would no doubt also have been beneficial but it entailed quite a lot of organisation and some expense and human and financial resources have been in too short supply to repeat this.

Efforts were made to widen participation by holding specific events. Growing Together held open days at the garden and in September 2006 they cooked some of the produce outside and invited people to come and join them in eating and looking around the garden. They also held an ‘ugly veg competition’ to make the point that vegetables do not have to look perfect to taste good. The event was well attended and some parents expressed an interest in the local Sure Start becoming involved. This was an annual event that was not so successful in the two following years due to wet and windy weather. Weardale CSA held an open meeting in April 2008 to provide an update following the workshop event in September 2007. It was attended by eight members of the steering group and 10 other members of the local community. Professor Mike Bell from the university of Wisconsin-Madison, who was visiting Newcastle University at the time, gave a talk about CSA in the US which was very well received. This talk was mentioned by participants in the independent focus group meeting “as an opportunity to learn more about CSA.”

3. WHAT HINDERED

Many barriers were encountered by the research groups, especially Weardale CSA. They usually delayed progress or triggered a change in direction and cumulatively were a source of frustration and a cause of some participants electing to leave the project. Some difficulties, such as a shortage of volunteers, are not unusual at all, but others were specific to the situation.

3.1 Resources

Although human resources (numbers of people involved, their availability, skills and knowledge, and their wider networks) formed the keystone of both projects, there were also occasions when lack of human resources and contradictory local knowledge had an unhelpful impact on the projects. An example was the apparent belief amongst some members of the general population that there was ‘something about the soil’ in the area that prevented the successful production of vegetables. I came across this viewpoint on a number of occasions; the proponents could never offer an explanation of what the perceived problem was or why they believed this (contrary to all evidence provided by successful allotments and home gardens). There was also some misunderstanding around the variety of produce able to be grown in the area. When Weardale CSA ran stalls at the local agricultural shows to advertise their forthcoming workshop event they displayed produce grown on their own allotments. This included sweetcorn, which at least one visitor claimed could not possibly be grown in Weardale! Another example from Weardale CSA occurred during the time when a decision needed to be made on the suitability of the land at Frosterley. Soil analysis had identified a high level of TPH (total petroleum hydrocarbons). A number of weeks passed before a test for volatile compounds was done that demonstrated that there were no dangerous compounds present. During this time much speculation as to the possible origins of the TPH occurred (they were either organic in origin, for example from leaf decomposition, or from some form of contamination). It was suggested that they could have originated from spent fuel deposited by bomber planes in the second world war, or that car-breaking activities had taken place on the land at some point. When I checked out the latter suggestion with the land-owner he was very annoyed that anyone should be saying this and strongly denied any such activities. This incident had the potential of souring relationships with the landowner, whose support and goodwill in offering the land rent free was an important element in moving forward.

A shortage of volunteers affected both projects at various points. This is not unusual and is well documented (e.g. DeLind, 1999; Coleman, 2002; Schafft and Greenwood, 2003). At Growing Together the potential demand for produce was more than the volunteers could cope with and therefore membership was initially limited to those

who could contribute a given number of hours to helping on the land (see Membership leaflet, appendix v). The availability of volunteers fluctuated with changing partnership arrangements (e.g. numbers dropped when the Green Gym finished, but increased as the local college involved more students). The presence of volunteers could also be a distraction, with Andy observing that he sometimes thought that he could achieve more on his own because of the time he was spending supervising volunteers. So the ability and experience levels of the volunteers were relevant to their impact, and whereas their participation was always welcome (more opportunities for interaction for service users and new people learning gardening skills), greater numbers did not always result in improved productivity.

In October 2007 Weardale CSA started with a steering group of 11 people with a good range of skills and experience. Others joined later at various stages but over time the number gradually dwindled and by April 2009 there was a core of four members doing all the work (Andrew, Louise, Tony, and Julia). Members left for a variety of reasons: three became pregnant and were too busy to carry on, two moved away from the area. A few became disillusioned, discovering that they did not enjoy working within the group, or that it was taking too long to gain access to land for hands-on growing work. Comments from the independent focus group (November 2009) and the reflective meeting (January 2009) illustrate some of the frustrations:

It's been disheartening though seeing numbers of people coming along for a short space of time then drifting away again. It was just unfortunate the number of very key members on the steering group, they or their husbands or wives got jobs elsewhere and things have happened. (Focus Group)

It's that old thing of trying to maintain interest and excitement between a visioning process and people actually having something physical in their hands. (Focus Group)

I've learnt a lot about working in a group, maybe I'm not a particularly good group worker in that I'm not very diplomatic. I'm not very good at sitting there while people said they'll do things and then don't, I don't find that an enjoyable experience. That I'm intensely frustrated by the process ... hours and hours and hours of talking and talking and talking and not having very much at the end of it. (Reflective meeting)

As well as falling numbers, the amount of time Andrew was able to devote to the project turned out to be less than the two to three days a week he originally anticipated. He was working as a non-stipendiary curate and increasing demands from the church on his time put a lot of pressure on him. Later on this was compounded by having to deal with (extended) family problems, involving travelling to another part of the country on numerous occasions. Any community led initiative is vulnerable to the effects of unanticipated events in the lives of those involved; there is no cushioning of institutional structures and circumstances must be weathered with the support of other volunteers. This is something that outside agencies seem to have difficulty in comprehending, sometimes expecting voluntary run organisations to operate in a similar fashion to those with a paid workforce.

Both groups started with a range of skills and experience. Growing Together's weakness lay in the areas of administration, planning and organisation. In order to move the gardening group from an internal activity group to a community project they were required to undertake non-practical tasks such as agreeing a structure, developing a constitution, holding meetings, and negotiating with landlords. This was a different way of working that they had to adapt to and which they achieved to the necessary level over time. They recognised this:

[Liz] knew our strengths, and we didn't have strengths in certain areas, and she helped us along with those things. Like the organising ... we had to do a lot to set this up, legally wise, especially with the County Council. (Participant comment from independent focus group)

Despite a wide range of skills, knowledge and experience (as demonstrated in the skills audit) Weardale CSA experienced a perceived lack of skills in some areas due to a lack of confidence. So although there were several people with many years of successful allotment growing they were sometimes held back by an individual's lack of confidence, even when offered additional training and support. Setting up as a CIC was also perceived as threatening by some members of the group and anxieties about this began to surface in the spring of 2008 when the final stages of incorporation as a CIC were going ahead and people were required to sign up as Directors. One member explained that she was "sitting quietly" because she did not really understand what was involved and felt that running a company was "intimidating".

This was a surprising comment at this stage and came from someone with a professional background who would be very familiar with making critical decisions and judgements and taking responsibility for much larger sums of money that we would be dealing with. In response to this I arranged a training session for Directors with our business adviser.

Progress was delayed in 2008 when it became apparent that the main resource for Weardale CSA – access to land – was no longer available. It came as a surprise to the steering group to find that the rent for the proposed land at Chris’s farm would be too high to make the CSA an economically viable enterprise. A whole new set of problems and questions appeared and just as the group was moving towards more of an ‘acting’ phase they were thrown back into focussing on planning. Although the new sites were quickly identified they were both uncultivated and required much preparation work before any planting could commence. At Frosterley, several issues needed to be researched before a final decision could be made. Due to its proximity to redundant lead mines the soil had to be tested, and negotiations and conversations had to be held with immediate neighbours. Once a decision had been made to go ahead, the lease (on both sites) took several months to be agreed and access to the land was restricted to steering group members until all legal documents had been signed. The original plan to use Chris’s land would have enabled access in the Spring of 2008 onto previously cultivated land.

Financial resources were a continual issue for Weardale CSA. Growing Together did not require a large financial input and the only time that progress was impeded by a lack of financial resources was whilst waiting for a grant to repair the damage to their polytunnels caused by stormy weather. Weardale CSA planned to employ a part-time grower but lacked any financial capital to be able to take on a paid employee. A loan was considered too risky and the community lacked the means to raise the finance itself (in comparison, Stroud Community Agriculture asked members to pay in advance the first year in order to pay a grower). Around £15,000 of start-up funding was secured that paid for items such as legal fees, insurance, fencing, and equipment. The appearance of the Big Lottery Local Food Grant in 2008 seemed to be an ideal opportunity to pursue the aim of employing a grower. When this grant was turned

down it forced a reliance on volunteer work for the foreseeable future although by the end of 2009 a revised first stage application had been submitted and accepted.

3.2 Individuals

Just as some individuals acted in ways that went beyond what might be expected of them in support of the projects, there were also instances of people who either directly impeded progress or failed to provide the assistance that might have been anticipated.

There were individuals with access to resources such as finance or advice and support who delayed or impeded progress by not responding to questions or communications, providing inaccurate information, or by taking a very long time to carry out the required functions. It is not appropriate to reveal details of these blockages but there were a number of specific cases that caused significant delays and frustrations. Reasons for this behaviour are speculative. Sometimes it appeared to be due to incompetence, and sometimes that this work was not a priority for them.

Aggravation was caused at one of the Weardale CSA sites by the behaviour of one of the neighbours who complained about some of the activities and tried (illegally) to impede access to the site. Dealing with this incident took up Andrew's time in writing letters in response to the complaints and in discussions at steering group meetings.

When working within a group some 'storming' is to be expected and there will be different styles, priorities and ways of working. Within Weardale CSA steering group the tensions were particularly difficult at times with conflicts around the style and length of meetings being the most prominent issue. I adopted a number of strategies (see chapter 4, 3.4.2) to address this and eventually the process did improve. However, other tensions remained and were not openly discussed in spite of my attempts to encourage this. Reflecting on relationships within the group in my journal in February 2009 I wrote: "the reality is messy, fragile, and turbulent." Nevertheless the group survived this period with a core of people taking it forward who developed a collaborative and positive way of working together.

3.3 Institutions

Weardale CSA had interactions with around 14 different institutions. Different group members were involved in these relationships, many of which were constructive and helpful (see above). However, in some instances this was not the case. The relationship that presented the most difficulties was that with the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) that administered the Big Lottery Local Food Grant. The project aims fitted the criteria for the grant and for the first time in any UK grant programme, CSA was mentioned as an example of the type of project to be funded.

Making an application of this size was going to take up a lot of time, but the steering group included members with previous experience of making such applications and an adviser from the grant making body was requested. The decision to go ahead with this application was almost inevitable in these circumstances: this grant did not exist when the group first set up and aspired to develop a CSA with a paid worker, so its appearance seemed to offer a potential solution to the pressing problem of how to access funding support until such time as the project was self sustaining. The reality turned out to be very different.

The application process was in two stages, and it was accepted at stage one and we were invited to submit a stage two (full) application. This involved many hours of work, meetings, discussions with the adviser, the production of a detailed business plan, and obtaining letters of support. The assistance from the adviser did not run smoothly and Louise complained that it would have been more efficient to have access to someone from the central team as whenever there was a question that the adviser could not answer (which was often), Louise had to wait for him to contact someone centrally and relay the information back to her.

The application was initially rejected on the grounds that a CIC limited by shares was not eligible to apply. Clearly the administrators and adviser had somehow overlooked this criteria that should have been picked up quickly at stage one. Another adviser, allocated to us by Business Link, who had helped with the process of choosing a legal structure was also employed by the Local Food Grant as an adviser and was himself unaware that this structure would not be eligible. I

subsequently talked to a number of other Local Food Grant advisers who were also unaware of this criteria and I discovered at least one other project that experienced the same problem. In this case it seems that failures within the organisation running the grant were the cause of the problem.

As a key criterion when choosing a legal structure had been eligibility for funding so the logical response was to change to a CIC limited by guarantee. When Tony contacted the organisers he was told that the only option was to begin the whole application process again and submit another first stage application as the original form had now been deleted from their computer system (thereby losing a season's growing potential). Many community led groups would have given up at this stage but Tony's experience in negotiating with funding bodies enabled him to persist in dialogue and the application turned out not to have been deleted after all and it was eventually reinstated on the understanding that the legal structure would be amended.

Having overcome this hurdle a meeting with an assessor took place soon after (March 2009). This was far from satisfactory on a number of accounts: the questions posed indicated a lack of familiarity with the business plan and little understanding of the CSA model. Finally, in May 2009, 10 months after submission of the first stage application, a second letter of rejection was received. The briefness of the letter and feedback in contrast to the effort put in to the application left everyone feeling very let down:

after literally 100s of hours work putting in the Local Food Grant application together we got a very strange outcome in that the assessor actually lives in the village ... there was very little objectivity we felt ... and the grounds on which it was turned down all had been addressed fully in the business plan and again and again it became clear, well it looked as though the assessor didn't really understand the model that we were working with ... (Participant comment from independent focus group)

The only feedback offered was "The Panel felt that the project was under-resourced with particular reference to the Grower, and the exit strategy/sustainability plan was thought to be weak." No-one could really understand how or why this conclusion had been arrived at. Tony in particular was perplexed and surprised at how the whole process had been handled. Had these issues been raised earlier in the process, either

by the adviser or by the central team, they could have been better understood and measures taken to make the project more acceptable. Tony requested more detailed feedback and in a letter to the RSWT explained:

The two very short reasons for the decision not to support the ... project appear to be contradictory and leave us floundering as to how we could make a better application ... we had an adviser for the unsuccessful application and they informed us that we had an extremely strong application. They did not raise the staff resource or forward/sustainability plan ... In my experience with other grant bodies there has been more guidance and negotiation around points of concern from the assessors/grant officers. I am concerned that this help, guidance and negotiation is not available as part of the Local Food scheme, and that as an applicant we are floundering without the necessary or relevant help and advice from yourselves.

Time and energy that had been devoted to this application could better have been spent working on the land, and this was the cause of a lot of frustration. Reflecting on the process it was clear that the overall impact of the grant was negative and that it would have been better not to have applied for it. However, given that it appeared at just the right moment with criteria that fitted perfectly with what the group were planning, not applying would have left us with the question of what could have been achieved had a successful application been made.

The frustration is that we would prefer to be actually growing ... But when you have got a carrot which has potentially £300,000 over three years attached to it which will buy you all the infrastructure that you need to get going and staff time and help then it's very difficult to ignore that carrot and just grow the thing organically ... (Participant comment from independent focus group)

Focussing on the grant application left little time for other developmental activities:

We have been torn between trying to go for these big funds and trying to get people more engaged in the project and we have fallen between two stools and trying to do some of the growing at the same time ... it's difficult looking back on it seeing how we could have done it differently. I think if we hadn't been drawn by the lure of the Local Food Grant we probably could have delivered a lot more on the ground and that might have stimulated more volunteers. (Participant comment from independent focus group)

Tony summed up his response in an email to the steering group:

It is not satisfactory to expect voluntary organisations to invest huge amounts of time to work up projects that may not stand any chance of success, without guidance around small points of detail. Other grant bodies are able to do this, why not the Local Food Grant?

Relationships with the District Council were on the whole positive for both groups. However, there was considerable confusion caused over the administration of a community fund that Louise applied for. She worked hard over the holiday period to complete an application by a deadline of 1st January 2008 only to discover that it did not go to the decision panel and that she had been wrongly informed about the amount of grant aid she could apply for. (The grants being offered in this instance appeared to be a unique funding stream arising out of the impending demise of the District Council planned for April 2009 when County Durham became a unitary authority, and as such the administration of the grants was not a tried and tested procedure).

More time was wasted in 2008 when Weardale CSA was advised that we would have to use the services of Business Link (BL) to access a business adviser. The process of registration was time consuming and of no benefit to the group; dealing directly with the Enterprise Agency was much easier and informal. Advice from BL on a possible Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE) grant was inaccurate so more time was wasted.

I made several attempts to engage the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) in both projects. Growing Together were interested in discussing the development of schemes similar to those observed at Kettering CSA where there was successful partnership working with local health promotion services. Weardale CSA's plan for a therapeutic arm to their work also needed cooperation from the PCT. A reorganisation of the structure of the PCT (from five district based organisations into one county wide one) was making it very difficult to locate the appropriate staff member to meet with as posts were subject to change. All conversations held were positive but in these circumstances it was not possible to take the dialogue any further towards action.

Access to the garden plot by Weardale CSA was initiated informally by Andrew and his Church contacts. It was attached to a local vicarage and was very overgrown and too large for the new incumbent to look after. Once formal negotiations began to set up the lease arrangements it became no different from dealing with any other landlord and the process was drawn out and lengthy. Weardale CSA also had to pay the £500 legal fees incurred by the Church, something that took Andrew by surprise. Thus the offer of free rent for five years was not as generous as it first appeared. It might have been assumed that relationships based on trust could have reduced or eliminated the transactional costs in this case, especially as the Church was benefiting from having the garden restored to productive use and the incumbent benefited from free produce.

Weardale CSA fell within an area covered by a RDPE LEADER group and this fund seemed the obvious choice for the match funding required by the Local Food Grant. In practice the application process was so complex and demanding that the group decided to withdraw the application and look elsewhere. In the first instance they were not given correct advice as to which elements of the project would be eligible for the funding and then Tony was sent a list of very detailed questions that seemed totally out of proportion to the amount of funding being applied for. Tony had the required experience to deal with this but most community groups would have found this very daunting. At a steering group meeting held in June 2009 it was noted that they would “investigate whether there are alternative grant streams with a lighter touch than LEADER – even if we are successful we may not wish to take up the grant due to the excessive scrutiny and reporting commitments.”

As there was no water source available at the Frosterley site (apart from the option of rain harvesting) Tony contacted Northumbrian Water about options for connecting to the mains water supply. He hoped that they might be able to provide a connection as part of their corporate responsibility work. This request was considered but refused and a lengthy exchange ensued in order to try and get a quote for costs to include in a future funding application. Tony was asked to supply anticipated flow rates and daily water requirements for the site. Any guidance on how to calculate this was refused. I made several enquiries and eventually got help from a specialist at the University

(section 3.3). When approached, the Soil Association, the local horticultural college, and other projects did not know how to calculate this estimate. Tony⁸⁶ described this experience at the independent focus group and used it as an example of how some institutions had been obstructive or unhelpful. His remarks provide a neat summary to this section (emphasis mine):

Wherever we have wanted to turn there has been something in the way ... for instance I have been trying to get water onto the site at FrosterleyBut they have now decided that they will be able to stick in a water pipe for us the other side of the River Wear, the other side of a railway line and half a mile away from the site ... So having gone through all that effort we are now asking for a spur off ... as that's the right side of the river and the railway line and considerably nearer. It just seems very, very difficult for a community group to come and do these sorts of things and the large organisations who you would think might be able to show a bit of leniency and give you some guidance seem to be totally unable to. And they tend to be slightly more obstructive than you would otherwise have thought.

4. REFLECTION

The pathways forged by the iterative action research were frequently unanticipated and unpredictable. Events and influences as diverse as inclement weather conditions, unforeseen personal circumstances of participants, the launch of the Local Food Grant and the unexpected need to find alternative premises prompted new directions and shaping of the projects. Developing timely practical knowledge – how to do this now and in this place – requires flexibility and responsiveness to shifting circumstances. In other words, the research practice needed to be *adaptive*, a feature built into the AR approach and well suited to working in environments that are characterised by uncertainty. This ties in with a body of literature concerned with decision making in complex environments spanning policy and strategy making and practitioner behaviour, and drawing on systems theory and complexity theory (e.g. Lindblom, 1959; Ackoff, 1974; Schön, 1983; Chia and Holt, 2009; Kay, 2010). In different ways these authors all tackle the practical challenge of working embedded within situations of “complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflicts” (Schön, 1983, p14) that characterise the social world. They all agree that in

⁸⁶ Notes from the focus group did not attribute comments to individuals but in this instance it is clearly Tony speaking as he talks about his negotiations with Northumbrian Water.

such circumstances ‘traditional expertise’ (Schön, 1983) or ‘rational decision making’ (Kay, 2010) simply do not work, and in practice are not used, although actions and decisions might be explained retrospectively using these frameworks (Kay, *ibid*). Rather than adopting an approach of specific goal setting and a planned series of actions to be followed to attain that goal, practitioners are more likely to be using “tacit knowing-in-action”, “reflection-in-action” (learning by doing) (Schön, 1983), and “muddling through” (Lindblom, 1959), approaches which, the authors argue, can in practice be both systematic and effective. Similarly, Kay argues that indirect or oblique actions where problem solving is “iterative and adaptive” and builds upon what has gone before can produce long lasting success. Chia and Holt take this further by demonstrating that strategy can emerge non-deliberately from an accumulation of actions taken at the local level that initially appear peripheral to the central issue of a strategic situation. This understanding has relevance both to the AR process and to the possibilities of wider impacts that are unknowable and unimagined by the active participants (see chapter 3, 2.2.4)

The fluidity of this adaptive emergent pathway does not always fit comfortably with the requirements and expectations of others, such as funding bodies and external partners. It also implies that any transferable lessons will be primarily on the level of process and approaches to problem solving, rather than relating to any specific episode.

Some of the factors helping or hindering progress were outside the ability of participants to influence or control, whilst we had agency to determine, change or develop others. Examples of where there was no opportunity to influence include the socio-political environment, the availability of grant funding, the responsiveness of institutions and individuals, and the unexpected personal circumstances experienced by some participants. These instances are contingent on the specific time and place of the research and as such are unique in their detail. However, they are all issues that will arise in any similar venture and as such I would suggest that they should be acknowledged as ‘known unknowns’ in the early planning stages. The participants had to seek to harness the positive opportunities and mitigate the negative influences. That this did not always work out as anticipated (as in the case of the Local Food Grant) demonstrates the difficulty of making the ‘best’ choices.

Features that could be influenced include techniques, foundational values, how the groups of participants worked together, areas of weakness, and the clarity of communications. These are more relational issues and bring to the fore the importance of building positive and supportive relationships within the groups: a group that cares about its members is more likely to survive the bombardment of difficulties that sometimes arise. Recognising this in the early planning stage and agreeing not only to discuss statements of values, ground rules, and meeting protocols but also to giving some time to observe and reflect on how they are working as an integral part of project development may help to build transparency and work through any conflicts.

In attempting to harness the positive opportunities, building positive relationships with outsiders was often the key to unlock resources. This is recognised in the concept of linking social capital, which “pertains to connections with people in power, whether they are in politically or financially influential positions” (Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002, cited in Dahal and Adhikari, 2008 p4) and “includes vertical connections to formal institutions” (ibid, p4). What is not so often recognised, but was an observable occurrence, was the role played by emotional engagement. The individuals who gave the most support and often went beyond what might be expected of them were those who displayed an emotional connection to the idea of CSA, local food, or growing your own food. This was apparent from the management at Growing Together, from Charlotte at the Enterprise Agency, and Jean at the local Council. The business advisor allocated to Weardale CSA was also very enthusiastic and initially gave his time voluntarily whilst the lengthy process of accessing funding for his work was in progress. Growing food for the local community taps into feelings and ‘cares’ as well as the intellectual arguments around the environment, health and well-being.

It was never certain which partnerships might evolve into long term relationships. For example, at Growing Together the local college started with a small number of students and hours and grew to become a major contributor, whereas the Green Gym, which was an active and central partner, came to an abrupt end when the funding ran out. At Weardale CSA the conversations held with the secondary school seemed to

indicate the potential for a mutually beneficial partnership that would play a major role in the shaping of the project, but this never came to fruition. In these circumstances, planning the detailed outcomes is impossible and it calls for an approach that is exploratory, emergent, and willing to try diverse models.

Similarly, drawing inspiration and learning from others was important in providing motivation and building confidence but it was not possible to replicate all ideas gathered, even when this was seen as desirable. Kettering CSA had an excellent relationship with the local health promotion department and ran a number of innovative projects that the people at Growing Together were interested to explore for themselves. But for us, the ongoing internal reorganisation of the PCT meant that it was impossible to find a member of staff who could engage with us to develop projects of this nature.

In responding to the barriers and opportunities presented throughout the research there are inevitably some instances where, on reflection, we could have acted or chosen differently. In both cases the focus of the planning and action was with the immediate participants. Awareness that wider community involvement would be required and was desirable was always present and discussed from time to time, with a number of events and communications undertaken in response. However, there were also opportunities that were not taken or acted upon that may have attracted more volunteers or potential members. The main reason for neglecting these opportunities was a shortage of both mine and the other participants' time. Choices had to be made about which actions to prioritise and dealing with the immediate tasks such as gaining access to land, raising funds, and growing food took precedence.

