

# **Rural Regeneration Policy and Practice. Rhetoric or reality?**

by  
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## ABSTRACT

This is a study of the rhetoric and reality of rural regeneration in the UK. The thesis considers the activities of practitioners and policymakers within the new forms of rural governance which have emerged over the past decade and are now having pronounced effects on the practice of rural development. Policy rhetoric is assigned meaning and interpreted by practitioners and eventually becomes a reality through development practice. This analysis uses the concepts of participation and partnership, in terms of their function as rhetoric framing contemporary policies that eventually become regeneration practice. Micro-politics are identified as crucial processes of rural development activity that affect this practice

The research draws on the work of a rural development initiative in Suffolk, the Communities First-Suffolk project. Using this project an ethnographic study was conducted. A theoretical framework is set out for each of the three main concepts – partnership, participation and micro-politics. Empirical findings from the Case Study are then used to analyse the theory underpinning the research.

A gap between rhetoric and reality was found to exist in both rural policy and within its practice. This consists of a paradox of governance in terms of decentralisation, rules of engagement, the role of lead agencies, participation and partnership structures. The role of the individual was found to be integral to these elements and indeed to broader rural development processes.

This thesis calls for government policy to recognise the disparity between rural rhetoric and reality. It thus suggests that policymakers consider adopting mechanisms to evaluate and review governance *processes* in addition to the traditional approach of evaluating regeneration products. Unless the rhetoric-reality gap is closed, existing exclusions, barriers and problems will continue to prevail within rural development structures, hampering the progress and activity of rural development agents - policymakers and practitioners alike.

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### ACRONYMS

ACRE	Action with Communities in Rural England
BDC	Babergh District Council
CA	Countryside Agency
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CDF	Community Development Foundation
CEP	Community Energy Project
CF-S	Communities First-Suffolk
COVER	Community and Voluntary Forum for the Eastern Region
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
DG	Directorate General
DTLR	Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
EARDF	European Agriculture Rural Development Funder
EC	European Commission
EEDA	East of England Development Agency
HC	Housing Corporation
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
LGA	Local Government Association
LEADER	Liaisons entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale (Links between development actions of the rural economy)
LVP	Local Villages Project
NCR	New Commitment to Regeneration
NCVO	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PAT	Policy Action Team
PRIDE	Partnerships for Rural Integrated Development in Europe
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RDC	Rural Development Commission
RDR	Rural Development Regulation
SRB	Single Regeneration Budget
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

### ABBREVIATIONS

Data was sourced from informants in different ways. Unless otherwise indicated the source of this is coded throughout the thesis in the following way:-

Steering Group member	SG
Community	C
Hastoe staff	H
Other regeneration agency	A
Documents	D: followed by
	RJ - Research Journal and personal notes
	F – File contents including minutes, official notes of meetings and other project documents

# 1 Introduction

The rural development landscape consists of a plethora of community groups, voluntary sector organisations and statutory agencies working together to achieve change for a particular geographic area. The groups involved in rural regeneration have different purposes resulting in the co-existence of competing agendas and philosophies. Despite such diversity, these groups work together in a common rural development framework underpinned by the concept of governance. Their function is to implement rural policy through combined effort, incorporating approaches and techniques that are promoted by government, either directly through statutory legislation or indirectly via rural development and regeneration funding programmes.

However because of this diversity a range of ambiguous concepts associated with governance has been adopted within this policy process including empowerment, participation and social capital. Recognition of the wider consequences of incorporating such ideas is not necessarily evident amongst policymakers. Hence while policy programmes require rural development groups to embrace and apply the concepts of empowerment, participation and social capital in project plans, they do not provide guidance on the implementation process. Furthermore funding programmes do not explicitly place emphasis on the *achievement* of such approaches, as they continue to focus on evaluating schemes using bureaucratic means including financial management and measuring project outputs.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the rhetoric and reality of rural regeneration in the UK, by exploring the interactions of community, voluntary and state organisations around the implementation of regeneration based on ideas about empowerment, participation and social capital. This analysis uses the concepts of participation and partnership in terms of their function as rhetoric framing contemporary policies in regeneration, and as techniques used within its practice. It considers the activities of rural development practitioners and policymakers within new forms of rural governance. Micro-politics are introduced as a mechanism through which rhetoric and reality can be further explored by reflecting and scrutinising what actually happens within a group i.e. the processes of rural development activity that are played out in the field.

Hence although government remains responsible for the development of rural policies, the implementation of these policies relies on a wider group of actors with competing agendas. They operate within a rural development structure, typically that of partnership. Under this new mode of governance, rural development structures employ various concepts without recognising the wider consequences, such as how such ideas are translated into practice. Consequently the literature and anecdotal evidence suggests that numerous disparities exist between the rhetoric of policy and the evidence from regeneration practice.

This research draws on the work of a rural development initiative in Suffolk, the Communities First-Suffolk (CF-S) project. An ethnographic study was conducted using the CF-S initiative. From this study the problems identified above are examined in the context of partnership, participation and micro-politics. A theoretical framework is set out for each concept and empirical findings from the Case Study are used to analyse the theory underpinning the research. This chapter presents background to the research problem, providing rationale for the study and describing the research questions. The novel approach taken within the research is then presented before providing a summary of the contents of this thesis, chapter by chapter.

## **1.1 Background**

'Disentangling rhetoric from reality is likely to remain of central importance in this new world of local governance' (Wilson, 2000:55). The importance of the link between policy rhetoric and reality was highlighted more recently by the outgoing UK Commissioner for Europe, Chris Patten (Radio Four Today Programme, 30.11.04) who argued that the disparity between policy rhetoric and reality at both European and National levels should be lessened. These citations capture the essence of the core research query – what is the rhetoric and reality of rural regeneration? This is examined from the perspectives of policy and practice.

The implementation of rural policy relies ever increasingly on input from and co-ordination of organisations and agencies beyond government including that of local communities. This trend has been evident through the emergence of various instruments for rural regeneration over recent years as this new mode of governance becomes the norm. There is now a significant body of academic literature which has analysed in detail the development of the institutional arrangements and accompanying

mechanisms for rural development and regeneration in a European, National and global governance context (for example O'Toole and Burdess, 2004, Hayward et al, 2004, Shortall 2004, Goodwin, 2003, Ward et al, 2003, Lowe et al, 2002, MacKinnon, 2002, Welch, 2002, Little, 2001, Anderson, 2001, Jones and Little, 2000, Shucksmith, 2000b, Taylor, 2000b, Storey, 1999, Ray, 1998, Ward and McNicholas, 1998; Woods, 1998a, Tracey, 1997 and Bryden, 1994). The recent explosion of rural studies literature is necessarily vast, as the subject of rural development and regeneration is broad with many themes critical to the ethos of rural development. Hence the literature is extensive and includes discussion on concepts including empowerment, power, legitimacy, partnership, participation, governance, social capital, economic development, social development, democracy and civic participation.

The theoretical context is often used to inform the development of policy with governments latching onto new concepts and incorporating them into policy rhetoric. The tendency for regeneration and development initiatives to do this is so great that Commins and Mernagh (1997) warn of new concepts gaining a certain level of public usage without sufficient understanding of what they actually mean in practice. This is borne out in the example of social capital with Portes (2000) and Bridger and Luloff (2001) concluding that more work needs to be done before social capital is adopted as reliable public policy.

Once ideas are adopted within policy, emerging regeneration programmes are then designed in ways that compel groups to demonstrate that they have applied the theories within their activity. Guidance is often lacking and so rural development groups struggle to fulfil this requirement, subsequently failing to receive resources to accomplish their objectives. Hence Schofield ponders a clichéd question within regeneration as he wonders how the advice to 'enlist community support' contained within government regeneration guidance can become a reality (2002:674). In addition Storey (1999) suggests that just because an official statement promotes a particular way of working does not mean that this is borne out by the reality. Also noting this inconsistency, Hayward et al (2004) call for critical analysis of the assumptions underpinning participatory projects, from the perspectives of both theory and practice. They imply that of importance to these initiatives are what notions i.e. meanings and beliefs, inform what is supposed to happen and also what actually happens. The literature thus hints at a disparity between rhetoric and reality.



Further ambiguities are evident within regeneration policy. For instance, although European and national rhetoric is of decentralisation and subsidiarity (Lowe et al, 2002, Marinetto, 2003, Stewart, 2000); Davies, (2002) and Edwards et al (2001) argue that centralisation also occurs. Meanwhile Storey warns of the danger of 'professionalisation' (1999:314) of rural development whereby expertise is used to access grants and get things done as the process of accessing funding is complex, requiring technical skills and expertise. The role of the rural development expert or professional becomes critical to the development process (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004, MacKinnon, 2002). The professional works with the partnership to adopt procedures and practices or 'technologies' (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004:300) that conform to the requirements of funding bodies. In so doing the partnership's objectives are either achieved or compromised. In compromising its position the group has chosen to 'fit within the political direction of the funding bodies' (O'Toole and Burdess, 2004). In both cases the partnership becomes constrained by the rules of the regeneration scheme from which it receives funding. This may be problematic for the group.

As ever more partnerships emerge in the rural development field they are superimposed to create what is often confusing and messy for those living in a particular community. Scratching beneath the surface reveals a micro-community of individuals who typically are involved in, not just one community project, but a number of initiatives. They are known to professionals from the various agencies as community champions, or individuals who tend to act on behalf of their community. And yet for those on the outside of the activities described above they can feel cut off from what is happening on their own doorstep. They are removed from the decisions on what will happen in their area, they are powerless to influence this process from their position on the outside. Even the individuals they elected are not necessarily involved in the regeneration process. Consequently a minority is accused of controlling regeneration groups with the majority claiming to be disenfranchised from the whole process. And yet such groups can successfully access regeneration funding. The rhetoric of such schemes is one of wide-spread community involvement but the reality appears to be involvement of just a few.

Hence rural governance brings with it a number of paradoxes. This thesis seeks to analyse rural development structures and processes, addressing some of the problematic concepts and complexities that are cited within the literature. Fundamentally it is concerned with what is supposed to happen and what actually happens. It will look at the rhetoric of rural policy and of the typical instrument found within that policy i.e. the partnership structure. Moving closer to the practice of rural development and the role of the individual, the research considers what actually happens within partnerships. It is concerned with the processes or micro-politics that occur within the rural regeneration group.

Government remains responsible for the development of rural policies. However the implementation of these policies relies on a wider group of actors with competing agendas operating within a rural development structure, typically that of partnership. Under this new mode of governance, rural development structures employ various concepts without recognising the wider consequences, such as how such ideas are translated into practice. Consequently the literature suggests that numerous disparities exist between the rhetoric of policy and the evidence from regeneration practice. Using the CF-S project, these problems are examined in the context of partnership, participation and micro-politics.

## **1.2 Research questions**

My research is concerned with what actually happens in the rural regeneration sector. Given the context that is set out in the rural studies literature, the expectation that many achievements will be made is great. The language of regeneration and its accompanying concepts is impressive. For instance ‘participation can become a source of tremendous vitality and innovation for the creation of new and more just societies’ (United Nations Development Programme, 1993:5). This is an ambitious claim made of a concept that as Chapter Four reveals can mean many different things, depending on various circumstances. This study seeks to uncover the reality behind such rhetoric.

One of the objectives of the CF-S action research project was to explore the role of a housing association in the rural development process by undertaking regeneration activities within various communities. Specifically one of the funders was concerned with how relevant the concept of sustainability is to these activities. This typifies the core problem posed within my research - how does regeneration rhetoric become

reality? This thesis is therefore concerned with how policy objectives are translated into practice and the changes that occur through this process e.g. if and how policy ideals are transformed along the way. These issues cannot be explored simply by considering the single dimension of the activities of a project within community regeneration. The regeneration process is much more intricate than that involving the design of policy or the implementation of policy through programmes or even the interpretation and application of these programmes within the regeneration environment. Throughout this process meanings are constantly being given through various mechanisms including the policy process, individual styles and particular traditions. To understand my central question a number of separate questions must be posed.

### 1. What is the rural development policy framework?

This question is critical to understanding the rhetoric of rural regeneration and it also provides context to my study. This question is thus mainly dealt with in Chapter Three. It offers an understanding of what policies have emerged and what are the ideals and principles behind these policies. It is an investigation of the bigger picture or the macro aspect of regeneration. This includes analysis of the official aims and objectives of programmes emerging from the policy framework and will thus demonstrate what they are seeking to achieve and also, how these achievements are expected to be made.

### 2. What are the mechanisms used to implement rural development policy?

Addressed primarily in Chapters Three and Four, this relates to the transformation of policy to practice. It seeks to investigate the way in which policy becomes a programme which in turn is translated to activity within a community. It is concerned with the structures used to implement regeneration policy and ultimately to carry out regeneration activities. It is also about how particular concepts within regeneration, e.g. participation, are played out in the field and the mechanisms used to achieve them. Hence this question refers to the coal face of regeneration in that this is where the action is. From this question another arises.

### 3. What actually occurs within rural development practice?

Having considered what is *supposed* to happen through analysis of the regeneration rhetoric and through examination of some of the official approaches that are advocated by funding bodies, my research explores what *actually* happens. Chapters Three and Four therefore touch on this question, while Five is entirely devoted to this theme. While the previous question explores mechanisms used to achieve and practice regeneration, this problem relates to the *processes* within the practice taken at the micro level. Regeneration practice entails undertaking tasks on behalf of a particular community. However sophisticated and complex these tasks may be, various mundane activities are required in order to achieve them. For instance meetings are held on a regular basis; but what happens during them? ‘It is in the micro-politics of institutional engagement, rather than through officially espoused views or strategies, that the public is constituted as actors’ (Barnes et al, 2003:396). Hence getting up close to the events on the ground is necessary to understand how communities come together as actors or participants in regeneration and crucially, the consequence of this.

4. What is the meaning given to rural development throughout the policy and practice process?

This question arises from each of the above questions and so it cuts across all Chapters of my research. It relates to both policy and practice and is relevant to the rhetoric and reality of rural development. It considers how meanings are given to rural development and regeneration through official discourse, but also by the interpretations that are evident within the different stages of regeneration that are considered above – policy, practice and process. Thus the significance of meaning within rural regeneration is revealed.

### **1.3 The research approach**

The approach taken by my research was an unusual one. On the one hand it was a form of action research while on the other it was a type of participant observation. This dual approach existed because I was employed by a Housing Association to undertake an action research project, Communities First-Suffolk (CF-S) which had various objectives, one of which was researching the potential role of a housing association in rural regeneration. Hence an output, required by funders, was the publication of a good practice guide based on the experiences of the project. The guide

would be used by other regeneration practitioners, including Housing Associations. The participant observation aspect of the research referred to the other main objective of CF-S which was to explore the processes associated with rural regeneration practice. This entailed working closely with a number of different communities assisting them as they set about undertaking regeneration activities. Not only did I have the function of getting involved i.e. participating, but I was to observe and document these actions. Once again this information would inform the good practice guide to be produced at the end of the project. Consequently the other main expected readers of the guide were 'communities' engaged in regeneration activities. Thus my position was a novel one in that I was employed to undertake action research, but at the same time to critique that approach through a process of participant observation. In other words I was to analyse and evaluate a project in which I was central.

The comparison that Denzin and Lincoln make of a qualitative researcher with 'a bricoleur' (2000:4) is thus pertinent to my research. By this term they mean that the researcher is a professional do-it-yourself person. The research process involves a choice of research practices that is dependent on the questions that are asked, the questions themselves dependent on the context, what is available in the context and what the researcher can do. There is no single prescriptive approach to the research. The end 'result' is a new image or picture of regeneration which represents a reality that does not exist within current debate. This reality was revealed by analysing a number of aspects of regeneration, including the macro and the micro as discussed in the research questions.

## **1.4 The thesis structure**

This section summarises the content of the thesis chapter-by-chapter, but first a note on its structure and rationale. The thesis is arranged in the following way. The next chapter discusses the methodological style of my study, with the three chapters following each concerned with a different theme within rural regeneration. Chapter Six brings the information together through a detailed discussion before presenting the final conclusions and recommendations for further study.

My research was about the different layers or perspectives of regeneration. This can be compared to the layers of an onion, where the skin is peeled away until eventually the very core of the onion is revealed. And so my approach was to consider regeneration

at the wider, policy or rhetoric level moving through structures, mechanisms and technologies employed during the translation of policy to practice to eventually discover the nub of rural regeneration, the micro-politics. Accordingly the richness of rural development literature necessitates theoretical discussion of a broad range of themes. While it is somewhat unorthodox not to present this through a discreet theory chapter (but not unknown see Shortall, 1990 and Jack, 2003), this was the approach deemed most appropriate to this thesis. Consequently each chapter of this thesis addresses different themes, all setting out the theoretical context before considering my research findings.

Hence Chapters Three, Four and Five each provide theoretical background in the form of a literature review before moving on to consider the emerging themes in the context of the research and the findings. The different themes are partnership and governance; participation; and micro-politics. The data and discussions are presented in this way given the disparate focus of each theme in the context of regeneration. The final part of this section offers a précis for each chapter.

Chapter Two presents the methodological approach employed for my study starting with an overview of qualitative and quantitative approaches. A brief history of ethnographic approaches is considered as this provides an insight into the principles used within my research, the most important one being reflexive participant observation. The research questions are then considered in some detail before moving to the next section which deals mainly with the case study, Communities First-Suffolk. This includes a profile of Hastoe Housing Association, the organisation hosting and leading the project along with a description of the CF-S project. Methodological issues such as access, acceptance and ethics that are pertinent to my particular research are discussed in some detail following a description of my ethnographic approach. Part three of this Chapter considers the methods employed within my research including the use of documents, action research and interviews. The Chapter concludes with a comprehensive account of my position in the field.

Governance and partnership are the core themes of the next Chapter. The theoretical backgrounds to the emergence of the governance agenda and the accompanying popularity of the partnership structure are considered in some detail. The specific case of a Single Regeneration Budget initiative, the Community Energy Project (CEP) is

used to conduct a form of discourse analysis on the rhetoric of regeneration. Chapter Three concludes by using the CEP and the CF-S projects to illustrate practicalities and challenges of governing through partnership.

Chapter Four focuses on the translation of policy to practice using the concept of participation, popular to rural regeneration. Using the literature, its meaning is clarified before discussing the legitimacy of participation. The theory is explored further using the CEP to illustrate how participation is played out within rural regeneration policy and practice. Finally the Chapter concludes with a discussion of participation theory and practice.

Getting to the final layer of regeneration within my research, Chapter Five concentrates on the processes within rural regeneration; they combine to form the micro-politics. This Chapter discusses at a very basic level what happens when a group of individuals come together to perform the regeneration activities as discussed within the preceding two Chapters. It analyses group relations and norms in relation to power, legitimacy, individual relations, meeting styles and tactics, decision making and communication. The Chapter ends with an analysis of the relevance of micro-politics to rural regeneration.

Finally Chapter Six considers all of the research findings in the light of the original research questions. My basic research problem was to explore the rhetoric and reality of policy and practice. Specifically it analyses this by exploring the paradox of governance in terms of decentralisation, rules of engagement, the role of lead agencies, participation and partnership structures. The rhetoric surrounding these issues is shown to be somewhat different to the reality that is played out within the rural regeneration field. The analysis considers the nature of participation by looking at techniques used and expertise required, the extent of participation and positive and negative involvement. The research proposes that rural development group dynamics including trust, norms, shared knowledge, perceptions, understanding, social networks, values and personality traits give rise to micro-politics. This explains why, for no apparent reason, some groups appear to be much more successful than other similar groups. Regeneration practice does not necessarily happen in ways that policymakers or practitioners might expect, nor is it a reflection of common policy rhetoric.

Consequently my research concludes that a gap between rhetoric and reality is present in both rural policy and its practice.



## **2 Methodology**

This Chapter has three main sections. It begins with an explanation of the methodological approach used within my research. This includes a description of the research questions before providing a brief review of the two main approaches used by social science research. The section concludes with a detailed theoretical overview of Ethnography, the approach selected for my research topic.

The second section considers the case study, Communities First-Suffolk providing background to Hastoe Housing Association, the organisation leading this initiative in which I was hosted as an employee. The context is set further through information on the key activities and events within Hastoe that contributed to its involvement in rural regeneration and development and hence the Communities First-Suffolk project. Issues that emerged particular to my case study are also considered.

Thirdly the Chapter concludes by describing the specific research methods and techniques used. This section reflects on the various positions and functions that I assumed within the field.

### **2.1 Section One: Methodological approach**

Social science research is conducted using qualitative and quantitative approaches, which may be used in tandem or exclusively, within a defined research topic. Confusion often arises over the relationship between methods and methodology, resulting in their separation into two independent categories. They are however inextricably inter-linked. According to Brewer methods are technical rules defining research procedures while methodology is 'the broad theoretical and philosophical framework into which these procedural rules fit' (2000:2). Thus methods are determined by the philosophical basis from which the selected methodology arises concerning ontological (about the nature of society) and epistemological (about the nature of knowledge) principles. Before looking in more detail at the philosophical background to qualitative and quantitative research the context for this thesis is set by presenting the research questions.