Seeing what happened to Growing Together in the years since my involvement ended (see addendum) I questioned why we had not sought approval from a higher authority within DCC before proceeding. This was never discussed at the time and the locality manager's strong support was taken as sufficient endorsement; she appeared to have authority to allow the project to develop, and had discussed it with her own manager. Although the question did occur to me at the time I did not want to

delay developments by suggesting a lengthy formal approval process and I guess that the other staff members would have rejected the suggestion in any case.

Having decided to apply for the Local Food Grant, (and as stated above, it would have been difficult to ignore it) we could have developed a more robust alternative course of action to be implemented should the application be turned down. This was attempted, but rather half-heartedly; so much time and effort had been required for the application that there was not much appetite for yet more detailed planning. In the event, the absence of any such plan was not an impediment as the focus was on growing as much as possible that season using volunteer labour whilst seeking out additional support to bolster a second application. This course of action could not be anticipated until the feedback from the Local Food Grant was received and responded to.

Whilst building relationships of trust is essential for community-based action research (chapter 4, 3.4.1) trust can sometimes be a barrier to questioning assumptions. This happened most explicitly for Weardale CSA in the case of the rent for the land at Chris's farm. That the terms needed to be negotiated was recognised early on. In a conversation recorded during the visit to Low Luckens farm in September 2007 Andrew said we "also need challenging conversations with Chris fairly soon re intentions re land for rent, costs, limitations he'd place on the land, expectations, length of tenure, what happens to buildings we put up on the land etc. Presumably all that gets worked into the legal agreement but at this stage it feels as though that conversation needs to be had sooner rather than later." The conversation did not happen for another two months and the underlying reason for the delay was probably an assumption that agreeable terms could be worked out, given the nature of the relationship that had developed between Chris and the other members of the steering group.

A comment by a participant in the independent focus group for Weardale CSA suggests that I might have taken a more direct approach in dealing with the tensions within the group: "[Liz should] be willing to be more critical earlier ... it became apparent that what we were doing wasn't kind of working and I don't know whether she spotted that before any of us did ... be willing to say the unsayable if she does

spot it in advance.” My journal records indicate that I was indeed aware of the problem early on! The problem was compounded by members talking to me outside of meetings but being unwilling to voice their true opinions publicly. I was conscious that relationships between some members extended outside the project and that these had existed before the project started and would continue whatever the outcome. To diffuse any personal animosity I encouraged individual members to raise issues at meetings using the values and ground rules that everyone had agreed. When this did not work I experimented with different ways of running the meetings until we found something that worked. All this took time and I could have been more direct earlier on but at the time chose not to be confrontational as I was unsure how some individuals would cope with that approach.

Without knowing the impact of these alternatives it is difficult to judge whether or not they would have improved the process or outcomes. The experience has made me more aware of assumptions that can arise in relationships of trust and the need to articulate and question these.

5. SUMMARY

In this chapter I have identified the key factors that either helped or hindered the development and progress of the two research projects and reflected on their significance and what can be learnt from these experiences. The impact of resources, individuals, institutions, the socio-political environment and the use of participatory techniques was looked at. Serendipity and uncertainty leading to unpredictable events meant that an iterative and adaptive approach to problem solving was appropriate.

In particular, the characteristics and availability of human resources within the groups and the influence of particular individuals external to them exerted considerable influence on how the projects developed and what other resources they were able to secure. The quality of relationships was also of central importance in securing physical, financial and knowledge resources. In the following chapter I introduce care theory as a conceptual frame of analysis. Care theory takes as its starting point the central premise that human beings are primarily relational and that ethical choices arise in this relational context. Action research involves making

choices along the way and the ethical framing of these choices using care theory makes sense of these choices, as well as being a useful tool of analysis for interpreting CSA.

CHAPTER 6

ETHICS, PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH, AND CSA

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; (John Donne)*

*Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone. (Maya Angelou)*

*... agriculture is increasingly just Ag – ag business, ag chemicals, ag
machinery, and perhaps just plain agony for some, given the stress, the
struggle, the loss of economic control, the loss of community, the loss of
environment, the loss of culture.” (Bell, 2004, p243)*

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis of the research viewed through the lens of an ethical framework and paying particular attention to power relations. Very early on it became clear that ethical dilemmas would play a central role. Values are central to PAR, creating a strong ethical dimension, and food production and consumption are inherently bound up with ethical choices.

Ethics is the systematic study of morality and deals with questions about what might constitute right and wrong behaviour, and the formulation of principles about how we should relate to one another and decide what to do. It asks the question “What should we pursue, protect, and care for above all, how and why?” (Eikeland, 2006, p43). It is a branch of philosophy and can be simply defined as “the study of ‘right behavior’” (Singleton and Straits, 2005, cited in Martin, 2007). Morality is a heavily contested term and philosophers have developed many different approaches (Rachels, 1995). Nevertheless, moral judgements have to be made on a daily basis and in discussing the topic of ethics, PAR⁸⁷, and CSA I am concerned with the practical application of normative ethical theories to research (applied ethics). This

⁸⁷Statements about the underpinning values and ethos of PAR can be assumed to apply to other forms of AR.

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ranges from the initial choice to undertake PAR, through to issues pertaining to who should be involved, how the research should be written about, and addressing issues of power in relationships. In this context I have found the literature in the school of ethics termed ‘care theory’ to be particularly pertinent, and in particular, Warren’s proposition that “regardless of which particular ethical principle one adopts in a given situation, a moral requirement of ethics ... is that it must be *‘care sensitive’*. ... Which particular ethic or situated ethical principle ought to be adopted as most appropriate in a given situation will be determined by the extent to which application of that ethic or ethical principle reflects, creates or results in care practices” (Warren, 1999, p131).

The chapter begins with a discussion about the ethical dimension of PAR, and its commitment to action as integral to its ethical framing. Care theory is then introduced as an appropriate conceptual framework for understanding the structure and practice of CSA and as the epistemological orientation of PAR. The basic assumption behind care theory, that human beings are primarily relational and that ethical choices arise in this relational context, provides the foundation for these arguments. A general disposition to ‘care about’ and the actions that arise out of this (‘care for’) are used to situate both PAR and CSA as caring practices. Previous authors’ use of care theory in relation to agricultural systems is built upon and applied to the research conducted for this study. This is followed by a discussion of power relations and the central place of power in PAR. I propose that care theory can also be usefully used to deal with the many dilemmas that are thrown up by power relations and other ethical issues emerging from practice.

In discussing these issues I am not attempting to provide tidy solutions. PAR is not a tidy activity and is often characterised by complexity, confusion, contradiction, and uncertainty – what Ackoff calls ‘messes’ (Ackoff, 1974) and Schön more graphically describes as the ‘swampy lowlands’ (Schön, 1983). Constructing an ethical research practice in this environment calls for an ongoing reflexive process and an acknowledgement that mistakes will be made and that there is not always an obvious right or wrong answer, but choices that need to be made and justified.

2. ETHICS AND PAR

Although (P)AR is a richly diverse field there is general agreement about a set of generic moral values underpinning it. In no way does this approach claim to be value free or objective, rather values are considered to be foundational. Values express what is considered important, worthy of respect and effort, what really matters, and hence values are strong motivational drivers for action. The actual influence of values on behaviour will be constrained by other drivers such as culture, personality, psychology, and economic and other circumstances. Brydon-Miller summarises the shared values underpinning most AR practice as participation in democratic processes, improvement of human life, and engagement in morally committed action (Brydon-Miller, 2008, p201). In any given PAR programme there will be specific conditions, pressures, and moral values operating that will influence how these core values are played out in practice.

The choice to embark on this approach to research in itself involves a personal value judgement about the purpose of research and how best to realise that purpose. It is a preference for a social research that, wherever possible, leads to change, and a judgement that this is most likely to be achieved by including action leading to change as a part of the research cycle. This decision will be contingent on the specific research being undertaken but, as Manzo and Brightbill point out “a PAR inspired understanding of social justice suggests that it is in fact unethical to look in on circumstances of pain and poverty and yet do nothing” (2007, p35). Not all PAR may be concerned with such extremes as ‘pain and poverty’ but wherever there is a perceived violation of a moral value such as equality, social, economic, or environmental justice, the principle of observing an unsatisfactory situation and deciding to try and do something about it, is the same. This is not to imply, of course, that other approaches to research have no capacity to effect change, or indeed that other approaches cannot be motivated by deeply held concerns about injustice; the difference is that PAR explicitly includes a commitment to action in its ethical framing. According to Brydon-Miller, examining the ethical foundations of AR is one way of maintaining “our common vision of research as a form of democratic action and a powerful force for social justice” (2008 p200). A neat way of summing

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up this approach might be “an ethical stance against neutrality” (Cahill and Sultana et al., 2007).

Undertaking PAR also involves decisions about epistemological and ontological standpoints. It embraces an epistemology that values different knowledges, including non-academic and non-expert knowledges, and a belief that these can and should contribute to the research and action process. PAR strongly supports an approach that originated in feminist critiques (and that is now shared by many forms of social science), and rejects the goal of a value free, objective researcher, somehow disembodied and separated from research subjects as if they shared no common humanity, and could discard their personal cultural norms, beliefs, values or identities and histories (England, 1994; Maguire, 2006). It is ostensibly value based and politically committed to positive social change. The use of the word ‘positive’ here immediately introduces an ethical dimension that is inherent in PAR. This commitment to positive change is stated by numerous authors using phrases such as “[a] struggle[s] for a more just, loving world” (Maguire), “the aim ... is to change practices, social structures, and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice, and unsatisfying forms of existence” (McTaggart), “to promote social and political transformation” (Selener), “build a better, freer society” (Greenwood and Levin) (all cited in Reason and Bradbury, 2001b). Such grand and somewhat idealistic claims may be disconcerting to PAR students embarking on a time and resource limited programme. I interpreted these statements as broad and high level objectives, providing an overarching ‘ethos’ within which I could position my very small contribution. So a foundational principle of PAR is an ethical commitment to positive social change and this necessarily entails making value judgements about what constitutes positive change in specific research settings and also in wider social structures. As with other forms of participatory research, the relational nature of the research and the positioning of research participants as collaborators, not subjects, results in the need for a different approach to ethics that is referred to in the literature as ‘participatory ethics’ (e.g. Manzo and Brightbill, 2007). The judgement about what is positive, what is good and desirable, has to be agreed amongst the group of collaborative research partners. Cahill frames the epistemological orientation of PAR

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as an ‘ethic of care’, as defined by Carol Gilligan (Cahill, 2007) where the emphasis lies not only on not doing harm, but on actively doing good. She approaches PAR as having the potential to be “an ethical praxis of care in which primacy is placed upon relationships and the responsibilities involved in working *with* communities” (p361). The next section develops these ideas and examines care theory in relation to both PAR and CSA, positioning it as the analytical framework through which I view my practice.

3. CARE THEORY

As well as Cahill’s (2007) suggestion that the epistemology of PAR can be linked to the concept of an ethic of care, some authors have also turned to care theory in relation to agricultural systems. An interesting analysis of the moral choices involved in agricultural systems in Iowa examines two systems of hog production and uses care theory to effectively critique industrial production methods (Curry, 2002). Another study based in Iowa, where around two thirds of CSAs in 1999 were run by women, uses care theory to analyse the practices of CSA growers and proposes that CSA can be viewed as “a system of resource management characterised by caring” (Wells and Gradwell, 2001, p117). This is further developed by Kneafsey and Cox et al (2008) in a study of AFNs in the UK (one example of which was a CSA). They identified a range of motivations and practices amongst both producers and consumers that they argue are consistent with the concept of an ethic of care. Further, they suggest that care can have radical political potential because it leads to action. When considering the ethical dimensions of this research, my choice of care theory arose initially from the observation that I was continually making choices about competing loyalties and practice (section 5.3) and that I was framing them as ethical choices. In addition, once the two research groups were established, I was surprised at the prominence of care issues in both settings. I began to see the relevance of care theory both to my PAR practice and to CSA especially with the emphasis in care theory on situated knowledge and relationships (Curry, 2002) and the proposition that “caring agricultural systems are context bound, not translocatable. They involve a level of attentiveness that leads to elegant solutions predicated on the uniqueness of place” (Curry, *ibid*, p125).

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Care theory emerged from feminist scholars from different disciplines in the 1980s with a seminal work by psychological theorist Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (1982) and educational philosopher Nel Noddings' *Care: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (2003 (1984)) (Curry, 2002; Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008). It is based upon the ontological premise that human beings are essentially relational, and that this, rather than the idea of isolated individuals free to make their own choices, forms the foundation of moral reasoning (Manning, 1992; Noddings, 2003 (1984)). Gilligan (op cit) argued that women generally approach moral reasoning in terms of relationship and empathy in contrast to men who adopt a more distanced approach of applying rules and principles, but also makes it clear that this difference is not presented as a generalisation about gender. Although there are differing views amongst care theorists on the place that an ethic of care has in relation to the more traditional ethic of justice (based on rights, duty, and obligation), all agree that "care is an important moral value ... necessary to the maintenance of society in general and to any adequate conception of ethics or ethical decision making in particular" (Warren, 1999, p134). Warren goes on to draw from Goleman's work on emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) to argue that ethical reasoning is not actually possible without care. Goleman's work demonstrates how both emotional and rational intelligence are prerequisites for reasoning and decision making and that the ability to empathise though care is part of what it means to have emotional intelligence. Warren argues for a universal ethic where a) ethical principles are viewed as guidelines and are context dependent (she terms this 'situated universalism'); b) there is a moral requirement to be 'care sensitive' (because this is a necessity for ethical reasoning); and c) the extent to which any particular ethical principle results in 'care practices' determines which principle to adopt for that situation. Care practices are described as practices "which maintain, promote, or enhance the well-being of relevant parties, or do not cause unnecessary harm to the well-being of those parties" (Warren, 1999, p139/40). This test of 'care sensitivity' provides a useful frame for the many everyday choices that occurred throughout my research programme, including negotiating the dilemmas discussed below in section five and in dealing with power relations.

3.1 Care theory and PAR

Manning (1992) identifies two elements in her construction of an ethic of care that are helpful in explaining what an ethic of care actually is, and elucidating the parallels with PAR. First is the ‘disposition to care’, which includes attentiveness to the needs and views of others. She states that this disposition “assumes a commitment to an ideal of caring; the ethically preferred world is one in which creatures are caring and cared for. Its institutions support and sustain caring whilst simultaneously reducing the need for care by eliminating the poverty, despair and indifference that create a need for care” (ibid, 1992, p62). This has immediate resonance with the wider aspirations of PAR quoted above (section 2). PAR and an ethic of care can be said to share a position regarding the purpose of human existence that includes attentiveness to the ‘other’ and the pursuit of improved well-being (see chapter 2). Second, and this point also relates to PAR, is an obligation to ‘care *for*’, a term first used by Noddings (2003 (1984)) to refer to *actions* that result from the disposition to care. Manning asserts that these actions can be in relation to people, animals, communities, values or objects (p62). Kneafsey and Cox et al (2008) also refer to this distinction, citing the works of Smith and Tronto and assert that this compelling drive for action means that care has radical political potential. I maintain that this is where PAR and an ethic of care truly meet. As I have already stated, undertaking PAR is most likely to arise out of a strong concern for a particular issue or situation (chapter 4, 3.4.1); another way of saying this is that PAR stems from care and is the search for action and knowledge that can contribute towards addressing the issue that is the cause of concern.

Another feature of care ethics that supports the argument for the epistemological orientation of PAR as an ethic of care (Cahill, 2007) is that of holism. Again I find Manning expresses this idea most clearly. She identifies two respects in which an ethic of care can claim to be holistic. First, it places people as “embedded in networks of care” in which “our self-identity is ... a function of our role in these complex interconnections,” thus placing the individual as an indivisible part of the web of human connections (Manning, 1992, p84). Second, she identifies in some expressions of an ethic of care an underlying assumption of “the earth as one body,

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and of ourselves as part of that body” (ibid 1992, p84). This takes us back to the paradigm of participation that Reason and Bradbury (2001b) offer as the foundation for AR (chapter 2, 2.3) participatory knowledge generation and action flow from a holistic paradigm that situates the researcher as already acting within, and inseparable from, the wider world.

3.2 Care theory and CSA

Food production and consumption are inherently bound up with ethical choices. That our choices about how we produce and/or consume food are intimately connected to all other aspects of our human existence is well recognised: Pence asserts that “How we make those choices says much about our values, our relationship to those who produced our food and the kind of world we want” (cited in Buller, 2010, p1875). Lang makes a similar point: “food is both a symptom and a symbol of how we organise ourselves and our societies. It is both a vignette and a microcosm of wider social realities” (1999a, p218). CSAs (and other models that comprise the family of so called ‘alternative food networks’) can be conceptualised as attempts to engage with ethical issues in the food system, albeit incompletely and imperfectly. I examine here how care theory has been used in relation to food systems and CSA in particular. I then build on and extend this use of care theory and apply it to my study of CSAs as a clear conceptual framework for understanding the structure, form and practices of CSA.

In her study of hog production in Iowa, Curry (2002) uses care theory (together with feminist agricultural theories) to assist in analysing the moral choices involved in different agricultural systems. Care theory, with its understanding of the essentially relational nature of human beings, allows a different perspective on the varying impacts of the two systems, on the animals, those that work with them, and the surrounding community. She argues that the dominance of a universalistic approach to knowledge and a dis-interested perspective allows agricultural systems to develop that ‘objectify nature’ and focus on technical solutions to overcoming restrictions imposed by nature, rather than seeking to work with nature. Care theory on the other hand supports situated knowledge that solves problems in the context of both nature and community. According to Curry therefore a caring agricultural system is one that

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is based upon the assumption of the fundamentally relational nature of human beings, and is context sensitive, building on ‘local complexity’ (ibid, 2002, p129). Applying this to CSA, the primacy of the relationship of producers and consumers as a building block of all forms of CSA (chapter 3, 2) strongly supports the assumption of a relational paradigm. Across the spectrum of CSA diversity the importance of this relationship is more or less strong, but it is the defining feature of the CSA model. The diversity of form of CSA can also be interpreted as a result of attentiveness to local complexity: no two CSAs are alike because they are developed locally, building upon specific local conditions and the availability of multiple resources and assets. So it can be said that the *structure and form* of CSA reflect an ethic of care.

Wells and Gradwell’s study of (mainly female) CSA growers in Iowa focussed on the practice of CSA (rather than the structure) and concluded that CSA growers, of both genders, were differentiated by their demonstration of care and caring practice (Wells and Gradwell, 2001). They observed expressions of care motives in regard to land, water and other resources, non-human nature, people (provision of safe and healthy food), community and place (reconnecting people to the land), and the future (by modelling an alternative community based food system). They contrast this with practices from conventional agriculture that are not care sensitive such as water pollution caused by pesticides, systems using large scale confinement of animals, exploitation of immigrant agricultural workers, soil erosion, and the damage caused to wildlife habitats. In reality the picture is much more complex and nuanced than this study suggests: for example, CSA members can display a mixture of motives and growers are often poorly remunerated (e.g. see DeLind, 1999; Hinrichs, 2000; Ostrom, 2007; Feagan and Henderson, 2008) and there are many examples of conventional agricultural practices that, for example, seek to protect biodiversity, operate strict animal welfare standards, and do not exploit their workers. The point here is not to create a dualistic comparison, but to illuminate the motivations of CSA growers as emanating from a standpoint of care and concern that has driven their actions.

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This potential for care to act as a driver for action, and therefore demonstrate a political dimension, is taken up by Kneafsey and Cox et al (2008) in their study of AFNs, including Earthshare CSA in Scotland. They draw heavily on the work of Joan Tronto who stresses the importance of translating feelings of care and concern into action (Tronto, 1993). Citing Tronto, they state that “Care is not simply about being concerned or anxious about the welfare of others but it involves taking steps to address those concerns ... by accepting the burden of responsibility” (Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008, p166). They identify three key sets of motives amongst consumers who used the schemes they investigated, which they describe as “care for local economies, environments, and future generations; care for health and wholeness; and care about transparency and integrity in food systems” (ibid, p 113). Producers in this study were also found to display motives and practices that could be described as caring behaviour. Thus care for others (human and non-human) is perceived as the basis for action around food production and distribution (ibid, p43). The origins of the LSPPC movement also support care as a strong motivational force. The story of the emergence of the first example of an LSPPC, Teikei in Japan, provides a strong example of action driven by care as groups of women, farmers and academics formed to find a way to respond to their concerns about the detrimental environmental and health effects caused by the rise in intensive industrialised agriculture in Japan (chapter 3, 2.1.1). The parallel beginnings in Europe were founded on principles formulated by Steiner, including those of ‘associative economics’ that is based on a relational view of humanity resembling the ontological basis of care theory and the first examples of CSA in the US were also built upon these principles (chapter, 2 3.1.1). It can be argued that associative economics is the practical application of an ethic of care to economic relations.

All this is not to suggest that actions arising from care are either predictable or unproblematic, or that all expressions of conventional agricultural systems are necessarily devoid of care. There will exist any number of diverse and complex motivations involving caring differently, and for different things (Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008). Everyday actions arising from caring are also often constrained by other motivations and circumstances such as available time, finances, and family

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circumstances (Kneafsey and Cox et al., 2008). This is only to state the obvious; we live complex lives in a complex world with many competing and conflicting influences and demands. There are also limitations to the use of care theory; it cannot account for everything, and CSA members and producers have widely differing reasons for their participation. We have already seen the struggle to maintain the ideals of practice that the early examples of CSAs were built upon and the difficulties of sustaining a truly collaborative practice whilst at the same time co-existing with capitalism: ‘performing the economy otherwise’ (Leyshon and Lee et al., 2003) is not easy (chapter 3, 2). Some participants will demonstrate more instrumental motivations than others (e.g. see Feagan and Henderson, 2008). There is also a potential difficulty when using an ethic of care in relation to CSA (and other related models) when it seems to position other practices as non ‘care-sensitive’ (using Warren’s (1999) terminology). Although there is a strong case for labelling some agricultural practices in this way when they can be seen to be directly causing harm to people, animals or the environment this will always be a heavily contested area. There is no simple dividing line between what might be termed ‘good’ and ‘bad’ practice in terms of care theory; the reality is a more complex spectrum of practice, complicated by people caring for different things in different ways. Nevertheless I would argue that care theory provides a strong conceptual frame for viewing CSA structures and practices. This conviction has been reinforced by observing and listening to CSA practitioners at conferences I have attended such as the *IVth International Symposium of the network URGENCI* in February 2010 and *Farming Together: The Future of CSA in the UK* held by the Soil Association in September 2011. Attendees at these events are likely to represent the most committed producers and CSA members, but many of those at the 2011 gathering were also relatively new to CSA. The language of care was prominent at both events which suggested that it was a primary motivation for action. In addition, links are being made between CSA and care farming in the UK. Care farming is the therapeutic use of farming practices to provide health, social or educational care services for vulnerable people⁸⁸. According to the Soil Association, “there is a natural synergy between CSA and care farming” (Soil Association, 2011). This provides further

⁸⁸ See <http://www.carefarminguk.org>

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support to the appropriateness of care theory as a conceptual tool in the study of CSA.

As already alluded to, the projects that developed from this action research programme displayed characteristics of care from the beginning. For Growing Together, adopting the CSA model complemented their desire to run an inclusive organisation where people with learning disabilities who had developed an interest and some skills in growing food, could become part of an integrated community project. They already embraced care as an integral part of their working practices demonstrated by their attitudes and behaviours towards people and in their choice of organic principles in their gardening activities. It soon became clear that those involved in developing Weardale CSA were also motivated by care and concern for people and planet. For example:

[CSA] fitted tightly with my value system and belief in sustainability. Glad to find so many others with a similar vision. (Tony, reflection evening⁸⁹)

I have an interest in how we eat and I felt for a long time that the way that we ... eat and shop doesn't make a lot of sense ... in terms of food miles and non-seasonal eating ... agricultural methods just leave huge amounts to be desired really. (Cathy, reflection evening)

When Andrew gave the talk at the Workshop event (September 2007) he quoted Sir John Tusa:

We live in a world of niches where each individual is separated from, wholly indifferent to, and even hostile to the values, interests and wishes of those in other niches. A good society must offer the concept of citizenship that relates to others, sees citizens in the round, and adds what they have in common to what they are entitled to have for themselves.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ See chapter 4, 3.3 Gathering and recording data

⁹⁰ Quoted by Yasmin-Alibhai Brown in "Who do we think we are?" GB04-02 greenbelt.org.uk/sampler07 CD. Sir John Tusa is a previous Managing Director of the Barbican Arts Centre in London.