### **2.1.1 The Research Questions**

As already indicated in the previous Chapter, my research is an investigation of the policy and practice of rural development. It poses the question - how does regeneration rhetoric become reality? This question is applicable from policy through to regeneration practice.

Rural regeneration activity is shaped partially by official policy and partially by the individuals participating in the group. Structures – typically partnerships - devised by policymakers are implemented in the rural development field embracing often abstract concepts such as participation and involvement. Policy is translated to become a reality, via a philosophical, value-based process, using particular mechanisms and structures. Thus in the process of transforming rhetoric to reality various influences are at play – policy objectives, the beliefs and values of individuals involved in regeneration and practical considerations such as funding regimes and regeneration structures. All of these affect the meaning given to regeneration and the type of regeneration that eventually unfolds on the ground.

Hence rhetoric cannot be explored simply by investigating policy documents as they become practice and so a number of questions are proposed each considering rural regeneration from different perspectives.

1. What is the rural development policy framework?
2. What are the mechanisms used to implement rural development policy?
3. What actually occurs within rural development practice?
4. What is the meaning given to rural development throughout the policy and practice process?

These questions and associated categories do not sit separately of one other. The boundaries between them are blurred, thus the topics are inter-related so that rural development practice informs policy design. Similarly the meanings given to rural development help to shape the policy framework and this in turn affects practice, so the linkages between these categories continue. This division provides a useful structure for analysis and so designates the core issues of concern to my research – meanings and processes within the macro and micro contexts.

That rural development practice informs policy design and vice-versa demonstrates an important sociological theory advocated by the prolific sociologist Anthony Giddens and provides a wider context for this study. Giddens (1984) structuration theory provides a framework that brings together subject and object; it links the micro with the macro and vice versa. Social practice is the mediation between structure and agency where 'agent and structures are not two independent given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality' (Giddens, 1984:25). Human actions within society are structured by the social while also determining the structure of society. Thus Giddens argues that structure and agency are interconnected and considers structures as 'the rules and resources upon which social agents draw when acting' (Porter, 1998:161). Giddens (1984) embeds norms and values (i.e. rules and resources) within the agent rather than in the structure. They exist virtually and so are only made real through meaningful actions; indeed they are produced and reproduced by action. Furthermore rules and resources may be material and non-material (McGrath, 2001).

Social power plays a role in the deployment of resources and so Giddens (1984) argues that through actions, all agents have the capacity to draw on resources. Hence structures may be constraining to activity discouraging particular action, but they also have an enabling role as they allow agents to do things in certain ways. Structure and action are therefore interlinked, forming a circular relationship where 'structure is both the medium and outcome of the practices which constitute social systems' (Giddens, 1981:27)

Structuration theory provides context for my research as it seeks to uncover the relationship between rural development rhetoric and reality. Policy and practice are intertwined as structure and agency. Applied to the rural development context actors or practitioners operate within a framework that is affected by the actions that they undertake. In turn the actors are constrained and enabled by that framework; they derive meaning from rural development structures. So practitioners seeking funding from a government agency need to know the rules governing and the resources available within the relevant programme so that they can participate effectively. These may be official regulations, but include unwritten rules such as the preferred type of activity that a funder wishes to support. Nonetheless, the structure is likely to be conducive to their activity as rural development programmes are designed partially as a consequence of experience from past activity. This is vital, as policy only becomes

meaningful through agents' activities and so the implementation of rural policy relies on the actions of rural development actors. Therefore, activities within the field of rural development influence the design of rural policies; witness the plethora of pilot studies and Good Practice Projects. Government policies meanwhile set the framework within which such activities must operate. Certainly structures may be made more flexible through the existence and exploitation of power by agents. For instance the rules imposed on a regeneration project by the funding organisation may be bent as a consequence of negotiation by the project manager. This is only possible if the manager has something relevant to offer the agency administering the structure, i.e. the funding body, such as the guarantee of project success.

While this provides a theoretical framework to the rural development field, it is not the primary focus of this thesis which is less concerned with how agents' i.e. practitioners' and policymakers' action affect the structure in which they operate, i.e. the policy framework. As the research questions will outline, it is concerned with the meaning that policymakers and practitioners attach to rural development and the process through which this becomes a reality through its practice. The theory informing the research is considered in the remainder of this Chapter.

### 1. What is the rural development policy framework?

This question is critical to understanding the rhetoric of rural regeneration while also providing context to my study. It considers rural development in terms that are essentially most remote from the community development volunteer active on the ground. Rural development policy has its roots in much broader ideals such as sustainable development or community involvement and this policy background has been the subject of much research. Policies may also be driven by a National agenda such as New Labour's desire to involve 'the community' (Stoker, 2002, Levitas, 1998). Similarly the role of Europe in National agricultural and rural development policies is apparent in the literature (see for example Lowe et al, 2003, Ray, 2000, Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001, Ward and McNicholas, 1998 and Shortall, 1994).

Some principles emerge primarily from a global context as in the case of sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 illustrates the broad agenda from which sustainable development

emerged (<http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/>). This resulted in the now famous definition by the global Brundtland Commission of sustainable development as meeting 'the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987:43). Eventually this theory surfaced at the local level through specific initiatives such as Local Agenda 21 but also less specifically within policies and programmes led by National Agencies such as the Countryside Agency.

Such policies, although based on a broad principle, are formulated and developed by government and administered in a number of ways. Rural policy is frequently translated into programmes administered by various agencies and applied across a wide area, either regionally or nationally. For instance the Rural Development Priority Area Programme of the 1990s which applied to specific geographic areas with identified need, was administered by the regional offices of the then Rural Development Commission. Meanwhile the Leader programme, the European Commission's rural development initiative was administered through a number of different agencies in England. Government offices were ultimately responsible for ensuring the Programme was administered in line with National government (and European) requirements; local authorities provided secretariat services and often Leader staff. In addition Leader Action groups met regularly to approve budget allocations. Rural development practitioners (both paid and voluntary) engaged in activities funded by the different programmes.

Of concern to my research are the policies that have emerged and the ideals behind them. In other words, what are the structures that exist for the practice of rural development and what is the thinking behind them? Or to apply Giddens (1984) structuration terminology, how can agents engage with the structures within which they operate, but which are in turn influenced by these activities? Such background provides an understanding of what the structures aim to achieve and how they relate to the human agents involved. It ensures that this research is more than an abstract study of a particular rural area. Instead the links between the local or the micro and the macro are highlighted.

Political context, policy fads and the historical background all influence rural development policy. They help to explain the reasons for particular initiatives and

programmes and give a broader context for understanding and interpreting the practice of rural development. This section is concerned primarily with the 'big picture', how it is structured, and the events that help to create it.

Past events and experience inform future policy. Historical background is essential for understanding current policymaking and the thinking behind existing policies. Official findings from previous programmes and policies provide 'good practice' and inform future policy design. Thus government may have experimented with particular ideas in the past that contribute to the shape of current policy, for instance the trickle down effect expected from regeneration policies of the 1980s was later proven to be ineffective (Audit Commission, 1989). It is no longer advocated by policymakers and current policies tend to address issues using a combination of bottom up and top down approaches, rather than relying solely on top down initiatives (Buller and Wright, 1990). In broad terms this approach is referred to as rural governance and it relies on a number of different agencies working together in any one area (Goodwin, 1998). The principles and practice of rural governance are critical to the rhetoric and reality of rural development.

Politics, fads and trends also affect the design of new policy, an example being the emergence of New Labour and its emphasis on the role of the community (Levitas, 1998). A more recent fascination within Tony Blair's government has been that of social capital with advice being given to Blair's government by Putnam<sup>1</sup>, a prominent academic on the subject. Tightly associated with trends are politics - winning votes is always an incentive to raise the positive impact of government in society. Government advisors, such as Putnam, may therefore advocate fashionable ideas, but they do so in a very political environment. Policy objectives do not always give consideration to the longer term. Government often favour short term policies with 'quick wins' as they help gain support and win crucial votes.

Ultimately a policy framework, influenced by the various factors discussed above, exists within which rural development operates. This structure is created to achieve the original ideals or policy objectives. It provides a mechanism to practice rural development. The policy background gives an indication of what is expected to happen and how it will be done. It forms and informs the rhetoric of rural development.

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<sup>1</sup> As stated by Putnam at lecture in QUB, March 2003.

## 2. What are the mechanisms used to implement rural development policy?

Exploration of the techniques used to implement rural development policy will reveal how policy is translated to practice. Rural development practice is the place where the policy framework is populated by both practitioners and policymakers. Official policy partially shapes the nature of activity by providing specific programmes and initiatives with guidelines and requirements. These documents chart what is supposed to happen within regeneration. Thus if groups wish to access funding from these programmes for their activity they are obliged to adhere to the relevant regulations. This often means engaging with particular mechanisms and technologies such as forming a partnership or using particular consultation methods. Assistance for this is normally available through official documents and professional officers employed by various agencies.

Regeneration programmes are the mechanism through which official policy is interpreted to become regeneration activity on the ground. The assistance available to do this is explored and includes consideration of official documents and guidelines and the role of professional staff and other individuals. Thus structures in the form of rules and resources (Giddens, 1984) are not only virtual, as they rely on instantiation through action by agents (Porter, 1998), but they can be both material and non-material (McGrath, 2001). For instance the rules and resources available to practitioners may not always be clear. They may consist of unofficial ways of doing things that do not follow pre-set regulations but are dependent on the policy officer administering a programme. Such unofficial rules and resources or norms, supplement more official (and typically written) rules and regulations that govern a scheme.

Getting close to the events on the ground thus gives a sense of reality to the policy rhetoric. It necessitates a detailed study of day-to-day events in a rural development setting. Following the practical progress of rural development groups demonstrates the mechanisms used to interpret policy and the extent to which practice corresponds with policy rhetoric. It also reveals how rural development participants interact and 'fit' into the policy framework and how they engage with the related mechanisms and concepts. The rural development reality is explored further through the following question.

### 3. What actually occurs within rural development practice?

This problem is concerned with what actually happens on the ground. It relates to the *processes* within the practice taken at the micro level. Prior to the phase of engaging with official programmes, a group goes through a process of identifying priorities and objectives. This involves ideological debates about what the individuals concerned believe to be important and how they are best placed to address these issues. Having prioritised its goals, via value-based discussion and debate, a rural development group goes through a series of practical steps to set the basis for its overall structure. Many groups spend a lot of time debating the merits of formal and informal organisation. This determines various other practical matters such as the chairperson and meeting procedures and frequency. All of this is done either in tandem with, or before the group addresses more obvious or transparent rural development activity such as refurbishing a play area or writing a funding application or even identifying specific need.

Fundamentally rural development groups are made up of individuals with personalities and characteristics that affect choices made and, ultimately, the activity pursued. They come together with different perspectives and they act, react and interact in a particular way. Close involvement with a rural development group is essential to appreciate its practice or activity along with the underlying ideology. Taken at its simplest level, regeneration is about how a group of individuals drawn from both the community and from professional agencies work together to achieve a particular task. This aspect of my research considers the very essence of regeneration practice from the perspective of the individual involved with the community group. It analyses the regular activities and interactions of the rural development group to further reveal the reality of rural development.

### 4. What is the meaning given to rural development throughout the policy and practice process?

Rhetoric and reality can be analysed through policy and practice as already discussed. However, to complete this analysis the meanings attached to the different components of rural regeneration as identified above must be considered. Hence this question cuts across the preceding three questions.



The meaning of rural development is only partially revealed by reading a report produced by a government quango such as the Countryside Agency's The State of the Countryside Series which 'outlines the latest key facts and figures about the English countryside, its people and places' (The Countryside Agency, 2004). Such reports provide a broad policy picture, but the actual meaning given to rural development encompasses more than a policy position. In the community it emerges from the process by which a group firstly addresses the ideological question of which goals it considers are priorities. Discussions are opinion based and revolve around individual values and beliefs but are also influenced by personal agendas and biases. People's views, beliefs, interpretations and motivations all affect the meaning that they give to rural development. Furthermore they have the ability to articulate these opinions through language, as attendance at a community group meeting aptly demonstrates! Moreover the role of the professional employed to facilitate such a process affects how official jargon and guidelines are interpreted to become regeneration activity within a community.

As already described, this research considers how individuals interact in rural development cognisant of the policy framework and of the mix of personalities present in this environment. The meaning given to rural development by practitioners and policymakers forms a core aspect of this analysis. This relates to Max Weber's theory of *verstehen* which explains social action in terms of understandings, motives, constraints and opportunities experienced by individuals that lead to their action (Porter, 1998). The translation of rural development policy to practice occurs after a series of interpretations – from government to the community via a number of agencies and organisations. Along the way different meanings are applied and these have an impact on the end result. Weber's theory is further considered later in this Chapter.

Policymakers may have been personally involved in particular rural development activity in the past or they could have a totally desk-based approach to the subject with no direct practical experience. Both approaches may result in the same policy ideal, but the recommended way by which to achieve it is likely to vary. Similarly individuals have different motivations for getting involved in rural development, whether in a personal or professional capacity, and this affects their preferences for how a programme is interpreted and in turn how a project is implemented. For

instance, grandparents with an extended young family may wish to ensure social facilities exist in their community to encourage their younger family and others to remain in the village. A professional practitioner may believe that local ideas are supported and implemented to ensure vibrant rural communities exist as part of a wider ideological agenda of self-help and community action. Yet another professional may be driven by her targets to achieve a certain number of community based projects over a specific time period. Programmes and initiatives are open to interpretation. The very essence of rural development activity is value driven and understanding the ideological perspective is therefore essential for understanding the meanings given to rural development itself.

My research uses a qualitative methodology and this is justified and described in more detail after an overview of quantitative methodologies is given. The characteristics of quantitative research reveal why it was deemed inappropriate to my research.

### **2.1.2 Quantitative methodology**

Quantitative methodology makes the ontological assumption that social life is perceived to comprise of objective structures independent of the people concerned. It consists of wholes and systems which go beyond the consciousness of individuals. Thus the real world exists separately to peoples' perceptions or beliefs of it. These assumptions are rooted in positivism and can be traced back to the work of the French sociologist Auguste Comte who used the term positivism to describe the application of science and scientific methods to the study of social life. It is premised on the idea that there is a real world out there independent of people's perception of it, as Brewer states 'the social world is revealed to us, not constructed by us' (2000:30).

Thus follows the epistemological assumption of quantitative research that objective knowledge is possible as reality is also objective and thus fixed (Lukes, 1982). Consequently general statements may be deduced from a theory and these form the basis of hypotheses which are then tested. Using this approach, social systems may be analysed through social facts. The value base of the individuals involved in social action along with their perceptions and motives are not of concern to positivist research. Instead it seeks facts that can be systematically identified through scientific methods. This philosophy is highlighted in Durkheim's view of social fact. "The determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of individual consciousness" (Durkheim, 1950: 110).

Principally the methodological position of quantitative methodology is that the methods, concepts and procedural rules of the natural sciences should be applied to the study of social life; with objectivity forming a core part of this approach. Consequently social phenomena are measured and described using numerate data and research is based primarily on fact, not value judgement (Ragin, 1987). Furthermore human beings are rational individuals and act in a rational manner. While their point of view is of interest, the meaning and interpretation of the researchers or the researched is not consequential, as they will react to the same stimulus in a similar (rational) way (Brewer, 2000).

Quantitative methodology is used to test theories, identify general patterns and make predictions through a process of deduction (Ragin, 1987). General statements are deduced by law or theory, from which hypotheses are formed and tested using 'hard', 'real' and 'objective' data from the research (Brewer, 2003b:237).

A quantitative approach is used where hypotheses require testing. The researcher uses variables to test propositions and identify relationships from which predictions can be made and general patterns identified. Durkheim's study of suicide provides an example of one of the most famous sociological studies to use a quantitative approach. He used government statistics to test hypothesis on suicide and to develop his now infamous suicide theory (Elwell, 2003).

Quantitative methodologies have many relevant applications. A funding agency wishing to research the success rate of a rural development initiative such as a village shop scheme would generate a survey to measure various issues relevant to those schemes. If it was interested in measuring success purely by existence, it could conduct a survey of all schemes funded a number of years prior to get an indication of those in ongoing existence. The survey might include the number of support visits by agency staff before and after funding was provided. From this a theory could be deducted: support visits to village shops are critical to longer-term success. The data would then be analysed statistically to determine the significance of such a theory and thus refute or confirm the theory. However, this approach would fail to provide an insight into the process of how village shop owners identified themselves as applicants to the scheme or their experience of applying for funding. It does not allow the

researcher to ‘get behind’ the facts. In other words the meaning attached to particular events and activities are not understood or revealed by the research.

Nonetheless used appropriately quantitative methodologies are extremely effective and useful within contemporary social science research. For instance Cloke et al (2002) research the geography of homelessness in rural England using official statistics to identify and map patterns. A database of rural regeneration partnerships was created by Edwards et al (2000) as one component of their study allowing them to identify key characteristics of rural partnerships. Similarly Monk et al (1999) combine quantitative techniques with qualitative approaches as they use a questionnaire survey to explore the rural labour market in England (prior to conducting in-depth interviews). Adopting a quantitative approach therefore provides a mechanism to identify patterns, measure data, test theories and make predictions. But it does not provide an insight into the processes and meanings associated with such events that are the issues of concern to my research.

My research is concerned with revealing the rhetoric and reality of rural development. Central to its focus is how the individuals involved affect rural development policy and practice. In other words subjectivity i.e. individuals’ (including the researcher’s) perception of and actions during events are critical to the research question. Given the assumptions of quantitative methodology about the nature of society and knowledge and the focus of my research questions, it is inappropriate to this study.

### **2.1.3 Qualitative methodology**

If quantitative research is concerned with measurement, then qualitative methodologies focus on meaning and it was this approach that I used to conduct my research. The work of Max Weber on social action with its emphasis on meaning and understanding, i.e. *verstehen*, forms the core ethos of the naturalistic<sup>2</sup> tradition and of my qualitative methodology. The meaning given to rural development by practitioners and policymakers relates to this broader sociological concept of *verstehen*.

In contrast to the French positivist tradition described earlier, Weber was concerned with the subjective meaning that humans attach to their actions and interactions within

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<sup>2</sup> In direct contrast to the way it is used here – the study of social life in real, naturally occurring settings, i.e. naturalism, is also used by some social scientists (e.g. Bhaskar, 1989) to refer to the adoption of natural science models of research to the social sciences. This position is also known as positivism.

specific social contexts. Weber recognised that a mix of motivations causes individuals to act in particular ways in the social world. Sociology, he believed, is a science of social action. Thus the social researcher must understand the social context within which individuals act. Such understanding, or *verstehen* forms the core approach to social research according to Weber. His famous work on The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism shows how the concept of *verstehen* can be used to research the social world. In this he argues that the inner life of Protestants is only available using interpretative approaches. Essentially his work validated meanings and social action and also introduced these terms into sociological discourse laying the foundation for naturalism (Elwell, 1996).

"Sociology . . . is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of 'action' insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior-be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is 'social' insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course" (Weber, M 1968/1921:4)

Hence individuals never act in a vacuum but are always considering the impact of their action in the context of a social setting i.e. with others in mind. Naturalism forms the central tenet of qualitative methodology. Centred on an approach that explores social meanings within a social world, qualitative research is therefore not modelled on the objective approach favoured by the natural sciences. Instead it describes and seeks to understand through quality and meaning.

A number of key ontological and epistemological assumptions provide the basis for qualitative study and they are also pertinent to my research. Fundamentally human beings and social behaviour are different from physical and inanimate objects. People live in material and bounded structures and locations; these contexts shape their interpretative processes and the meanings that people assign to events (Brewer, 2000, Goffman, 1959). Thus people are meaning endowing; they have the capacity to interpret and construct their social world and setting rather than responding in a simplistic and automatic way to any particular stimuli. They are also discursive and can articulate their meanings. That is they can tell others what they mean by something – a comment, an idea or behaviour – and can suggest the motives behind it.

In the case of my research the meaning given to rural development by practitioners and policymakers relates to the broader sociological concept of *verstehen*, as already discussed.

This has implications for society which is not fixed and unchanging. Instead it is shifting and changing, being constructed and reconstructed by people themselves on the basis of their interpretative processes. All social life is partially interdependent on the concrete situations and structures in which it exists (Brewer, 2000, Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, Gillespie and Sinclair, 2000, Elwell, 1996 and Hammersley, 1990). These assumptions about society, the individuals within it and the nature of knowledge were applied to my research.

Qualitative approaches are widely used in rural research. For example, Newby's (1977) study of farm workers was conducted using an ethnographic approach to discover their role in the farming sector in East Anglia. Focus groups were used by Shortall (2001) to study the impact of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reforms on rural women. Meanwhile Cloke et al (2002, 2003) combine quantitative research with qualitative approaches (archival research, interviews and ethnography) to understand connections between homelessness and rurality.

Research conducted using a qualitative approach occurs in real, naturally occurring situations and contexts (the field), independent of scientific manipulation. It focuses attention on what human beings feel, perceive, think and do in the field. Qualitative research places emphasis on analysing meanings given to events from individuals' standpoints, taking into account feelings, perceptions, emotions, thoughts, moods, ideas, beliefs and interpretative processes of members of society as they understand and articulate them. It is discovery based and inductive, rather than deductive. Stress is laid on observing and experiencing what is happening naturally rather than hypothesising about it beforehand. Methods used are unstructured, flexible and open-ended. These approaches and characteristics are found within my case study and are placed within an ethnographic framework.

#### **2.1.4 An ethnographic study**

Ethnography is not a straightforward term. It possesses inconsistencies (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). It is sometimes understood as qualitative research; that is, it forms a perspective on research (Wolcott, 1973) in the same way that quantitative

research provides a perspective. It is also used to signify participant observation (Herbert, 2000). Additionally it can also be used to describe a particular approach or style within qualitative research (Brewer, 2000). It is this latter understanding that I apply to my study. As the discussion below will demonstrate even here ethnography is more than a method – it is a process encompassing methodological issues as well as methods. To understand the concepts underpinning my ethnographic study an overview of the development of ethnography is essential.

### **Traditional ethnography**

Some ethnographers strive to meet the standards of the natural sciences. They believe that rigour allows them to capture reality which is fixed and can be revealed, described and explained. Thus the practice of ethnography using this approach is formal, rigorous and systematic and reflects the positivist scientific model. The ethnographer is the expert and uses structured methods of data collection. Research if conducted in this way is objective and provides a ‘real’ picture of the world. The researcher is powerful as he or she is seen as ‘a larger-than-life figure who went into and then returned from the field with stories about strange people’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:13) A positivist approach was favoured by anthropologists emerging from the British colonialist era – e.g. Evans-Pritchard (1940). Similarly the famous study by Lynd and Lynd (1929) on Middletown, USA used a list of standard categories or a cultural inventory to organise field data, providing them with the indication for their investigation.

At the other extreme to the positivist approach is humanistic ethnography. This type of ethnography is typically associated with the various generations of ‘Chicago School’ sociologists with their origins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Fielding, 1993). These sociologists believe that full immersion within the world of the people being studied is essential to allow the researcher to adopt the perspective of the researched. Hence Whyte (1981) joined the Norton Street Gang in order to gain better access to the community. The researcher’s power lies in his or her ability to represent the subject’s story through narrated life history (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Centred on the belief that people have the capacity to give meaning to their world, humanistic ethnography operates on the basis that it produces a privileged access to social reality. The ability of individuals to construct their reality through their capacity to understand and interpret social life means that humanistic ethnography places

emphasis on research in naturally occurring settings over artificially created settings. Thus the data collected is taken at face value by the researcher who embraces the culture of the researched to become an 'insider'. The researcher is as much a subject as researcher (Vidich and Lyman, 2000). This approach claims to have 'special' and privileged access to insider accounts of people's world-views. The data collected provides a 'real' description of the social world.

Although they come from two polarised ideals both the humanist and the positivist approach attempt to provide a realist description of the world. They achieve this through 'thick description', a term coined by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) to describe the layered, rich and contextual description of an event or social scene. In contrast to 'thin' description which is the bare facts (Brewer, 2000:39), thick description gives a perspective from the inside and presents detail, context and emotion in such a way that it 'invokes emotionality and self-feelings' (Denzin, 1989:83). The humanist approach does this by blurring the distinction between the researcher and the researched, i.e. the researcher takes on roles within the researched community. The positivist approach meanwhile conspicuously retains the distinction between the researched and the researcher; the researcher being the 'expert' that provides a 'real' description. The ability of the researcher to achieve 'realism' through these approaches forms the basis of criticisms railed at ethnography and so provides an insight into the development of alternate, contemporary models.

### **Criticisms of ethnography**

Disillusionment with the concept of thick description alone as a means of analysing people in their social setting led to something of a crisis in ethnography. Critics of the realism found in traditional scientific and positivist approaches to ethnography argue that thick description alone cannot provide a 'real' picture instead claiming that it reveals a 'naïve reality'. These critics split according to differences in their stance regarding realism.

Postmodernist critics present the ultimate extreme position and indeed criticism. They argue that research is a product of the researchers who themselves are not detached as they make choices about research design, location and approach, helping to create the data that they end up collecting (Marcus, 1980 and Clifford, 1981). All experiences are created in the text written by the researcher and so generalisations cannot be made (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). All accounts are constructions made by the observer



within a particular context and so the question of which account more accurately represents reality is meaningless (Brewer, 2000). This is the crisis of *representation*.

Furthermore as all research is subjective it can only provide a socially constructed account of the world. There is no independent and external reality; human existence is relative, temporary and culturally created; located in a particular community (Spretnak, 1991). As the field cannot be represented through ethnography then the *legitimacy* of the data itself becomes questioned due to the deconstruction of terms such as validity, reliability and generalisability, traditional criteria for evaluating ethnography. Legitimacy is the second crisis of ethnography.

The extreme, uncompromising and, I would suggest, unconstructive postmodernist position advocates the notion that the criteria for ethnography are unknown and uncertain. It created what Denzin and Lincoln (1998:21) initially labelled the 'double crisis' of ethnography, referring to the crises of representation and legitimation. Later they introduce the crises of 'praxis' suggesting a 'triple crisis' for ethnography (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:17). This refers to accepted practice being undermined as new and varied approaches emerge. These new ethnographic positions, each retaining some form of realism while responding to the original main criticisms railed at ethnography – representation and legitimation – provide new models for ethnographic practice. Consequently all offer a variation on realism and encompass the notion of reflexivity, the latter term being introduced to ethnography as the key solution to the crisis of representation (Altheide and Johnson, 1998).

For instance Hammersley (1990) offers subtle realism as an alternative to naïve realism where validity (made up of plausibility, credibility and evidence tests) and relevance (e.g. the emancipation of women through feminist ethnography) are key criteria. Meanwhile analytical realism (Altheide and Johnson, 1998) is based on the premise that the social world is an interpreted one and thus all knowledge is perspectival with the researcher, the topic, the subjects, the field, the sense making process and the written text at the heart of ethnography. Validity is essential and is achieved through a reflexive account of the researcher and the process. Finally, critical realists assert the objectivity and reality of material structures, that is they believe structures are 'real', but structures are continually reproduced by people in everyday activity (Bhaskar, 1989). They are concerned with the relationship between social structure and social

action. Hence understanding the actor's viewpoint may be necessary for social knowledge but it is not sufficient, there are other individual interactions and interpretations about which the researcher needs to know (Porter, 1995).

The concept of reflexivity forms a core approach to alternate models. Reflexivity is a familiar approach within rural research, see for instance Newby (1977) in his study of farm workers in East Anglia, Strathern (1982) in her study of village life in Essex, Mayerfield Bell's (1994) study of English village life and Pini (2004) on the Australian sugar industry. These studies demonstrate that a greater contribution to knowledge can be made through the use of reflexivity. It is more than naval gazing or biographic analysis; reflexivity is concerned with a theoretical and analytical process. Contemporary ethnographic research involves critically engaging with those being researched to understand what wider causes and effects influence their viewpoints (Cook and Crang, 1995). This includes consideration of unarticulated nuances such as reactions, practices, passing comments and body language. Reflexivity recognises the challenge of telling it like it is and the need to go beyond people's words. It also refers to larger scale matters such as the bigger picture or context within which events occur. Reflexive ethnography is thus valuable for two reasons; firstly it considers the role of the researcher and secondly it places the research in a wider context. Both of these characteristics of reflexivity are considered in turn.

Fielding points out... 'The ethnographer is never a detached observer. "Objective" observation is hopeless to achieve' (Fielding 1993:164). Thus personal beliefs, biases, history and experience all affect how the ethnographer sees events and also how events are recorded. As thick descriptions are selected by the ethnographer they do not represent reality. The ethnographer becomes a research instrument (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) and so two ethnographers may have different interpretations of the same event (Herbert, 2000). This difference should not be dismissed and Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argue that we should be reflexive in trying to set the data against context rather than eliminating the effects of the ethnographer. Hence being reflexive entails being explicit and open about circumstances that produced the data and recognising how and why the social world represented is a partial, selective and personal version (Brewer, 2000). Within my research a description of events is therefore inadequate; consideration also needs to be given to me as an individual and my position within the research field, how this affects what I 'see' and how I interpret

the information. England describes this 'betweenness' (1994:86) as a process of filtering by the researcher based on his / her perceptions and interpretations of the fieldwork experience. The researcher is essentially the interface between the research field and the research. Accordingly the researcher is a crucial component of the research, impacting on it as her own personality and history affects her understanding and interpretation of events. Consequently England (1994) suggests this reflexivity is more than naval gazing, it involves analytical scrutiny and can induce self-discovery leading to insights about the research questions.

The discussion earlier in the Chapter establishes the need to consider the link between structure i.e. the policy framework and agent i.e. the rural development actors. It established that these elements do not exist independently of one another and so cannot be analysed in isolation; instead they symbolise a 'duality' (Giddens, 1984:25). Rural development practice thus results from inter-play between policy and practitioners. Herbert suggests that 'if the macro-micro link merits investigation, then ethnography seems inescapably important' (Herbert, 2000:555). Generalisations can therefore be made about micro-events studied in the field; this being an important issue for my research and the link between rural development practice and policy. Consequently reflexive ethnography facilitates the analysis of the macro via the micro. Reflexivity therefore relates to the wider research context. The researcher must have an understanding of how both the researcher and the researched are immersed in the community under study and in wider communities (Cook and Crang, 1995). In the case of rural development, description alone fails to get behind what is happening or to help understand the systems and structures that affect rural development practice. It fails to provide a policy or community context and so it does not give consideration to the affect of the context on events and the resulting inferences made. Analysis of the rhetoric and reality of rural development demands an approach that is revealing and probing thus providing broad context. For instance consideration of language and the rural development discourse will help to analyse wider issues, such as the reason why individuals attach particular meaning to events or why societal issues impact at the individual or community level.

Brewer (2000:51) outlines a process for undertaking ethnographic research which allows ethnography to look beyond the immediate setting and make connections to wider societal issues. It follows from Mill's (1959:5) call for a 'sociological

imagination' and is based on the 'ethnographic imagination'. The ethnographic imagination describes the 'imaginative leap necessary to recognise the authority of ethnographic data' (Brewer, 2000:51), thus responding to limitations cited by post modern criticism of ethnographic research – representation and legitimacy. In the case of my research it allows analysis of the macro via the micro, that is rural development policy through a case study.

Brewer's (2000) model has three dimensions:

- i. the need for the ethnographer to establish his/her integrity and thus the authority of the data;
- ii. the belief that microscopic events can illustrate features of broader social processes as long as the ethnographer sets out the grounds on which those generalisations are made
- iii. people exist in a complex world which must be analysed if the social world is to be understood.

Participant observation and the use of basic language or discourse analysis are key components within this ethnographic model. They are processes used to achieve the objectives of ethnographic imagination facilitating reflexivity but also responding to the dimensions of the ethnographic imagination. The remainder of this section considers the principles behind these approaches.

#### **Participant observation and discourse analysis**

Participant observation involves the researcher moving between participating in and observing a community, the extent to which the researcher participates and observes varying according to the research. It was famously used by William Foote Whyte in his study of Italian residents living in the North End of Boston during the early 1940s. To do this he claims that an open mind is essential as participant observation 'opens up possibilities for encountering the completely unexpected phenomenon' (Whyte, 1984: 27).

Participant observation however is not straightforward. It is confusing; Cook and Crang (1995) suggest even conflicting, because it is about taking part and observing simultaneously. Many typologies have been developed that define key stages in the participant observation process (see for instance Adler and Adler, 1987, Junker 1960

and Gold, 1969). Gold's (1969) typology distinguishes between participating and observing. This provides a useful starting point for considering appropriate roles for the researcher and the associated pitfalls. These are considered next before going on to review the specific roles that I assumed.

Gold (1969) developed a typology of the ideal typical field roles that span a participant: observer continuum and explains some of the dilemmas associated with each. At the one end is the participant whose true identity is never known to those in the field as the participant 'pretends' a role and risks 'going native' (Gold, 1969:34), thus the researcher over-identifies with the researched. The role is incorporated so effectively that the researcher finds it impossible to view the field dispassionately, resulting in a loss of perspective. Hence the researcher may no longer gather data or record observations (Burgess, 1984). In any case done appropriately full participation is effective for gaining a realistic picture of the dynamics of the community. This enables the researcher to participate in particular events that can then lead towards a generalisation that would not otherwise have happened (Whyte, 1984)

The participant-as-observer differs in that both the field worker and the informant are aware that theirs is a field relationship. Gold (1969) warns that some of the problems may be initially developing trust with those in the field, but then the field worker may over identify with those in the field as familiarity has increased. This is not a problem with the observer-as-participant category where contact within the field is more limited and so has its own glitches, the main one being that the researcher misunderstands those in the field as knowledge is very limited.

Finally, the complete observer does not have social interaction with informants. Although Gold (1969) points out that this is the least used role in field work, when it is applied the main danger is 'ethnocentrism' which occurs whenever a field worker cannot or will not interact meaningfully with an informant.' Gold's typology provides a useful starting point for the analysis of my roles within the field although it is limited by its linear nature. It does not allow for roles to be simultaneously superimposed and assumes that the researcher can only fulfil one of the functions at any one time. In fact as a later section reveals, this was not the case within my research which demanded a more flexible approach to participant observation allowing for roles within roles.

Within this approach I used a form of discourse analysis to facilitate a reflexive approach. Various models of discourse analysis are evident with the concept emerging as a discipline in itself (van Dijk, 1997). It was not my intention to use complex linguistic analysis to explore rural development; instead I used a simple approach to demonstrate the relationship between rhetoric and reality and also to explore the role of language in the rural development process. It provides insight into what people say and what they actually do or on how rural development is understood, in other words it facilitates a reflexive approach.

Although the notion of discourse is 'essentially fuzzy' it is taken here to mean the properties of 'text and talk in context' (van Dijk, 1997:1/3). Discourse analysis is used increasingly to analyse social policy and practise, typically in an urban regeneration context (Hastings, 1998; Hastings, 1999; Smith, 1999 and Taylor, 1999) and sometimes to compare government rhetoric and reality (see for instance Fairclough, 2000). My approach is informed by Fairclough's three-dimensional model for analysing political language (of New Labour) in terms of the rhetoric and reality; considering language in terms of genre, discourse and style. Hence I consider how much language is part of the actual activity of rural development, how rural development is represented in various media such as policy documents or community meetings and how performance is affected by values and identities.

Ethnography underpins the approach that I took within the broader qualitative methodological framework as already described. In my study I used various methods, processes and techniques to collect the data and later to analyse that data; participant observation being a key process within my research. Ethnography forms an umbrella under which methods and processes used within my research exist. The style of ethnography used, while originating in the traditional ethnographic approaches emerged as an 'alternate model' following criticisms levelled at these traditional ethnographic approaches.

## **2.2 Section Two: The Case Study**

In this section I summarise the reasons behind my choice of Case Study, the CF-S project. I then provide background to reflect on the context within which my research occurred. It should be noted that the case study involved working in specific communities and background information on those communities is provided in later

chapters. The information given here includes a description of the organisation hosting CF-S, Hastoe Housing Association, in terms of its structure, the regulations governing its activity and its core objectives. Emphasis is placed on the history of Hastoe and one aspect of its governance as an example to illustrate the culture of the organisation and the reality behind the rhetoric. This analysis helps to explain Hastoe's motivation for developing and hosting Communities First-Suffolk.

The case study selected for my research was Communities First Suffolk, a three year rural development project led by Hastoe Housing Association. During this time I was employed as the project co-ordinator.

It was selected for the following four reasons:-

1. It facilitated participant observation. Firstly participant observation could be conducted directly on CF-S as it had a remit to work directly with a number of rural communities across Suffolk on regeneration initiatives. Participant observation would also be carried out on the broader case study, Hastoe Housing Association. As a member of staff with direct involvement in routine organisational issues I would be fully immersed in the Hastoe environment and have connections with associated settings.
2. It represented a space where policy and practice came together. Thus it involved all individuals relevant to my core research query; policy makers and practitioners, both paid and unpaid. It symbolised the application of a macro policy in a micro setting.
3. It represented a popular approach to regeneration, both intrinsically in content but also by design. It involved an organisation designing and hosting a project and then setting out good practice emerging from activity within the project all of which was applied within a community setting.
4. The project within the case study was itself of interest to my research, involving as it did rural regeneration. Part of the task of the project was to interpret and apply government policy. CF-S was time limited and had a specific agenda with particular tasks that were to be achieved within the context of a community

environment. This micro context had relevance to the macro as findings from CF-S were to inform policy nationally.

### **2.2.1 Hastoe Housing Association**

Hastoe was established in 1962 by the Trustees of the Sutton Dwellings Trust. It became independent from this Trust in 1982 when it had 1333 homes. It currently manages in excess of 2500 homes (Housing Corporation (HC) website). The organisation has grown in terms of the volume of houses which it manages, but it has also extended its remit beyond housing provision. It pioneers new approaches to affordable housing and initiates schemes not directly concerned with providing housing. The Association has been involved with a number of activities including pioneering the use of private funding in building affordable homes, promoting shared ownership and introducing energy efficiency in affordable housing. It has set up various initiatives such as Sustainable Homes, Investors in Communities and a Rural Resource Unit. ([www.hastoe.com](http://www.hastoe.com))

Within the context of housing provision and regeneration, Hastoe is a small provider. The Housing Corporation, the funding and regulatory body for housing associations in England and Wales, holds a Public Register of Social Landlords (housing organisations). This register illustrates the wide range of housing organisations that currently exist.

At one end of the spectrum are agencies such as The Places for People Group which 'is one of the UK's leading housing and regeneration specialists and is responsible for more than 52,000 homes in England, Scotland and Wales' ([http://www.placesforpeople.co.uk/about\\_us/index.asp](http://www.placesforpeople.co.uk/about_us/index.asp) 25.02.04). It functions through nine subsidiary companies including six housing associations. These housing associations range in size from North British Housing with about 47,000 homes across England to Kush Housing Association based in London and providing 700 homes. Overall the Group employs around 1400 people and has 25 offices across the UK. More recently it established a charity Places for People Regeneration to further its regeneration activities (Annual Report 2003 – Review). Meanwhile at the other end of the housing and regeneration continuum are Associations such Highbridge Society Limited which manages nine homes in Sussex.



Most of these organisations have a unique feature that distinguishes them from peer organisations. For instance an organisation may be the only social housing provider in a particular location, or it may specialise in housing for a particular group such as the elderly. Hastoe is no exception to this rule and it has developed its own niche. In East Anglia it provides housing for local people and for those on low income.

### **Management Structure**

As with most Housing Associations, Hastoe is managed on a daily basis by a senior management team, headed by a managing director who joined Hastoe in 1981. He has therefore been involved with Hastoe as it grew from a very small housing provider to one with a portfolio of Housing and 'Housing Plus' activities.

In addition a committee, which meets monthly, provides organisational management and governance by discussing strategic matters such as [housing] development schemes, financial audit and rent policies (15.05.02). The following analysis reveals that even though extensive legislation exists to govern it, Hastoe is able to manage its affairs in a way to suit its own needs.

### **The Committee**

The matter of Housing Association governance was the subject of much national legislation in 2001 with guidelines emerging for housing organisations across the board. The Regulatory Code of the Housing Corporation (the body that governs housing associations) was set out in the publication 'The way forward: Our approach to regulation' (The Housing Corporation, 2001). It encourages housing associations to become more transparent. Specifically Regulatory Code 2 deals with governance and 2.2 addresses directly the matter of the board thus:

'Regulatory code 2.2: Housing associations should be headed by an effective board with a sufficient range of expertise – supported by appropriate governance and executive arrangements – that will give capable leadership and control' (The Housing Corporation, 2001:22)

The accompanying regulatory guidance 2.2 provides assistance for implementing this code:

'a) Effective governance arrangements can be framed around the following questions:

To what extent does the governing body perform its key governance roles well?

To what extent does the governing body work well together?

To what extent does the governing body comprise appropriate people?

b) The governing body is diverse, reflecting the communities the association serves, and has a range of skills, experience and up-to-date knowledge.

c) Organisational and management structures reflect the association's business objectives.

d) The governing body meets regularly. It ensures that the association acts within the terms of its constitution and relevant legislation' (The Housing Corporation, 2001:22)

Some housing associations sought tenant involvement in their committees as a direct response to this regulation. At Hastoe residents could get involved with one of two local committees (one each for the West Country and the South East) or they could join the main committee. The local committees, established in 1999 and 2001, were not strategic or highly influential in their early days. For instance the West Country Committee spent much of their early meetings 'getting to know about the various activities of the West Country operation' (D:F- Hastoe Housing Association Limited Doc. A.41 May 2002).