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Andrew went on to say “I would suggest that our own local community would benefit greatly from an ethically thoughtful CSA which fosters that ‘citizenship that relates to others, sees citizens in the round, and adds what they have in common to what they are entitled to have for themselves.’ ” This is in effect a critique of the view of humanity as consisting of independent individuals and saying that the ‘good society’ is relational. Around this time there were a number of fatal accidents in the locality and several participants had begun to talk about the CSA as something positive that was happening, a sign of hope. In a letter to prospective CSA members in October 2008 Andrew wrote:

The bottom line is our shared concern to grow natural, unsprayed food locally, and through this to build a healthy community, in more ways than one: a community in which everyone’s contribution will be valued ... at a time when our community here needs to hear some good news and have the chance to build something really positive for the long term.

The underlying emphasis on care is clear. From the beginning, Weardale CSA’s plans included the goal of promoting “the involvement of people who could benefit therapeutically” (Weardale CSA, 2008) and their hope was that that when the CSA became established they would be able to offer services to people with mental health problems. That these aspirations were not achieved is an example of how actions emanating from care are constrained by other circumstances. That they were there at all indicates a strong ethic of care underlying the motivations of participants.

The test of ‘care-sensitivity’ can also be applied to dealing with the ethical dilemmas that are thrown up by power relations. In this next section I introduce the concept of power and discuss three areas where power relations were particularly prominent.

4. POWER RELATIONS

The importance of power relations is implicit in PAR, because of the commitment to social change and to the co-production of knowledge (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008). I include a discussion of power relations in this chapter because they underlie many of the ethical dilemmas encountered. Care theory offers a framework for the required reflexive approach to dealing with power and making the choices about how to

respond to inequalities of power and position. I consider three arenas where power relations played a prominent role in the PAR process: the issue of positionality of the researcher, the relationships between the project groups and external organisations, and the empowerment processes that took place. I begin with a brief overview of the literature on power as a concept.

4.1 Thinking about power

Several authors stress the importance of undertaking an analysis of the power dynamics operating in the participatory research process (Cahill and Sultana et al., 2007; Kesby and Kindon et al., 2007; Brydon-Miller, 2008). However, the issues surrounding the conceptualisation of power are rarely discussed in PAR literature (an exception being Gaventa, 2008), and a common understanding of the nature of power is frequently assumed. As in-depth analyses of the subject demonstrate, conceptualising power is complex and a topic of continuing disagreement: “there is no agreement about how to define it, how to conceive it, how to study it and, if it can be measured, how to measure it” (Lukes, 2005 p61). According to Lukes (*ibid*) some authors have gone as far as to suggest that the concept of power should be abandoned. However unsatisfactory and incomplete any attempts at conceptualising power may appear, they nevertheless offer an extended understanding of a phenomenon that is recognisable in some form to everyone: I recognise power when I meet it (see Box 9).

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Box 9: Encountering power

I need to secure the support of the Local Authority for my proposal to develop a Sustainable Local Food Strategy for County Durham. I need this to be demonstrated by a small financial commitment. I talk to the relevant council Officers who are supportive but have no access to budgets and are preoccupied with their own job security due to Local Government reorganisation in Durham. I contact the relevant Cabinet Member to arrange a meeting. Three months later the meeting takes place with him and his Director. I am allocated 30 minutes. I think carefully about what language to use, how to present my case, what outputs the work will produce that will support the Council's own targets. I use my knowledge of how the organisation works, its culture. On the day I take care over my appearance, I allow plenty of time for the journey in case of any unforeseen happenings that might make me late (and arrive 30 minutes early), I focus my attention, re-read my proposal. At the agreed time the Director is still in another meeting and the Councillor arrives five minutes late. The meeting starts 10 minutes late. They have my papers in front of them but I'm not sure if they have read them or how much they have understood. They admit they are coming at this 'cold'. By the end of the 20 minutes they say they have enough understanding of my proposal and my request and will talk to the relevant Officers and get back to me. The ball is all in their court again. I've had my 20 minute window of opportunity to influence but it is clear where the 'power' lies – the capacity to act and determine outcomes - and who is controlling the process of negotiation.

Thinking about what power is, who possesses it, and how it is exercised in social life has produced a picture with layers of increasing complexity. Social Structuralist theories placed power firmly in the hands of an elite group such as those who control capital (Marxism), are privileged (elite domination), or men (patriarchy); these groups possess power, other groups do not (Taylor, 2003). This explanation was challenged by pluralist thinkers who view power as being spread out more widely throughout society. Power in this case is seen to operate in situations of conflict and disagreement between A and B, whereby if A's preference prevails over B's, A is demonstrating an exercise of power by virtue of winning the argument. In his seminal book "Power a Radical View" Steven Lukes describes this as the 'one dimensional' view of power and his subsequent analysis is useful in providing a narrative about the development of thought about power. In this one dimensional view power is achieved via the outcome of decision making processes rather than being a result of reputation, as is the case in structuralist theories. Lukes goes on to describe a 'two dimensional' view that arose from critiques of pluralist theories,

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notably that of Bachrach and Baratz, and then adds his own third dimension. The second dimension recognises that power has ‘two faces’; in other words, as well as operating in observable situations of conflict, it can also be present as a result of what is concealed, by non-decision making and by preventing certain issues from entering the public political arena. Thus the dominant group protects their own position by supporting “a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures (‘rules of the game’) that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others.” (Bachrach and Baratz, cited in Lukes, 2005, p21). Lukes then goes on to introduce another layer of complexity in his ‘third dimension’ where he suggests that there is a more covert mechanism whereby B agrees with A even when it is not in his own interest to do so, as a result of A shaping and influencing B’s preferences so that B comes to believe that they are in agreement with A’s. In Lukes’ words, A exercises power over B by “influencing, shaping or determining his very wants” (Lukes, 2005, p27). This can happen through a number of mechanisms for example, advertising and other means of information control, and socialisation. This raises the topic of how to define ‘interests’ or preferences and explains Lukes’ use of the term ‘a radical view’ to his third dimension as in this case, a person’s preferences are understood to have the possibility of being formed by a system that is not acting in their best interests.

Gaventa and Cornwall take Lukes’ three tiered model and relate each dimension to PAR and its role in facilitating empowerment and change for research collaborators (2008). They illustrate how each dimension of power can be equated with a different conceptualisation of knowledge and hence the role that knowledge production can play in empowerment and change. They regard the democratic and inclusive approach to knowledge generation taken by PAR to offer an important contribution to empowerment and social change. By opening up the research process to non-academic participants the assumption that non participation in decision making is not an issue (as in the one dimensional model) is challenged; space is also created for bringing different issues and problems to the fore so offering opportunities to challenge the bias inherent in the two dimensional view. The more radical PAR

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practices, in the tradition of Freire's idea of *conscientização* (Freire, 1972)⁹¹, also attempt to unveil the hidden forces that are operating to inform participants' views and preferences.

The discussion so far has only considered power in a negative sense: that which is used to influence others with the assumption that this usually favours the interests of the party able to exert the strongest influence. There is another, more positive side to power that is equally important in PAR. In defiance of his previous assertion that no agreement about the nature of power is possible, Lukes offers a broad and generic definition of power as a dispositional concept, an inherent ability that may or may not be actualised. The above discussion has been all about 'power over'; Lukes suggests that this aspect of power relations, which is contested, should be seen as a sub-set of a generic meaning of 'power to'. Power in this generic sense is the player's ability "to bring about significant effects ... by furthering their own interests and/or affecting the interests of others, whether positively or negatively" (Lukes, 2005, p65). Used in this sense, power in social life refers to the capacities of the social actors and can incorporate other aspects of power as sub-sets, including 'power with', and 'power from within' (Rowlands, 1997). These latter two facets are important when considering empowerment processes in PAR and I have incorporated them into a model using Lukes' generic meaning as a starting point (see Box 12). Rowlands uses a typology of four types of power: 'power over', 'power to', 'power with', and 'power within'. She describes 'power with' as "a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles a problem together", and 'power within' as "the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals"⁹².

⁹¹ In 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' Freire argues for a dialogical educational process that encourages critical thinking and unmasks political, social, and economic oppression, thus producing critical consciousness or *conscientização*.

⁹² These definitions are cited in Rowlands (1997, p13) and are quoted in Williams, from the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (1991) *Two Halves Make a Whole: Balancing Gender Relations in Development*" Ottawa, mimeo

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No discussion on power can fail to make reference to another influential thinker on power, Michel Foucault, who viewed power as “rooted in the system of social networks” (Foucault, 1982, p24) and operating “through discourses, institutions and practices that are productive of power effects, framing the boundaries of possibility that govern action” (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008, p175). He revealed intimate ties between knowledge and power and saw the limits of individual thought and action bounded by the discourses of the powerful. This is a similar idea to that of Lukes’ third dimension where individual preferences are affected by socialisation. Acknowledging power as being deeply embedded in social relations means that any claims to have fundamentally altered power relations through a PAR process should be made with caution. The research participants and myself are woven into existing networks of power and whilst it should be possible to evidence empowerment – participants’ exercising ‘power to’ bring about desired change – it is unlikely that any long-term change in overall power relations between local actors will be affected.

In this research programme, power differentials occur both within the collaborating group and between the group and outside stakeholders as a result of differences in knowledge, status, and control of resources. Principles of democracy, social justice and equality under an over-arching ethic of care, would suggest that power differentials should be identified and any negative effects minimised wherever possible. But there also needs to be recognition that embedded differences do exist and they are not going to be eliminated in the course of one action research study. Perhaps the most that can be expected in any one study is that the researcher can “identify and attempt to moderate instances of power’s more negative effects whilst acknowledging parallel instances of its positive effects” (Kesby and Kindon et al., 2007, p22). I am adopting what Marilyn Taylor describes as the pragmatic assessment of what can hoped to be achieved by community action whereby there is the “possibilit[y] for small-scale influence, even if the fundamentals of power are not addressed” (Taylor, 2003, p14). One way that PAR can seek to influence the way that power differentials are played out is by effecting governance (Kesby and Kindon et al., 2007). By adopting the role of facilitator, modelling participatory methods and

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suggesting the groups agree a basic set of values and principles (and in the case of Weardale CSA, Ground Rules) at the outset of the process, a basic framework was constructed that offered the potential for each member to fully participate. Although, as the facilitator, I proposed undertaking these exercises, the content was constructed by the participants themselves, thus mitigating to some extent the criticism that imposition of ground rules by facilitators can be an imposition of a particular form of conduct (see e.g. Kesby and Kindon et al., 2007, p21).

As discussed in chapter 2 (5.6) participatory processes, particularly in the field of development in Majority World countries, have been subject to a rigorous critique, with issues of the understanding and use and abuse of power being central to the debate (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Although focussed on the role of participation in development, this debate has brought to the fore the requirement for continual examination of the processes and outcomes of participatory processes in all contexts, and a reminder that they can have negative as well as positive effects (see Box 1, chapter 2).

4.2 Power and positionality: aspiring to be the ‘friendly outsider’

I discuss positionality in two dimensions, my position as a university based researcher in relation to the local collaborators, and my position in terms of other personal identities (professional background, gender, biography).

I perceive my own position within the power relations in the group as changing over time. During the early stages when I was seeking out research participants and before any agreement was reached about working together, my position was relatively powerless. The development of my fieldwork as envisioned was dependent on finding research participants who were already desiring change and who saw the CSA model as an appropriate and relevant option to explore. Once the collaborative group was established, my position could be interpreted as being a relatively powerful one, although there was always interdependence between myself and the group – we needed each other. But in the early stages I had resources of knowledge and experience and access to networks that most of the other participants did not possess at this point. My goal was to share this knowledge and access to networks

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over time so that the participants were not dependent on me. There may remain some areas, for example access to expert help from university colleagues, where it is inappropriate to do this as it is not an ‘open network’. This approach is in tune with care sensitivity that is attentive to the needs of others.

On the continuum of possible positionalities for action researchers suggested by Herr and Anderson (2005) (see chapter 2, 5.1) my work falls within the category of “outsider(s) in collaboration with insider(s)” (p31) and I adopt the term used by Greenwood and Levin of ‘friendly outsider’ (1998). This phrase is used to denote the relationship between the professional researcher and the group of collaborators. The term ‘outsider’ implies that the researcher is not a member of the group in the same way that the other members are, and is therefore able to bring fresh perspectives and knowledge, to question tacit assumptions and beliefs, and to facilitate new opportunities for change by, for example, linking the group to others who have undertaken similar change processes. ‘Friendly’ signifies the nature of the relationship: that it is built on trust and mutual respect, collaborators feel comfortable in the company of the researcher, there is a rapport between them, and that communication is clear and involves a shared vocabulary that everyone can understand.

In my work with both groups this is the position I aspired to and I regard it as the best generalisation of the relationship. However, in practice the situation was more complex and there were often multiple positionalities at play. In the case of Growing Together the boundaries were clearer because I came in to an existing gardening group at the Centre. Although a new and more independent group was formed with the transition to a CSA, I was clearly not connected to the Centre and did not share their past history. My intervention was ‘from outside’ the group. There was no expectation that I would get involved in the project outside of meetings or actions that I had agreed to undertake in the course of a meeting. In the case of Weardale CSA I perceived it as being a more complex situation. This was a new group comprised of people some of whom had known each other previously and some who had not. There was no commonly shared history as a group. My position as an

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outsider was clear in the early developmental stages as I was instrumental in bringing the group together and organising and facilitating a public event (Workshops). Also in the early stages of the formation of the Steering Group I took a pro-active role in facilitating meetings and using participatory methods to establish the group's ways of working and their Aims, Objectives, and Values. I was also an outsider in the sense of not being 'local' to the geographic area to be covered by the enterprise. I was able to hand over the running of meetings quite early on to an 'interim Chair', which marked a positive move towards equality in collaboration (section 4.4) My role became more about providing knowledge input and making links with relevant outside stakeholders (advisors, funders, local authorities, other CSAs etc). In this role it was more difficult to maintain outsider status as I became just one member of the group working towards the goal. This is where the fine line between 'going native' (generally considered to be undesirable – but not by all (e.g. Blake, 2007)) and maintaining an outsider status sometimes became blurred and I would feel the need to step back and reflect on my interactions with the group.

The nuances of the relationships with both groups became more blurred when informal conversations took place or when the group was threatened from outside. Informal conversations with one or more group members can reveal shared values and experiences that naturally cement relationships on a more intimate level. Sharing the delights and frustrations of past and present gardening endeavours and what the process of growing means to us personally: hearing Andy (Growing Together) say that he retreats to his garden when life gets stressful, or Victoria (Weardale) say that her allotment is her place of rejuvenation, and responding with my own stories; chatting with Donna (Growing Together) about her ideas and enthusiasm for making jams and chutneys and the difference 'knowing who made it' makes to the experience of consumption – these conversations are about a shared construction of reality, meaning and values and cross the lines of the insider-outsider relationship. This is where other personal identities of gender and biography influence the nature of the relationships. For example my previous experiences as a mother choosing to grow food as a way of providing a healthy diet on a low income resonated closely with one of the participants at Weardale. We were able to share stories, including

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how other people viewed us and our unconventional lifestyles. The participants had enough in common to want to work together to develop a CSA but they were by no means homogenous so forming insider connections with some members was potentially problematical and as Herr and Anderson remark, multiple positionalities “may bring us into conflicting allegiances or alliances within our research sites” (Herr and Anderson, 2005, p44). I would argue that this is all part of the complexity of the process and if subjectivity is to be embraced rather than avoided, is inevitable to some degree. The researcher is present in the research as themselves and I agree with Greenwood and Levin that “Creating trustful relationships with people in the field can not be done unless the ‘real’ person is present” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998, p128). Discovering shared experiences, political views, or values held in common can help in building constructive relationships and prevent the researcher from being perceived as having no connection with the other participants. Serious difficulties can be avoided by welcoming diversity of opinion and approach within the group and regarding this as a point of strength and a positive resource, and by encouraging members to articulate their views even if they think they might be different from the majority view.

At times when the group appeared to be under threat from outside I have observed that I tended towards closer identification and use the inclusive language of ‘we’, thus positioning myself within. This occurred during internal conversations about a problem with an external stakeholder (e.g. a legal professional who was not responding and thereby seriously impeding progress) or in negotiations with external stakeholders who held resources required by the group. Becoming aware of this I chose to continue this somewhat paradoxical positioning as a way of demonstrating my support and solidarity at difficult times.

There were occasions where I found myself in between the group and an external agency or individual and with the choice of whether or not to encourage or open up that relationship at a particular point in time. This gate-keeping position is potentially one where power can be misused and these choices were sites of doubt and uncertainty for me. If it was a ‘live’ situation with an offer of help or intervention

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that I was not sure would be helpful, I therefore discussed any concerns I might have with the group. This is not entirely satisfactory as they were only hearing my side of the story. My main consideration as a facilitator was for the group to have access to expert help and advice but for them to always maintain control and ownership of the process. When involved in intervention research (an approach sharing many similarities with AR) Pierre Stassart describes how he asked experts to “tell what you know, but not what to do”⁹³ and I talked to the groups about experts being ‘on tap, not on top’. It is all too easy for participants to hand over decision making to someone who exudes confidence and knowledge but in doing so, to lose a sense of responsibility and ownership of the consequences of that decision. Whilst an expert or advisor can walk away, the participants have to live with the long term consequences and should be fully involved in decision making and able to have a critical approach, voicing doubts and concerns as part of the process.

4.3 Relations with outside agencies

Both projects were reliant on the co-operation of a number of outside agencies and stakeholders who thereby occupy positions of power in relation to the groups. As Ray has postulated, endogenous development rarely, if ever, occurs purely as a result of ‘bottom up’ activity, but rather takes place at the interface of the local and extra-local, a model he terms neo-endogenous development (Ray, 2001). In order to implement their plans to become a more independent community supported scheme, Growing Together required the support of both the District Council, who owned the land, and the County Council, who run the Day Centre. Weardale CSA required the co-operation of landowners and their legal representatives, and organisations that could provide funding and support to set up the business. Examples from both cases illustrate the power held by specific individuals within these structures (Box 10 and Box 11).

⁹³ Pierre Stassart, 2008, personal communication

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Box 10: Case One: The open-minded official

Growing Together needed agreement from the local Council (landowners) for their plans. Entry to the Council was via an administrator who was initially unsupportive but became enthusiastic once the potential benefits to the Council were understood. The decision ultimately lay in the hands of a committee of elected Members but the recommendation would be through a Report written by the administrator's Manager. The Manager was invited to meet the group. As well as being impressed by their enthusiasm and commitment he also admitted that allotments were not 'his speciality', that he had not much previous involvement in allotment management, and that therefore he was 'open to new ideas'. Following consultation with the Legal Department, he subsequently produced a Report recommending support for the Group's plans and suggesting how it could fit with existing Allotment Law.

Box 11: Case Two: The friendly official

Funding for the public Workshops held in September 2007 and 10K for start up costs were both identified by Jean, an official in the local Council. I knew Jean from my professional role and had recently got to know her better as we both took part in an action learning set. I initially met with Jean in November 2006 to talk about the research I was planning and explore any avenues of support that the Council could offer. A positive rapport was established at this first meeting and support for my approach was gained. This was partly due to Jean's past experiences of failure of top-down models of development in the rural area of the District. This relationship proved key to securing these funding sources. Jean appeared to be influential with the partner agency administering the funds and in gaining the support of the colleague working in the same department. Because the CSA project did not always neatly fit business grant criteria it required interpretation in favour of the group to secure the funding. The personal dimension of this relationship was highlighted by a misunderstanding between Jean and another member of the Weardale group. This *could* have jeopardised the start up fund if it had not been resolved. (chapter 5, 2.2).

In the first case, had the Manager been someone with a long-standing involvement in allotment management and fixed ideas, any further progress could have been blocked, or at least made very difficult. Although the elected Members have decision making power, without the recommendation and background research of an Officer it is unlikely that a way forward would have been found. Thus the power held by that Official and the relationship with the group at that point in time was crucial to our progress.

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The second case illustrates even more strongly the importance of relationships with specific individuals. It might reasonably be assumed that decisions regarding funding by an agency would be based entirely on ‘hard facts’ related to policy and regulation, dependant on such questions as to how well a project supported the policies and strategies of the funding agency. Whilst these were of fundamental importance and funding would not have been available without them, it was also dependant on the active support of individuals within that organisation who took a very pro-active role in enabling the funding to be released. In this particular case, because of the unusual nature of the business being created, it is reasonable to conclude that without the added support of Jean and others, this funding would not have been forthcoming.

Both these cases illustrate a social structuralist model of power, where power is present because of a level of elite status, and also evidencing the one dimensional aspect of influencing (Jean influencing colleagues and the Council Manager influencing Member decisions, the participant group influencing the Manager, myself influencing Jean etc).

In dealing with this (and other) relationships with outside agencies everyone involved has had to make ethical choices about behaviour. I chose to use constructive personal contacts within key agencies to promote the goals of the projects. This has been described in terms of ‘social capital’ by many authors including Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1986) and Putnam (Putnam, 2000). A problem arose in Case 2 when Jean and one of the participants had a misunderstanding. Jean became upset and later told me that she had considered withdrawing support and would have done so had it not been for our positive relationship. On such narrow threads hang success or failure. This was the first of several encounters where participants learnt to ‘play by the rules of the game’, which sometimes meant concealing their true responses or opinions. One way in which participants dealt with this was to enact “performances of deference” (Scott, cited in Lukes, 2005, p126). James Scott developed a theory of behind-the-scenes resistance based on research in extreme situations of domination. However the technique of public performances of compliance whilst simultaneously expressing criticism in private is not necessarily limited to these conditions. It

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provided a necessary outlet for the frustrations often experienced when dealing with more powerful groups. The most obvious enactment of this behaviour occurred in relations with the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) who were administrators for the Big Lottery Local Food Grant. The privately expressed view of the Weardale CSA committee was that the handling of the application by the RSWT was extremely unsatisfactory on several accounts (chapter 5, 3.3). However, the chosen response was to negotiate rather than complain. Julia suggested taking a stronger line in response to the rejection:

I just wondered about being a little more forceful in one or two places to convey the fact that a lot of thought, consultation and advice seeking did inform the original application ... volunteer commitment and expertise suggests that the project has a real chance of significant success if seed (!) funded at this stage, therefore we'd appreciate all possible advice and input in order to maximise our chances of a successful resubmission. ... Or is that too strong/inappropriate? (email correspondence June 2009)

Tony, who was handling communications with RSWT, responded:

I am keen to remain as friendly –rather than forceful – on the basis that we don't yet want to bite the hand that could potentially feed us!!

This very understandable reluctance to challenge or criticise the power holders reduces the likelihood that weaknesses in the grant making system will be properly exposed and improved upon.

4.4 Empowerment

The term 'empowerment' is in common usage across all levels of the social and political strata (Rowlands, 1997) and appears frequently in UK Government policy around social inclusion and engagement. In July 2008 the Labour Government published an 'Empowerment White Paper' entitled "Communities in Control: real people, real power" (Communities and Local Government, 2008); community empowerment was proclaimed as the central aim of the paper. The Government describes community empowerment as being about the community and Government working together and identifies three key components: active citizens (individuals speaking and acting), strengthened communities (groups working out solutions), and

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partnership with public bodies. The unspoken assumption is that empowerment is something that government has to offer communities, or as Taylor says, it is assumed that 'expertise lies outside communities and that communities need to be 'em' – powered' (Taylor, 2003, p143). In this model the locus of control and boundary setting remains with the already powerful actors who have the ability/power to make the rules. This approach follows the traditional deficiency model of development, where the focus is upon what is lacking in communities, rather than an asset based approach that builds upon existing resources (Kretzman and McKnight, 1993). It is related to the equally common use of the term 'community capacity building' and its inherent assumption that professionals must transfer expertise to communities in order to enable them to function as a partner in the political process. An alternative view is that what is required is 'capacity releasing'⁹⁴, whereby the role of the professional is to open up pathways that enable communities to utilise their latent capabilities to take an active role in decision making or local development.

In a similar vein, the term 'empowerment' is also owned by a different tradition that understands it as a process originating from *within* communities, albeit often facilitated by a professional outsider or local community activist. Whilst the co-operation of more powerful agencies might be required, in this approach it is not they who are setting the agenda, and empowerment should include an awareness of and attempt to challenge and expose two and three dimensional power operating within these structures. This tradition owes much to the work of Paulo Freire and his reflexive, action orientated educational practice that emphasises the requirement to develop a critical consciousness to motivate action for change (Freire, 1972). It is within this tradition that I am using the term empowerment.