Meanwhile the main committee conducted the strategic business on behalf of the association. Residents could join by requesting an application form and information pack. The opportunity to apply to the committee was advertised in Hastoe's newsletter which was circulated to staff and tenants. In 2002 the application form asked the applicant to state their reason for applying to be a member of the committee. It also asked what skills, qualities and experience they would bring to the committee.

The governance guidance was formalised by the Housing Corporation in 2002 and was likely to take some time to trickle down to all organisations. Thus to track progress on the committee structure in Hastoe some comparison over time is necessary and the committee membership is analysed below for 2000 as well as 2004.

The combined experience, qualifications and awards held by the Hastoe committee in 2000 was impressive including ex-senior partners of solicitors firms, ex-managing directors and managers along with chief executives and directors of quangos. Frequently referred to by Hastoe staff as the 'great and the good' (D: RJ) of society,

these individuals were not appointed by accident, nor did they make speculative applications to join. They were hand picked by the Managing Director. Consequently they represented a strategic choice of individuals who due to their current or previous roles, were well-connected to networks of influence and power. For instance one of the committee members was a Director of the Countryside Agency with responsibility for one of four Directorates in that Agency (the Directorate entitled 'Making life better for people in the countryside') each of which is responsible for allocating budgets internally and providing funding to outside agencies and organisations.

The committee membership of 2004 contains no residents and continues to represent a list of individuals with impressive credentials (see <http://www.hastoe.com>). Out of the thirteen members, ten joined prior to 2002. The exclusiveness of the Board is illustrated by the chosen venue for numerous Christmas meetings. Over the lifetime of the CF-S project it was The Athenaeum, a private members club located just off the Mall in London. Until recently women were not permitted to become members of this club, and were only allowed into the club through association with other (gentlemen) members. This environment could be perceived as being highly intimidating for a typical Hastoe resident, the type of individual encouraged by Regulation 2.2 to help govern the Association.

It is apparent that the Hastoe committee did not reflect the communities that the association served – typically families on a low income with a strong local connection. It was actually led by an elite group of well connected individuals. This helps to explain how Hastoe came to lead a large rural development based project, the subject of the following section.

#### **Communities First-Suffolk**

Communities First-Suffolk was the name of the project that I co-ordinated for just under three years for Hastoe Housing Association. It was this project that became my Case Study. As it provides an interface between rural development policy and practice, the story behind its development is crucial. This reveals not only how meaning is given to rural development, but also how policy becomes practice.

Hastoe Housing Association compiled a position paper on market towns in early 1998 entitled 'Housing as a driver for regeneration and sustainable development in market towns and villages'. This was the culmination of a series of meetings held with partners

over the preceding two years (H). The partners went on to become the CF-S Project Steering Group and many of them represented organisations that made financial contributions to the project.

Formal applications were made to the Housing Corporation and the then Rural Development Commission in 1998 for funding for the 'Sustainable Rural Communities' project. Funds were approved by the Housing Corporation late 1998 and by the Rural Development Commission early 1999, respectively providing 50% and 31% of the project costs for a three year period. The remainder of the necessary funds were sourced from two local authorities and the shortfall was made up by Hastoe.

The applications made to the two key funders did not represent cold submissions. They were developed through a responsive process of engagement whereby the fledgling project steering group became a forum where representatives from the funding bodies offered advice on how the proposed project fitted with their priorities. For instance letters of communication within the then Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) show how the proposal was promoted within this government department by the funding representative on the steering group. It was sent to the senior officer with responsibility for allocating the fund in question and emphasises how the proposed project met internal objectives... 'the proposal fulfils 5 of the Commission's objectives which relate to sustainable development, providing affordable housing and community involvement' (D: F - letter from Housing and Planning Division RDC to Rural Development Division DETR 9.9.98).

Hastoe effectively courted the key agencies involved and while the outcome of the funding application was not entirely predictable, a flat rejection was highly unlikely. As the project had been developed by the Housing Association in conjunction with the steering group that included representatives from the RDC, it was no accident that the project explicitly met with their objectives. It had in part been shaped by the RDC.

This process of developing projects in conjunction with the applicant is one that many government agencies use. It is justified as it avoids the scenario of organisations investing time and resources in developing projects only to have them rejected outright with no negotiation or explanation. However, for many organisations getting to the

point of engaging in meaningful dialogue with such funding bodies was challenging and elusive (SG).

Hastoe's connections and reputation gave it the leverage and clout to successfully issue invitations to various agencies to get involved in the development of their project. The fact that one of the funding body's executive Director's was a member of the Hastoe Committee cannot have been a disadvantage.

#### Project details

Communities First-Suffolk was a three year project, budgeted originally at £191,750. Fundraising secured most of this money from two agencies. The Housing Corporation provided funding under their Innovation and Good Practice programme (£95,875), while the then Rural Development Commission funded CF-S under its policy development fund. (As this was in excess of £50,000 the application had to gain DETR approval - £60,000 was requested). In addition two local authorities provided an annual contribution of £2000 towards the project. The shortfall was underwritten by Hastoe through the provision of a guarantee.

The aim of the project was 'to demonstrate the contribution that RSLs and affordable housing can make to rural regeneration and sustainability' (application to the Housing Corporation, 1998). The description of the main activities of the project co-ordinator provides an insight into the expected nature of this contribution.

'A key task for the co-ordinator will be to identify the communities to be part [sic] of the project. These should include a small market town, a large village and a more remote, small settlement. The co-ordinator will work with Parish Councils and others to establish community action teams.' (D:F - Application to the Housing Corporation, 1998).

Further understanding of what the steering group and Hastoe expected to achieve through CF-S is given in the stated targets and outputs in the applications to the then Rural Development Commission and the Housing Corporation. As these targets indicate CF-S was not directly linked to building or providing homes for people – the core business of any Housing Association.

1. Community Action teams set up in a minimum of 3 settlements.
2. Action plans to be produced and implemented.
3. Training to be arranged for local teams.
4. Publish and distribute 3 Newsletters.
5. Publish and distribute preliminary (1 year) and interim ( 2 years) reports.
6. Arrange one publicity event in year 2.
7. Four projects to be launched.
8. Publish and distribute manuals and final report.
9. Arrange final publicity event to launch manuals and reports.
10. Produce and implement exit strategy.

(Housing Corporation and Rural Development Commission applications, 1998)

Within CF-S I worked in a varying capacity with communities in Bures, Thurston, Brandon, Great Cornard/Sudbury and Stradbroke within East Anglia. For instance my involvement in Great Cornard and Sudbury was extensive and at one stage of the project I was easily committing the majority of my time to this community. I helped to write the successful bid to the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). Consequently my involvement within this community grew. I was appointed vice-chair of the emergent SRB regeneration group, the Community Energy Project (CEP). It was responsible for managing the SRB funding and activities. I co-ordinated an associated working group and I also liaised closely and regularly with the CEP Project Manager.

Conversely my involvement in Bures was limited to helping the footbridge project group. I assisted them with funding applications to achieve their aim of building a footbridge. This was to connect the village which, being located in two counties, was divided not only by administrative boundaries, but also geographically by the River Stour. The activities that I got involved with are discussed later in this chapter as I examine my different roles within CF-S.

As project co-ordinator I produced various publications including two newsletters, a policy paper and finally a Good Practice Guide, Sustaining Rural Communities (McAreavey, 2003) along with related summary documents. The Guide was published jointly by the key sponsors of the project – Hastoe Housing Association, the Countryside Agency and the Housing Corporation. It was launched to an audience of

policymakers and paid practitioners. An unintended publication emerged from the project, *Made to measure: How to evaluate the success of local community action* (McAreavey and Morris, 2003) which was co-written by myself as project co-ordinator and John Morris an external evaluator to the CF-S project. This guide was produced due to the innovative evaluation model developed within the project. It followed a seminar series designed and led by the project co-ordinator and external evaluator for rural development practitioners in Suffolk.

### **2.2.2 My ethnographic approach**

A key consideration of my research is context and the desire to show the link between the micro and the broader social world. This incorporates the traditional naturalistic emphasis of ethnography on the capacity of individuals to bestow meaning on events and activities. My research methodology thus rests on the concept of *verstehen* as already discussed. My selected approach borrows from the various iterations of realism identified above particularly in respect to reflexivity. It is most closely aligned to Brewer's (2000) approach using the ethnographic imagination, thereby contextualising the research field and allowing the micro to inform the macro. Furthermore Giddens (1984) structuration theory prescribes that structure and agency interrelate. Rural development agents i.e. policymakers and practitioners, affect and are affected by the structures in which they operate. Consequently rural development practice and policy are closely connected.

Mindful of naïve reality, the key criticism of traditional humanistic ethnography, I approached my study with a concern for reflexivity. Reflexivity is inherent to my ethnography given the theoretical context within which it exists. This recognises that the researcher and research findings are not isolated from wider society and that the biography of the researcher along with personal values and interests affect the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Consideration is given to my personal position and my research relationships within the field as well as the circumstances within which the research was conducted. This reflexive style is integral to my ethnography and is applied throughout my research analysis.

**Ethnography**, as used within my research, represents a particular style of research that studies people in their own setting. It attempts to understand the social world through social action providing a link between the micro and the macro. Attention is paid to context and meaning and thus the perceptions and influences of the

researcher/researched, the topic, the wider social structure and the field are key considerations to the research.

The particular techniques used within my research would not have been possible without negotiating around a number of methodological issues. As these issues were critical to the success of my field work they merit consideration before discussion of research methods and 'results'. They relate to general field relations - access, acceptance, ethical issues and accessing information – and arise as a result of the methodology employed.

### **Access**

Gaining access to research is explored in some depth in this section because it forms a critical aspect to any ethnographic study. It influences the shape of the research because it affects the field to which the researcher has access. It also provides insight to those organisations and individuals providing access (Burgess, 1984) and the process that the researcher must go through in order to secure access. Possibly of most importance to the researcher in gaining access and acceptance, is the possession of perseverance and a thick skin.

Access involves people and their lives and is a random business. It is complex and requires patience, creativity and flexibility. The barriers to research and the way they are overcome are important to the overall research process (May, 1993). This section illustrates some of the practical issues that arose for me as I negotiated access. My experience shows that 'gaining access is a political process' and the researcher has to be able to respond quickly, thinking on her feet (Hornsby-Smith, 1993: 54). The time taken to gain access can be unpredictable (Cook, 1997 and Cook and Crang, 1995), the process messy and confusing (Cook, 1997) and there is never any guarantee of success. In short, attempts to access communities can produce mixed results.

Typically gaining access involves negotiating with gatekeepers. Gatekeepers are individuals who formally or informally have the power to give access to the field. Thus they must be identified before a relationship is built with them. I used gatekeepers that I already knew as well as those with whom I had no previous



relationship. Having worked with the Local Villages' Project<sup>3</sup> (LVP) in my previous role with Suffolk County Council, I had established a good working relationship with the LVP Steering Group. Therefore I took the pragmatic decision to invite them to join the CF-S project. My key contact in this community, and the chair of the steering group immediately and enthusiastically accepted the invitation. As with most issues the rest of the steering group members took their lead from him and endorsed this decision.

In Thurston after spending a long time trying to get along to community meetings under the endorsement of a professional colleague who was fairly sceptical of my project and of me, I finally made contact with a community 'champion'. Having spent many months trying to access the group through what turned out to be the inappropriate person, a professional colleague, access was available when I was able to identify the 'right' person, the community champion. As chair of the steering group he was in a position to invite me to meetings and to endorse my project to the rest of the group. This took some time as it was done via the cycle of meetings already planned by the community.

Cook (1997) suggests approaching the 'keepers' of several of its different 'gates' thus avoiding over reliance on a single person. In Great Cornard I initially relied on my local authority contact to provide access without much success. Eventually I approached several individuals simultaneously rather than relying on this one individual. I made contact with the chair of the tenant liaison group, the local authority economic development officer and the volunteer centre co-ordinator.

In addition I tried to get involved with the Great Cornard Community Action Plan which was being led by the Parish Council with help from Suffolk ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England). Invitations to and information about meetings seemed frustratingly elusive. I later discovered that a colleague from a trusted partner organisation was filtering my messages to the groups, briefing me retrospectively about meetings rather than providing advance notice of them. She was also reluctant to let me contact the relevant individuals directly – despite polite requests from me for contact details and the officer's agreement to forward these, they never materialised.

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<sup>3</sup> The Local Villages' Project was a community-led initiative, operating in partnership with various agencies, that undertook a comprehensive regeneration process primarily based on the findings from a questionnaire survey and a series of public meetings.

Parallel to this lack of successful access I became involved with the process of developing the Sudbury / Great Cornard SRB bid. My tactics for approaching a number of different gatekeepers had paid off! I joined the budding project partnership as a partner with an interest in the community of Sudbury and Great Cornard. A whole network of groups and organisations was instantly available. The economic development officer was relieved to have another person with experience of working with the voluntary sector<sup>4</sup>. As he was unsure how to make contact with this interest group my emergence in the field was opportunistic and so I developed a niche role for myself. Furthermore I made contact with relevant individuals. In turn I became gatekeeper for the Sudbury / Great Cornard Single Regeneration Budget bid.

My problem with the professional colleague soon evaporated and we established a working relationship where, although there was not a lot of friendship, we knew the boundaries of our relationship. The point here was the need to identify the critical gatekeeper(s). If negotiations are successful with that individual then the other gatekeepers are likely to concede access.

#### **No access**

In contrast to eventual 'success' in Great Cornard and Thurston, I had a different result in Bures. A commuter village lying on the Essex: Suffolk border, Bures has two parish, district and county councils. Thus the administrative boundary vis-à-vis elected representatives has the potential to double the number of possible access points to the community.

Having experienced the length of time taken to identify the relevant individuals in Great Cornard I was determined to enhance my likelihood of success in Bures. I thus made numerous attempts to identify gatekeepers through the district and parish councils, the village hall committee and the community councils for both Essex and Suffolk. From this I had a couple of meetings with local residents. The only outcome from this was an introduction to, and ongoing contact with, a project group that were working on a specific issue – a footbridge. In 16 months this was the extent of my contact with the village, despite a glimmer of full access being given to the village hall group. Access in Bures was much less successful than in Thurston or Great Cornard.

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<sup>4</sup> Revealed through subsequent interview with Economic Development Officer

Cook (1997) suggests that some communities are more guarded than others. During my meeting with the Bures village hall group Chairman, (Peter) I sensed a lot of hostility towards CF-S. This was manifest by an in-depth, but 'unfriendly', even hostile style of questioning on my project by the Chair about how Bures could benefit from being involved with CF-S. I began to wonder why Peter had even agreed to meet with me. Suddenly and dramatically the tone of the meeting changed. It was as though Peter had changed his mind and with it his manner. At his suggestion when we had finished our discussion we took a stroll through the village and Peter pointed out some key features, before getting some more contact details from his home in the centre of the village. At this point he even made me a cup of coffee. I left his house in a good mood congratulating myself on how the meeting had taken a complete u-turn and that I had convinced him of becoming involved with CF-S. Unfortunately I did not speak with him after this meeting despite phone calls and letters sent to him.

### **Acceptance**

Just as seeking access can be timely and unpredictable, so is the achievement of acceptance. Access is no guarantee of acceptance. Acceptance occurs at a number of different levels in the field – within communities and associated groups and within organisations – all of this depending on acceptance by individuals. It also evolves over time and with it the type of information that is available to the researcher changes. In Burgess' (1984) experience, although he had negotiated access to the school and been accepted at the organisational level, this did not automatically translate to individuals within the organisation. He had to work on personal relationships with individual members of the school community. This highlights the two-stage approach that negotiating access can take, firstly getting in – achieving physical access and secondly getting on – achieving social access (Cassell, 2001) or it could be described in terms of official and unofficial access. Getting in or gaining official access to an organisation may be achieved, but until social access or acceptance occurs at the unofficial level, progress cannot be made.

Acceptance is linked to circumstances and positionality. For example, within CF-S my acceptance was forthcoming from professional colleagues who respected Hastoe. The project's connection with the Countryside Agency (both funding and personal contacts) was influential in helping to gain the respect and acceptance from some sceptical individuals. This was shown during discussions where body language demonstrated their positive impression of being associated with the Countryside Agency. As a result

of my own and Hastoe's connections, I was able to introduce local groups and colleagues to other respected professionals in the region and nationally and also to influence these external quangos.

### **Levels of acceptance**

As the researcher constantly negotiates between roles with the researched, there is fluidity around levels of acceptance depending on circumstances. In his research at a school, Burgess (1984) was perceived differently by three individuals, all of whom ultimately came to accept him as something quite different from their colleagues, and this over a different timescale. Having spent a couple of months in Hastoe I was not able to engage with the Housing Manager at any professional level. Although I did have limited personal exchanges from time to time there was little rapport between us. At various team meetings the Housing Manager and the Secretary claimed that CF-S was just being delivered due because the Managing Director thought it a good thing but really had 'nothing to do with Hastoe'. Access was provided to the field – the Managing Director agreed that I could use the data collected within Hastoe while co-ordinating the CF-S project for my PhD research. However, acceptance within the field was less readily available where I had to work to gain acceptance with individuals.

At the beginning of my research I naively assumed that acceptance was not an issue among the steering group organisations and thus by default among any of the officers within those organisations. I quickly discovered that I had to work very hard to gain access to the networks that became crucial to my daily work rather than rely on them by default. Suffolk ACRE approached me to undertake some work in a particular community under the auspices of CF-S. This represented a level of acceptance by senior staff at ACRE. However, I still had to negotiate access through the local community and the relevant ACRE officer working in this area. The officer had demonstrated that acceptance by her organisation was insufficient and that I had to negotiate and secure acceptance from her.

### **Release of information**

That the researcher develops field roles related to degree of involvement and membership (Janes, 1969 and Adler and Adler, 1987) resonates with my fieldwork. While my experience does not correlate exactly with Janes' five phases of newcomer, provisional member, categorical member, personalised member and imminent migrant;

it provides a close parallel. I experienced a change in levels of acceptance based on the length of time with which I was associated with the community. This was accompanied by a change in the type and amount of information to which I was given.

Janes (1969) suggests that information gained is specific to each phase. While being viewed a newcomer, individuals in Thurston were reluctant to exchange any more information than was vital to getting the job done. As trust developed I moved through the member categories receiving increasing quantity and quality of information. Eventually the steering group chair volunteered information through personal telephone calls. This information was very useful for understanding the local politics and the reason for particular things happening. It was not the type of insight gained by attendance at the local meetings. At this stage I felt like a personal member of the group as opposed to a more official or categorical member.

The achievement of access and acceptance does not mark a point at which they are achieved. Instead they have to be renegotiated at every turn. Furthermore official access is quite different to unofficial access or acceptance which must be navigated and negotiated independently.

### **Incentives**

An incentive is usually a useful device for 'hooking' the researched. At the outset I naively assumed that those groups who were serious about community activity would sign up to involvement with CF-S as the project offered 'free' help. However, I quickly realised that a more attractive hook was necessary. When discussing the project with the chair of the Thurston steering group I described how I would be available to assist with their work including providing information, assisting with planning, signposting to other agencies and helping to write funding applications. The chair was receptive enough to this. When I mentioned my 'modest' budget that was available to CF-S communities it felt as though I had switched on a light; I had connected with the chair, spoken in a relevant language. His enthusiasm for involvement with CF-S was noticeably greater.

In the ongoing struggle to gain acceptance from the Suffolk ACRE Officer referred to above, the existence of a budget improved my standing in ways that would not have been achievable through persuasive words. I had described the project countless times to her, and concluded that my ability to describe CF-S must be inadequate because she

did not seem to be able to distinguish between my role and her own responsibility<sup>5</sup>. On yet another attempt to engage with this Officer I brought the role of the project's budget to the forefront. In mentioning the budget and I instantly felt that we had connected, I knew that I had her full attention. Her hostility visibly evaporated and she started to work out how we would be able to use the funds to further the work of Great Cornard, Brandon and Thurston. These communities were part of her own Community Action Plan targets.

Getting accepted within Hastoe entailed involvement with activities peripheral to my research topic and beyond the remit of the CF-S project. I helped at events including housing scheme launches, often doing mundane tasks such as helping with catering. These lowly tasks had enormous payback as various staff members within Hastoe were grateful for the assistance. I also used travel time to talk about the CF-S project and how links could be made to housing management and development. Eventually I established a degree of acceptance within Hastoe.

#### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues in ethnography typically concern the covert versus overt debate. All of my research was conducted on an overt basis. My involvement in the field was overt in that I explicitly asked permission of those with whom I was working – Hastoe staff, CF-S sponsors and steering group, CF-S communities - to study them as part of my research; typically this followed the more complicated task of gaining access and acceptance. Confidentiality requires concrete action to ensure that while the researcher has access to the identity of the respondent, no one else can match names with responses (McAuley, 2003). Consequently, unlike Scheper-Hughes (2000) where confidentiality was guaranteed although not genuinely maintained with tricky consequences, this was overt participant observation and all of the researched were fully aware of my role. Despite the overt nature of my research I have taken steps to hide the identity of informants through various means. The names of individuals have been changed using pseudonyms and in other instances where the status of the individual is pertinent, rather than refer to the individual by position reference is made to their team, e.g. Senior Management Team.

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<sup>5</sup> A Project Officer for the Community Action Plan Project, this individual worked with communities to generate community action plans. This aspect was similar to the CF-S project. However the difference was that I was involved with a limited number of projects to explore the process of regeneration led by a Housing Association, producing a good practice guide highlighting the results. The ACRE project was concerned with achieving as many Action Plans as possible.

While permission was granted to conduct my research I remain doubtful that all of those in the field necessarily remembered that I was carrying out research for my PhD thesis. Nonetheless their permission was sought and granted and I tried to ensure dominance of the research role (de Laine, 2000) by reminding them at all reasonable opportunities that I was conducting fieldwork. Informants reveal information, often sensitive, without realising it especially if they temporarily forget that research is being carried out. Participant observation relies on potentially being able to access this type of data at any time. As such moments are often unexpected; the astute researcher will endeavour to be in the right place at the right time ensuring access to the rich data produced through this research process. I used this type of data to complement that gained through the twenty-five semi-structured interviews that I conducted. In these circumstances informants are made anonymous through the use of codes indicating the source, rather than names.

Within my case study the publication of the Good Practice Guide raised another ethical matter. The project was sponsored by the same organisations responsible for publishing the Guide – The Countryside Agency in conjunction with Hastoe Housing Association and The Housing Corporation. The document was circulated in draft for comment to all members of the steering group which included representatives from each of these agencies. Ultimately I was also employed by Hastoe. Although I did assert my integrity during this process it was within the constraints of these boundaries. Consequently the document was reviewed by both Hastoe and the main funders – The Countryside Agency and The Housing Corporation – and so it can safely be deduced that they were never going to publish any radical findings or conclusions that compromised their position. However the reality was that throughout the review process I consulted Hastoe and The Housing Corporation only when necessary but worked very closely with a Senior Policy Advisor within The Countryside Agency. She did not insist or even request any changes to the document's content.

Leaving the field is a personal decision (de Laine, 2000). Circumstances of the field while dictating elements of it also ensure its unpredictability. My position within Hastoe was directly linked to project funding and was fixed over three years; this paralleled my planned existence within the field. All of the communities in which I was working were informed of the duration of my involvement. Eventually while

some of the community practitioners were disappointed that I was leaving, they were not surprised as I had made them fully aware of the situation. Hastoe agreed to retain links with each of the communities through the Development Manager. However this would be on a minimal basis as he already had the full time function of identifying sites and building housing for the Regional Office in East Anglia.

## **2.3 Section Three: Research Methods**

Various specific techniques or methods were employed to collect data. At a practical level I was employed by Hastoe Housing Association as a project officer for the Communities First-Suffolk project for just under three years from 1999. I co-ordinated an externally funded research project in my own organisation while also fulfilling the role of participant observer. Participant observation forms a core approach to my ethnography and the methods discussed here all fall within the participant observation roles. I kept a daily research journal to record events as I experienced them and this was supplemented by field notes. Minutes from meetings along with official publications – policy documents and funding guidelines - were used to complement my personal records. In addition I conducted twenty-five semi-structured interviews.

The use of different methods is described by Denzin (1978) as a form of methodological triangulation where different methods are used to ensure effective collection of data. The use of various data sources in ethnography or ‘methodological pragmatism’ (Burgess, 1982: 163) provides a fuller picture of one reality as different sources of data are used to explore it. While the various methods used in my research are reviewed below as separate entities they are better considered as techniques that are interwoven and as a result inform one another. For instance techniques used within the action research aspect of the research such as the CF-S seminar occurred within the framework of the ethnographic approach and became part of the participant observation.

The nature of emerging data collected determined its analysis. It did not make sense to collect the data over three years and analyse it following this period as a separate task. Instead notes from meetings, observations from the field and interview notes were constantly reviewed, coded and interpreted, thereby informing ongoing fieldwork. Data interpretation was achieved by writing field notes and prose, reading and examining documents, debating emerging ideas with colleagues and peers. Discussion



happened in formal settings such as meetings, seminars and conferences or informal interview sessions. Conversations also occurred in informal situations including conversations prior to and following events and in the more congenial activity of lunch. These various rich sources are each legitimate forms of data within the participant observation process. All moments were research moments and my eyes and ears were constantly attuned to what was happening vis-à-vis my various roles and my research agenda. The different research methods are discussed separately below. Prior to that the system used to present data is provided.

As the above paragraph indicates data was sourced from informants in different ways. Unless otherwise indicated the source of this is coded throughout the thesis in the following way:-

Steering Group member      SG

Community                      C

Hastoe staff                     H

Other regeneration agency    A

Documents                      D: followed by

    RJ - Research Journal and personal notes

    F – File contents including minutes, official notes of meetings and other project documents

In the instances where interviews were conducted, the code is followed with <sup>i</sup>. Hence if the data emerged through an interview with the Chief Executive of Hastoe it is denoted thus H<sup>i</sup>. A number of interviews were conducted with the same individuals in the same way that numerous conversations and discussions were held with the same informants. If these separate occasions were important to the discussion it is noted separately within the text but otherwise it is not recorded in the coding system.

### **2.3.1 Documents**

Brewer (2000) advocates the use of many different documents – personal and official; primary (compiled by the writer) and secondary (obtained from someone else's primary document); and contemporary and retrospective recorded at the time or after the event. This helps to avoid significant omissions by the researcher. Furthermore such cross-checking of information sources validates generalisations by the

ethnographer. Using a broad range of source documents was vital to my research as I investigated the rhetoric and reality of rural development.

While in the field I was constantly on the lookout, watching for information germane to my central research topic of regeneration policy and practice; rhetoric and reality. As a result I used the following:

- diary
- field notes
- interview notes
- meeting papers and minutes
- funding guidelines
- CF-S publications
- government and policy documents
- voluntary sector publications
- newspapers

All events that I attended and participated in were recorded in my diary. It formed a major source of data, recording events over the duration of my involvement with Communities First-Suffolk, during which time three annual day-to-view diaries were filled. A highly disciplined approach to maintaining the diary was essential to ensure that daily journal entries were made thereby providing a comprehensive record of all field encounters. This necessitated making entries at times that were not always convenient, such as late at night after Board meetings or in the field between meetings. During some days entries were brief as few notable events happened. On other occasions when there was significant activity, journal entries spilled over the allotted space.

Fielding urges ethnographers to focus on the 'behaviouristic' (1993:162) so that diary records remain at the lowest level of interference. My diary did contain descriptions focusing on events as I saw and perceived them; but it also contained abstractions and analytical ideas recorded after the description of events. The diary was not just a superficial account of events; it was a rich and contextual description of my activities. This was essential to help develop ideas and participate/observe in the field with new ideas and insights fresh in my head.

My diary was complemented by notes recorded in the field, at the moment events or discussions had occurred. Field notes allowed me to document comments that individuals made during meetings or in seminars and helped to provide the privileged depth of information that was available within my ethnographic study. They were written up in full on a regular basis before being reviewed and coded.

Document coding occurred to assist the process of analysis by extracting key themes and relevant issues, it happened in the following way. Data were reviewed regularly by re-reading journal entries, field notes and interview notes, searching for and identifying predominant themes, including those that emerged over the duration of the research through the data gathering and document analysis and those that originally stimulated the research, both relating to the central research question. These topics were physically highlighted within the documents and coded according to theme, and eventually by sub-theme, pertinent to the central research question.

Combined with documentation from the semi-structured interviews, these records provided a thorough account of field activities facilitating an ethnographic approach where research is open ended and discovery based. This inductive style assisted the classification of over-arching themes supplemented by sub-themes vis-à-vis the central research challenge. This was not a one-off task; instead it was an ongoing, cyclical process occurring throughout my time spent in the field, that is the data collection period. Short articles exploring these issues and incorporating relevant academic literature were constantly written, reviewed and discussed with my supervisor. This offered a way to review past events whilst sorting data by identifying critical, relevant issues within the field. In addition I had discussions with certain colleagues where I articulated embryonic ideas and sought their opinions and viewpoints. All of these reflective approaches contributed to tailoring the ongoing research through measures such as the design of semi-structured interviews and contributions made to meetings. Consequently as themes and sub-themes were identified I conducted theoretical analyses that led to the introduction of further related issues into the research. This was the manner through which material was extracted for inclusion within the research.

The official documents used were reviewed with attention to the language used in terms of style, discourse and genre and the corresponding function that they were supposed to fulfil. As already described, this was achieved by conducting discourse

analysis with the emerging enquiry forming sections of the discussion mainly within chapter three.

The process of ethnography relies on constantly developing and fine tuning ideas, rather than a discrete series of steps with data analysis at the end. Consequently as a researcher I was tuned into specific issues at any one time and so issues and events that had resonance with my research topic were more notable to me than issues peripheral to my study.

### **2.3.2 Action research**

The CF-S project is best defined as a form of action research. Different definitions of the concept exist (see for example Lewin, 1973, Gummesson, 2000 and Reason and Bradbury, 2001); broadly these include fact finding, gathering information, participation and taking action as integral to action research. This occurs as a cycle of planning, taking action and evaluating the action; these three stages lead to further action. Thus action research is a cyclical process involving the researcher and those experiencing the issues (Lewin, 1973). Coghlan and Brannick (2001:26) emphasise the need for 'reflection on the content, process and premise issues in how the action research cycles are undertaken'. Action research involves an element of risk as the process and outcomes are constantly changing and potentially unknown (Winter, 1989).

Action research used within my research differs from participatory action research which is rooted in Habermas' (1972) argument that knowledge, methodology and human interests are inescapably linked. Participatory action research has a double objective as 'it aims to produce knowledge and action directly useful to people, and also to empower people through the process of constructing their own knowledge' (Shortall, 2003:225). Some of the key criticisms levelled at this approach illustrate why it was not employed within my research. It tends to focus on specific cases paying little attention to the structures within society, it involves untrained participants in researcher roles and it presents a naïve understanding of power, powerlessness and processes of empowerment (Shortall, 2003). Hence participatory action research is unable to make a defensible link between the micro and the macro, or rural development policy and practice.

With its emphasis on the process – creation of community action plans and associated training – along with a final task informed by the process – the publication of a good practice guide (McAreavey, 2003), CF-S had an action research agenda. The process was two-way with findings from the field revealed and discussed mid-way through the project through a seminar. Feedback from these meetings were then used to inform the next phase of the project and eventually fed into the production of the good practice guide. A core aspect of the project was the examination of the process which led to the various events, for instance the iterations that different groups went through to achieve their objectives. All of this information was assimilated and interpreted to comprise the good practice guide.

Participation formed a key approach within CF-S. Public meetings, family fun and community planning days were held in conjunction with the project. All of these activities required planning and were organised by groups comprised of paid and voluntary practitioners. As co-ordinator I also presented ‘findings’ from the project to seminars within conferences. All of these activities provided opportunities for me to interact with a broad range of organisations and individuals; they also illustrate the participatory aspect to the project.

The limitations to the action research agenda of the project should be noted. Although users were involved through membership of the steering group this was not as broad as it might have been. For instance communities were represented through Suffolk ACRE, an umbrella organisation for community organisations. Indeed community practitioners, when asked to get involved, believed that their time was more appropriately devoted to working directly on their own concerns. Ideally CF-S would have held more than one seminar during the research to allow engagement with user groups, but resources did not allow this. One seminar was held and this provided the opportunity to discuss progress with various stakeholders – policymakers and practitioners (both paid and voluntary). A fear of the unknown which arises due to the risk associated with project outputs and processes can instigate limited involvement by powerholders such as commissioning bodies. Community practitioners were not involved in the design of the CF-S project which was an entirely professional task and occurred within Hastoe Housing Association in conjunction with project partners, i.e. the CF-S Steering Group. One-sided involvement is a common failing of action research projects and leads to agencies’ defining their user group’s needs according to

the agencies' specific need and thereby setting the research agenda accordingly (Todhunter, 2003). However, this imbalance must be considered fully as the steering group included umbrella organisations whose remit was to represent various community groups. Furthermore the research agenda was not dominated by a single organisation as the Good Practice Guide (McAreevey, 2003) was published in partnership by three different organisations.

### **2.3.3 Interviews**

Conducted on a one-to-one basis between the interviewer and respondent, interviews rely on verbal stimulus to obtain a verbal response. Typically interviews are based on the fact that verbal descriptions are a reliable indicator of the respondents' behaviour, meanings, attitudes and feelings and also that the questions are a reliable indicator of the subject being researched (Brewer, 2000).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-five individuals drawn from the community or with professional backgrounds. Individuals were selected on the basis of their availability and with the intention of achieving a reasonable representation of both professionals and community representatives from the public and community sectors and reflecting the mix found within the Case Studies. So for instance the selection of community residents happened in the following way. Letters were sent to tenants living in Hastoe's small housing development in Thurston indicating that, as I planned to conduct random interviews on a particular morning, I would call at a number of houses seeking interviewees. Subsequently I went to the estate and called randomly at eight houses, through which I identified four individuals who were willing to participate in the process, whereupon the interviews were conducted. A further two community residents were interviewed at a family fun day event in Great Cornard. Meetings were set up with professionals who worked, and volunteers who were active, in the voluntary and community and public sectors. They were identified through existing networks from the Case Studies. In the end semi-structured interviews were conducted with six community residents, five volunteers active in the voluntary sector, eight public sector professionals, one private sector professional and five professionals working in the community and voluntary sector.

A record of each interview was made through extensive and consistent note taking, providing comprehensive information on the issues discussed along with key quotes encapsulating critical assertions made by the interviewees. I piloted several interviews

using a Dictaphone to record the content of the interview. This confirmed criticisms made of this approach - people hold back because their opinion is going on record verbatim. Such was the extent of this that during one of the pilots, the interviewee actually stated that since the Dictaphone was switched off he could 'be a bit more open' (SG<sup>i</sup>). He then proceeded to give very direct opinions about the CF-S project. For this reason I chose to use written notes during interviews to encourage respondents to be as open as possible. Nonetheless the main shortcoming of this approach to recording interviews within this research must be recognised. The notes were not a verbatim account of what had happened; as they were selected and written by myself, for instance in selecting certain quotes other statements were discarded. Consequently the interview notes represented an account of the event that had been filtered and affected by my perception of the experience. In an attempt to minimise this limitation and to ensure the collection of strictly rigorous data, a disciplined approach to the interviewing mechanics was applied. This involved writing up notes in more detail immediately after interviews were conducted. As soon as possible afterwards these detailed notes were reviewed and coded by extracting key concepts and identifying and labelling emerging themes and sub-themes. This scrupulous method reduced the time that lapsed between conducting and documenting interviews. I was also able to pick up issues while immersed in the field and so I existed within the field conscious and aware not only of the actual occurrence of events, but also of the underlying issues behind these community activities. As well as ensuring the accuracy of data, this level of consciousness provided me with an insight into events as they unfolded before me, prompting further lines of enquiry within the research, highlighting particular themes and informing my listening as I conducted subsequent interviews and undertook other research within the field. The coded and detailed notes formed key documents, integrating with information emerging within other documents arising from field activity and described earlier in this Chapter.

Other distortions can occur within the interview. Interviewees may lie if they think the truth is not socially acceptable or they may misunderstand the question, particularly if it is ambiguous. The interviewer affects the type of information given. Their social status and general demeanour influence the responses of the interviewee. Unstructured interviews go some way to minimising this affect as they avoid structure and appear to take the form of a conversation, or as Burgess (1984:102) describes them 'conversations with a purpose'. My research used semi-structured and unstructured

interviews in an effort to minimise the interviewer effect as I was very conscious of the desire of individuals to say what they thought they should say rather than what they genuinely believed. In other words officially they said things that were socially accepted and approved. Off the record they were more candid with their beliefs and opinions. For instance it was rumoured that staff believed that the motivation for Hastoe to get involved with CF-S was solely that of a member<sup>6</sup> of the Senior Management Team's desire to get official recognition through a knighthood as was the case for one of his colleagues in another housing association. Conversely the official line from this member of staff was that CF-S was not a stand-alone project but that links would emerge with housing management and development and thus a new way of working would evolve due to the project. This stance was echoed by another Senior Manager at meetings in the public domain; contrary to his viewpoint given in informal, unstructured interviews. Furthermore it was commonly believed by officers from organisations active in rural development that funding was given for CF-S because of the connections that Hastoe's Senior Staff had within various government agencies and quangos. Such information was gleaned during unstructured interviews which were more like chats than formal interviews.

Cook and Crang (1995) outline a series of issues that should be considered when interviewing such as appearance or the need to establish rapport. This is of most relevance when interviewing strangers as is the case with first time or one-off interviews. The majority of my interviews were conducted with individuals that I knew and worked with in some capacity – either through the CF-S steering group or on a more regular basis through community project work. Four of the interviewees were not known to me personally, although they were tenants of Hastoe. Thus a relationship already existed as tenants in the East Anglian office had a relationship with the housing and development managers. This was very formal in physical appearance and verbal communication. The Housing Manager insisted tenants use her full title i.e. 'Mrs' even though many of the conversations were highly personal revolving around family disputes and financial difficulties. The Housing Manager and the Development Manger both wore formal clothes such as tailored jackets and suits. This provided an image for the tenants of Hastoe staff and so the ambience of these interviews was formal at the outset. I had to work to 'informalise' this; partially achieved through my

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<sup>6</sup> Although this relates to a single individual, in the interest of protecting the anonymity of this person the Senior Management team is cited.



personal approach and partially through explanation of the purpose of the interview and my position within Hastoe.

On the matter of interviewees misunderstanding the question, Brewer (2000) suggests that it is essential that respondents interpret the question in the same way. Of equal importance is that the question draws out what the interviewer intends. Part of my research was concerned with the way in which people interpret concepts, such as rural development or sustainable development or the CF-S project. When I first talked about rural development with the Chief Executive in terms of the various communities that I envisaged the Project working with he was unenthusiastic and gave me a lukewarm response. I explored this further to discover that the terminology 'development' in a housing environment, whether prefaced with rural or not, had the connotation of building houses, a very politically sensitive subject in rural England. Hence I had to adapt my terminology to regeneration and so within Hastoe (and housing circles) the project from that point was referred to as a rural regeneration initiative. Other issues related to ethics were relevant to the interview process and these are discussed in the ethical section earlier in this chapter.

#### **2.3.4 My position in the field**

The importance of the researcher's position is well recognised. De Laine (2000:47) talks of 'staging appearances and performances' and other feminist literature in particular is brimming with discussions on performance and positionality (for example Naples, 2000, Coffey, 1999, Rose, 1997 and Nast, 1994). Burgess (1984) claims that personal biography and experience of the researcher influence the research role. Specifically England (1994) points out that her tendency towards supplication and her biography helped her to gain access that might not have been so readily available to a differently positioned academic. My experience of working in rural development influenced my position as a project co-ordinator. Prior to working at Hastoe I was a funding officer with Suffolk County Council. In this role I was responsible for helping local groups and organisations in the Rural Priority Area and the Leader II area to access funding. I advised groups as they developed their application for funds and I also made recommendations to various committees based on these applications. I had kudos due to the close relationship with funding; this being a very important issue to the community and voluntary sector. This experience gave me a network of contacts from key organisations across the public and voluntary sectors. Local experience gave

me a reputation, people had pre-conceived ideas about what I was and was not. At times this worked to my advantage, at other times it was a distinct disadvantage.

On a number of occasions on meeting officers for the first time it transpired that they had heard of me and of my work (usually from my County Council days). On these occasions it made the task of promoting CF-S easier than if I was an unknown person. My up-to-date knowledge of local happenings and contacts meant that I avoided spending time developing professional networks. I knew many of the personalities and so was able to either approach them directly or use them to find out the most relevant person to approach for a particular area / issue. My starting point within these networks was generally one of inherent acceptance.

The historical role associated with my previous job and based on what those who knew me expected me to do was gradually eroded as my position within the various communities in the CF-S field emerged and along with it the roles that I undertook. These later functions had to be developed over time to overcome individually pre-conceived ideas among already established contacts within the field.

This central role of the individual within the research process is well recognised within the literature (see for example Cook and Crang, 1995, England, 1994, Katz, 1994, May 1993 and Burgess 1984). Furthermore 'the researcher is an instrument in her/his research and despite some commonalities geographers [*sic*] are not part of some universal monolith' thus 'fieldwork *is* personal' (England, 1994:84, 85). Such is the degree of the personal in fieldwork that Lofland (1971) argues that as researchers we should ask ourselves if we are truly able to get along with the people in the field, even if we do not necessarily share their outlook on the world. The extension of this being that if we cannot 'get on' then we should question our ability to conduct the research. Personal characteristics and potential clashes may not always be apparent during preliminary meetings or they can be an unknown and uncontrollable factor with new personalities constantly emerging in the field. During my study an officer was assigned to work in a community in which I was working. The situation became tricky as it became apparent that she was against the idea of working with me on anything causing me problems with access to meetings, events and individuals. This situation was given and was out of my control.