In many cases the first stage of the process will be personal empowerment: developing a sense of agency and a belief that I have the potential and ability to make things happen (Rowlands, 1997). Discovering and joining together with others with similar interests and gaining access to resources (e.g. knowledge, networks, training, new understanding, finance), either through the sharing of information or

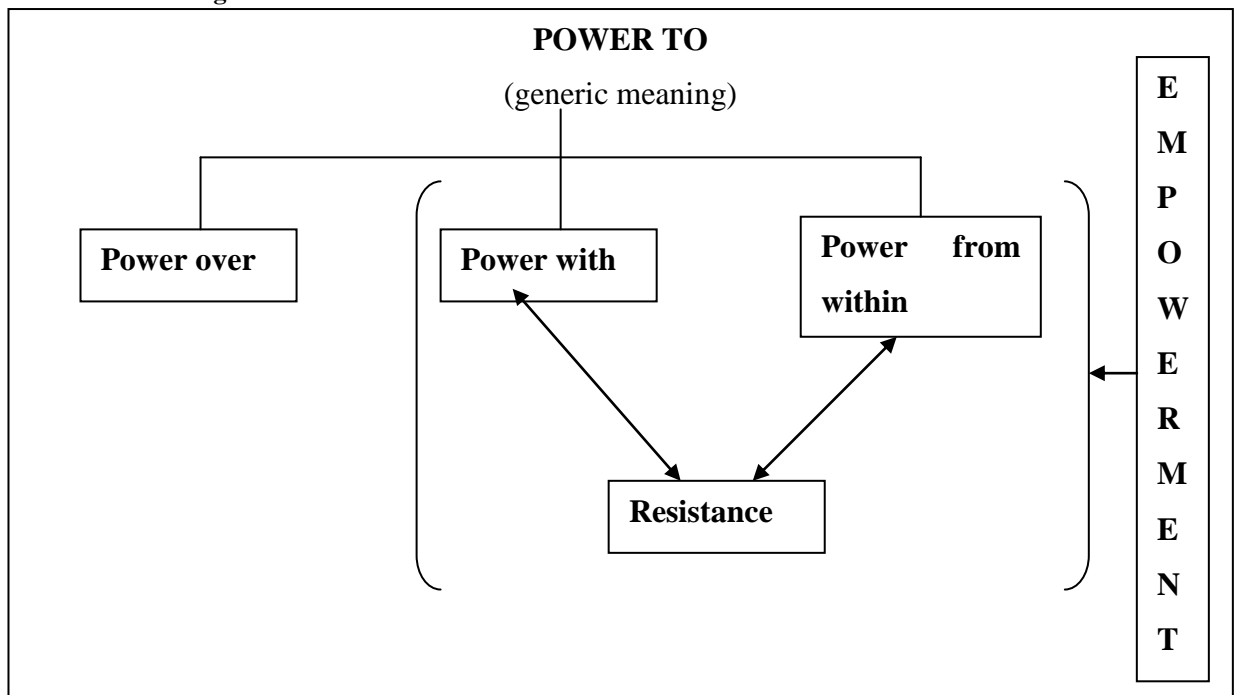
⁹⁴ I am indebted to David Brettell for introducing me to this term

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via an external facilitator, can then lead to actions to address specific issues or problems. Using Lukes' generic meaning of power as 'power to', and combining it with Rowlands' categories of different forms of power, and Scott's notions of covert resistance, I position empowerment within the sphere of 'power with', 'power from within', and 'resistance' (Box 12).

Box 12: Meanings of Power



PAR operates as a form of empowerment through the cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The two groups involved in this study were able to effect change as a result of the process and generate agency from working together and growing confidence, knowledge, and networks. Adopting the role of facilitator and catalyst my concern was to interact with participants in ways that encouraged self-reliance, learning, and inclusion of diverse opinions. Ethical dilemmas arose when there was a conflict between behaviour that was enabling and the pressure to achieve an outcome within a tight timescale. The choices I made about my mode of intervention at these points were deliberate but not always satisfactory. This conflict can be understood in terms of Habermas' description of communicative and instrumental action (Habermas, 1981) whereby the former is process orientated and

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concerned with achieving mutual understanding and consensus, and the latter is outcome orientated (Butz, 2008). An example was during the process of writing the lengthy funding application for the Lottery grant for Weardale CSA. The application was written by a sub-group of the steering group with individuals taking responsibility for sections of the form. I had agreed to contribute information about CSAs and links with policy. The Business Plan had been written prior to the application process (and therefore without reference to Lottery guidelines). With only a few days to go before the deadline for submission, the Advisor who had been allocated to the project suggested that some adjustments may be needed to the Business Plan, including the addition of a Job Description and Specification for the proposed employee. There was no time available to confer with the group over this so I made the adjustments myself. To allow for discussion at a later date I marked the Job information as draft. However, as is often the case if a task is done *for* a group rather than *with* or *by* them, the documents were accepted at a later meeting with very little debate. This instrumental intervention is not empowering and risks removing ownership and responsibility from participants.

At other times I made the choice to be more directive rather than enabling in my behaviour such as in the early stages of the Growing Together project when the group was forming. Prior to any roles being assigned I took a lead in setting the agenda and informally chairing the meetings. I knew that this was a developmental stage and that roles would be assigned later on. Judgements such as these can be justified by appealing to the care sensitivity test, a judgement that the chosen behaviour “maintain[s], promote[s], or enhance[s] the well being of relevant parties, or do[es] not cause unnecessary harm to the well-being of those parties” (Warren, 1999, p139/40).

As Rowlands and other feminist writers argue, empowerment refers to more than participation in decision making and must often include personal empowerment, defined by Rowlands as “developing a sense of self and individual confidence and capacity, and undoing the effects of internalised oppression.” (Rowlands, 1997, p15). Within a mixed group of participants there will be differing needs for this

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development. The involvement of people with learning disabilities in Growing Together meant that this was an underlying theme enacted as part of the Centre staffs' approach to their work. One case stands out in this respect when one of the users of the Centre was successful in being awarded a Community Champion grant from the Scarman Trust to set up a fruit growing area on the site. He also accompanied me and others from the group when we gave presentations about the project, and participated in the presentations. Victoria from Weardale CSA accompanied me to a presentation of my work to the Regional Development Agency, One North East (the CASE partners). She had to speak spontaneously as she had missed my voicemail message explaining to her what I would ask her to say but she spoke confidently about her reasons for getting involved and answered a tricky question. She said "It has given me a lot of self-esteem to realise I can do this."

Requirements from external bodies such as banks, funders, and in the case of Weardale CSA, the Community Interest Company (CIC) Regulator, impose a hierarchy on the groups from quite an early stage. Even before the Weardale CSA Steering Group was formed following the public Workshops in September 2007, posts of interim Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary had been allocated in order to open a bank account. At this stage only five or six people were meeting and the focus was on planning for the Workshops. The Chair and Treasurer were appointed because they were willing to take up these posts. The Secretary was someone who had volunteered to do administration but was unable to attend meetings at the time. These appointments were by consensus and then carried on into the Steering Group when it formed. These titles carry an implicit power structure with them but they are not sought after: they also carry responsibility and commitment and most volunteers are more comfortable with a looser association from which they can extricate themselves more easily. Later on, when the need for a Company Secretary for the CIC arose, no-one really wanted the position and it was filled by Louise (initially temporarily) because she volunteered to do it if no-one else was willing, even though she did not regard it as her particular skill area or something that she would enjoy doing. Because of her positive attitude and growing determination and enthusiasm she gradually moved from the edges of the group to the centre, albeit with some initial

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misgivings. The situation in Growing Together was different in that it was a mixed group of service users, paid employees, and occasionally volunteers from outside. The paid employees volunteered for the roles of Chair and Secretary. A young volunteer on the Green Gym programme appeared keen to be Treasurer and accepted the appointment, but despite offers of training and support, was unable to fulfil the role, and another employee took it on. I noted in my journal at the time that

this meant that all designated posts were held by staff members from the Centre. Having someone who had started as a green Gym participant in a central role would have illustrated the expansion of the project beyond the bounds of the Centre but for the time being this wasn't feasible.

This illustrates another difficulty in equalising power within the group when some members have particular circumstances that make it more difficult for them to take on positions of responsibility, even with support.

There were also issues related to personal empowerment that I considered to fall outside the boundaries of this study but that hindered progress. As would be expected there were unequal power relations within the groups themselves. Both had their leaders who are looked to by the other members to provide a level of direction and take more responsibility than other members. Power differentials are fluid and can emerge from a variety of sources: members who devote the most time to the project, have specific skills, have status attached to their professional roles, or who have access to particular resources, can potentially exercise more powerful positions within the group. Activities undertaken in the early stages of working with the groups were specifically designed to encourage a way of working that is inclusive and that values everyone's contribution. Aims, objectives and values were created through participatory processes (chapter 4, 3.4.2) designed to minimise power inequalities. The production of a skills audit for Weardale demonstrated that everyone had something to offer. However, the introduction of governance tools such as a statement of values and ground rules does not *guarantee* a levelling of relations within the group. The participants are not just living in the bubble of the participatory space constructed for the purposes of the research project but are relating to each other in other spaces where hierarchies and complex relationships may already exist.

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These inevitably affect the interactions within the group, for example, by creating an unwillingness to be openly critical. I was aware that some members felt it necessary to withdraw because of dis-empowering relationships with other members. I do not intend to analyse the internal workings of the groups any further; the participants took part because of their desire for change. They were like any other group of people working together, they had their internal struggles and personality clashes, and they were influenced by the social norms and local politics of their communities. For the purposes of this study I do not consider it appropriate, ethical even, to expose these to the wider world. That is not within the purpose and scope of the study.

5. MORE ETHICAL ISSUES IN PRACTICE

This final section considers four additional areas where choices are analysed within the framework of an ethic of care: choice of the research topic, choice of the research approach, dealing with multiple stakeholder expectations, and informed consent and impact on participants.

5.1 Choice of the Research Topic

By including this brief analysis I am being deliberately explicit about the influence of my biography on my approach to research and the choice of research topic in particular. I maintain that personal biography and value systems are integral to the choice of research topic and approach. I am not, as some positivist approaches would claim to do, assuming a stance of objective outsider, but rather writing myself into the research process and approaching my research from a specific standpoint (chapter 3, 3). The current positions I take on such topics as globalisation and conventional agriculture are my own and are held in the knowledge that they are contested. The point of including them is to be transparent about my interests in relation to this research and to position myself as a participant.

When I first heard about CSA I was immediately interested and enthusiastic. I saw in it the potential for people to engage with agriculture and horticulture in a more intimate and committed way that goes beyond a self-identification as a ‘consumer’ of a commodity. It also offered the farmer/grower an alternative relationship with customers providing a secure market, giving more control and influence over prices,

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and the potential for a more just reward for labour. As I reflected more on my response I began to understand that it was closely related to my personal history and the package of values and beliefs that I carry concerning food production, distribution, and consumption. I can trace the origins of these standpoints back to childhood and a seemingly innate love of the countryside, and in particular of growing food and gardening. At a very young age I already placed a high value on 'nature', by which I meant non-human fauna and flora, rural landscapes, and being able to find places of relative solitude. In the late 1960s I became a solitary campaigner for environmental issues in my school at a time when it was not high on most people's agendas. I did not need persuading about the merits of 'organic'/low-input and small scale food production as I was concerned about the negative environmental impacts of large scale industrial agricultural practices. I was never a purist in my support of organics, my concerns being about maintaining healthy and productive soils, biodiversity, pollution, and reliance upon high energy inputs and dependence upon oil, rather than strict adherence to rules and regulations. I am not sure when I first became aware of climate change and the dangers of increasing carbon emissions, but the parallel issue of limited oil supplies and the coming of a time when the maximum rate of global extraction begins to fall (so called Peak Oil) was brought to my attention by the publication of *Small is Beautiful* (Schumacher, 1973) and a memorable visit to my university by its author in the 1970s.

On the global scale it is clear to me that there is something fundamentally wrong with our food production, consumption and distribution. This point of view has been explored by many scholars and the complex problems, contradictions and injustices of the conventional food system have been widely documented (e.g. Tansey and Worsley, 1995; Pretty, 1998; Lang, 1999a, 1999b; Pretty, 2002; Lang and Heasman, 2004; Lyson, 2004; Carolan, 2011). Many people go hungry whilst others in the developed world increasingly suffer the consequences of obesity and nutritionally poor diets. People in the UK and US are losing touch with the origins of their food and the skills necessary to produce and process it (Blythman, 2006a). Campaigns in the UK to promote healthy eating such as 'Five-a-day' have been successful in raising awareness but have not produced any radical changes in behaviour (HMSO,

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2004). There are some indications that economic pressures are beginning to reverse these trends with the demand for allotments soaring and some councils opening new sites (BBC, 2008; Green, 2008), and in 2008 the sale of vegetable seeds exceeding those of flowers for the first time since the Second World War (Vidal, 2008b). In a relatively short period of time, consumers have come to take for granted the all year round availability of all varieties of fruit and vegetables, not seeming to notice the attendant loss of flavour, choice of varieties, and sometimes also nutritional content (Barrett, undated), as varieties are bred for their ability to maintain a long shelf life or withstand transport over long distances. A more seasonal approach to food consumption is attracting more attention and being promoted by some groups, e.g. The Fife Diet⁹⁵, and the locavore movement in US⁹⁶ (Kingslover, 2007). The hidden costs of transporting food are being investigated. A Government report in 2005 calculated that food transport accounts for 25% of all HGV kilometres in the UK and in 2002, 8.7% of the total UK road sector emissions (Defra, 2005). The same report estimated the direct environmental, social and economic costs of food transport to be £9bn/year. Air transport at present contributes only a small amount, but it is the fastest growing area. Trade has many benefits but there are many aspects that are contested. It is not within the purpose of this study to undertake an analysis of these issues. Transporting goods to central distribution centres for packaging before distribution through supermarket chains, importing and exporting identical produce, utilising productive land in Majority World countries to grow produce for export when their own citizens are malnourished are just some of the practices that are frequently questioned by critiques of the modern food system.

My overall concern is about particular aspects of the global food system and the dominance of a neo-liberal capitalism that results in the privileging of economic above social and environmental benefits. As Pasmore observes: “Human needs continue to be secondary to technical and economic advancement as measures of the

⁹⁵ Small, M. (2008) CASE STUDY: PROCUREMENT – FOOD The Fife Diet: Think Global – Eat Local <http://www.ssdforum.org.uk/docs/CASE%20STUDY%20Fife%20Diet.pdf> (accessed 09/10/08)

⁹⁶ Oxford University Press Word of the Year 2007, <http://blog.oup.com/2007/11/locavore/> (accessed 09/10/08)

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progress of society” (Pasmore, 2001, p47). The same could also be said of environmental needs. CSA is one model that attempts to redress the balance somewhat and choosing a PAR approach to CSA in the north east of England created a small place for change.

My perception of the global food economy as fundamentally flawed and inherently unjust is therefore an underlying value that has influenced my choice of research topic – I *care* about these things. In addition, I also have a strong belief in the therapeutic value of being connected in some way to the land and soil. Life would be much diminished for me if I could not participate in growing food in some way, however small. It brings a connection to the seasons and a reminder that we are all ultimately dependant on the ecosystem for our survival. I have learnt the value of growing food though personal experience but there is a body of evidence that would seem to support this (Brown and Jameton, 2000; Milligan and Gatrell et al., 2004; Soderback and Soderstrom et al., 2004). It also facilitates a ‘process of knowing’ (Curry, 2002, p128) whereby our relationship with *some* plants and animals develops into “a rich, complex, and deep sense of connection and commitment to the rest of the biosphere” (ibid, 2002, p128) and forms the foundation of the care that results in action. As previously mentioned, this fits with Reason and Bradbury’s ‘participatory paradigm’ referred to in chapter 2, (2.3) that is premised upon a relational and ecological cosmos of which humanity is part of the whole (2001b).

Finally, the community-building aspect of CSA and its potential for both using and building upon social capital, meshed closely with my professional practice of community development (chapter 3, 3). My professional experience and identity provoked a positive response to, and gave me a particular interest in, these aspects of CSA. In the following section I also make a connection between community development and PAR through their shared values.

5.2 Choice of Research Approach

I have already argued that the choice of PAR as an approach is in itself an ethical issue (section 2). For me it was primarily a personal preference for research that effected some practical change and that integrated research and action. My choice

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was also influenced by my professional background in community development. This experience equipped me with the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake collaborative work. The values of community development as set out in the National Occupational Standards are: Equality and Anti-discrimination, Social Justice, Collective Action, Community Empowerment, and Working and Learning Together (Federation for Community Development Learning, 2011) (chapter 3, 3.1). These are closely aligned with the values of PAR. The potential with PAR to leave a legacy that benefits the research participants and involves them as equals fitted with this value system I had been working with for many years. PAR is committed not just to revealing what might be unsatisfactory about society but also to being involved in bringing about change.

So my approach in this study is based upon an ontology that regards me and the participants as embodied within the processes of knowledge production and action. We all bring our interpretations and constructs, influenced by our life histories. And an epistemology that acknowledges and values different knowledges (including tacit and local knowledge) and that is pragmatic in the sense of linking ideas and propositions to action by which they should be tested.

5.3 Dealing with Multiple Stakeholder Expectations

The process of working collaboratively with research participants raises additional issues of accountability and responsibility for the academic researcher. The wider context of any research endeavour can throw up competing demands and conflicting values and priorities that require choices and compromises (Brydon-Miller, 2008). Cahill et al ask “How do we address the push and pull between multiple commitments and responsibilities to activism, the university, the community and ourselves?” (2007, p311). In my research setting I had responsibilities to the university (completing the PhD Thesis, conference presentations and papers, participation in postgraduate activities, occasional teaching requests, administrative requirements), to the sponsoring partner (engagement with policy and the organisation, reports), participants (collaboration, support, availability, staying to see change achieved), and to myself (time for everyday activities). This has not been an

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easy path to manage, especially with the added responsibilities of working part-time in addition to the research work. Undertaking PAR is very time intensive, especially during the formative stages. It is difficult to anticipate exactly the length and amount of time required as there are many uncertainties. How long will it take to find the participants? To bring them together? To develop a functioning group? How much time and effort will be needed to secure the necessary resources (funding, skills, knowledge) that will be required? There are also questions about how much time should be invested in more informal exchanges that serve to build trust, provide encouragement, or listen to anxieties. The participants' concerns revolve around achieving the change they want to effect, whilst the university is more concerned about the production of the thesis, academic papers, reports, seminars, and requests for the occasional teaching input.

Dealing with these competing demands has required an ongoing openness to negotiation from all parties. My initial research proposal suggested the animation of three CSAs of differing types (community garden, community initiated, farmer initiated). As the research progressed this was re-negotiated as it became evident that the time and input required for Weardale CSA was considerable and involvement in a third enterprise could seriously compromise the writing of the thesis. An alternative approach, exploring the potential for the research to engage with policy, was agreed. There are no easy answers to these dilemmas; they need to be recognised and tackled as they arise and using an ethical framework – what matters, what is most important in this particular instance, and what choice will be most likely to result in 'caring practices' – helps in the process of making choices. Participatory research can produce strong feelings of obligation to the participants that can sometimes conflict with requirements of other parties. It is easy to talk about the importance of 'exit strategies' in the remoteness of a comfortable room in the university, harder to explain to time-poor participants why you can not spend more time supporting their endeavours. All PhD research programmes will include some element of evolution and change, with PAR the situation is complicated by the commitment to participants and the lack of control over a process where decisions are made by the research group, rather than the researcher. Care theory helps here too with its central theme of

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attentiveness: paying attention to the thoughts, feelings and actions of others that also involves going at another's speed (Wood, 1994, cited in Curry, 2002): the timescale of the participants may not match the requirements of a funding body. Being part-time enabled me to work at the groups' speed without too much pressure from other sources, such as completion dates.

5.4 Informed Consent and Impact on Participants

The practice of informed consent rests on the assumption of a research participant being an object of study and therefore potentially at risk of suffering physical or emotional harm in a situation over which they have little or no control. When research is *with, for* and *by* research participants these risks may still be present but the participant has active agency and input into the research process and so takes shared responsibility for decisions and actions. The question of consent is then not necessarily a formalising of the relationship with the researcher who then controls the research process, but a decision to take an active part in a process that they hope will produce some positive change of benefit to themselves and/or the wider community. For the participants in this study it involved a commitment not only to the researcher, but also to the other participants. The motivations to take part are varied but will include a strong interest in achieving a successful practical outcome and willingness to take the risks that involvement presents. Having an active role means that the levels of risk can be negotiated at various stages as decisions are made as part of the PAR cycle.

Whilst I considered individual consent forms to be inappropriate to this approach to research I did need to ensure that everyone had an understanding of my role and position, and that this was part of a PhD study. I talked through these issues with individuals in the early stages but as new people joined and the groups formed it became necessary to have something in writing that could be agreed and that could be used when new people joined. To this end I drafted a 'Memo of Agreement' for each group (appendix ii).

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An issue pertinent to informed consent that is less well documented but which has often been present in my thoughts is the impact that the process has on participants (in particular those that give most to the project) and the subsequent emotional engagement of the researcher. Even though participants are taking part in a course of action that they have chosen and are doing so because they are keen to “make things happen”, nevertheless I am aware that my intervention as an outsider has disrupted the status quo, albeit in a direction that they wanted to go. Change brings disruption to routines, unexpected challenges, the demands of additional voluntary work, and anxiety and stress at difficult times in the process. As Klocker observed of her AR: “real people’s lives were involved ... there will be a great deal of self-doubt and many sleepless nights” (2012, p156). Of course there are also many positive experiences: new friendships, pride in success, excitement at being involved in something that you believe is worthwhile, learning new skills and knowledge, and if successful, achieving your goals. A reflection exercise with some of the Weardale CSA steering group members in January 2009 (chapter 4, 3.3) revealed some of the ups and downs of involvement. Positive feelings accompanied achievements such as the first volunteer day on the land, completing a funding bid, the public workshop, and being able to distribute apples to people who had helped. Anxieties were noted in relation to the amount of volunteer time needed, lack of funding, and the responsibility of spending public money. Frustrations were expressed at the many delays experienced and “the unequal workload, people not responding to emails.”

Causes of frustration and anxiety came both from within and without the group itself. Difficulties from without often resulted from bureaucracy, poor communication, or simply that the CSA’s issues were not a priority. An email from Louise, a steering group member conveys the strength of feeling aroused over confused communication with a local funding agency:

Their limit for the fund is 40K. That would have been useful to know initially wouldn't it! Argghhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!

It is impossible for the researcher to stand outside this emotionally and as time progresses there develops a kind of solidarity with the group. If Cahill is correct in

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identifying in PAR an epistemological orientation as an ‘ethic of care’ (2007) it is not surprising that there is a high level of emotional engagement involved. The concept of an ethic of care allows an acknowledgment of the place that emotion plays (Kneafsey and Dowler et al., 2008). Another way of describing this is that of “ ‘embodied’ intellectual practice” (Brydon-Miller and Greenwood et al., 2003):

We never leave our corporeality; we engage in ongoing cycles of reflection and action in which our bodies and ourselves and those of our collaborators are not only present to us but essential to the very process of understanding messes. Pain, joy, fear, bravery, love, rage – all are present in our action research lives. (p21-22)

I could add others – anxiety, laughter, sleepless nights, disappointment, excitement, celebration, pride (in achievement). These reactions and experiences are shared both in the context of the group and between individuals. Emotions rise and fall at different phases in response to current events. After the Workshop event in September 2007 (Weardale CSA) which generated a lot of local interest and the evidence of sufficient local demand to proceed, Victoria, one of the participants who had been involved from the very early stages, said “this is getting scary, really scary” in response to a growing understanding of what lay ahead. I recognised the description Cahill gives of her PAR work:

Deep breath. Slow down. I have been here before. I remember this feeling. This is familiar. ‘This’ referring to the ups and downs, the worries, the sleepless nights. This is the emotional engagement of doing participatory research. (Cahill, 2007, p361).

It is unusual to find such honesty and exposure of the daily reality of PAR but because these emotions arise, they present as an important ethical consideration for any research that will involve an element of disruption and stress to participants. The choice to participate is made willingly but often without the full prior realisation of the impact it may have: the ‘informed’ part of ‘informed consent’ is necessarily partial, even though each person is responsible for their decision to take part. It is impossible to foresee these impacts, either their specific nature or their extent, prior to the initiation of the project, and to concentrate on this aspect in advance might be

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unpopular or deemed unnecessary by people who are focused on action. Some of these issues were touched upon in the early stages of the steering group when ground rules and values and principles were agreed. Nevertheless, in retrospect it might have been helpful to encourage more in-depth conversations about how participants (myself included) would react to events such as unexpected barriers, demands that become greater than anticipated, and difficulties arising from relationships within the group, particularly as some members had no previous experience of working in groups.

6. SUMMARY

Ethics is an important subject for PAR practitioners. PAR is a value based approach distinguished by a commitment to action in its ethical framing. I have used care theory as an analytical framework through which to view my research practice. It has an ontological premise that human beings are primarily relational and that this is the foundation of moral reasoning.

The underpinning values of PAR include the participation in democratic processes, improvement of human life and engagement in morally committed action (Brydon-Miller, 2008) and so care theory and PAR share a position regarding the purpose of human existence that includes attentiveness to the ‘other’ and the improvement of well-being. ‘Caring about’ something can lead to active participation by ‘caring for.’ PAR stems from caring about and is the search for action and knowledge that can contribute towards addressing the issue that is the cause of concern. An ethic of care can also be said to be holistic as it places the individual within a web of complex interconnections. When this is also extended to include the non-human world it parallels the underlying participatory paradigm of PAR as proposed by Reason and Bradbury (2001b).

CSA, along with other so called ‘alternative’ models, can be conceptualised as an attempt to engage with ethical issues in food systems. Using care theory, it is suggested that a caring agricultural system will be context specific and based upon the ontological premise of relational primacy. It is argued in this chapter that CSA reflects an ethic of care in its form, structure and practices.

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A key element in any PAR process is addressing the issue of power relations in the research setting. These relations throw up ethical dilemmas that require choices about how to respond to inequalities of power and position. Acknowledging that power is deeply embedded in existing social relations, no claims or expectations are made about eliminating power inequalities in the course of this study. Rather, an overarching ethic of care and principles of democracy, social justice and equality provide a strong rationale for minimising negative impacts of unequal power relations and encouraging empowerment by e.g. effecting governance, sharing knowledge, and using participatory techniques. Power has been discussed in relation to positionality, relations with outside agencies, and empowerment. The crucial role of particular individuals within external agencies and their capacity to act and influence events central to the groups' plans emerged as a strong and recurring theme. Empowerment is used in the tradition that understands it as a process arising from *within* communities rather than the transfer of expertise that lies outside. PAR acts as a form of empowerment through the planning/acting/reflecting cycle. The research groups became empowered to effect change by working together in this way and growing confidence, knowledge and networks. In the course of the research process, situations arose that required me to make judgements about methods of intervention that were not ideal but that I justified by the argument that they demonstrated the most care sensitive practice. Examples of personal empowerment for individual participants are also given, as well as instances where equalising power was impossible.

In the final section of the chapter, four additional areas involving ethical issues are addressed. I argue that the choice of research topic and research approach both involved an ethical stance and that personal biography and values play a central role in these choices, and that they are essentially driven by care. Dealing with the often competing demands of different stakeholders is an ongoing task that is handled by reference to an ethic of care that must embrace all parties. The standard practice of informed consent is different for PAR and I explain how this was handled by ongoing communication and memos of agreement. The realities of emotional

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engagement, especially in negotiating the more troublesome experiences in the projects' development are exposed and acknowledged within a framework of care ethics, so raising questions about the meaning of informed consent in practice.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

*Wanderer, your footsteps
the road, and nothing more;
wanderer, we have no road,
we make the road by walking.
As you walk you make the road,
and to look back
is to see that never
can we pass this way again.
Wanderer, there is no road,
only traces in the sea. (Antonio Machado)⁹⁷*

We only know as we go (Chia and Holt, 2009, p186)

The enquiry never ends, because each 'satisfactory' ending contains new beginnings. (McNiff and Whitehead, 2009, p55)

1. INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter I begin by revisiting the original aims and objectives of the research and review how far they were achieved and what changed in the course of the research programme. The most important question for me in examining the outcomes of the research is whether or not the goals of the research participants were met and the research produced some positive change from their point of view. The most compelling evidence for this has to be in the projects themselves. They have both experienced some challenging problems, either during the period of my involvement (Weardale CSA) or afterwards (Growing Together); they are now both thriving, although Growing Together has more recently become re-absorbed into the wider structures of the County Council (see addendum). Their story will go on long after this document is gathering dust. They have developed differently than first imagined but in the emergent process of PAR this is to be expected: they have demonstrated that they can be adaptive – a characteristic that in the words of Chia and Holt, is the “key to survival” (2009, p46).

⁹⁷ translated by Chris Cavanagh, 2008 <http://comeuppance.blogspot.com/2008/12/some-poems-by-antonio-machado.html>, accessed 01/09/11

In section 3 of this chapter I bring together the insights from the research and discuss their implications for CSA research and practice, including some messages for policy makers and suggested areas for further research. In section 4 I discuss the process of doing an action research PhD and in reflecting on the actions and outcomes of the past five years I suggest some criteria for evaluating the quality and validity of the research.

2. RESEARCH AIMS AND DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 1 set out the background to this research, explaining how it emerged from a much smaller study (Charles, 2005) and complemented existing research interests at the Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) at Newcastle University and the increasing interest, among academic researchers, policy-makers and practitioners, in the potential for the development of more locally-embedded systems of food production and distribution. I explain in this chapter how the initial objectives were tackled, what changed, and what influenced the framing of the thesis.

The overall aim of the study was to build upon the results of an MSc feasibility study (ibid) and to develop a full-scale action research study into CSA development in the north of England. The three broad objectives were to:

1. Examine the development and characteristics of CSA in the US, Japan, and EU and its early translation in the UK (chapter 3).
2. Trace the development of local/alternative food networks in the North East region and characterize the strengths and weaknesses of the ‘local food economy’ within regional development (chapter 4).
3. Develop, critically appraise and reflexively monitor detailed action research activities in County Durham to facilitate local stakeholder discussion and collaboration around local CSA schemes (chapters 4, 5, and 6).

In chapter 1 I explain that as the research developed, the original objectives were revised (as above) to reflect the growing emphasise on the understanding of CSA as ‘caring practice’ that operates within available interstices of hegemonic discourse, practice and policy, and a broader analysis of CSA and its future potential. Even as I

write it appears that the cracks in the hegemony are widening as political and economic instability augers a time of potential for transformations. I also explore the linkages between CSA and my own profession of community development.

The practical question to be answered was: “Given the low level of CSA activity in the North East, can CSA projects be animated here through an action research approach, and how might participants benefit in this context?” During the course of the research, many subsidiary questions about specific aspects of the project development were raised by the research groups as part of the research/action cycle (chapter 1, 2). These numerous questions were the drivers of the specific actions taken and were dealt with using the iterative cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting that is common to all forms of AR practice.

The distinctive contribution to knowledge is in two key regards. First, the central role of PAR in facilitating stakeholder collaboration to develop CSA schemes enables an analysis of the role of PAR in animating rural development initiatives. Second, the specific socio-economic characteristics of Weardale where both projects are located mean that this research provides a highly original and distinctive contribution by examining how PAR might animate local food initiatives in a deprived area.

The choice of AR was new to the CRE and a relatively unusual approach for a PhD study (and still is). Therefore it was deemed appropriate for this study to incorporate a reasonably detailed exploration of this field of research (chapter 2). The decision to choose AR involved a personal value judgement about the purpose of research and how best to realise that purpose. It reflects a preference for a social research that leads to change, and a judgement that this is most likely to be achieved by including action leading to change as a part of the research cycle. I decided that by seeking to actually animate some CSA schemes in the region I could discover something about what helped and hindered their development in this specific setting and at the same time leave a rural development legacy in the form of new projects. The weakness of this approach lies in its focus on a particular situation that may or may not be typical of other settings. If AR was to be judged on its ability to produce a generalising proposition it would not pass the test. However, if it is accepted, as argued in chapter

2, that different criteria are required to assess the validity and quality of AR because it differs in terms of purposes, relationships, ways of conceiving knowledge, and relation to practice (Reason and Bradbury, 2001b) then this issue is no longer a problem. This is not to say that nothing can be learned that is applicable to new situations. Process knowledge, about how the research was conducted, can be useful to other researchers (Ladkin, 2005). Other knowledge needs to be carefully assessed and the contextual details studied before making any assumptions about transferability: what has worked in one situation may not work in quite the same way in another.

The original intention for the action research activities was to attempt to animate three diverse CSA schemes: a small community level scheme, a farmer led scheme (an existing farm or a group of small farms adopting CSA for part of their produce), and a consumer initiated scheme whereby the consumers would find land, resources and a grower. This suggestion was qualified by the statement that due to the essentially democratic and participatory nature of AR it was possible that this initial proposal would change. From my previous contact with Dave at the Aucklandgate Day Centre, I anticipated that the first category could be based on their gardening group, and this was indeed the case. As explained in chapter 3, I initially expected a farmer led scheme when I began conversations in Weardale, whereas it became consumer/volunteer led, and then entirely run by volunteers. A few months after forming this group of co-researchers I began to realise that I would not have the resources to develop a third project. I agreed with my CASE partner and supervisors that I would explore a policy output instead. After several iterations, this became the proposal to facilitate a Sustainable Local Food Strategy for County Durham. Although emerging directly from this research study, this will run as a separate follow-on project hosted by Durham Rural Community Council and funded by Durham and Darlington PCT Charitable Trust. It commenced in November 2011 for a period of 30 months. The practical outputs from this research are therefore two CSA schemes and a local food policy project.

From the early stages of conducting the study it became clear that ethical issues ran like a thread throughout the whole tapestry of AR, CSA, and CD. I wanted to explore

this aspect at a deeper level and identify a rationale for the many choices that need to be made that was based upon an ethical stance. I discovered that the colour of thread that fitted most appropriately was care theory; this provided me with a lens through which to analyse the research process and CSA as ‘caring practice’. As I link the values and intentions of CD with those of AR, ethical issues, especially around the topic of power, are continually to the fore. Ethics therefore became the focus of my analysis in chapter 6 and the framework through which I viewed my decisions from the choice of topic and approach, to the smaller, everyday choices that had to be made as the projects progressed.

3. INSIGHTS FROM THE RESEARCH AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

This section uses the main insights gained from the research to discuss implications for research and practice. I begin by considering the possibilities for community development work and CSA, and this is followed by reflections on the implications of adopting an ethic of care as a framework for practice and policy. There is a reminder of the centrality of relationships when considering the barriers and opportunities that arose and a forward look at the future of CSA in north east England. The section concludes with some messages for policy makers and suggestions for further research.

3.1 CSA as a site for community development and transformational change

In this study I have made a connection between CSA and community development (chapter 3, 3) arguing that the value base of community development sits comfortably with CSA. The restoration of a ‘sense of agency’ (Ostrom, 2007) to local communities is fundamental to the purpose of community development. In the sense that CSA is understood as offering a degree of improved food democracy – people having a measure of influence over the nature of their food supply – CSA fulfils a primary aim of community development. Community initiated CSAs, or those with high levels of member involvement, can be sites for community development in that they are examples of collaborative community action that seek to improve food democracy. The degree to which any particular CSA meshes with community development values will be locally contingent and is more likely to occur where the instigators have some history or experience in the field, as in the case of Stroud Community Agriculture, for example. Both of the projects developed from

the action research activities in Wear Valley demonstrate, to a greater or lesser extent, the values espoused by community development, and produced outcomes that can be described using the conceptual frameworks familiar to community development of social capital, empowerment and community action. Community development practitioners working alongside community members in deprived communities might consider CSA as an appropriate project model when seeking to improve general health and well-being.

The broader question of the potential for CSA (alongside other AFNs) to be the instigator of wider food system change is also explored. Several authors have investigated the question of whether CSAs are mostly ‘oppositional’ (with a more radical political agenda) or ‘alternative’ (a marginal activity that exists more or less happily alongside the dominant system). I argue that this approach results in a simplification of a more complex picture, with evidence of a wide spectrum of motivations and purpose amongst CSA participants which are themselves dynamic and change in response to learning and the prevailing political and economic context. There is some evidence that from the 1980s and the growth and spread of neo-liberal discourse, it became more difficult to survive with a purely oppositional stance. However, if CSA in all its diversity is conceptualised as an activity that takes place within the available interstices of policy, discourse and practice as an example of “performing the economy otherwise,” (Leyshon and Lee et al., 2003) it remains a potential force for change. Drawing on the theories of Kay (2010), Chia and Holt (2009), and J.K. Gibson-Graham (2002), I propose that these active spaces contain within them the potential for wider food system change.

3.2 Developing a ‘caring practice’

The framing of the research using care theory developed in response to the experience of working collaboratively with the research participants, as explained in chapter 1 (1). I began to see the relevance of care theory (with its emphasis on relationships and situated knowledge) to both my PAR practice and CSA.

Care theory is not only applicable to more traditional forms of caring such as caring for children, the sick, or infirm. It is also about what we care about in terms of ideas, non-human life, objects, and aesthetics. It foregrounds care as a primary motivator

for action in situations where the object of our care is threatened or mistreated. Concern and empathy are recognised as valid and valuable sources of moral decision making. As shown in chapter 6 (3.1), PAR stems from an ethic of care, and shares ontological and epistemological positions and a compelling drive for action. The implication for PAR is the potential to be a tool to release a reservoir of energy that resides in the disposition to care; this principle could be applied to topics other than food systems in the context of rural development. Where caring about something is not translating into action, PAR is an appropriate tool for uncovering barriers and discovering opportunities for action through collaborative research. This includes situations where barriers can seem insurmountable because of, for example, powerful social structures, corporate control, or dominant economic forces. In these cases, and the food system can be included here, small advances in localised situations, generated and sustained by care can seem insignificant. But an ethic of care would tell us that they are worth pursuing - and all movements start somewhere. This use of PAR as a means of effectively animating the political potential of care opens up new territory within care theory that could be further explored and tested.

In respect of food systems, care theory suggests particular characteristics of a caring agricultural system and it forces us to pay attention to the impact on people, animals, and the wider environment that have a relationship with that system. CSA, I have argued, can broadly be described as a caring agricultural practice because of its dependence on relationships, attention to the local context and care for the wider environment, with the proviso that there exists a wide diversity of form and practice that means that some examples merit this description more than others. Care theory could usefully be applied to other agricultural systems to evaluate them in terms of a caring (and by implication, 'good') practice. What difference would it make if agricultural and food policy was constructed on the basis of an ethic of care? Curry (2002) says that "Our policies do not match the realities of our relational nature" (p128) and calls for a breaching of the boundary between morality and politics so that questions around health, ecology, and more general well-being are included in public policy. This is an important point: care theory provides a rationale for a more holistic approach to policy and practice that is built on the premise that human nature is first and foremost relational. This approach draws different boundaries, it does not

pit ‘greens’ against conventional approaches for example, rather it suggests a different way forward based on a shared assumption about the nature of human experience and being. We are a long way from this position of course and care theory is often regarded as complementing other forms of moral thought, rather than providing a complete picture. However, Slote (2007) has developed an argument for an empathetic ethic of care that provides a complete account of individual and political morality, so it is not an unthinkable future.

I suggest in chapter 6 (3.2) that the practical application of an ethic of care to economic relations is demonstrated by the practice of associative economics. One of the possible outcomes of the current economic and environmental turbulence may be the strengthening of such practices, and this would benefit CSA and other AFNs. According to Steiner, social change cannot be animated by imposing ideas from above, but by encouraging and “recognizing what is already emerging, or trying to emerge, within the social life of our times” (Karp, 2008, p25). Karp argues that just such a new approach to economic relations is now trying to emerge from within the sustainable food movement, and he cites CSA as an example, alongside others, including cooperatives. Evidence from the cooperative movement in the UK would seem to support the notion that more people are becoming interested in these approaches and that they are showing some resilience to economic pressures. Between 2008 (the beginning of the current financial crisis) and 2011 the number of coops in the UK rose by 23%. Turnover and membership numbers have also risen with the cooperative economy growing by 21% in the same time period to reach a total of £35.6bn (Cooperatives UK, 2012).

For CSA, the implication is that there may be more scope for tapping into care as a motivator to grow the movement. In looking for new participants, both farmers/growers and members, appealing to existing groups and organisations that exhibit dimensions of care would seem to be a way forward.

Care theory is used in this study as a frame for reflexive practice. By applying an ethic of care to dealing with the many dilemmas encountered either as a result of power dynamics within or without of the groups, or from other areas of competing

demands, it was possible to forge a more consistent path of decision making. Many of these decisions are contestable and I do not claim to have made ‘right’ decisions, simply to have justifiable reasons for them.

3.3 Finding the barriers and opportunities: situated knowledge for CSA development in Co Durham

Chapter 5 examined the opportunities and barriers presented during the course of the research projects and noted how the eventual pathways forged by the research groups were often unanticipated and unpredictable. The specific situated knowledge gained at different stages of development enabled the projects to move forward but it was not always clear what questions needed to be asked until a specific situation emerged. The conclusion was that the timely and practical knowledge required demanded a highly adaptive approach that was well suited to PAR.

The notable influence of individuals on the projects’ progress and outcomes emphasises the difficulty in predicting outcomes or of replicating a development trajectory with a different set of actors. It is not just that areas such as the projects’ goals and values were determined by a particular group of actors, but in repeated instances resources were either released or withheld, progress delayed or expedited, as a result of individuals’ actions or attitudes. In both cases progress was highly contingent upon the nature and availability of human resources: the time, skills, knowledge and wider networks of the participants, and the responses of individuals within outside agencies and the quality and nature of the relationships built with them. The projects provoked very supportive responses from some individuals, especially when they engaged emotionally and responded from a stance of caring about the overall success of the endeavour. When this was lacking, the barriers to progress were harder to overcome. Care theory provides a conceptual framework that anticipates the centrality of relationships and the impact the nature of these relationships will have on the form and progress of the projects. Specific problems were worked through using processes and techniques that sought to minimise power inequalities, maximise participant agency, and discover ways of overcoming lack of resources, whether these were financial, physical, or human.

3.4 The future of CSA in north east England

The title of this thesis – “Community Supported Agriculture as a Model for an Ethical Agri-food System in North East England” – implies that CSA provides something worthy of imitation for developing the agri-food system in this region. This research has been set in the context of both global and local socio-economic and environmental conditions that are in a state of flux and CSA is offered as one route to responding to these conditions in regard to how, where, and by whom our food is produced. It has the potential to assist in growing the market for food that is both produced and consumed within the region, improving diets through increasing the consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit, increasing consumer engagement beyond that of a simple economic transaction, increasing food democracy, and furthering understanding and education through direct participation. It is never going to be attractive to all, or even the majority, of producers or consumers and sits comfortably alongside other developments such as more self-provisioning in private and community gardens, food cooperatives, farm shops, farmers’ markets, and food festivals, which all help to reconnect consumers with the food on their plate, and producers with consumers.

Some possible explanations for the slow development of CSA in the region are given in chapter 4 (2). I do not foresee a rapid growth in the immediate future and although CSAs have multiplied in the last five years across the UK, they remain very much a marginal model. However, I suggest that there are some signs that an environment conducive to their growth is emerging. There seems to be a steady growth in interest and activity around local food generally in the region. I do not possess any definitive figures but I have observed a number of new local food businesses appearing over recent years, in addition to the popularity of farmers’ markets and growth in farm shops already alluded to (chapter 4, 2). These are mainly small secondary producers providing for example hand-baked bread, local game products, home made cakes, and relishes/sauces. If this trend continues, this will begin to create a pull on demand for more primary producers to supply locally grown ingredients. There has also been a noticeable increase in community activists working on local food issues and projects, mainly through the various transition groups that have sprung up around the region, including some groups exploring CSA as a possible model. Allotments are

over-subscribed⁹⁸ and community initiated CSAs, similar to the model that Weardale CSA has morphed into (another example being Loxley Valley Community Farm⁹⁹ near Sheffield), could offer an alternative to people who want to grow their own food, and may eventually produce a surplus to sell to non-working members.

The question about the potential involvement of farmers in setting up new CSAs remains. No farmers from County Durham attended a Soil Association workshop on CSA held in March 2011 for interested farmers from the North East. I hope to explore this further in County Durham through the follow-on project of developing a Sustainable Local Food Strategy.

Policy that provides a supportive environment for the flourishing of CSAs and other forms of shorter food supply chains within the broader family of AFNs is more likely to emerge at the local, rather than the national level, where policy remains broadly focussed on larger scale systems. The loss of the regional level of administrative governance in England (Regional Assemblies, Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies abolished successively in 2010/11/12) reduces opportunities for the potential of regional policy to assist the development of regional food systems as suggested by Kneafsey (2010):

The strengthening of regional governance structures could assist the development of regionalized links between food producers and consumers, through for example, the growth of regional public sector procurement (for example, regional food to schools, hospitals, prisons), land use planning decisions favouring localized food production, public health campaigns to promote food growing and campaigns to reduce carbon footprints by buying more locally produced food. (p183)

Evidence suggests that the influence of regional governance on local food systems in the north east region has in practice been limited to a narrow economic focus that “potentially ignores the diverse nature and potential of local food economies” (Maye and Ilbery, 2007, p165). More locally targeted policy developments in some other areas of the country on the other hand are showing more promising signs of

⁹⁸ Confirmed by conversation with DCC officer, 29/11/11

⁹⁹ <http://www.loxleyvalleycommunityfarm.org.uk/>

embracing a more diverse approach to supporting the growth of local food systems. Examples include policies in Brighton, Manchester, Sheffield and London (Food Matters, 2006; London Development Agency, 2006; Food Futures Partnership, 2007; Sheffield First Partnership, 2011). The follow-on project to this research programme, a Sustainable Local Food Strategy, will seek to begin this process in County Durham. One area that might be looked at in the development of this strategy is the availability of facilitative support to animate new projects. Intervention by a facilitator, as this study shows, can animate action that would otherwise not have happened. It ignites latent resources, enthusiasm, and interest, bringing together people, ideas, and agencies that were formerly unconnected to generate change and action. This may be especially important in locations where activity around local food production is low or non-existent.

Finally, I would argue the case for a reflexive “offensive localism” (chapter 4, 4) in the north east region, bearing in mind its position at the bottom of the economic hierarchy in England. Mindful of the arguments cautioning against an uncritical adoption of localism (e.g. Winter, 2003; DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Born and Purcell, 2006), this must demonstrate at its heart support for environmental and social sustainability and justice. This approach taps into the strong sense of local pride and identity as an asset for development. The underlying ethical and environmental values of CSA could provide a solid foundation for a new form of reflexive localism around food production and distribution that is not exclusive or static. The reality in practice is likely to be messy and imperfect. An ‘offensive localism’ needs to be reflexive and critical of its own practices, willing to continually reform and re-evaluate.

3.5 Messages for policy makers

The following are some suggestions for policy makers that might assist the growth of community based local food projects and the development of the local food economy generally:

a) A funding programme accessible to individuals (rather than groups) along the lines of the Community Champions fund should be re-instated. A small grant that does not require the setting up of a constituted group with all the attendant policies

and procedures in place enables ideas to be tested, learning to take place, and encourages the pursuit of innovation. It also opens the door to sources of support and advice and networks of similar projects.

b) The learning gained from visiting similar projects was extremely valuable. Small grants that pay for travel expenses for such visits and for well-established groups to share their expertise would be likely to speed up the growth and spread of CSAs and other local food models. Most CSAs are very keen to share their knowledge with enquirers but this takes them away from their core business and funding to support knowledge exchange would facilitate this.

c) The availability of up to three years of revenue funding (as via the Local Food Grant) can have unintended consequences. Some organisations not previously involved in local food production will invent projects because they rely on new funding streams for their viability. Others, Weardale CSA included, are driven towards planning to start bigger than they otherwise would have done and spend a lot of resources on ensuring compatibility with the funder's requirements (organisational policies, detailed business plan and cash flow etc). A more flexible fund, designed to reflect the emergent and uncertain reality of new project development, might be more helpful. So for example, rather than requiring a full three year plan and projection, an initial grant might be offered for 12 months with far fewer requirements and the understanding that the necessary documentation could be developed during this time. Follow on funding could then be offered following an assessment of progress and advice provided on moving to the next stage. Given the current economic climate it is highly unlikely that public money will be widely available to future projects. Even if a second Local Food Grant is run, it is very likely to be vastly over-subscribed again. Alternative sources of funding such as community finance are being used¹⁰⁰ and where this is not available, private funding from existing landowners could be an alternative option.