Hence the field is not a physical place. Nast (1994) suggests that it is located and defined in terms of specific political objectives which shift according to circumstances and so the field is a social terrain. Locating roles and managing field relations therefore relies on social interaction and personal relations. My performances and positions within the field consisted of moving between different roles and often carrying out roles within roles. The functions were accomplished through participant observation.

### **2.3.5 Participant observation in Hastoe**

As analysed earlier while Gold suggests that a chosen role is 'an expedient device for securing a given level of information' (1969:38), his analysis does not explicitly endorse fluidity between roles. However the movement between research roles and ongoing negotiation and renegotiations of these with different informants is an important part of fieldwork (de Laine, 2000, Schatzman and Strauss, 1977 and Junker, 1960). The need to flit from one role to another was much more important to my research than I might have ever imagined. Indeed within my study I had to simultaneously adopt a number of roles, simply shifting from one role to another was inadequate. I had to be several things at any one time; the nature of my participation was not straightforward.

Fundamentally I had two primary roles, that of participant and of observer. I participated in my case study, the CF-S project in two ways – I was the project coordinator – and within this role I had another role of participant-as-observer. This secondary role related to the nature of the case study – a pilot project that sought to provide good practice to other rural regeneration practitioners. The function of being a participant was only achievable through participation coupled with a degree of observation. Simultaneously I had another primary role where I observed the whole process within the larger ethnographic framework that formed the basis for my research.

There were two main issues arising in connection with my position. One concerned the need to shift along the participant-observer continuum between the roles described above, depending on circumstances in the field. The other related to the fact that the two separate primary roles, described above as participant and observer, and the secondary role of participant-as-observer were superimposed. Although they are situated on different places in the participant-observer continuum, in my experience

they occurred simultaneously. This situation reinforced the need for rigorous records including my field notes and personal diary. I also discussed and interpreted events with colleagues to verify what I had understood to have happened. I was in a situation where, although I was participating, I also had to step aside and observe the situation, something of an out of body experience! It was for this reason that I believe I avoided 'going native' (Gold, 1969:34) the danger associated with complete participation. Although I was participating fully in the field, I was always involved with another role. This gave me the distance to always retain an element of the 'outsider' status.

The multi-concurrent roles did not come easily to me. Initially I struggled to identify a single participatory function that would fit all occasions for the steering group, the communities, Hastoe and other agencies, tension and confusion ensued. Clearly a single role to meet all of these needs did not exist. It felt deceitful, or schizophrenic even, to describe my role in one meeting in a particular way and then to present myself in an entirely different light at the next, while all the time knowing that I had another role of observer. I also experienced 'fieldwork fatigue' (Kneafsey, 2000:63) as changing roles required boundless energy and motivation.

The ongoing movement between the selected roles also required skill and shrewdness to judge each situation and move accordingly thus maximising research opportunities. Fuller (1999) uses the analogy of wearing different hats in different circumstances to describe his experience with a credit union. This emerged to become two heads – the 'researcher' and the 'normal me' (Fuller, 1999:225). As my roles emerged during my research I had similar problems. I had different functions within the participant/observation spectrum; I was researcher, facilitator, co-ordinator and 'myself' all in one day. Negotiating between roles becomes an essential skill in itself. Fuller's hat and head problem eased over time, as his experience grew and he learnt how to position himself and negotiate between roles (Fuller, 1999). Until I understood this and the need to do it I was not comfortable with my own expectations of my position. Grappling with the multi-role function was a challenge and was not always easy as I often resisted having such a variety of purposes at the same time.

The tasks that I undertook varied from the humdrum activity of tea making to the more serious business of running a public meeting. However as Gold (1969) observes, during the process of developing a field relationship with an informant lesser roles are

achieved to eventually attain the key role. My strategy was to undertake a predominantly observational role at the outset of my involvement with a community with which I had no previous experience. Eventually as familiarity with the group increased my level of participation increased.

All of my roles were achieved through ongoing relationships with informants, some of whom I already knew and others I had to establish new relationships with. Brewer (2000) contends that trust is pivotal to developing a role and this is made up of verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Social skills and physical presentation contribute to the latter. Hence body language that is friendly is preferable. Equally behaviour must be pitched appropriately including acceptable personal appearances. While in the field I was conscious that I had to slowly develop my profile within the community and gain the respect of the informants. I was very conscious of my personal presentation – for instance my use of jargon and the type of clothes that I wore. More formal clothes that I used to impress local authority staff with were not selected for meetings with community groups.

Nonetheless I did not always feel as though I personally had a great deal in common with some of the community members within some of the groups. For example, when faced with a clique of ‘retired ladies’ from the village of Thurston, areas of commonality were not always apparent. Nast (1994) suggests that in some instances there are such great differences between the researched and the researcher that there is difficulty in establishing personal or social common grounds. Relationships can be hard to build and thus it becomes difficult to develop further understanding of the community in question. Given that learning increases as points of contact are established (Bell, 1993), I tried to identify some common ground with the women in Thurston.

Most of the individuals involved in the group were retired and community activities formed a type of hobby for them. They were resourced with a great deal of life experience. In comparison I felt relatively young and often inadequate. Although a ‘professional’ in the field I got the impression that not having the life experiences of voluntary colleagues, my viewpoint were not quite as valid. As it happened our shared frustration with the dominance of the men in the steering group provided bonding material between me and the female members. The men often engaged in circular and

repetitive discussions about a particular issue. On one occasion having sat through the same discussion for the third consecutive meeting, some of the women rolled their eyes at me. Following up the meaning of this gesture in casual conversation I discovered that it *was* due to frustration with the lack of progress and the dominance of the men. While this commonality may appear superficial and inadequate to make connections, it was sufficient for me to establish rapport.

The success of establishing relationships with informants was dependent on factors including personalities, the need to establish trust and to identify common ground. This is a risk of fieldwork and as I have already discussed new relationships in the field are not always guaranteed, nor is access to key informants. The two main functions that I had within my participant observer roles are considered below.

### **The Professional**

According to the Collins Concise Dictionary (1999) a professional is 'suitable for, or engaged in as a profession' while a practitioner is 'a person who practices a profession'. In the context of rural development and regeneration the two terms are used interchangeably referring to individuals who are paid for their work. They differ from the individuals who participate in regeneration in a voluntary capacity. In a similar way I use these terms interchangeably because they are both concerned with practicing the profession of rural development. My professional role encompassed a number of 'sub' roles including facilitator, mentor and researcher which are considered below.

My professional role extended beyond Hastoe to a wider audience. To other colleagues in the voluntary and public sectors I had a professional function relating to rural development and regeneration. To some individuals it may simply mean attending lots of meetings and conferences with networking as a priority. Other professional rural developers may interpret it as helping groups get things done, whatever tasks this may include. Therefore professional baggage involves a number of other roles.

The term professional or practitioner can be unhelpfully interpreted as a vague, catchall and meaningless concept. In my analysis I attempt to understand it as something that is specialist and technical. Thus it is a reflection of the knowledge, experience and approach to working that I brought to the post. Simply attending meetings and being

able to respond to queries as they arose gave me a powerful function. 'Knowledge and guidance and the ability to signpost to other agencies were invaluable contributions from CF-S. Tony also valued my ability to take instant decisions on funding issues' (D:RJ).

Within Hastoe there were a number of 'specialist' projects that received Innovation and Good Practice Grants (I&GP) from the Housing Corporation. The funding source thus provided a commonality across these projects while also demarcating them within the organisation. Implicitly the projects were autonomous and were different to the core business of the organisation. The officers involved were distinguished as non-housing professionals as the housing profession formed the mainstay of the Association. However there was also a degree of mystery around this professionalism. For instance Hastoe's West Country Office rejected the opportunity to get involved with a new I&GP project due to the perceived nature of the work and consequently their perceived inability to deliver. Essentially they indicated that because they did not have an equivalent person to me they would not get involved. Internally I had a role as a professional with specialist knowledge, experience and expertise. In this role I helped to lead the organisation into a new area of activity thus helping to mark the project as an action research activity.

As recognition of my acceptance as a professional among colleagues I was asked to take part in a variety of different activities. These included membership of and official positions within steering groups and committees and delivery of seminars and training programmes. Furthermore I developed good working relationships with a number of key individuals who frequently provided me with valuable information or sought my opinion on particular issues and events. This is often described as networking and I believe that my inclusion in certain networks was due to my accepted role as a practitioner. As an interesting aside, it is notable that inclusion in these networks further enhanced my acceptability and this in turn resulted in more networks being opened to me. It is something of a virtuous circle<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Is the corollary of this that I could have experienced a vicious circle of rejection among the key networks leading to further rejection among additional networks; the net effect being no role as a professional / practitioner?

Facilitation describes much of the work that I did with the communities within my professional role. In my capacity as facilitator I assisted groups as they strove to achieve their objectives. The role of a facilitator is varied and in my experience this included data analysis on the results of questionnaires, provision of funds for community events, assistance with report editing, the provision of general and specific information and the execution of general and specific tasks. Tasks were often as mundane as providing and helping to serve refreshments at a meeting. Hence the facilitative role was about willingness to get involved with disparate tasks as they arose.

The facilitation role involved removing barriers to various groups relating to both information and status. Often communities do not know how to access specific information or which particular person to contact. The absence of such information becomes a barrier to the community preventing it from achieving what it set out to do. For example, knowing what to do in order to apply for Countryside Agency funding and where to get this help saved a lot of time and frustration for the Local Villages' Group in Stradbroke. Likewise the struggling steering group in Thurston was reassured and encouraged to learn that communities in other parts of the county faced similar problems to their group.

Integral to the function of professional is the role of mentor defined as 'a wise or trusted advisor or guide' (Collins Concise Dictionary, 1999). Mentoring involves trust between the advisor and the advised; the achievement of this trust influences the quality of information that then becomes available from the advised (in exchange for the advice). This relates to the degree of acceptance that the participant observer passes through and experiences in the field as discussed earlier. Having attended a number of meetings in Thurston, I was soon in a position where my face was familiar and so I felt that I could make a contribution to the proceedings of the meetings. Following this I started having conversations before and after meetings with the chair of the group. The subject was sometimes linked to the community appraisal, but other times it was about more general issues. We had established rapport and this was confirmed through telephone conversations where we discussed group dynamics and the actual progress being made. Stanley and I went on to have regular conversations during which he was up-front about asking me for advice on how to further the progress of the group. The improvement to the amount and quality of the information



that I received was marked. Initially communication was basic; this progressed to become the exchange of detailed information. In the end Stanley called me to seek my advice on specific issues; he trusted and valued my viewpoint. A similar pattern unfolded with the Local Villages' Project, where I knew the chair of the group from my previous job with Suffolk County Council. He sought my advice on issues concerning the group, but he also asked my opinion on other more personal matters.

Because I had good working relations with these two chairs, I became much more familiar with the issues within the community. Furthermore I felt more at ease asking for further information or clarification on existing issues as I took the time to provide advice.

Perhaps less apparent, but nonetheless evident, was my researcher role. I had informed all of my colleagues that I was conducting research as part of my PhD thesis. Indeed in many instances it was necessary to seek their permission to use data as part of this research. I had anticipated that there would be more discussion of this role than transpired. Beyond negotiating access there were few discussions around my researcher role. In the end it was something that I remained conscious of and that I felt on the whole kept an element of 'difference' between me and professional colleagues. With one exception, the Chief Executive of ACRE was writing up his PhD thesis at the same time and consequently we had numerous constructive discussions on conducting research. This connection was also useful because he understood my position and so provided me with numerous access points within ACRE.

#### **Funder and Gatekeeper**

Within CF-S there was a budget for the sole use by the communities. The remit of this budget was not specified but broadly it was to further the activity of the communities involved in the project. It was at my discretion as project co-ordinator to allocate these funds. As I have already described this role was very important in persuading some groups to become involved with the project and in achieving access to certain communities and networks. Perception of the project was more positive and my authenticity enhanced because I had funds to allocate. Nonetheless, the reality was that the take-up of funds was low and on various occasions I unsuccessfully attempted to bolster the lack of funding within some of the communities using CF-S funds - as opposed to waiting for them to ask for funding.

In addition to having direct responsibility for allocating CF-S funds I was influential in other budgetary allocations including those made by myself as a strand co-ordinator in the Community Energy Project. Prior to the recruitment of the CEP Manager, the strand co-ordinators (of which I was one) agreed the CEP Delivery Plan and helped to identify projects that could be funded under year one.<sup>8</sup> To assist with the allocation process, the Board took a decision based on the viewpoint of the strand co-ordinators and the economic development officer. This resulted in a number of research projects gaining funding during year one, as recommended by the Strand Co-ordinators.

The importance of a budgetary or funding role was evident during the development of the CEP bid for SRB funding. I received a call from the Volunteer Centre Co-ordinator just before the final SRB bid was due to be submitted in June. The co-ordinator wanted me to attend a meeting organised by the Centre to inform groups and individuals in the area about the bid and the opportunities that it would bring to Sudbury and Great Cornard. There was nothing untoward in this request itself.

However, just four months earlier, during the initial days of the bid's development, I had left a series of telephone messages with the co-ordinator, trying to make these links, but to no avail as she did not return my calls. At this early stage of the CEP I did not have any official role as it was a bid in development and I was working closely with the economic development officer, planning for the consultation with the community. By April, although I still did not have an official role, I was a key person in the development of the bid and had a profile within the communities of Sudbury and Great Cornard. I had chaired a number of meetings drawing together community and voluntary sector organisations. During these meetings there was ample opportunity given to attendees to highlight areas of foremost concern within Sudbury and Great Cornard. The identified priorities were then added to a list within the provisional bid. This was a real chance for the community and voluntary sector to address particular future funding requirements in their area. The Volunteer Centre Co-ordinator seemed to suddenly realise that I was a critical individual in the process. She set out to ensure that her organisation became involved by inviting me to her meeting. My role as an influential person or gatekeeper in the bid development was acknowledged. A year later, the Co-ordinator successfully offered her meeting room as the venue for the

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<sup>8</sup> Under SRB funding guidelines, the money as outlined for each year in the original bid must be spent. In the CEP approximately £20,000 had to be allocated and spent by 31 March 2001. Given that the Delivery Plan had only been agreed at the end of November this became a scramble to use the funds rather than lose them.

community and neighbourhood strand meetings and began to attend both these and the Health Strand meetings.

## **2.4 Summary**

The three sections of this Chapter were concerned with the methodological approach used within my research, the nature of the Case Study and the selected research methods. A brief overview of quantitative research was provided before moving on to a detailed analysis of qualitative research. This included an in-depth study of ethnography with an explanation of the criticism and crisis facing it as a qualitative methodology. The specific type of ethnography used within my research was then profiled before discussing the role of participant observation and discourse analysis in this approach. This first section ends by presenting the research questions and placing them in the context of contemporary rural development.

The Case Study, Communities First-Suffolk was described next and, along with relevant background to this project, the discussion provides the reasons for using this project. My ethnographic approach was then presented and this highlighted the role of reflexivity as well as citing emerging issues including questions of access, degrees of acceptance, availability of information, incentives and ethical matters.

The final section of the Chapter focused on research methods employed by my research. Specifically documents, interviews and action research were outlined before my position within the field was discussed in detail. This provided an insight into the importance of performance to participant observation and the need to shift between roles. The two main positions that emerged within the field comprised the final analysis within this Chapter.

Chapters Three, Four and Five follow the themes of partnership and governance; participation; and micro-politics respectively. As already highlighted the multi-disciplinary nature of rural development determined the structure of the body of the thesis. Hence these Chapters each present the theoretical context to the theme before discussing and analysing the relevant empirical findings.

Partnership and governance describes the structures of rural development policy and practice. In particular this Chapter provides an overview of the rhetoric used within the

field, using discourse analysis to facilitate discussion. The next Chapter uses the theme of participation to demonstrate how policy becomes practice; theoretical consideration is given to the meaning and legitimacy of participation before illustrating how it is interpreted and applied by policymakers and practitioners. Chapter Five focuses on individuals or agents by examining the micro-politics of rural regeneration. This is an investigation of the processes associated with activity and so the Chapter looks at group relations and norms using subjects including power and legitimacy.

Throughout this analysis the over-riding question - what is the rhetoric and reality of rural development policy? – is considered. This is broken down in terms of the four questions that inform the central issue. Hence Chapter Six discusses the findings in terms of rural development policy framework including the structure and mechanisms used to implement this structure, the events that accompany rural development activity and finally the understanding of and meaning given to the concept throughout the policy and practice process. Crucially my research reveals a disparity between rhetoric and reality.

### **3 Governing through partnership**

Investigation of the rhetoric and reality of rural development necessitates analysis of its theoretical framework and it is this broad theme that is now considered. Rural development theory is concerned with the ideals and principles behind policy and practice and so provides an insight into the institutional motivation for emerging schemes and the expected outcomes from them. Such rationale also reveals the type of practical instruments and mechanisms that are used to implement theoretical rural development objectives. Consequently analysis of rural development theory illustrates the structures within which policymakers and practitioners operate whilst providing a broader contextual framework that illustrates why such structures exist and what they seek to achieve.

This Chapter reveals how wider economic and political influences have led to state restructuring in terms of institutional capabilities, legitimacy and sources of power (Pierre, 2003). This has led to an erosion of traditional bases of political power resulting in the adoption of new tactics by government including the governance approach with partnership as its accompanying instrument.

The Chapter has two main sections; the first is concerned mainly with discourses of government. Theories of governmentality and governance are analysed in terms of their philosophical origins and their applications to contemporary Western States. This provides a means of understanding new forms of government and what it signifies for those being governed. Partnerships are then introduced as a technique commonly used within rural regeneration by setting out a theoretical framework before considering how they are applied as structures of government. Partnership in the era of New Labour is advocated as part of the way in which communities and citizens can work with government and influence activities in their area. This is also evident within European rural policy with Agenda 2000 and subsequently the Rural Development Plan for England and the English Rural White Paper advocating bottom-up integrated rural development. Both national and European policies are analysed within government discourse.

The second half of the Chapter moves on to consider the practice of this policy by using two examples of partnerships within rural development. The role of official

documents in the partnership development phase is considered within the case of the CEP by analysing those that were issued to assist the application and development process. The delivery of both projects is considered, demonstrating the role and influence of the lead partner within the partnership model. This gives rise to the issue of who partnerships are really for, who controls them and thus who benefits from them, especially when set within the wider discourses of the Chapter.

Both sections inform the central topic of the thesis as they are concerned with aspects of rural development rhetoric and reality. This is framed within regeneration discourse that facilitates analysis of the use of language or rhetoric of rural development within a social and political framework. Furthermore it provides a way of exploring the relationship between structure and agency (Giddens, 1984) as it reveals how individuals may bring about change to the rural development framework through the use of language. As a result regeneration policy rhetoric exists at different levels including that of the nation state, the policy maker and the practitioner.

This Chapter reveals multiple discourses of government that result in tensions between policy and practice. Espoused rhetoric does not always match the reality of rural regeneration governance, particularly where partnerships are concerned. Indeed the case is made that a regime of governmentality, rather than governance, predominates within rural development whereby power remains firmly in the hands of government rather than being dispersed beyond, or weakened within, traditional forms of government. Consequently the achievement of the core values of governance such as power devolution, decentralisation, participation and shared responsibilities are contentious. For that reason the processes associated with governance are considered in more depth in Chapters Four and Five.

### **3.1 Section One: Discourses of government**

This section focuses primarily on rural development rhetoric by placing it within the broader context of government discourse. It does this by charting the emergence of theories of governance and governmentality, their prominence in rural development debates and by providing a detailed analysis of their meaning. Finally the European rural development agenda and the UK regeneration framework are analysed in light of governance and governmentality, with particular attention to the prominence of partnerships and an analysis of these structures.

### 3.1.1 Multiple discourses and rhetorics

At its simplest discourse is 'the ensemble of social practices through which the world is made intelligible to oneself and to others' (Gregory, 1996:136). Although it has various different meanings including analysis of talk, texts and accounts (see Brewer, 2003a for an overview) and as Chapter Two illustrates, this research employs discourse analysis to analyse language and its use in terms of genre, discourse and style. A number of key features have been described within the literature and are relevant to this analysis of governing through partnership, indicating how it extends the enquiry beyond rhetoric.

Discourse creates acceptable formulation of problems and also solutions to those problems (Foucault, 1980). Thus according to Stenson and Watt (1999) governmental discourses produce political and economic agents, issues of concern, conceptual geographical spaces, agendas for action and favoured techniques for making sense of a situation. And so for example Murdoch and Abram (1998) analyse the scope for community involvement in the housing sector, showing how communities are rarely invited into discourses of central policy formulation, although they are able to participate in consultative discourses through various government programmes. By encouraging their participation in one arena, they are mobilised out of another discursive picture (Fairclough, 1995). Correspondingly Hastings (1999b) introduces discourse analysis as a means of exploring questions of power and equality within urban policy, problematising the notion of straightforward meaning by situating events in a broader social and political framework.