¹⁰⁰ For example Bristol Community Farm (<http://www.thecommunityfarm.co.uk/>), and information from the Soil Association

(<http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=lg0J1%2Fqkn%2Bs%3Dandtabid=226>)

c) If CSA is to expand beyond the margins in the UK it will necessitate the engagement of existing farmers and landowners. To enable any such transition will require a programme designed to overcome real and perceived barriers to change including support for facilitation to link interested community members to farms and assist in establishing member support: most established farmers are unlikely to have the capacity and may not have the skills to administer a CSA. Facilitation would play a key role.

d) Farmers' are more likely to consider CSA as an option if they can see it operating successfully in a context similar to their own and see tangible economic benefits. Demonstration CSA farms with open days and publicity in mainstream agricultural press (e.g. Farmers' Weekly) would raise the profile and spark discussion.

e) At the local government level in County Durham the lack of any joined up policy for food means that organisations and departments are working in isolation and there is no joining up of policy across health, economy, environment, planning, and education in relation to food, even though the County Durham Sustainable Community Strategy lays out clear aspirations for a thriving local food economy (chapter 4, 2.2). I seek to begin to address this situation through the proposal to facilitate a Sustainable Local Food Strategy for Co Durham as a policy outcome from this research.

3.6 Areas for further research

CSA in the UK remains under-researched and there are many avenues of inquiry that could be usefully pursued to illuminate in greater depth how and why it has developed, what motivates members and producers, how economically viable it is, what impact it has on members and the wider community, and what measures might help it to become more established. Other more specific suggestions are:

- In the north east of England in particular, an inquiry into the attitudes towards 'local food' to discover how it is understood, whether it is associated with middle class values, why people do or do not buy it, and preferences for how it should be made available.

- More research on the ‘graduation effect’ observed by Kneafsey and Cox et al (2008) to discover the extent of behaviour change consequential from membership of a CSA.
- An action research programme to trace the growth of local food businesses and community based food projects in the north east region and to link these two strands together in pursuit of shared objectives and mutual benefit.
- Action research with policy makers to explore the use of care theory in policy making in the area of agri-food.

4. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

4.1 Doing an action research PhD

The relationship between AR and conventional social science has not always been smooth (chapter 2, 2.3) and although in many respects it has ‘come in from the cold’ (Hall, 2005, p2) and is positively welcomed by some, there remain pockets of resistance. Choosing AR for a PhD is still unusual and therefore it can be isolating at times and provoke anxieties around what exactly a thesis constructed from a community based PAR programme will become. Therefore I am including a few reflections on the experience here.

Documenting AR is by nature autobiographical (Herr and Anderson, 2005) and a narrative account is the favoured style. In a PhD account, authored by the academic researcher alone, it is also important to allow the reader to hear the voices of the co-researchers. I am not sure how successful I have been in achieving this and often wished that I had collected more direct statements from participants. The more structured conversations that were recorded and transcribed, and communications written by participants, were invaluable in this respect. In reality it was a matter of making choices about priorities and balancing the time taken on more detailed data gathering and engaging in the change process itself.

The strength of choosing this approach is that it becomes possible to achieve a measure of real change as part of a PhD programme. It links academic endeavour to everyday lives and embraces the community as an equal partner, thereby achieving engagement and impact through research. Perceived conflicts around initiation and

ownership can be overcome (Klocker, 2012); transparency of method is more important than adherence to theoretical purity. Universities could do more to enable community initiated research by undertaking preliminary consultation with community groups and individuals to discover the issues and questions they are grappling with, and developing research proposals from this work. During the lifetime of this study Newcastle and Durham universities became one of six 'Beacons for Public Engagement', university-based partnerships that are working to support, recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement¹⁰¹. This has raised the profile of participatory research in the region and in particular, the Centre for Social Justice at Durham University, has promoted the practice of PAR¹⁰². In the field of rural development, AR has the potential to open up opportunities for researchers to work with non-academics to forge innovative projects at ground level. Durham University has supported several new AR projects, some of which may impact on rural communities (these can be viewed on the Centre for Social Justice website). It is to be hoped that further AR programmes will be forthcoming, although with the end of the funding available through the Beacon, new sponsors are needed.

If this approach to research is to grow, there will also be a need for more training to be made available in our universities. Undertaking this type of research requires a certain level of maturity, and experience of working within communities and with diverse groups. The 'shadow side' of participatory research needs to be understood if practice is to avoid falling into the trap of becoming manipulative. Consideration also needs to be given to time frames: a three year PhD programme may limit the extent of the action research activities and involvement of the academic researcher who also has to undertake academic reading and writing. The pace of development can be slow and I found that being part-time gave me more flexibility in this regard.

The popularity and practice of AR appears to be associated with the prevailing political and cultural climate (chapter 2, 2.3). I would suggest that the second decade of the 21st century is likely to be a fecund time for AR. The combination of what

¹⁰¹ <http://www.beaconnortheast.org.uk/> Beacon North East runs from January 2008-December 2011

¹⁰² <http://www.dur.ac.uk/beacon/socialjustice/>

Dick (2011) terms “turbulent times” that call for pressing needs to bring change in the fields of environmental sustainability, economic stability, and social and economic justice, and the continuation in political circles of the rhetoric of localism and devolving decision making power to communities, is likely to create demand for more participatory and action research, both within and without universities.

4.1.1 Evaluating the quality and validity of the research

This section asks some questions about process and outcomes and suggests an appropriate means of evaluating the quality and validity of the action research activities. The scholarly debate around this topic is summarised in chapter 2, (5.3), where it is suggested that it is necessary for each researcher to establish some appropriate criteria for their work. Once the research groups had been formed the work was collaborative, both in finding answers to pressing questions (research), making decisions about how to proceed (planning), and in the subsequent reflections on action. Achieving the goals of the participants became the main objective for my role as facilitator, whilst also trying to encourage and nurture open communication, equality of participation, learning, and the capacity to continue in the longer term without my involvement. It was important that I was clear in my thinking about the primary focus of the action research so that I could make decisions about how to proceed when it was just not possible to give equal attention and time to all aspects of the process. Within the wider framework of an ethic of care I could understand my privileging of task and goal achievement, for example, in terms of caring practices whereby the relationship I had with my co-researchers and my commitment to them as equals was the basis of my actions: their priorities became my priority. That the drive to achieve an action outcome can sometimes result in the sacrifice of some measure of rigour in favour of relevance can be considered as an acceptable trade-off (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2003) and “no one action research project can be ‘perfect’ in the sense of responding to all the issues we note. Some concerns are simply more pressing in particular contexts” (Bradbury and Reason, 2001, p344).

In chapter 2 (5.3), I refer to some suggested criteria proposed by authors for assessing quality in AR and in the following paragraphs I use a condensed version of these criteria to apply to this study.

a) Outcome validity

Given the primary objective explained above I begin with the criterion of ‘outcome validity’. There is general agreement amongst AR scholars that the quality of the action is an important criterion and that the views of the participants themselves must be taken into account when evaluating this. As Bradbury and Reason say: “ideally, people’s response to action research work is ‘that worked’ or was ‘helpful’ ” (2001). The evidence for outcome validity lies with the projects themselves and their achievements in becoming established and growing food (see snapshots and addendum) and with the views of participants as expressed at the two independent focus groups, and a reflective meeting at Weardale CSA.

The comments by participants who attended the focus groups for Weardale CSA were mostly about process rather than outcome (see for example, quotations in chapter 4, 3.2 and chapter 5, 2.5). This may be because at this point (November 2009) the future direction of the scheme was not clear and was still focussed on submitting a revised application to the Local Food Grant. Although there were many frustrations caused by delays and unanticipated barriers (as described in chapters 4 and 5) this was not attributed to the action research approach and it was acknowledged that without it, it would have been very unlikely that anything would have happened. At the reflective meeting held in January 2009 the participants spoke positively about their achievements to date in acquiring land, grants and starting to grow food. One participant said:

Main achievements are that it’s actually done something, as in there’s something practically happening on the ground. It does seem to me that I think to have even got this far is quite a big achievement.

Weardale CSA did not achieve their objectives as set out in their Business Plan (appendix vii) because the hoped for funding was not forthcoming. Although this was a huge disappointment for everyone, it also removed the pressure and responsibility of running a larger project and freed up time to spend on the land. It allowed time for reflection and a re-assessment of priorities, resulting in a decision (after my involvement had officially finished) not to reapply for the funding but to proceed with an alternative model (see addendum). This could be interpreted as a

testimony to the learning and habits that had been acquired from participation in the action research reflective cycle that produced an adaptive organisation able to work out an alternative pathway.

Growing Together's comments convey more directly that they were very satisfied with the outcome of the work, despite also facing setbacks, mainly from weather damage. Comments from the focus group include: "it worked for us"; "it's all been very positive"; "before, we wouldn't have thought to do things like that". The focus group facilitators summed up other conversations: "it's now the norm to attract volunteers, people coming in every week want to be a part of it. Getting very busy at times"; and "still room to grow and expand", indicating an intention of continued development.

b) Process validity

In the field of community development, where I have spent most of my professional life, it is a common understanding that process is as important as outcome: how we relate to the people we work with, demonstrating values of respect for all persons and social justice, are defining issues of quality in our work. This is also the case with AR: "because action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living, situational knowledge, in many ways, the process of inquiry is as important as specific outcomes" (Reason, 2006, p198). Process validity is concerned with the quality of the way in which the research was conducted and includes how the involvement of all stakeholders and group members was enabled, how learning was promoted, the quality of relationships, and that the process was allowed to be emergent and developmental. I deal with these aspects in three sections:

Involving all stakeholders

Both projects began with a small number of participants that then expanded over time. My initial conversations with Growing Together were limited to the Centre staff but once they had clarified their thinking about what they wanted to achieve, service users became more involved in planning the project. Outside stakeholders tended to engage on a more informal or task based level so that negotiations with the local College and the District Council, and relationships with other allotment holders,

took place outside of the formal meetings. Exceptions to this were BTCV and Sure Start who were both represented at meetings during the time of their involvement in the project. We were very open to participation of other stakeholders and invited others to join (e.g. Groundwork). That they did not become more involved was due to a shortage of staff time rather than a lack of interest or feeling unwelcome. The ability of outside stakeholders to influence was always going to be limited as long as the project remained within the auspices of the Day Centre and therefore the County Council. The intention for the Centre as a whole to become an inclusive community venue was never realised. Had these ideas been followed through the potential for a wider stakeholder involvement in Growing Together may have emerged and the opportunity for them to become fully independent may have been greater.

As described in chapter 4 (3.2) participants in Weardale were initially located through networking and then by opening access up to the wider community through a public meeting, which drew in people from outside these networks to form the steering group. There was no specific targeting of particular groups (e.g. low income) but the meeting was deliberately organised in a way that tried to be inclusive and to attract all members of the community (e.g. by providing free childcare, a free meal, and an accessible venue). From several (verbal) comments made by some who attended we achieved an unusually good mix of people from different sectors of the community. Outside stakeholders such as land owners, schools, small businesses, councils, and the Soil Association were informed of the project and engaged more proactively when required.

Promoting active involvement of all group members

I placed a high importance on using processes designed to enable all participants to contribute their ideas, skills, knowledge and enthusiasm to the research and action cycle. These processes are detailed in chapter 4 (3). Beginning with building trusting relationships I describe some of the techniques employed and actions that sought to encourage ‘empowerment’ i.e. the animation of the ‘power within’ and the ‘power with’ (Rowlands, 1997) that produces agency to act to bring about change (chapter 6, 4.4).

Learning

“A mark of quality in an action research project is that people will get energised and empowered by being involved, through which they may develop newly useful, reflexive insights as a result of a growing critical consciousness” (Bradbury and Reason, 2001, p344). The research groups were learning groups in that we were all discovering how we could establish a CSA in this particular context. There is much evidence of individual and group learning occurring either from shared knowledge or from experiential learning. The majority of participants had never heard of CSA before becoming involved. Learning took place at specific points such as the visits to existing schemes, training events, and studying for a horticultural qualification. Group members also learned from each other in areas such as growing food, writing funding applications, and writing a business plan. The opportunity to develop new skills and confidence came through taking part in preparing and delivering presentations and setting up a new organisation. Many of these skills will be useful in other settings (and have already been used elsewhere) and should have raised confidence in the possibility of working together to effect change. Learning to use the AR approach and the learning and reflection cycle in problem solving and decision making was arguably the most important learning legacy in that it can change the way we think about problems and setbacks, seeing them more as learning opportunities rather than failures. The reflective session held at Weardale CSA (January 2009) asked what participants had learnt so far from their involvement. Here are some of the responses:

That I need to be well organised to cope with the demands ... that I will have to take on responsibility if needed.

[To] set up and do things properly takes a lot of time and legwork. If we hadn't done this it may cause all sorts of problems in the future.

Learnt about CICs, fundraising, a bit about growing, about checking and double checking when you speak to officials about funding criteria etc.

about agencies – not to write them off when initially they don't look too promising; working as part of a group – relationships are central.

I've learnt a lot about working in a group ... I've learnt about CSA, I'd never heard about CSA before that meeting in September in the School, so I've learnt a lot about that, We went down to the River Swale project, that was interesting, and when Mike Bell came from the US, that was interesting, I learnt about CSAs in the States. And I read a book by Barbara Kingslover, which I really enjoyed, a fantastic book, so I've learnt quite a lot about food generally I think.

Agencies and organisations are only as good as the people working for them.

What you can achieve collectively.

These remarks demonstrate that there was an ongoing process of learning to work together and to communicate with outside agencies and that people were reflecting on their experiences and learning from them.

Conducting action research also results in a constant spiral of learning-by-doing for the academic researcher, both in terms of an inquiring approach to our own practice, including 'reflecting-in-action', and in the wider sense of co-learning with the group as we explored pathways to achieving goals. The main areas of my practical learning were:

- Using PAR gave us all a shared understanding of a systematic approach to exploring the overall question ("How can we do this here?") and the multitude of questions that arose in the course of the process. It helped in a very practical way to cope when things did not turn out as anticipated by always accepting this as an opportunity for learning and re-evaluation of plans.
- My predisposition to trust people can sometimes result in making assumptions about their thinking or intentions and I have learnt to be more conscious of the necessity of questioning and checking what has not been articulated.
- Giving more time to discussing the 'unknowns' at the beginning of a project may be useful to draw into the open the need to be adaptive from the start.
- It supported my thinking about the important role that facilitation can play in animating community action. A facilitator connects assets and acts as a catalyst for change. Assets come in many forms: for example human (e.g. ideas, enthusiasm, skills, knowledge, desire for change, time), physical (e.g. finance,

land), institutional, social, and cultural. All the ingredients for action can be available but if they are not connected, nothing happens.

Emergent and developmental

The importance of the research process being emergent and developmental is linked to all the above points: if it is truly collaborative and if learning is taking place then the form the action takes will only become apparent as a result of the research process. And if it has been empowering, the process should be sustainable without the continued input of the academic researcher. Reason (Reason, 2006, p198) understands emergence to mean “that the questions may change, the relationships may change, the purposes may change, and what is important may change.” The stories of the two projects demonstrate these characteristics and the process is continuing following the end of my involvement.

4.2 Final remarks

Overall, this study demonstrates how community-based PAR enabled community development practice around local food production in disadvantaged rural and semi-rural communities. It successfully established new projects and a small improvement in food democracy, and facilitated learning and empowerment: participation in CSA has demonstrable benefits. The experience was often enjoyable, with warm and supportive relationships; at other times it was difficult, worrying, and stressful. This is action research.

Transferable lessons are mainly to be found in broader issues: the advantages of action research in certain situations, the benefits of facilitated development, the usefulness of participatory techniques backed up by appropriate behaviour, the centrality of ethics and ethical thinking, the potential for CSA to be an agent of change in mobilising community action around food, and an account of what participatory reflexive practice actually looks like. Each PAR project has to forge its own path, it may learn from the ‘traces in the sea’ from what has gone before, but it will be unique and make its own road.

In one sense, this is the end of a long journey. Action research is slow and convoluted, and does not necessarily have clear beginnings and endings. It is not the

end of the story; I am now moving on to the Strategy work that has developed out of this study and the two projects continue to evolve, in their own way still following the action research spiral of inquiry. The end is indeed the beginning.

APPENDIX I

DISCUSSION SCHEDULE FOR EXPLORATORY MEETINGS (WEARDALE)

1. Introduce and explain what I am doing
Action research (CSA in NE England)

- ~ Discovering together
- ~ Changing things for the better
- ~ Plan, act, observe, reflect cycle

2. What are your aims/goals?
What do you want to change and why?

3. CSA – information handout and leaflet. Discuss as a model in relation to point 2.

4. Discuss potential level of involvement:

- ~ Core group
- ~ Growing
- ~ Administration
- ~ Organising social events
- ~ Finance
- ~ Recruiting members
- ~ Publicity
- ~ Education
- ~ ?

5. Next steps:

- ~ Visits
- ~ September 15 event
- ~ Training
- ~ Setting up core group

APPENDIX II

MEMORANDUMS OF AGREEMENT FOR GROWING TOGETHER AND WEARDALE CSA

Memorandum of Agreement

Tindale Community Garden

Tindale Community Garden (TCG) agrees to work in partnership with Liz Charles (LC) as part of an Action Research study about Community Supported Agriculture. This study is being undertaken with the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University for a PhD dissertation. The wider aim of the study is to find out if the CSA model is a useful tool to develop local food projects in the NE that also encourage a closer connection between producers and consumers. The key features of Action Research are the involvement of stakeholders as participants in the research process, and the goal of producing a positive change – in this case the establishment of new CSA projects.

TCG will be acting as co-researchers with LC with the purpose of finding a way forward for the project which meets their stated aims.

TCG will identify what they want to achieve (aims) and will work with LC to decide how best this can be done (objectives).

Memorandum of Agreement

Wolsingham CSA

Wolsingham CSA Steering Group agrees to work in partnership with Liz Charles (LC) as part of an Action Research study about Community Supported Agriculture. This study is being undertaken with the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University for a PhD thesis from 2006 – 2011 (part-time). It is being supported by One NorthEast through a CASE studentship agreement. The wider aim of the study is to find out if the CSA model is a useful tool to develop local food projects in the North East of England that also encourage a closer connection between producers and consumers. The key features of Action Research are the involvement of stakeholders as participants in the research process, and the goal of producing a positive change – in this case the establishment of new CSA projects.

The Steering Group will be acting as co-researchers with LC with the purpose of identifying local priorities and motivations, available resources and an appropriate project model.

The Steering Group will identify what they want to achieve (aims) and will work with LC to decide how best this can be done (objectives).

APPENDIX III

WEARDALE CSA: FIRST STEERING GROUP SKILLS AUDIT OCTOBER 2007

HORTICULTURE	NAMES
Growing	Jennie, Angie, Cathy, Rachael R., Marjorie, Rachael G., Chris (potatoes!), Victoria, Andrew, Geoff
Organic Methods	Marjorie, Rachael G., Victoria
Extended Season	Victoria
Protected	Rachael R., Marjorie, Rachael G., Victoria, Andrew, Geoff
Composting	Angie, Cathy, Rachael R., Beverley, Rachael G., Chris, Victoria
Other	Rachael G. (ecological impact), Chris (irrigation), Victoria (rotations, soil types, companion planting, disease and pest control et al!),
FARMING	
Animal husbandry	(Richard), Angie, Rachael R. (hens), Beverley (hens), Chris, Victoria, Geoff (hens)
Other	Chris
ADMINISTRATION	
Minutes	Jennie, Chris, Victoria,
Computer	Jennie, Angie (vg), Cathy (some), Rachael G., Chris, Tony, Victoria, Andrew, Geoff
Organising Groups	Jennie, Angie, Rachael G., Tony, Victoria, Andrew, Geoff
Organising Events	Jennie (behind scenes), Angie, Cathy (gd), Tony, Victoria, Andrew
Other	Angie, Rachael R. (photography), Rachael G. (paperwork), Chris
FINANCE	
Treasurer	Jennie (w training), Victoria
Accountancy	Victoria
Book-keeping	Angie, Chris, Victoria
Other	Rachael G. (Nat Lott experience),
BUSINESS	
Organisation management	Chris, Tony, Victoria, Christine
Business Plans	Chris, Tony, Victoria (some), Christine
Financial	Chris, Tony, Victoria (some), Christine

People	Cathy, Chris, Victoria (vg), Christine, Geoff
Employment	Chris
Insurance	Chris, Christine
Marketing	Chris, Tony, Victoria, Christine
Other	Angie (TI centre), Chris, Tony (distribution and risk management), Christine

LEGAL

Employment Law	Cathy (some), Chris
Organisational structures	Tony
Leases	Chris
Other	

WORKING WITH GROUPS

Management comm./Trustee	Jennie, Chris, Victoria
Chairing	Jennie, Rachael G., Tony, Andrew
Other	Rachael R. (education, learning disabilities, therapists)

COMMUNICATIONS

Writing	Jennie, Rachael G., Chris, Tony, Andrew
Publicity	Jennie, Rachael G., Chris, Tony, Victoria, Andrew, Christine, Geoff, Louise (photography)
Design	Jennie, Rachael R. (husband artist), Chris, Tony, Andrew, Geoff, Louise (leaflet design)
Public Speaking	Jennie, Rachael G., Chris, Tony, Andrew
Other	Tony (photography), Andrew (networking, motivating)

PRACTICAL

DIY	Angie, Rachael G., Chris, Andrew, Geoff, Louise
Countryside	Jennie (hedges), Angie, Rachael G. (fencing), Chris, Victoria (hedges, ponds), Geoff
Cooking	Angie, Rachael R., Beverley, Marjorie, Rachael G., Chris, Tony, Andrew, Christine
Making preserves	Rachael R., Beverley, Marjorie, Rachael G., Andrew
Other	Angie (any outdoors), Cathy (medical), Beverley (delivering boxes, photography, learn other), Andrew (photography),

What do you do best?

Andrew – communication and motivation; practical, hands-on; developing vision and putting into reality by working with groups.

Tony – marketing and distribution, communications, project management.

Chris – farming, finance, business skills.

Rachael G. - organising things, growing veg, computer skills.

Marjorie – cooking, making preserves, gardening.

Beverley – cooking, preserves, hard physical labour.

Rachael R. – working with people with learning disabilities.

Jennie – encouraging and valuing other people

Christine – marketing, communication (business meetings), business set up

Geoff – making in wood/metal; pest control; school links

Louise - Photography and Design, General DIY/manual labour

What skills would you like to improve on or learn?

Andrew – veg growing, developing schools liaison, developing competence in supporting users and volunteers, understanding dynamics of rural economy.

Tony – understanding horticulture and farming.

Chris - horticulture, publicity.

Rachael G. – planning growing veg on larger scale, business skills.

Beverley – growing skills, organic methods.

Rachael R. – organic growing and crop rotation

Angie – horticultural knowledge

Jennie – horticulture, finance

Christine – organic growing methods for veg.

APPENDIX IV

QUESTIONS USED FOR REFLECTIVE EVENING JANUARY

16TH 2009 : “LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK”

Using ‘ORID’ model: Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, Decision.

1. OBJECTIVE (facts, data, senses)

- a. Why did you get involved?
- b. What are the main achievements of Weardale CSA to date?
- c. What do you remember as being the most significant events?
- d. What have you been involved in doing, how has most of your time been spent?

2. REFLECTIVE (feelings, moods, hunches)

- a. How did you respond to the idea of setting up a CSA?
- b. Were you surprised at any time? (explain)
- c. Were you worried at any time? (explain)
- d. Have you felt angered/elated/curious/confused/depressed by anything? (explain)
- e. What has been the high spot?
- f. What has been the low spot?

3. INTERPRETIVE (critical thinking – so what?)

- a. What have you learnt from your involvement so far? (e.g. about developing a project, working as part of a group, about CSA/local food etc, about agencies, organisations and individuals who can help, about local resources)
- b. Is there a key insight you have gained?
- c. What is the most meaningful aspect of this activity from your point of view?

- d. Do you relate what you are doing to any other activities, models, concepts, theories you know about?

4. DECISION (now what?)

- a. What will you do differently in future? (What didn't work?)
- b. Has involvement with the CSA changed your thinking in any way?
- c. What lessons or advice would you give to others attempting similar activities?
- d. Is there anything you would like to change in this coming year in the way the CSA is developing?
- e. Is there anything you would like to change in this coming year in the way the Steering Group operates?

FEEDBACK ON THE PROCESS

- 1. Are there any questions you would remove/add?
- 2. Did the questions help you to remember how you think and feel about what has happened so far?
- 3. Any other comments?

APPENDIX V

GROWING TOGETHER MEMBERSHIP LEAFLET

<p style="text-align: center;">MEMBERSHIP</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This is how it works</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You pay an annual Membership Fee of £5/year (payable in March each year).• You can be a Working Member and help in the gardens on a regular basis, or• You can be an Ordinary Member and just receive a share in the produce in the form of a box of Veg & Fruit, as available.• You can also support the garden by becoming an Associate Member and get involved or not as you choose (but not receive a box).• Boxes are priced dependent on size and can be collected from the Centre on Fridays between 4pm-6pm (winter)/7pm (summer) or Saturdays between 8am-12pm.• Working Members receive a free box for 8 hours/week work in the garden, & a half price box for 4 hours/week work. Times can be arranged by discussion with Andy or Dave – if you can be flexible so can we!• No previous gardening experience is needed – you will be shown what to do & how to do it.	<p style="text-align: center;">Don't fancy getting your hands dirty but would like to help anyway?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">There's lots of other things to help with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publicity & newsletters• Leaflet distribution• Keeping records, sending out mail• organising trips out / social	<p style="text-align: right;"></p> <div style="text-align: center;"></div> <p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;">For more information please contact:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dave Adlam 07766 726374 Andy Moore 07786 027132</p>
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A BRIEF HISTORY

The garden started out as one allotment plot in the 1990s. It was attached to the Aucklandgate Centre and provided training opportunities for people with a learning disability.

By 2000 5 plots were being cultivated and in 2003 Sure Start also began to use the site. People involved in the garden wanted it to develop into a real community resource open to all and benefiting everyone.

In 2006 a new committee was formed and Tindale Community Supported Allotment Gardens was set up with the full backing and agreement from Wear Valley District Council. Growing Together is about growing food together, growing friendships, knowing who grows your food and how, enjoying the flavours of freshly picked produce, and growing a connection to the land that feeds you.



.WHO ARE WE?

•Growing Together (official name "Tindale Community Supported Allotments") is an independent community group working in partnership with other organisations and the local community to:

- grow and supply fresh, 'home grown' vegetables and fruit for members
- promote healthy communities through access to fresh local produce, exercise, leisure activities, training and education.



THIS IS HOW WE WORK

- Active involvement will be encouraged at all levels
- Transparency
- Re-connecting people with the earth and with their food
- Naturally grown produce
- Learning for everyone
- Building community spirit
- Having fun

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN US?

GROWING TOGETHER – Local Food for Local People

- Do you want affordable 'fresh from the garden' vegetables and fruit with that 'home-grown' taste?
- Would you like to know who has grown your food & how, & where it has come from?
- If the answer is 'Yes' you can join us by filling in a membership form available with this leaflet*.

• The number of boxes we can supply is limited so we may have to start a waiting list. Priority will be given to Working Members this year as we need all the help we can get, but there will be places for Ordinary Members too. Growing Together is all about working together and everyone is welcome here.

•THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WE WORK WITH

•Local Schools & college

•Sure Start

- *If there is no membership form with this leaflet please contact Andy or Dave.

APPENDIX VI

GROWING TOGETHER BUSINESS PLAN (2008)

**TINDALE COMMUNITY
SUPPORTED ALLOTMENT
GARDENS**

Business Plan

2008



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BACKGROUND

Tindale Community Supported Allotment Gardens (working name “Growing Together”) grew out of a gardening group based at the Aucklandgate Day Centre for adults with learning disabilities in Bishop Auckland. This group was set up in 1999 using land on an adjacent allotment site owned by Wear Valley District Council. In 2003 a partnership was formed with the local Sure Start group and children and their carers became involved. Groundwork West Durham also helped through an intermediate labour market project whereby raised beds, fencing and a paved area were built on the site. A grant was also obtained to erect a shed. The project was named Tindale Community Gardens and was officially opened in August 2003. This partnership initially thrived and was featured in a TV documentary about community projects. However, as personnel changed the involvement of Sure Start declined and the garden reverted to being a project of the Day Centre.

In November 2005 Ceri Gibson joined BTCV North Pennines as the first Green Gym Project Officer for the region. Her role was to set up a series of pilot Green Gyms. BTCV do not own land and so she identified the Community Gardens as a great site to use. The enthusiastic gardening group were already well established and the idea for the Green Gym was to link the work they are doing in the garden to exercise as well as introducing other members of the community to the site. Ceri has now left but the Green Gym continues to run under the leadership of staff from the centre that has been trained by BTCV.

In mid 2006 the group were introduced to the idea of community supported agriculture (CSA) by a researcher from the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University. This model fitted well with the aspirations of those running the gardens to broaden the project out to include the surrounding community, and to become an independent organisation. Meetings of a steering group began in February 2006 to further this aim.

Community Supported Agriculture

This is a term originating in the USA and adopted by the Soil Association (UK) to refer to situations where “the responsibilities and rewards of farming are shared” (Soil Association, 2004). The size of the enterprise is not important and ‘farming’ can be better expressed as ‘growing’ in this instance. The essential feature of a CSA model is that the relationship between those who produce food and those who consume it is far more than an economic one, and usually involves a form of membership arrangement. Consumers are frequently involved in many aspects of the project including planning, helping with production, and organising social events. Most, if not all, CSA initiatives adopt organic or low-input methods of production and are keenly aware of environmental impacts.

AIMS and OBJECTIVES

The Constitution describes the Aims of the organisation as:

To work in partnership with other organisations and the local community to improve the quality of life for local people through:

- i. the production and sale of local ‘home grown’ food and horticultural products involving participation of the community;

- ii. the promotion of healthy lifestyles and citizenship through diet, exercise, training and education, leisure, and inclusion.

These will be achieved by

- i. developing a weekly box scheme for seasonal vegetables and fruit for members of the CSA
- ii. encouraging local residents to become members and to be actively involved
- iii. using excess produce to make preserves to be included in the offer in the box scheme
- iv. partnership with BTCV Green Gym
- v. developing partnerships with local schools, colleges, and health providers to promote healthy lifestyles.

VALUES and PRINCIPLES

Values are very important to Growing Together. Adults with learning disabilities will continue to play a central role in the running of the garden. The plans for integration into the wider community fit well with the Government's Valuing People programme which is all about rights, choice, independence and inclusion. A set of values and principles agreed by the Steering Group are:

- ◆ Active involvement will be encouraged at all levels
- ◆ Transparency
- ◆ Re-connecting people with the earth and with their food
- ◆ Naturally grown produce
- ◆ Learning for everyone
- ◆ Building community spirit
- ◆ Having fun

THE STORY SO FAR

The early meetings of the steering group developed ideas and agreement about the goals and purpose of any new organisation. Agreement from Durham County Council (who runs the Day Centre) to form an independent organisation was obtained. Discussions were also held with Wear Valley District Council and in September 2006 a Report to the Community Services Committee gave approval to the formation of a 'non-profit making organisation providing fresh fruit and vegetables to its members' using the existing allotment plots. The Council has subsequently designated several additional allotment plots to the project.

The way was now clear to form the new organisation and following an inclusive group process the Constitution was finally completed and adopted in December 2006, together with the formation of a Management Committee.

In the meantime, visits were made to two other projects to learn from the experience of similar schemes. Kettering CSA ("The Green Patch") operates in a similar environment on 21 former allotment plots situated adjacent to an estate not dissimilar to the neighbouring estates in Bishop Auckland. Cookes West Farm at Broompark, Co Durham was the first CSA to become established in Co Durham. These visits proved very helpful in providing information about operating a box scheme and contact will be maintained with both groups.

In British Food Fortnight 2006 an open day was held at the allotment site including an 'Ugly Veg' competition which was reported in the local press. During 2007 80 boxes of vegetables were grown for members and some produce was also used for the Open Day in September and for 'tasters' for Sure Start and children, and students from Bishop Auckland College.

This Plan sets out the budget, membership arrangements, marketing, and the growing plan for the second year of operation.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is open to all individuals who support the aims of Growing Together and pay the annual subscription. Group membership is also available.

There are three categories of individual membership:

Working Members: those who want to help with the growing of produce. These members will receive a reduction in the price of their box, or a free box, depending on the number of hours worked.

Ordinary Members: pay the full price for their box and have no commitment to work a certain number of hours in the garden.

Associate Members: pay the annual subscription but are not eligible to take part in the box scheme. They can be on a waiting list for the scheme if they want to be. They can become involved in other aspects of Growing Together such as organising social events, open days etc.

At present priority will be given to Working Members. Initially there will be a maximum of 25 members who are eligible to take part in the box scheme. This figure may be increased later in the season depending on crop yields.

PARTNERS

BTCV Green Gym®

BTCV has 40 years of experience in working with volunteers to deliver practical courses and activities relating to conservation of the environment. Ten years ago a GP identified a need to prescribe fresh air, exercise and healthy eating rather than medication. BTCV started working with the GP to deliver Green Gyms. Green Gyms North Pennines now offer volunteers the opportunity to work out in the fresh air reaping the rewards of community spirit, team work and improved health. Several Green Gym volunteers work each week at the allotments.

Bishop Auckland College

Essential Skills students visited the allotments as part of their horticulture enterprise. As a result, 12 students (accompanied by 3 support assistants) have a weekly placement at the allotment. The students have developed their gardening skills and knowledge of the production and benefits of local food and look forward to their visits.

Local Schools

Two local schools and nursery have expressed an interest in the gardens and discussions are taking place with them about how they could become involved.

Sure Start

Sure Start organise a variety of regular sessions for children and parents at the gardens. They are also involved with the Woodhouse Close Arts Festival Week in February '08, where there are several workshops planned to take place at the gardens.

Sure Start has worked closely with the community garden project for a number of years now. Sure Start takes under 5's and their parents/carers to the garden frequently. The garden is a welcome resource to Sure Start as, by using the garden, we are promoting children's development. Children can take part in different activities and learn new skills, we dig for worms, plant flowers and look around the garden to see what has been planted and what is growing. This can promote a child's knowledge and understanding of the world and it also promotes holistic development, the children are able to touch and feel the soil.

The children also benefit by being out in the fresh air and interacting with their parents/carers and there is always a warm welcome whenever we go to the garden. We hope to continue these activities at the garden In the future, it is a very important resource to Sure Start, the children and their parents/carers.

Groundwork West Durham

Groundwork Trust West Durham has been contacted and has attended a couple of meetings. They support the project in principle and contact is being maintained in order that any opportunities for support can be identified.

Primary Care Trust (PCT)

Due to the reconfiguration of PCTs in Co Durham discussions were not progressed in 2007. A fresh approach will be made in 2008 to explore potential partnership working.

FINANCE - WISH LIST 2008	£
2 Wheeled Blec Tractor	3000
Publicity materials and promotional events	1000
Timber for raised beds and fencing	700
Tools and personal protective equipment	800
Polytunnel covers	250
Irrigation system	240
Green Gym membership + Federation of City Farms and Gardens membership	205
Seeds, Onion +Potato sets	200
Topsoil for raised beds	400
Organic fertiliser/ manure	200
Camera +Printer for publicity	200

Hose and trolley	150
Compost	200
Hardcore for paths + raised beds	200
Water containers	100
Salad bags	60
Metal propagating tables	50
Paper bags	30
TOTAL	£7985

GRANTS SECURED

Groundwork West Durham – Donation of £1400 Steel Security Container for equipment.

Scarman Trust Community Champions Fund - £2000 being used to establish organic fruit garden.

Wear Valley District Council community fund - £300 to go towards timber fencing.

MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION

A general information leaflet will be used to promote the scheme with local groups and individuals.

Open days will be held at intervals throughout the year.

Boxes will be available in 2 sizes (small and large) and will be priced at a comparable rate to supermarket non-organic produce.

Produce will be harvested and packed on Fridays and members will be able to collect their boxes on Friday evenings between 4 – 6pm (winter) and 4 – 7pm (summer) or on Saturdays between 8am – 12pm.

INSURANCE

See attached copies for evidence of public, employees and product liability insurance.

GROWING PLAN

See attached plan.

PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE ADULTS POLICY

See attached policy.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

See attached policy.

APPENDIX VII

WEARDALE CSA BUSINESS PLAN

Weardale CSA

Community Interest Company

6597038

Business Plan

sustainably producing and selling
healthy, naturally grown food to the
local community

November 2008

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CONTACT DETAILS

Name of company: Weardale CSA

Address: c/o 4 Park Terrace, Tow Law, Bishop Auckland DL13 4NQ

Directors: Andrew Cromarty, Tony Devos, Victoria Routledge, Louise Taylor (Company Secretary), Angie Turnbull

Legal Status: Community Interest Company Co-op (limited by Shares)

Company registration number: 6597038

1. Executive Summary

Weardale CSA Community Interest Company will sustainably produce and sell healthy, naturally grown food to the local community. We will enable local people to re-connect with growing food by creating inclusive opportunities to take part in and learn about all aspects of food production, and promote the involvement of people who could benefit therapeutically.

Over the next 10 years we aim to provide a full range of foods from Weardale (including vegetables, fruits, herbs, meat, poultry and dairy) through our own production and by linking the CSA with a range of partners (including local farmers). Along with our members we aim to supply local schools, care homes and retailers. Provision of employment opportunities within our rurally isolated area is also a key aim of our work and it's intended that growers and other employed labour are all from the local area. It is intended that the membership of Weardale CSA is grown to 250 individuals and 10 organisations / businesses within this period also.

Producing food now takes place within a complex, globalised food system involving many stages between 'field and fork'. The connections between farmers and their local communities in terms of direct trade have largely been lost, with many farms specialising in large scale production of particular crops or produce.

Community Supported Agriculture schemes, or CSA's, provide an opportunity for people to take more control over their food supply, to reconnect with the land and the food on their table, to learn about food production and to develop new skills. They provide a source of local, sustainably grown, fresh produce and contribute to revitalising a local food economy.

Weardale CSA is a Community Interest Company Co-operative limited by Shares. The co-operative model was chosen because the values of this movement fitted well with the Principles and Values agreed by the Steering Group. A CIC provides the legal basis for a social enterprise with an asset lock that prevents any of the individual members or directors benefiting financially. Choosing the Share option means those individuals who wish to support the business can do so by longer-term investment.

Throughout the development of the CSA from its project stages to the legal entity, the company has been assisted ably by other partners with an interest in employment and enterprise, regeneration, health and healthy eating and disadvantage in the local area, including:

- Centre For Rural Economy, Newcastle University
- Wear Valley District Council
- Wear Valley and Teesdale Enterprise Agency
- Business Link North East
- 2d – Council For Voluntary Service
- Stroud Community Agriculture
- Soil Association
- Local Partners

The board of Weardale CSA realise that the support of the above bodies is a key strength of the business, ensuring that it always has multi-agency support as well as good links to organisations that can guide the business towards sustainable income streams.

2. Background Information

a) Community Supported Agriculture

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a generic term, originating in the USA and adopted by the Soil Association in the UK, to describe a model of food production based on a close partnership between consumers and producers. It originated in several countries around the world from the 1960s onwards and has various names and numerous forms. The common underlying feature is the nature of the relationship between consumers and producers: a partnership where the risks and rewards of producing food are shared. Members are committed to purchasing a 'share of the harvest' each season from a particular producer (or group of producers) and often pay for this partly or fully in advance.

CSAs take many forms but they are often concerned with wider issues beyond that of producing food. So, for example, they may include social events for members, educational activities, and health related activities. They are also usually founded on strong environmental principles of sustainability. Most CSAs grow food in the tradition of the organic movement, although they may not be officially registered as members are fully aware and involved in the business and therefore do not need a formal certification procedure.

CSAs provide an opportunity for people to take more control over their food supply, to reconnect with the land and the food on their table, to learn about food production and develop new skills. They provide a source of local sustainably grown, fresh produce and contribute to revitalising a local food economy.

b) The need

Producing food now takes place in a complex, globalised food system involving many stages between 'field and fork'. The connections between farmers and their local communities in terms of direct trade have largely been lost, with many farms specialising in large scale production of particular crops or produce. Whilst this may have brought some benefits many people are now becoming concerned about some of the dis-benefits. This is reflected in debates about 'food-miles', environmental damage caused by intensive farming, loss of family/small farms (and related landscape and social consequences), questions about the quality of food that needs to have a long shelf life, the dependence of agriculture on oil, and concerns raised from recent health scares such as BSE that have caused some people to want more information about where their food is coming from and exactly how it is produced. There is a growing interest in finding ways of reconnecting consumers and producers and CSA is probably the model which does this most thoroughly.

c) History

A researcher from the Centre for Rural Economy at Newcastle University is undertaking action research into CSA in the NE of England. When she approached some local residents in Wolsingham she discovered a number of people who already had aspirations to develop a local food scheme and who responded with great enthusiasm to the idea of CSA. A small group was formed and they worked together during 2007 to spread the word and ascertain what the demand for such a scheme might be. This culminated in a half-day Workshop on 15th September at Wolsingham College supported by Wear Valley and Teesdale Enterprise Agency. This event was attended by 60 local people who were able both to learn about the proposed scheme and also to input their own views and ideas.

A Steering Group was established following this event and they have been meeting since October 2007 to determine the details of the scheme and how it should operate. This Business Plan is the culmination of this developmental work.

3. The Vision

a) Aims and Objectives

Aims

To sustainably produce and sell healthy, naturally grown food to the local community. To enable local people to re-connect with growing food by creating inclusive opportunities to take part in and learn about all aspects of food production, and to promote the involvement of people who could benefit therapeutically.

Objectives

Pre Project Year ('08 – March '09)

- Agree the legal framework for the organisation and complete registration.
- To carry out such assessments deemed necessary on the proposed plot of land and to draw up an agreement with the land owner.
- To identify resources and plantings required for the first year.
- To identify and raise the necessary start-up money from both the membership and other funders.

Year 1 ('09 – '10)

- To attempt to farm the land leased in a way that maximises the sustainability of the soil's natural fertility.
- To be supplying 25 food shares to members.
- To start providing:
 - Good quality vegetables and herbs for consumption by the initial members and for sale at Bradley Burn Farm shop [as part of their share of the crop] in 2009.
 - Fresh, natural, food, free of chemical pollutants.
 - Food picked, packed and collected on a weekly basis reducing food miles
- To reconnect members of the Weardale CSA with the land by offering volunteering opportunities, information bulletins, website updates and events.
- To engage a grower by June 2009.
- To develop partnership working with education providers, Museums Live (cultural volunteering), and other potential partners.
- To source funding to commission consultancy to develop business case for negotiating a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the PCT for introducing therapeutic opportunities.

Year 2 ('10 – '11)

- To widen the range of foods produced to include more vegetables, herbs and fruits as well as preserved foods.
- To increase the membership of Weardale CSA to provide 40 food shares.
- To produce business case for PCT and to instigate negotiations for a SLA.
- To further develop opportunities for partnership working.

Year 3 ('11 – '12)

- To increase the membership of Weardale CSA to provide 63 food shares.
- To secure SLA with PCT.

- To become financially sustainable.

Years 4 – 10

- To provide:
 - A full range of foods from Weardale (vegetables, fruits, herbs, meat, poultry, dairy etc) by linking the Weardale CSA with a range of local farmers.
 - Local schools, care homes and retailers (food and hospitality) with local natural, unsprayed food.
- To increase the membership of the Weardale CSA to 250 individuals and 10 organisations / businesses by 2015.

b) Social benefits

The business will create opportunities for developing new skills and networks through the experience of running a locally based social enterprise and through the opportunities for practical involvement in growing and other aspects of the scheme. Some members will simply purchase a share of the harvest whilst others may become involved with social or educational events. There will be benefits to specific sectors of the community as the scheme develops and opportunities are able to be offered to, for example, people recovering from mental health problems. The wider rural community will benefit in the longer term as the CSA expands to include other producers.

c) Principles and Values

- We will attempt to make the experience fun, fostering community spirit and reconnecting local people with food production.
- We aim to be accessible to all irrespective of their circumstances.
- Decision making will be transparent, with any member able to express an opinion. Wherever possible we will seek to achieve consensus.
- We will work within a spirit of cooperation, in a mutually supportive no-blame culture.
- To support Weardale's local economy while creating a pleasurable and co-operative working environment with a fair return to all involved.
- We will aim to produce a diverse harvest of fresh, high quality food.
- We will agree the value of shares [or any other agreed measure] in advance, accepting that value when the food is produced.
- We will maintain an appropriate membership to fit the anticipated level of food production.
- We will minimise our negative environmental impact, ensuring that the scale of growing is sustainable.

- The food we produce will complement existing provision, ensuring that the local economy benefits.
- If we need to supplement our own produce with out-sourced food from similarly-minded growers, the following order of preference should be applied:
 1. From the UK (as local as possible).
 2. From within Europe.
- We intend to develop ‘best practice’ and will share our expertise, experiences and information with anyone who wishes to find out more.

d) Legal Status

Weardale CSA is a Community Interest Company Co-operative limited by Shares. The co-operative model was chosen because the values of this movement fitted well with the Principles and Values agreed by the Steering Group. A CIC provides the legal basis for a social enterprise with an asset lock that prevents any of the individual members or directors benefiting financially. Choosing the Share option means that individuals who wish to support the business can do so by long-term investment.

4. What we do

a) A typical week/month

Weardale CSA will produce sustainably grown produce and distribute a share of the harvest weekly during the productive season to members. Any surplus produce will be sold to local businesses such as Weardale Coeliac’s Choice. A part-time employed grower/manager will be supported by volunteers both from the membership and other sources (e.g. Cultural volunteer programme, school pupils). The activities that might take place in a typical week and month are explained in boxes 1 and 2.

Box 1: A typical week at Weardale CSA

Monday: Grower working on land at Frosterley all day. Volunteers working on production of a Newsletter and recipe suggestions to include with this week’s food share. In the evening there is a meeting of the Board of Directors and Steering Group to consider monitoring report from the grower and receive Treasurer’s quarterly report.

Tuesday: School party is on site supervised by teaching staff having agreed activities with Grower the previous week.

Wednesday: No activity.

Thursday: Grower works half day harvesting food for this week’s food share helped by 2 volunteers.

Friday: Grower works half day and members collect and weigh food shares. Volunteers take some shares to drop off points in villages for collection.

Saturday: Today is a volunteer work day at Stanhope garden. Grower works half day instructing volunteers about what needs doing and supervising work. 12 volunteers come and help at various times during the day.

Box 2: A typical month at Weardale CSA

A typical summer month might consist of the following:

- a) Usual round of daily growing and harvesting activities.**
- b) During school term, primary school visits once per week.**
- c) During school term, day placements for secondary school students.**
- d) Monthly meeting of the CSA Board, and additional task-group meetings on key areas of development.**
- e) A workday for Cultural Volunteering programme volunteers.**
- f) Saturday volunteers work day, followed by an evening social, for all members of the CSA, with barbecue.**
- g) Cooking workshop, to make jams and chutneys, for inclusion in weekly box, as an optional extra.**
- h) Evening horticulture teaching event, led by the grower and other CSA members.**
- i) Group visit to another CSA or organic growing project, to widen horizons.**

b) Membership

As a Co-operative the company is owned by the members. Membership is explained in the membership application pack information sheet (*Appendix 4*). Membership will initially be drawn from existing volunteers and those who completed an Expression of Interest form (*Appendix 5*) at (or after) the Workshop event. Additional members will be recruited through word of mouth, a website, the local press (Weardale Gazette), and local advertising and events. Expectations for membership numbers are:

Year 1 (April 09 – March 10):	25
Year 2 :	40
Year 3 :	63

c) Food Shares

Members will sign up for a share of the harvest (a food share) at the beginning of the season and will be expected to sign up for a minimum of one season. Payment will be made monthly or quarterly in advance. The cost of one share in the first year will be £25/month (including a minimum of 48 hours volunteer growing) or £31.25/month.

5. Market Research

A feasibility study investigating the potential for CSA in Wear Valley was conducted as part of an MSc in rural development in 2005.¹⁰³ This study concluded that there would be sufficient demand and support for a CSA project in the area.

The bulk of the membership of the CSA will come from the residents of Weardale as it is the intention to produce 'local food for local people'. The Dale stretches from Tow Law in the east to Cowshill and the Cumbrian border in the west. The total population of the 3 Wards of St John's Chapel, Stanhope and Tow Law is 6,759¹⁰⁴. The population is concentrated in the 3 main settlements of Stanhope, Wolsingham and Tow Law, with numerous small settlements along the valley.

Wear Valley District was ranked 32nd out of 354 local authority areas in England in the 2004 indices of multiple deprivation. It is the most deprived rural district in England and has significant levels of deprivation across the income, employment, crime, education and health domains (Brindle, 2004)¹⁰⁵.