Discourse thus reaches beyond analysis of rhetorical strategies by situating language within a social setting or context (van Dijk, 1997). Foucault argued that discourses produce social knowledge and practice through their connection to power (Lemke, 1995). Consequently discursive events, according to Fairclough and Wodak are 'shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them' (1997: 259). By introducing the notion of power and social practice this widens analysis beyond rhetoric or language; it provides a means of analysing the duality of structure and agency (Giddens, 1984). Political elites for example may operate as agents within local government structures through reproduction of discourses of rurality and power (Woods, 1997). Equally the achievements of a rural community project may depend on how the group's leader or champion applies her interpretation of what constitutes

rural development activity. As 'discourses provide partial, situated knowledge and therefore, reflect particular constellations of power' (Edwards, 1998:69) discourse analysis facilitates the development of perspectives on the multiplicity of viewpoints that exist within rural regeneration. It identifies the presence of regeneration actors' differing cultural, social and political intents.

This theoretical framework informs the following analysis of partnerships within rural regeneration. It highlights the need to go beyond investigating partnership rhetoric; demanding analysis of the broader policy contexts that have led to the emergence of regeneration partnerships.

### **3.1.2 Governmentality and governance**

The terms governance and governmentality have emerged within regeneration and rural development literature to depict relationships between the state and its citizens; explaining how governments choose to do things and outlining the corresponding role of their respective communities. For instance Raco (2003) uses Foucault's notion of governmentality to describe devolution in the UK. Raco and Imrie use the same concept to analyse rights and responsibilities in urban policy incorporating a detailed analysis of the SRB programme and the ways in which it has been rendered operable, namely through 'the sharing of powers and responsibilities between national and local government and community-based voluntary sector organisations' (2000: 2192). Meanwhile MacKinnon uses governmentality to illuminate structures of governance in the local economy by examining the 'precise mechanisms which give state authorities the reach and capability to monitor and steer the activities of local institutions' (2000: 311). Through analysis of rural policy, Woods and Goodwin contend that 'new forms of governance which seek to develop 'partnerships'...may all be positioned as part of the new regime of governmentality' (2003:254).

In this way literature based on governmentality theory focuses on government technologies, strategies and institutions as used within society (Stenson and Watt, 1999). As such, governance is presented as a component of governmentality; a technique used by government albeit with a corresponding dispersion of power within this framework as it is relinquished to governance partners such as civic and private sector groups. Thus governance becomes a means through which government renders society governable. As a result the literature is often confused and confusing; with governmentality and governance used virtually interchangeably or as constituents of



the same concept. Woods and Goodwin (2003) call for rural researchers to engage more directly with original theoretical writings to produce conceptually informed understanding of rural policy and governance. With such a request in mind and given the foginess of the literature, this section explores discourses of governmentality and governance by returning to the original literature. This involves analysis of the theories expounded by Foucault (1991), Habermas (1975) and Jessop (2002) and provides a rigorous framework through which rural partnerships, governance and power relations may be analysed.

### **Governmentality**

Foucault defined government as the 'conduct of conduct' (Gordon 1991:2) that is a form of activity that influences the behaviour of some person or persons. Governmentality is about how to govern or the art of government and is a rational action. It is a collection, including institutions, procedures and tactics, that allow the exercise of power through the political economy on a particular population (Foucault, 1991). This has been evidenced in the West and has taken precedence over other forms, namely sovereignty (exercised through juridical and executive state means) and discipline (exercised through the individual using various practices including military). Foucault's discussion of governmentality centres on analysis of the relationships between spaces of government, populations and processes of individualisation (Lemke, 2001).

Governmentality according to Foucault (1991) emerged in Western European societies during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century due to the discovery of a new reality – the economy – and was concerned with a new object – the population. In the sovereign or disciplinary regimes that preceded governmentality emphasis was placed on authorising and regulating the subjects of a territory (Dean, 1999). In other words a territory was primarily an object to be regulated, typically by the imposition of laws. By contrast in this new era government regards states as being made up of a population of individuals which is a resource itself to be fostered, used and optimised (Dean, 1999). In deeming the population as a resource or asset to the state and by supporting and cultivating the individuals within, government principally exercises its control. This is much more subtle than exercising power through military or sovereign means as happened prior to the emergence of governmentality. The seemingly unobtrusive approach of governmentality comprises an 'ensemble... [of]... institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections' and 'calculations and tactics' facilitating a complex form of power

(Foucault 1991: 102). Thus individuals within a population may not be aware that they are being influenced by the state when they engage in activities led by a particular institution, even though they have been thoroughly calculated by government. For instance this may be through involvement in regeneration institutions such as partnerships that are determined by procedures set out by government institutions. Does this regeneration framework represent Foucault's *ensemble* that characterises governmentality whereby power resides firmly with government? Before this question can be considered further, the concept of governance must be introduced and analysed.

### **Governance**

Typical basic definitions of the Welfare State describe its commitment to social solidarity and citizenship outlining the State's responsibility of securing a small amount of welfare for its citizens (Esping-Andersen, 2001). Welfare states of the Western world were created within a regime of Fordist economic growth during the post-1945 period where large scale, hierarchical structures dominated. Internationalisation, the break-down of Fordism and the emergence of new technologies led to a crisis in the Fordist welfare states (Jessop, 2002). This crisis was accompanied by a 'crisis of legitimacy' of the institutions of government and so traditional political power bases were eroded (Habermas, 1975). Challenges from within the state resulted in the emergence of so-called neo-liberal regimes characterised by minimalist states that are deregulated and privatised; where central government is replaced by semi-autonomous agencies; and individualism replaces collective solutions (Pierre, 2000).

This is referred to as the 'hollowing out' of the national state – 'powers are delegated upwards to supraregional or international bodies, downwards to regional or local states or outwards to relatively autonomous cross-national alliances among local metropolitan or regional states with complementary interests' (Jessop, 2002: 235). It is characterised by a proliferation of the scales at which economic and social policy is pursued; including a growth in the amount of rural partnerships as part of this new mode of governance with many recent publications focusing on the application of governance to rural regeneration (MacKinnon, 2002; Welch, 2002; Edwards et al, 2000 and Goodwin, 1998). Hence while 'neo-liberalism may mean less government, it does not follow that there is less governance' (Larner, 2000: 13) or more precisely less state intervention does not mean less government (Jessop, 1998).

At its simplest governance is 'the way society collectively solves its problems and meets its needs' (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2001:13). Nonetheless governance is a term that is used freely and often inconsistently by policymakers, practitioners and academics within contemporary regeneration practice. Although used in such a variety of ways with various meanings (Rhodes, 1996, 1997 and Stoker, 1997) according to Stoker there is broad agreement within the literature on the *basic* meaning of governance. He describes interdependence between public, private and voluntary sectors within a governance arrangement. Goodwin and Painter suggest that governance 'focuses attention' on the relations between the wide range of actors within a local area including elected government, non-elected organisations and central government (1996:636). Similarly Pearce and Mawson (2003) refer to the renewed attention paid by central government towards the relationship between citizens and government. They discuss the importance of the community and the shared responsibility of different agencies and representatives in a particular area for getting things done. Fundamentally the conformity is that governance shifts responsibility and accountability for doing things at a local level from central government to a group of agencies drawn from all sectors within the community. Partnerships typically provide the mechanism or instrument for achieving governance. They aptly meet the requirements of governance as they 'offer a blending of resources from the public, private and voluntary sectors' (Goodwin, 2003:3).

In general governance is concerned with structure, process and method (O'Toole and Burdess, 2004). It signifies 'a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing' (Rhodes, 1997:15). It is 'the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred' (Stoker, 1998:17). Hence it is less concerned with what is done and more with the way in which things are achieved.

Stoker (1998:18) argues that governance relates to:-

1. A set of institutions within and beyond government
2. Blurring of boundaries for tackling social and economic issues
3. Power dependence in relationships
4. Autonomous and self-governing networks of actors
5. Capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government (Stoker, 1998:18).

Stoker (1998) does not view governance as simply being about achieving greater efficiency or about a new set of managerial tools, but he argues that it refers to a completely different process for achieving results. Consequently the outputs from governance are not necessarily different from those of government, but the way in which they are achieved is distinct; much of this stemming back to the apparent dispersion of power away from traditional government. For instance the role of community and voluntary organisations is changed in this environment as they become 'the avenues for local governance' (O'Toole and Burdess, 2004). Hence the emergence of service level agreements between government and voluntary agencies where standards set out what is expected of agencies delivering particular services. This contrasts with the past when grants were distributed without much concern for how the associated services were delivered.

That governance is a dynamic, ever changing process is apparent in Goodwin's (2003) article where he identifies a very clear difference between government and governance - 'where the term government signals a concern with the formal institutions and structures of the state, the concept of governance is broader and draws attention to the ways in which governmental and non-governmental organisations work together' (2003:2). He goes on to highlight the significance of power, arguing that governance refers to 'the ways in which political power and authority is distributed, both internal and external to the state.' In both Stoker's and Goodwin's analyses the concept of power relations is explicitly linked to governance while the fluid nature of governance is implied. Governance this suggests, is not simply a means to an end, but is concerned with the process itself. Based on this insight and drawing on Stoker's propositions I propose the following description of rural governance.

Rural governance is achieved through public, private and voluntary sector agencies coming together typically as a partnership to realise a shared objective in a particular geographic and/or thematic area. The structure of the partnership is such that responsibility is shared among members and collective responsibility ensues. Members rely on one another for different functions and all have valuable and varied contributions to make to the partnership. Ideally the partnership is not reliant on any one agency or organisation for its existence and it alone

has the ability and capacity to make decisions; it has a reasonable degree of autonomy.

Governance does not imply a fixed structure or a specific 'model'. Governance is not static, but it is a fluid and dynamic concept and so a prescriptive approach to implementing governance ideals is inappropriate. The specific circumstances under which a particular governance framework emerges determines the resulting structure. For instance funding guidelines may determine how projects are designed and governed, this in turn may be influenced by the agency administering the fund. The community in which an initiative is delivered will affect how governance institutions are developed and who is involved. The agencies involved shape the emerging activity.

Governance theory highlights the importance of the community and the shared responsibility held by agencies from different sectors for getting things done. Although the term is used in a variety of ways with different meanings there is conformity in that it devolves power and shifts responsibility and accountability for doing things beyond central government. There are hints of discrepancies within the literature on the extent of power devolution, with Pierre contending that political power still remains within state although its capacity to project its power is weakened (2000). But there is consensus that a degree of power is distributed outside of government (Goodwin, 2003, Jessop, 2002 and Stoker, 1997)

#### **Differing discourses?**

Discourses of government reveal differing understanding of the role of power and of interpretations on the origins of current structures that are operationalised by government. Governmentality describes how power remains with government, although it may employ mechanisms such as technologies (e.g. consultative exercises) and institutions (e.g. Local Authorities) through which it renders society governable. It originally surfaced from a concern with the political state, in particular due to the demise of the sovereign state. While governmentality is about a government's relationship with its governed, this is in terms of how power is exercised through the art of government by a governing state. Governance meanwhile, signifies a loss of power for government, with power being shifted upwards, outwards and downwards resulting in the creation of global, European, national, regional and local institutions and agreements. This mode of governing arose due to the breakdown of the welfare

state, the crisis of legitimacy and the resulting ascendancy of neo-liberalism. It extends the powers of governing beyond the boundary of government and so the theory is about more than simply government. Despite their differing discourses, the terms governance and governmentality are frequently used indistinguishably or structures of governance are presented as a component part of governmentality.

There are two significant reasons why this is problematic. The historical contexts from which both concepts emerged are quite different and the fundamental distribution of power in each model varies. Governance emerged due to welfare state restructuring and the 'crisis of legitimacy', it involves governing *beyond* government. Discourses of governance allege that power no longer lies solely in the domain of government but is dispersed to new partners, including bodies outside the public sector, and so traditional boundaries of government are eroded (Stoker, 1997). Governmentality meanwhile is connected to political forms and objectives of government, how power is exercised by government and the complexity of ensuing power relations. It emerged from Foucault's initial analysis of Machiavelli's *The Prince* where the debate is concerned principally with articulating rationality intrinsic to the art of government (Foucault, 1991).

The next section uses rural regeneration partnerships to unravel some of these issues. It poses the questions: Are partnership structures found within rural development techniques used by government as part of the ensemble of a governmentality approach where power ultimately resides firmly within government? Or do partnerships represent a new way of working where the legitimacy of government is questioned and power exists beyond government among the new governance partners?

### **3.1.3 Partnerships**

Partnerships form a crucial component of the governance agenda and Stoker has commented that governance is delivered in part through the launch of 'initiatives galore aimed at building partnerships' (Stoker, 2003:430). Meanwhile the OECD views partnerships as a 'tool' to improve governance (2001:13). The partnership remit is thus typically broad; Jones and Little (2000) claim that partnerships encompass a broad range of policy intentions from basic policy direction to specific policy delivery mechanisms.

Partnerships have become a permanent feature of the rural development landscape. Their role and importance are central to both national and European regeneration policy with the term 'partnership' working its way into official language. As Cheverett points out, 'rural partnerships are being increasingly emphasised in official policy statements at all levels' (1999:106) giving examples of rural partnerships in the Cork Declaration (1996) and in the English Rural White Paper. Partnerships feature so heavily in New Labour rhetoric that Cloke et al comment that the 'political air is thick with talk of "partnership"' (2000:130). Partnerships are not just popular in Western Europe, Goodwin (2003) cites the establishment of partnership working as a mechanism for implementing rural policy in the UK and beyond, giving examples as distant as Australia.

At a practical level partnerships have become regeneration policy delivery mechanisms. For instance they are often a necessity for unlocking funds from central government and the European Union (Hall and Mawson, 1999, Edwards et al, 2001). As a consequence the volume and growth of partnerships during the 1990s was remarkable. Edwards et al (2001) discovered over 150 partnerships operating in three UK counties in the area of rural regeneration, of which two thirds were formed during or after 1996. These partnerships accessed various European and national funds including LEADER, the Single Regeneration Budget and Rural Challenge.

### **Defining partnership**

Reinforcing Peck and Tickell's (1994: 251) claim of partnership as a 'good thing', Westholm (1999:14) claims that 'it is frequently used by organisations in order to lend lustre to different kinds of co-operations'. Within the diversity of meaning given to partnership, a positive image is built-up and many partnerships describe themselves in environmental, social, economic and sometimes cultural terms. For example, the Greenwich Partnership was set up 'to achieve real social, economic and environmental improvements for all communities'. (The Guardian, 29.11.00)

Atkinson (1999) points out that language is rarely a pure act of communication, but that it almost always occurs in a discursive context reflecting relations of power and domination. Context is everything and reveals a lot about the actual and desired meanings associated with partnership. This is not always shared or agreed and Mackintosh claims that 'the concept of "partnership" contains a very high level of ambiguity' (1992:210). Meanwhile Westholm (1999) notes that it is used to mean

different things depending on the situation and this can lead to difficulties. For instance Collins' (1997) study in Ferguslie Park, Paisley illustrates how the term partnership has the potential to be misunderstood and also to be used in a manipulative way. The notion of partnership meant different things to different people and eventually different groups used language for their own purpose and for their own advantage. The community saw the partnership as an opportunity to express grievances with statutory bodies. It was not always considered in a positive light and Collins (1997:100) reports that increasingly 'partnership' itself became a dirty word in the mouths of tenants. In the CEP one particular Board meeting was virtually devoted to considering an appropriate name for the project. On a local authority officer's suggestion of using the label 'partnership' within the title, one of the community representatives exclaimed:

'Partnership! What does that mean anyway? We don't use that word. That's a council word.' (C)

In the midst of such strong feeling and after heated debate, the Board agreed to steer clear of the word partnership on the basis that, not only was it meaningless to the community, but that it typically was used by government. The CEP Board wished to portray an image of an organisation rooted in the community and belonging to Great Cornard and Sudbury. Thus the term project was agreed over partnership. Despite this the initiative is described in official documents as a partnership (D:F - East of England Development Agency (EEDA) correspondence and SRB bid document).

With great potential for its meaning to be abused, defining partnerships is a challenging task. A review of regeneration literature reveals that much research defines partnerships very specifically, often making reference to the formality, time period, partners, structure and overall purpose (Westholm et al, 1999, Bailey et al, 1995 and Geddes, 1994). The Partnerships for Rural Integrated Development in Europe (PRIDE) project (Westholm, 1999:15) that focused on partnerships across Europe defined them as having the following features:-

- Voluntary alliance between at least two of the three sectors – public/private/associate.
- A clear structure



- Deal with permanent or long-term activities and have an integrated approach (not dealing with only one project or issue)
- Serving a territory with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants

Meanwhile the analysis of partnerships by Bailey et al focuses on the institutional arrangements for and the over-riding purpose of partnerships. Their working definition of partnerships is 'the mobilisation of a coalition of interests drawn from more than one sector in order to prepare and oversee an agreed strategy for the regeneration of a defined area' (Bailey et al, 1995:27). Mackintosh (1992) studied partnerships with sustained joint working and where there was additional social benefit that could not have been generated purely by a public, charitable nor commercial project.

Other research focuses less on structural aspects of partnerships and more on process related issues (see for instance Edwards et al, 2000). Partnerships are often viewed as achieving things that individual agencies cannot achieve while working alone. Hence Murray (1998) likens them to new business ventures where risk occurs among partners who come together, each making a contribution and yet hoping for greater individual and collective profit as a return on their investment. Stewart (1998) identifies 'wicked issues' as those issues that can only be tackled by bringing together the resources of a different range of providers and interest groups. Meanwhile Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) cite the emergence of partnerships from a desire to open up the local decision-making process arising from disenchantment with formal political processes. Partnership difficulties have been detailed (see for instance Whittaker et al, 2004, Edwards et al, 2000, Jones and Little, 2000, Cloke et al, 1998) and include power relations between members, membership domination particularly by local authorities, failure to build common agendas, failure to achieve community participation, the question of control of resource allocation and the inability of current partnership structures to achieve shared accountability.

The analyses highlighted above illustrate key features of the partnership model and help to reveal what a partnership actually is. The range of meanings given to partnerships is demonstrative of their diverse nature. The OECD (2001) claims that part of the challenge in analysing partnerships lies in the large range of policy goals that they seek to achieve along with the diversity of structure that exists. This leads it

to conclude that 'there is no universal model of partnership' (OECD, 2001:20). Consequently its report 'Local Partnerships for Better Governance' is concerned with partnerships and 'co-operative bodies' (2001:20) assigned with a local governance agenda. Its primary focus is on organisations pursuing a policy goal per se rather than on those with a particular structure.

The concept of partnership is best served by a definition with a non-prescriptive approach. This is for various reasons - partnerships are typically used as a vehicle for governance and because of the fluid and dynamic nature of governance. Echoing the stance of the OECD that there is no 'universal' partnership model this provides the starting point for analysing and understanding partnerships in the context of rural governance. This research is less concerned with only those partnerships recognised by government agencies, typically large and strategic such as Local Strategic Partnerships. The focus here is on partnerships that are found sprinkled across the rural regeneration landscape with a regeneration remit.

A partnership is a group of individuals, representing various organisations or a geographical area and including the voluntary and public sectors. Partners work together in an equal and shared way over a specific period of time for the benefit of their combined communities to achieve a common purpose. Their activities would not be possible were they to operate in isolation of one another.

This has resonance with aspects of Stoker's (1998) insight into governance as discussed earlier. Thus on the surface partnerships can be viewed as apt structures with which to achieve governance. But do they also form part of a governmentality approach to governing? National and European policy contexts are examined in light of governance and governmentality.

#### **National regeneration policies**

Government of the 1980s was highly centralised with peripheral input from the community and voluntary sector and local democratic institutions. Central government dominated the provision and design of services. The Audit Commission (1989) later reported that the property and physical regeneration focus of public-private partnerships of the 1980s, failed to produce the desired cascade impact on local communities. Partnerships were expected to 'generate wealth that will eventually flow

back into the community' (Parkinson, 1988:10) but these anticipated benefits did not happen. The design of the subsequent regeneration model, the Challenge Fund, was influenced by the failure of these public-private partnerships to make the desired impact on local communities and the broader process of the hollowing-out of the state. Consequently the emergent City Challenge relied on the involvement of the community representing a dispersion of power from the central state. This was a competition fund that operated between 1992 and 1998; delivering 31 Partnerships with an average spend per partnership of £240m. It was a forerunner to the Single Regeneration Budget. (DETR, 2000)

'City Challenge was a ground breaking and very successful programme, which has provided the basis for a step change in regeneration policy. Many of its features have been incorporated into subsequent regeneration and area-based programmes. It provides important lessons for current and future regeneration activity' (DETR, 2000:7). On this basis it is helpful to consider the key findings that emerged from the final evaluation of City Challenge. The following were considered essential to 'ensure the success of local regeneration:

- Getting the local strategy right;
- Getting the right people and leadership;
- Involving the community;
- Working with Partners;
- Getting the right projects and the right project mix;
- Effective delivery and forward planning; and
- Creating a Programme infrastructure that assists partnerships to deliver local regeneration' (DETR, 2000:1)

Furthermore 'the main factors which influenced Partnership performance at the local level were:

- The calibre and experience of individuals in the Executive team and on the Board;
- A clear and appropriate regeneration strategy; and
- A fully-fledged partnership approach to working. Partnerships estimated that working in this way doubled the impact compared with the likely achievements had organisations acted in isolation.