Apart from potatoes grown at Bradley Burn Farm, the only vegetables and fruit grown in Weardale are in allotments and private gardens. From the response received at the Workshop event (see below) and from conversations held by Steering Group members with local people, we are satisfied that there is a strong demand for our products and an enthusiasm for the CSA model with its emphasis on community building and co-operation.

a) Workshops

In September 2007 a public Workshop event was held at Wolsingham School and Community College with the purpose of a) informing the local community about CSA and the plans being discussed to establish an initiative in Weardale, b) finding out the level of demand and support in the local area and c) involving a wider number of local people in developing ideas for the project. The Programme for this event can be seen in *Appendix 6*. A total of 50+ local people attended the event and at the end of the day there were 30 people who said they wanted to become members, 27 of whom were interested in helping with growing and 21 in offering other help. In addition 19 other people had either given apologies beforehand or booked and were unable to attend on the day. These people (and others) were subsequently written to and are being kept informed.

¹⁰³ Charles, L. (2005) *Community Supported Agriculture: fertile soil in Wear Valley?* Newcastle university MSc dissertation, unpublished

¹⁰⁴ ONS, 2001 Census

¹⁰⁵ Brindle, J. (2004) *Deprivation in Wear Valley: The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 and what it means for us*. Presentation to the 2004 Wear Valley LSP Conference, Bishop Auckland

b) Members

At the time of writing, in addition to the 10 local people on the Steering Group and Board of Directors, there are 30 people on a list of potential members and another 18 on a list of people who wish to be kept informed of progress.

c) Partners

(Bradley Burn Shop, Weardale Coeliac's Choice, 2 Schools)

Bradley Burn Farm Shop at Wolsingham has been an active partner in the development of the scheme and will initially purchase 10 food shares. Discussions have taken place with Weardale Coeliac's Choice¹⁰⁶ (a small local business making soup and other products) and an arrangement to sell surplus produce to them will be explored in further detail when the business is up and running. Other ways of working in partnership with this local company are also being explored. Discussions have also been held with the local schools about working together.

d) Suppliers

Food shares will come primarily from food produced by the CSA except for potatoes, which will be supplied by Bradley Burn Farm, and carrots, which will be supplied by Nafferton (organic) farm. In addition, when there is insufficient produce (e.g. during the 'hungry gap' from around March – June) shares will be supplemented by additional produce brought in from Nafferton Farm (see *Appendix 7* for suppliers' prices).

e) Potential competitors

There are currently no other CSAs in the locality. There are a number of vegetable box schemes that deliver in the area but they do not offer the same degree of connection with the producer nor do they offer food 'grown in Weardale'. A mobile fruit and vegetable van comes to Wolsingham (bi-weekly) but is unlikely to appeal to the same customer base as it does not promote local or organically grown food. The arrival of the Big Lottery 'Local Food' grant in the Spring of 2008, whilst being an ideal potential source of funding for this initiative, may also result in other schemes being set up. However, the very local focus of CSA means that customer loyalty should be strong.

f) Other local projects

The Harehope Quarry Project is currently developing its local food offer with primary school children. The quarry is adjacent to the field that we are growing in. We are ensuring there is a regular dialogue between the two projects to ensure that we co-operate rather than compete.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.weardaleglutenfree.co.uk/>)

6. Marketing

We have used a number of methods to advertise our plans so far:

- Word of mouth – this is important in a community based project and will continue to be a key method in our marketing strategy. It has produced excellent results so far, with many of the people involved having first been contacted personally by someone.
- Local press – the Weardale Gazette is a popular local paper and has already run a number of articles about the CSA. We will continue to use this medium for maintaining awareness and seeking new members and volunteers when needed.
- Posters – we have used posters to advertise public meetings and will continue to do so.

In addition to these methods we will also:

- Produce a Leaflet – we intend to produce a leaflet introducing Weardale CSA that can be distributed in community venues and used at events.
- Develop a website – we have been offered help from the Enterprise Agency to develop our own website. Prior to this the Agency has included information about us on its own website.
- Social events – we will hold social events for members. Some of these will also be open to friends or to the whole community.

We are aware that our members (customers) will have varying needs and preferences and we aim to be flexible in meeting the needs of e.g. different sized households, differing ability to collect food shares, different motivations for joining and becoming involved.

7. Human Resources

a) Board of Directors

The current Board of Directors is made up of individuals with a wide range of skills and experiences, providing direction both strategically as well as operationally. They are supported by a number of other members who together form the Steering Group. Details of Directors and Steering Group members can be found in *Appendix 2*.

In order to provide more focussed activity on day to day issues, the Board has formed a number of Sub-Groups, the nature and make-up of which is continuously developing:

i) Growing and Land Issues

Deals with Lease arrangements and relationship with landowner
Plans what shall be grown and how
Co-ordinates volunteer activity

ii) Fundraising

Submission of funding applications

iii) Administration

Business Planning
Financial monitoring
Production of Reports

iv) Communications

Production of quarterly newsletter and other communications with members
Website production and maintenance
Publicity

b) Employees

A part-time Grower/Manager will be employed from Spring 2009. The draft Job Description and Person Specification can be seen in *Appendix 3*.

c) Volunteers

Members will help with growing on a regular or occasional basis. Members who cannot contribute a minimum of 48 hours/year will pay a surcharge for their food share. Some members will get involved in other ways such as organising a social event, contributing to the newsletter, or producing recipes.

Year 1: 19 individuals helping as volunteers

Year 2: 30 individuals helping as volunteers

Year 3: 47 individuals helping as volunteers

d) Partners

Throughout the development of the CSA from its project stages to the legal entity, the company has been assisted ably by other partners with an interest in employment and enterprise, regeneration, health and healthy eating and disadvantage in the local area, including:

Centre for Rural Economy, Newcastle University

A PhD student drew local people together to investigate the potential for starting a CSA in Weardale as part of an action research programme. Ongoing support through facilitation, linking to outsider resources and providing relevant information has continued.

WEAR VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Officers from the regeneration department have given advice on sources of small start up funding enabling costs of Workshop event, incorporation, legal fees, insurances, and a contribution towards cost of fencing to be met.

WEAR VALLEY and TEESDALE ENTERPRISE AGENCY

Helped to apply for above funds (which they administer) and with planning, publicity and marketing for the Workshop event (September 2007). Helped source funding for Business Link advisor.

BUSINESS LINK NORTH EAST

Advisor provided help with deciding a legal structure, incorporation, and producing a Business Plan.

2D – COUNCIL FOR VOLUNTARY SERVICE

Provided small grant for learning materials and will signpost volunteers.

STROUD COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE

Advised and assisted with running of Workshop event (September 2007).

SOIL ASSOCIATION

Local representative attended Workshop event and provides information about CSA network and events.

ABUNDANT EARTH

Ran a workshop sharing experience of running a CSA for event in September 2007. Provides ongoing advice as required.

WEARDALE COELIAC'S CHOICE

Producer of local and organic soup. Wants to purchase surplus produce when available for the local soup brand. Would like to supply the CSA with vegetable peelings to compost.

BRADLEY BURN FARM SHOP

Opened in 2007 with an emphasis on selling locally produced food. Provides venue (no charge) for Steering Group meetings. Supplies manure and will supply locally grown potatoes to members to add to their food shares. Will commit to purchasing an initial 10 food shares.

WOLSINGHAM SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This partnership will develop as the CSA starts producing food. The school has visited the (Frosterley) site and is keen for pupils to be involved on site as part of their curriculum.

The board of Weardale CSA realise that the support of the above bodies is a key strength of the business, ensuring that it always has multi-agency support as well as good links to organisations that can guide the business towards sustainable income streams.

DURHAM PCT

Interested in the plans of the CSA to involve people recovering from mental health problems. Given advice as to how to prepare for this development by employing the services of a suitably qualified consultant to help the Steering Group to produce a sound business plan and policies for this work.

GROWING TOGETHER

A small allotment based CSA working with people with learning difficulties in Bishop Auckland. Shared a stand at one of the Agricultural Shows when promoting the Workshop event and shared experiences and advice.

BEAMISH MUSEUM

Have agreed to bring their heavy horses on to the Frosterley site to plough the land.

Museums Live! West Durham Cultural Volunteering Programme

Are interested in the CSA as a site for volunteering. This should result in regular input from a group of volunteers.

8. Land

a) Frosterley

The land to be farmed comprises approximately three acres (1.2 Ha), situated at the eastern extremity of the village of Frosterley, three miles west of Wolsingham. Historically used for pasture, the land belongs to the quarrying company, 'Sherburn Stone', and was last grazed in 2007. The soil, consistently 30-40cm deep, has been fully analysed for possible contaminants, for nutrient status and pH. The field, largely flat but sloping 4m downwards to the north-eastern corner, lies approximately 200m north of the established Harehope Quarry project, and occupies a raised position (175m above sea-level and approximately 20m above the level of the River Wear, some 100m to the north).

The available land, approximately rectangular in shape, runs NNW – SSE, with a wire-fenced frontage adjoining the roadside of approximately 180m, with gated access some 70m from the northern extremity. The southern boundary, some 75m long, also wire-fenced and running WSW – ENE, faces onto a historic 'green way' giving access to fields to the West. The proposed northern boundary, also wire-fenced, faces a small copse and derelict stone quarry. The larger part of the western aspect of the field is bordered by a 3m high earth bund, consisting of top- and sub-soil removed in 2007 from quarry land immediately to the West. This provides a degree of shelter from the prevailing westerly winds. There are currently no immediate water sources directly available, and access to water and electrical power are being investigated. Vehicular access to the site, via a private road, has been agreed informally, as has day-to-day parking on a designated parking area on quarry land.

2m deer-fencing and incorporated rabbit-fencing is currently being installed with assistance from other grant streams. Provision is being made for the installation of a small number of poly-tunnels, along with refurbished containers, for lockable storage and as a produce distribution centre. In the future it is hoped that a permanent building can be put up on the land powered by sustainable forms of energy production, both ground-source heating and a wind turbine.

b) Additional land

It is anticipated that quarrying operations to the west of the field will cease in 2010, and that the soil bund will be removed and the soil redistributed across the land immediately adjacent. Subsequent to that, it is expected that Weardale CSA will have the opportunity to expand its operations into the extended area. This will require extensions of the perimeter deer and rabbit fencing, but will take the available land area to some 2.5 Ha (ca 7 acres), the north-western aspect of which will benefit from some wind-protection afforded by a line of established conifers. If production grows

according to plan and significant expansion occurs in scheme participants, it is hoped that Weardale CSA's land will eventually expand to ca 6 Ha (approximately 15 acres), and production may also include meat reared on the land and slaughtered locally.

c) Stanhope

An additional small plot of land (approx. ½ acre) has been secured in the town of Stanhope. This is a more sheltered site and will enable the production of a wider variety of crops.

Copies of the leases are attached as *Appendix 1*

9. Finance

Budgets and cash flow forecast are attached as *Appendix 8*.

Funding prior to the bid for the Local Food Grant has already been forthcoming from the following sources:

- i) Scarman Trust
- ii) Wear Valley District Council and Business Link
- iii) 2D CVS
- iv) County Durham Foundation

10. Equipment

The necessary equipment and tools required In order to start growing on the 2 sites and to open the project to a wider number of volunteers are detailed in the budget. Quotes for the larger items can be found in *Appendix 9*.

11. Risk Analysis/Scenario Planning

Risk	Likelihood (H,M,L)	Impact (H,M,L)	Mitigation
<u>The Vision</u> Social Benefits Somebody doing the same thing.	L	M	As a Coop, join forces, or develop USP.
<u>Values</u> Eroded by necessity, whim or practicality.	M	H	Use values and principles at every meeting. Refer to core values before decision making. Encourage those who have values at heart to speak up in their defence when threatened. Though flexibility may be essential for survival of business.
<u>Legal Status</u> We operate outside the legal parameters of a CIC Co-op. Perhaps essential for business survival (restructuring).	L	H	Make sure all decisions fit within our legal operating structure by reminding ourselves of them regularly. Re-define status and registration criteria.
<u>Market Research</u> WORKSHOPS AND MEMBERS Those who showed an interest by attending workshop were merely displaying idle curiosity, and have changed their mind about being involved.	L	M	Holding regular meetings to update existing customers/ volunteers and invite along those who newly expressed an interest, or who couldn't attend last event. Have some tasks for them so they can practically engage with the project if wish to do so.

Risk	Likelihood (H,M,L)	Impact (H,M,L)	Mitigation
<p>PARTNERS</p> <p>Business of future partners changes / contracts close.</p> <p>Changes in school curriculum / policy mean we cannot work with them.</p>	L	L	<p>Always have an eye to expand partnership base so changes can be accommodated, thus reducing dependency. Partnerships should always be icing on cake, not our be all and end all. That should be our individual customer base. Always maintain business-like approach and make sure our facilities / staff are best placed to conform to current legislation.</p>
<p>POTENTIAL COMPETITORS</p> <p>Those who view themselves as competitors may seek to engage in rumours and counter marketing to dissuade membership expansion.</p> <p>Someone else (e.g. local farmer) starts local vegetable initiative selling direct to customers.</p> <p>A 'Box Scheme' moves into the area with aggressive marketing aimed at our target market.</p>	<p>L</p> <p>L</p> <p>M</p>	<p>M</p> <p>M</p> <p>M</p>	<p>Always be clear and vocal on aims of CSA. Try to engage with those who may view us as potentially damaging to their business to see if partnerships rather than hostilities can be developed.</p> <p>Very unlikely given that existing diversification away from hill farming is mainly non-agricultural. Local expertise not available within farming community to enable this. Ours is very different as operating as a co-operative - for community rather than private enterprise.</p> <p>Having talked to existing large box schemes' operating in the N.E, the possibility of this happening is on the cards. We are a rural area and there are no great benefits from saturation of potential market for existing box schemes as population too disseminated. Also our production will be local – a USP they would find</p>

			difficult to compete with.
HUMAN RESOURCES <u>Board of Directors</u> Members of steering group may change if people move away from area / Changes in personal circumstances.	M	L	Need to keep membership fresh and always encourage new people to join who may also bring along new skills or discover latent ones. Realisation of 'people' as 'Key Factor' in the CSA's existence essential.
EMPLOYEES AND MEMBERS May not be able to recruit 'grower' locally as no local established practice for growing veg. Also only a part-time position and may not be enough to retain staff.	M	M	Need to spread the net wide, maybe hire professional recruitment advice. Use our networks to source potential employees. Also 4 of us are undertaking 'RHS level 2 in Horticulture' funded by Scarman Trust to enrich our own knowledge base.
OTHER PARTICIPANTS Established groups may be reluctant to come along as this is a new concept in volunteering locally. May get a tail-off of existing willing volunteers.	M	L	Make sure we are well organised when groups do arrive. Utilize existing strong community interest and establish our own volunteer groups 'in house' to keep up the already strong momentum in gaining local interest. Through polished communications and encouraging repeated media coverage.
Risk	Likelihood (H,M,L)	Impact (H,M,L)	Mitigation
<u>Land</u> LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION There may be some complications with the quality / use / yields from the land that can't be anticipate but can be	M	M	Have realistic expectations and also flexible plans to accommodate the changes that are needed. Prepare to utilise a certain amount of experimentation in growing plans/techniques in years 1and2 to maximize productivity by year 3. Plan for each Phase but also build

<p>factored in and prepared for just In case.</p>			<p>in a plan B for each factor in case funding or other problems Endanger development. Make sure realistic expectations are communicated to all membership especially those who have no experience of growing.</p>
<p>EXPANSION If original lease does not guarantee potential for expansion in that locality, and the need for expansion arises, how will the project maintain momentum, if at all.</p>	L	L	<p>Expansion is not a definite - even if successful the project may wish to stay small to concentrate quality of service without added risk of expanding customer base and capacity using volunteers. If membership choose however to expand then other options could always be taken e.g. split-site operation, maximizing use of existing site or expanding in the locale of the existing site but leasing land from another agent.</p>
<p>PROJECTED INCOME Budget income level Isn't achieved.</p>	M	M	<p>We must work within our budgets. System in place for regular review.</p>
<p>NON-COMMERCIAL INCOME Isn't forthcoming</p>	M	M	<p>We have already experienced turn- downs and delays in grants being accessed. Realise we need to be non-reliant ensuring our dependency on non-commercial income is not our weak point in the business. Lack of commercial income will possibly mean growth is slower as this could provide the larger injections of cash necessary for investment in capital schemes, without the associated risks of borrowing.</p>

APPENDIX VIII

WEARDALE CSA WORKSHOP AGENDA SEPTEMBER 2007

15th September 2007

PROGRAMME

2-2.30pm	Introductions	Liz
	Why Local Food?	Liz
	A CSA for Wolsingham?	Andrew
2.30 – 3.15pm	Workshops	
3.15 – 3.35pm	Break	
3.35 – 4.20pm	Workshops	
4.20 – 5.15pm	‘Open Space’	Carol/Nick
5.15pm	Travel to Bradley Burn Farm Shop	
5.30pm	Introduction to Conversation Café	Carol
5.55pm	Table discussions with meal	
6.30pm	Quick feedback	
7.15pm	Legal Structures Workshop	Carol

APPENDIX IX

WEARDALE CSA WORKSHOP DETAILED PLAN

To bring:

Nick	Liz
Laptop with photos and organisational structure slideshow	Flip chart easels Liz
DVD of SCA	Flip chart paper Charl
SCA leaflets	25 marker pens Charl
Conversation café table cards	Extension lead Liz
Price comparison table on A3	Registration of interest forms Charl
Contact details for CDA and David Button (for ongoing local assistance with legal structures)	Data projector with USB cable to connect to laptop School
Extract from 'HEAT'	Lots of large post-it notes for open space session Charl
Open space instruction flip	Blank paper for conversation café note takers Charl
SCA harvest supper notes	Pens for conversation café note takers Charl
Parking space flip	
Guidelines for conversation café table hosts	'Offers' flipchart? Nick

Time	Duration	Content	Led by
1.45	15	Arrivals and Registration	Liz
2.00	30	Introduction Outline of the afternoon. Mention 'offers' flipchart. Why Local Food? - Liz A CSA for Wolsingham? – Andrew	Liz Liz Andrew
2.30	45	Workshops Choice of 3: Stroud Community Agriculture 15 minute presentation. 25 minutes for questions and answers. 5 mins at end to get people to focus on questions/issues that they want to bring to the open space session. Low Luckens Abundant Earth (Cookes West Farm)	Nick / Carol Jon Wilf
3.15	15	Break. Remind people to write on the 'offers' flip	Liz
3.30	45	Workshops Choice of 3: Stroud Community Agriculture 15 minute presentation. 25 minutes for questions and answers. 5 mins at end to get people to focus on questions/issues that they want to bring to the open space session. Low Luckens Abundant Earth (Cookes West Farm)	Carol / Nick Jon Wilf
4.15	45	Open Space/ Ask people to think about questions and suggestions that they have for a CSA for Wolsingham. We want everyone to suggest topics for conversations we	Nick

		<p>will have over supper later.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Working in groups of about 4 people, write your questions and suggestions on post-it notes using the marker pens. One item per post-it. Write big and clear for others to read. Do not discuss topics now – time for that later. 5-10 mins for this writing exercise. 2) Bring the post-it notes and stick them up on 5 flip charts we have prepared at the front of the room. Try to group similar topics together. 3) Nick leads participants through a process of grouping the post-its and writing headings for each group of post-its. The headings will be written as ‘How...’ or ‘What...’ questions. Carol sorts easy ones silently as this is happening. <p>Write up finalized questions for conversation café</p> <p>Hand out ‘Registration of Interest’ Forms. Reminder of ‘offers’ flip Ask to hand in to Table Hosts in Cafe</p>	<p>Carol</p> <p>Liz</p>
5.00	15	travel to Bradley Burn Farm Shop	
5.15	15	<p>Introduction to Conversation Café.</p> <p>Carol will introduce the concept of conversation cafes and again, ask for note takers. She will then give a brief summary of the questions and suggestions that came out of the Open Space. These will also be written up as a numbered list on a flip.</p> <p>5 or 6 people to be table hosts (see guidelines below and on each table) Nick and Carol to circulate and make sure the table hosts are coping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduce the idea of conversation cafes - About 8 people per table - CSA projects are managed by their members. 	<p>Carol</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reminder that we don't aim to make decisions tonight, but rather to explore questions and suggestions and understand more about what is important to people interested in a CSA for Wolsingham - encourage people to stick to the principles on the table cards - remind people to write down ideas and suggestions on the blank paper on the tables. Please can the note-takers write clearly so that the notes can be typed up later. Note-takers please leave your phone number on the notes in case we need help reading your writing! - Please work through as many questions as you comfortably can. Each table will be given different question number to start at. Work your way down the list of questions. If you get to the bottom, start again at question 1. <p>Collect food and find a table (no more than 8 people per table)</p>	
5.30	10	Food served	

5.40	35	<p>Conversation Café</p> <p>Table discussions (max 8 people per table with one host on each table to steer and timekeep):</p> <p>Guidelines for core group table hosts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stick to the conversation café guidelines and remind people of them if necessary - Please work through as many questions as you comfortably can. Each table to start at a different question and work your way down. If you get to the bottom, start again at question 1. - Remind people to write down their ideas and suggestions on the blank paper - Collect Registration of Interest Forms <p>Choose one or two comments or ideas from your table to be read out at the end</p>	Carol
6.15	15	Summary from each table	Carol
6.30		Close with summary of afternoon and some idea of what will happen next. Date of next meeting?	Liz
6.30	30	Break. Opportunity to see SCA DVD?	
7.00	60	Org structure workshop	Carol/Nic

ADDENDUM

A BRIEF UPDATE ON THE PROJECTS' POST-RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT

1. GROWING TOGETHER

When my direct involvement finished at the end of 2008 they were looking forward to increasing production in the following year and moving towards being in a position to sell boxes to non-working members from the surrounding community. However, during 2009 a combination of staffing changes in management, and reconfigurations throughout the County Council (which became a Unitary Authority in April 2009), resulted in a change in attitude towards Growing Together. By the end of the year they had been moved into a DCC building (but still occupying separate premises from the main Centre) and were no longer allowed to operate under their own Constitution or to manage their own budget. Restrictions were put on partnership working and it became harder for volunteers from outside the Centre to become involved. They have retained the name 'Growing Together' and are run as a 'specialist service'. Andy has had to take on new managerial tasks in addition to organising and overseeing the food production activities. There is a waiting list of clients to join but insufficient staffing to expand. At my last meeting with Andy (18/11/11) he was hoping to bring in some additional staff support, along with new service users, from a neighbouring town.

2. WEARDALE CSA

Following the end of my formal involvement in December 2009 I attended three more meetings in February, July, and August 2010. Preparations for applying for stage 2 of the Local Food Grant were still going ahead at this stage, although it seemed that there remained a lot of work to do in order to meet the deadline in September. BTCV were keen to run a Green Gym and support the application process. Replacement fruit trees had been planted at Frosterley and a variety of produce grown on both sites.

Recruiting new members was a difficulty, and a problem with thistles was developing at Frosterley. This latter problem was tackled with the help of a neighbouring eco- project, Harehope Quarry, who ran some pigs on the land over winter. Harehope was also running a project in Frosterley to encourage the village to become more resilient to environmental change. Local food production arose as a top priority from this exercise and this provided an opportunity to recruit more members from the village. Julia engaged in conversations with interested people and gradually developed relationships with them, so that by March 2011 five families were planning how to manage the Frosterley site and were in the process of becoming CSA members. A decision had been made not to reapply for the Local Food Grant but to continue to develop the project using volunteer labour.

I attended the AGM in July 2011 as an observer, by which time 13 families from Frosterley had become involved in growing vegetables and fruit on individual plots, including running chickens under the developing orchard. The meeting was well attended and included some animated discussions on acceptable production techniques. They had adapted their approach and developed a different model that was working well.

I asked Julia to verify this account and she agreed with my synopsis, adding:

“15 plots on the main field taken, with 2 and a half still vacant (and of course the two lots of chickens in the orchard) ... Now we've broken the back of getting the field under cultivation (and thus conquering the thistle problem), hopefully next year we'll be able to tidy things up a bit more (both in terms of making the field look neater, and running things). We'll have to see how effectively it continues to function as a 'community' project – as numbers have increased (which is obviously good), it's made it more difficult to keep a community/collective ethos going. But the main thing is that everyone has managed to grow and harvest produce, which – given where we were this time last year – I think is a major achievement!” (email communication, 14/12/11).

6 Frosterley July 2011: The Orchard



7 Frosterley July 2011: The plots



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