The study also found that low levels of community involvement were associated with poor Partnership performance and that regeneration performance was weaker in areas of high unemployment.’ (DETR, 2000:1)

The findings from the evaluation of City Challenge highlight the role that individuals play in the process. Whether coming together either as a group with the relevant skills and experience to form the partnership or working together to identify a suitable mix of projects, successful partnership working fundamentally relies on people coming together and having the capacity and ability to work together, albeit within a the City Challenge policy framework.

In 1994 the Rural Development Commission introduced a competition fund, Rural Challenge, which was similar to City Challenge but specifically for rural areas. Six £1 million prizes were given to partnerships within designated Rural Development Areas (Little et al, 1998). Four rounds of the Rural Challenge competition were held, with the final bidding occurring in 1998, after which it was amalgamated into the SRB programme (Jones and Little, 2000). This type of fund marked a departure from earlier forms of rural regeneration policy and practice which tended to be based on sector rather than territory (Little and Jones, 2000). Little et al highlight the prominence of competition, partnership and private sector involvement and note the feeling that the initiative is ‘seen as rural policy attempting to “catch up” with the urban’ (1998:133).

At the same time the SRB was launched. It emphasised the central role of local communities in regenerating their area with the aim ‘to encourage local communities to develop local regeneration initiatives to improve the quality of life in their area’ (DETR, 1997c:3). The fund was for all areas including ‘rural, urban fringe and urban areas throughout England over a period of 1-7 years’ (1997a:3). The first round of funding was awarded in 1995/6 and the programme ended in 2000/01 with the sixth funding round (Rhodes et al, 2002). The SRB programme was a substantial initiative with £5.7 billion of funding committed directly while total expenditure was £26 billion (ibid).

Striving for a more flexible approach to regeneration, initially it brought together 20 previously individual programmes from five different government departments (DETR,

1997c). With a single department administering the overall SRB scheme, albeit in conjunction with Government Offices for the Regions (GOR) for the first four rounds along with the Regional Development Agencies (RDA) for the final two rounds, the emergence of the programme represented a move to rationalise bureaucracy. The government was keen to learn lessons from the programme and so the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) commissioned various evaluations including one from the Department of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge. The recommendations emerging from the mid-term review provide an insight into how future policy may be framed. Although written by the team at Cambridge the report is published as a DTLR document and so is implicitly endorsed by the government.

‘Central to the initiative has been an emphasis on a partnership led approach to regeneration whereby interested parties come together at the local level to devise a regeneration scheme and seek financial support through an annual bidding round’ (Rhodes et al, 2002:11). Partnership, competition and hands-off management were thus seen to be embedded in the SRB scheme. The Mid Term Report on ten SRB Case Studies, while recognising the importance of such partnership working, highlights structural matters such as the role of the private sector, monitoring and review processes, avoiding ‘shot-gun marriages’ (Rhodes et al, 2002:17) and the importance of strategic planning and fitting in with wider objectives. It does not make clear the central role that *individuals* play within this process. This is a significant omission given its importance in the City Challenge evaluation this being the tradition from which the SRB emerges.

The DETR’s (1997c) Effective Partnerships handbook explicitly mentions that City Challenge Partnerships pioneered many of the concepts now employed within the SRB Challenge Fund, particularly the partnership approach. Furthermore it goes on to claim that experience from City Challenge was of great value in developing the SRB Challenge Fund processes (DETR, 1997c). Thus the lessons learned from City Challenge informed the design of the SRB, explaining the central role of local communities and the importance of partnerships as shown later in the analysis of SRB Six. Consequently the role of the individual is equally pivotal to the SRB process as it was to City Challenge.

In general the model employed by the SRB programme is viewed as a success by the evaluators with positive comments such as 'it has begun to encourage more effective community participation in local area regeneration' (Rhodes et al, 2002:46) sprinkled throughout the Mid Term Evaluation. Furthermore the report claims that the 'SRB bidding process with its project bidding, appraisal and approval elements has done much to develop the regeneration skills and local expertise required. This view is now fairly common across all players concerned (local authority, private sector and community). The enhanced capacity of partners has improved ability to bid for funds from European programmes as well as lottery funding' (Rhodes et al, 2002:18).

According to Smith and Sullivan 'public participation has been a central concern of New Labour in the UK since its election to government in 1997' (2003:237) as it attempts to build the relationship between the state and its citizens under the co-called Third Way (Giddens, 1998). There was a shift from the purely centralised policy agenda of the Conservative government to a more flexible, decentralised approach where the community plays a central role. 'Communities do not only figure as places of danger or instruments of social control. They are also the arena of political inclusion' (Levitas, 1998:125). For instance the New Commitment to Regeneration acknowledged the importance of genuine engagement with the voluntary and community sector (Ross and Osborne, 1999).

The importance of the local community is also apparent in the Local Government Act 2000. It places a *statutory* duty on local authorities to draw up community strategies. In the guidance notes to accompany this aspect of the Act, the DETR states that community strategies must 'be prepared and implemented by a broad 'local strategic partnership' (LSP) through which the local authority can work with other local bodies' (DETR, 2001:para12). DETR suggests that the key to an effective community strategy will be successful partnership working and community involvement.

Paradoxically, as several academics have noted, the Labour government while, espousing the rhetoric of community involvement, and indeed decentralisation, has retained strong central control over key policy areas (Marinetto, 2003 and Stewart, 2000). Modernisation is being pursued so that local government can 'in partnership with others, deliver the policies for which this government was elected' (IPPR, 1998:22). Davies (2002) refers to a 'paradoxical process of decentralisation and

centralisation occurring in which responsibilities for regeneration imprison, rather than liberate, local political initiative'. This suggests that regeneration can occur, but only within a particular framework as defined by government where power remains with government rather than being shared among partners i.e. as part of a wider governmentality agenda rather than one of governance.

Decentralisation of government brought with it the creation of the RDAs which were formally launched in 1999 having been established under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 (DTI website). The RDAs inherited a number of funding programmes such as Rural Priority Areas<sup>9</sup> and the Single Regeneration Budget. Taken together these programmes had in turn been governed by a plethora of central government agencies including DETR, DTI and MAFF. Consequently many of the new RDAs were coming to terms with internal, organisational issues<sup>10</sup> while endeavouring to fulfil statutory requirements including administering the previously mentioned programmes and publishing their first Regional Economic Development Strategy. The launch of SRB Round 6 thus brought with it great potential for confusion and chaos with the new administrative arrangement.

The then Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions<sup>11</sup> (DETR) issued national guidance which set the framework for the relationship between the SRB partnerships, RDAs and Government Offices for the region. The guidance focuses in particular on delivery plans; project appraisal and approval; financial guidance; and monitoring and periodic review but it 'is not intended to be a desk instruction for Partnerships and RDAs' (DETR, 1999a:1). A territorial and decentralised approach is emphasised as DETR advises that detailed procedures must be developed between the partnership and RDA, whilst adhering to DETR and thus government legislation.

Prospective partnerships were invited by their local RDA to submit an expression of interest in the first instance. The RDA reviewed expressions of interest in accordance with the over-riding objectives of the SRB and with the Regional Economic

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<sup>9</sup> Formerly known as Rural Development Areas and managed by the Rural Development Commission

<sup>10</sup> For example in East Anglia staff from the Rural Development Commission was re-located to either the newly formed Countryside Agency or the East of England Development Agency. So in many cases the same faces were representing two very different organisations each of which was striving for a new identity.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) took over regeneration funding in 2000, this responsibility was then transferred to DTI following the June 2001 election (www.dti.gov.uk).

Development Strategy for that region. The scheme therefore represented some degree of decentralisation with regard to assessment and project development while also being centralised in that all bids had to comply with national objectives and procedures.

SRB 6 was designed as a two-tier system. 80% of the funds were to be allocated to the most deprived neighbourhoods as identified by the Index of Local Deprivation. Schemes from these areas were expected to include the four objectives identified in the Social Exclusion Unit's report *Bringing Britain Together: a National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal*, published in September 1998. These are:

- tackling worklessness;
- reducing crime;
- improving health;
- raising educational achievements (DETR, 1999b:para1.2.3).

The remaining 20% of SRB resources would tackle pockets of need in other areas 'including rural areas, and the former coalfield areas and coastal towns not included in the Index' (DETR, 1999a: para 1.2.1) The scope for these bids was much broader and priorities included 'strong links with the regional priorities...and to other programmes and initiatives, effective and inclusive partnerships and the full involvement of the local community' (para: 1.2.5). Furthermore it was recognised that 'as partnerships in these areas may not be as well developed as those in other areas, there may be a particular need for support for capacity building' (DETR, 1999b:para 1.2.5)

The RDA also took into consideration how proposed bids met the objective of their Regional Economic Development Strategy. Under central government guidance and approval these strategies were bound to provide three key elements:

- a regional framework for economic development, skills and regeneration
- a framework for the delivery of national and European programmes
- the basis for detailed action plans for the agency's own work

The aim was to help to ensure that regional opportunities were fully exploited and that those responsible for taking economic decisions were working effectively together, with common goals and accepted priorities for regional development. The role of



partnerships was seen to be key to this, for instance EEDA states that 'we will seek innovative means of continuing to build public private partnerships' (EEDA, 1999:3). Furthermore it recognises that 'many different organisations, partnerships and other key stakeholders have played and will continue to play a leading part in formulating policy and delivering initiatives.'

Proposals meeting the necessary conditions were invited by their RDA to submit a 'final bid'. So although the day-to-day management of the scheme rested in the hands of the decentralised RDAs, the SRB programme operated within a framework administered by central government both via the SRB objectives and the approved economic development strategies.

Underlying its commitment to decentralisation, early in 2001 the government announced the demise of the Single Regeneration Budget. Projects funded under SRB Round 6 were the last to receive monies under this scheme. All existing schemes would receive their full funding allocation as agreed previously, from a 'Single Pot' (DETR, 2002:12) administered by the RDAs. This funding continues to provide the single source of income to RDAs and once allocated, is available to them to spend as they see fit to achieve the regional priorities identified in their regional economic strategies. Most RDAs assess need according to the Index of Local Deprivation with delivery occurring through local partnerships (DETR, 2002).

### **New European rural policy**

National policy cannot be considered without reference to the European context. European policy is interpreted and implemented by Member States and thus sits alongside national policies. It therefore influences rhetoric as policymakers align national policy to European policy. It also affects the practice of regeneration as national initiatives are designed to complement European programmes. Effectively the key shift within European rural policy has been a movement 'from supporting sectoral policies (agriculture) to supporting more spatial (rural) policies' (Shortall, 2004:110, Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001). The 'old' approach to rural policy was dominated by the Common Agricultural Policy, a sectoral policy, and its emphasis on guaranteeing farming incomes (Performance and Innovation Unit, 1999) hence traditionally 'rural policy has been equated with agricultural policy' (Ward and McNicholas, 1998:28). In other words policy rhetoric equated rural with agricultural.

Several CAP reforms have altered this policy position endeavouring to 'decouple' farming subsidies from production in an attempt to alleviate over-production of certain commodities across Europe. The new approach to rural development is outlined in the European Commission's (1988) *The Future of Rural Society* document (see Ward and McNicholas, 1998 for a fuller discussion) and is further promoted in *Agenda 2000*, a political statement on *Strengthening and Widening the European Union* (European Commission, 1999b). *The Future of Rural Society* document emphasises the need for rural development policy to make the most of local potential in terms of exploiting local assets with regional capital and human resources and, crucially, to ensure that adequate co-ordination exists to do this. It advocates the creation of a network of rural development agencies or agents to play a stimulating, mobilising and co-ordinating role and it thus recognises the importance of the territory, a shift from the earlier emphasis on the agricultural sector. In *The Future of Rural Society*, the Commission implicitly endorses a governance approach with its emphasis on the need for links between and within government agencies, but also between other sectors such as economic development agencies and voluntary organisations.

A precursor to the agricultural component of *Agenda 2000*<sup>12</sup> was the *Cork Declaration*. In 1996 it set the context for the European agricultural policy reforms initiated in 1992. In addition to its promotion of partnership working, it indicated an emphasis on regional programming, greater transparency and bottom-up participation, highlighting the role of subsidiarity in achieving integrated rural policy (Lowe et al, 2002). These features and emphases continue within *Agenda 2000* as 'the guiding principles of the new policy are those of decentralisation of responsibilities – from EU to local level - and flexibility of programming based on a 'menu' of actions which can be implemented according to the countries' specific needs' (European Commission, 1999b:6)

*Agenda 2000*, pivotal to the ongoing reform of CAP, sets out arrangements for integrated rural development through the Rural Development Regulation (RDR). This requires each member state to draw up a territorially-based Rural Development Plan which considers economic, environmental and social impacts in consultation with interested parties (Lowe et al, 2002). The England Rural Development Programme was submitted to the European Commission in fulfilment of the obligations under Council Regulations (EC) 1257/1999 and 445/2002 as part of the *Agenda 2000*

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<sup>12</sup> *Agenda 2000* is a three-part challenge focusing on agricultural reform, economic prosperity of the member states and the financial framework of the EU (European Commission, 1999).

reforms. It sets out plans for rural development in England over the period 2000-2006 (DEFRA, 2000b). In this the Government sets out its 'overall aim for rural and countryside policy:

"To sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all." (DEFRA, 2000b: 6.1.3)

Lowe and Ward (1998) point out that the RDR introduces other management principles to the heart of the CAP including those of decentralisation and partnership. Indeed the Directorate General (DG) for agriculture identifies a 'multisectoral and integrated' approach and 'flexible aids for rural development' as two of the principles of the second pillar of the CAP, the new rural development policy (European Commission, 1999a). Specific mention is given to promoting decentralisation and consultation at the regional, local and partnership level. To facilitate the administration at the regional level the England Rural Development Plan contains regional chapters based on Government Office regions. Lowe et al connect the UK approach to implementing the Rural Development Regulation with devolution which in turn integrates 'agricultural administration into other sub-national structures concerned with territorial and regional governance' (2002: 12). The RDR thus indicates a shift from sectoral to spatial oriented policy, placing partnerships as the key mechanism to translate this rhetoric to reality.

The philosophy of European rural policy is captured within the Leader programme. LEADER+ (*Liaisons entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale* i.e. links between development actions of the rural economy), launched in England in 2001, focuses on 'local development strategies drawn up and implemented by local action groups, essentially local partnerships, involving representative sectors of the local community. Implementation will be through small-scale, innovative projects addressing local rural development issues in socially, economically and environmentally sustainable ways' (DEFRA, 2000a: Introduction, para.1). Leader+ places emphasis on the communities within which each partnership operates, relying on local groups to identify sustainable solutions to their rural development issues using a particular [participatory, bottom-up] approach. It recognises local difference and adopts a spatial approach.

Three actions define the core activity of the programme, they are concerned with the development of integrated, pilot development strategies; co-operation on joint projects; and networking between and within Member States. Hence local people can get involved through membership of their local action group directly or by receiving funding for project activity.

European rural policy has many similarities to National regeneration policy rhetoric. It advocates a territorial approach that recognises local difference and it relies on input from local communities through integrated partnerships. Specifically participation, empowerment, capacity building, integrated development and bottom-up development are critical concepts in the LEADER process, with an emphasis on the involvement of local actors and agents (Ray, 2003, Shortall and Shucksmith 2001, Storey, 1999 and Ray, 1998). Consequently responsibility for getting things done does not lie with traditional forms of government. Instead agencies from different sectors have a role in the regeneration of their area. This new way of governing is thus common to both European and National rural policy.

European and National policy rhetoric on partnerships is explored by charting the historical context within which partnerships have emerged. Back in 1992 Mackintosh stated that the theoretical frameworks for understanding partnerships were not well developed. It is fair to say that much more work has been done on partnerships since then in an attempt to conceptualise and understand the partnership process. See for example, Whittaker et al (2004), Goodwin (2003), Liddle (2001), Carley et al (2000), Edwards et al (2000), Shucksmith (2000b), Hastings (1999a), Westholm et al (1999), Hastings (1996), Bailey et al (1995) and Bailey (1993). These analyses reveal the processes associated with partnership focusing on issues including their evolution, power relations, structure, legitimacy, accountability and community involvement. The range of case studies reveals that partnerships can take many forms and achieve many different things; this is explored later in the section.

### **Rural White Paper**

The long awaited white paper for rural England *A Fair Deal for Rural England* was published in 2000 in parallel with the urban white paper. The actual document was informed from sources beyond government as it drew on the consultation document *Rural England* published in 1998, with at least 2000 people responding and the government 'listening' to their viewpoints (Department for Environment, Food and

Rural Affairs (DEFRA), 2000c: 1.19). Also informing the White Paper was the *Rural Economies* report (Performance and Innovation Unit, 1999). This was part of New Labour's modernising government agenda whereby the deficiency of the then existing policy framework, with its roots in the agricultural policies of the 1940's, was recognised. This document encouraged feedback and debate from those with an interest in the issues raised in the report. Traditional boundaries between the government and public were eroded as the government sought to elicit views from the public on matters of interest to them.

The summary Rural White Paper states 'Our guiding principle in both is that people must come first' (DEFRA, 2000d:1). In the full document the government outlines its commitment to rural areas setting out 'what they can expect' (2000c:1.13). In this the government pledges to ensure that rural communities get a fair deal in public services and that government's rural policies are joined up. Central to and implicit within the paper is the notion of governance in that it sets out the way in which governmental and non-governmental organisations work together. 'Government's role is to provide the framework and support within which people can succeed and the flexibility to develop appropriate local solutions' (2000c:1.13). Onus is therefore placed on the public to help the government achieve its commitment as terms such as *empower*, *help*, *work with* and *support* are used to describe the relationship between government and rural communities. It is not simply about the government pledging to do certain activities; success will only happen with the support of rural communities. The government's overall 'goal is to help people in rural areas to manage change, exploit the opportunities it brings, and enable them to create a more sustainable future' (2000c:1.14). The government thus makes it clear from the outset that it will not be doing everything for rural communities, but that they have a responsibility to take action.

Assistance is given to communities to enable them to achieve their responsibilities. The 'White Paper sets out a toolkit of measures which local communities can apply to meet their priorities and concerns' (2000c: 1.12). For instance the government vouched to 'strengthen the most local tier of administration, the town or parish council, and give it a bigger role' (2000b:8) and so a parish fund to which parishes can apply directly was created. The fund was designed to 'give them more freedom to decide on the kind of help they need' (DEFRA, 2000d:5) in recognition of the belief that local

people are best placed to identify the challenges and opportunities within their community and to respond to these. Hence groups such as the Local Villages' Project applied for this funding to the Countryside Agency for assistance with holding public meetings to publicise their consultation work. Through this particular measure the government's partnership approach is evident.

The Rural White Paper reflects much of New Labour policy rhetoric where core ideals such as empowerment, participation, capacity-building and community involvement predominate. From the consultation process associated with the development of the Paper to the anticipated delivery mechanisms, traditional boundaries of government are blurred as governance through partnership is advocated. Policy rhetoric espouses that responsibility for achieving local solutions does not lie with one particular sector, but each geographical area is allowed to take a flexible approach reflecting local needs and priorities. Not only does this demonstrate the government's commitment to decentralisation, but it highlights the emphasis on a territorial approach over the established sectoral approach. These features are similarly illustrated by the 'Single Pot' administered by RDAs for their particular geographical area. However, despite such rhetoric policy instruments, the structure of existing government ensures that central government retains control over regional bodies. This was illustrated through the relationship between RDAs and central government. Thus the extent to which the rhetoric translates to reality and governance ideals, such as community involvement and decentralisation, are achieved will be examined later through analysis of an SRB partnership. Firstly the European policy context is considered.

### **3.1.4 Summary**

This section reflected principally on discourses of government. This was done through analysis of theories of governance and governmentality, with emphasis on the corresponding role of government and its exercise of power. An overview of European and national rural regeneration policy provided further context for analysis of the emergence of the current partnership structures that exist within rural development.

Rural policy nationally and within Europe is teeming with notions of concepts and ideals drawn from the theory of governance and these are featured in policy instruments such as LEADER+ and the SRB. Nonetheless the structures of rural policy contain numerous layers of government with hints of a chain of accountability back to government. In this sequence the central bodies appear to retain control over

the overriding policy agenda with regional government agencies and regeneration groups being accountable to the centralised bodies. This suggests that while at one level rhetoric is of a governance approach, the reality is closer to that of governmentality. In other words 'it is the state which continues to govern governance' (Edwards et al, 2001: 308). Power resides with government and is mobilised by supporting, nurturing and optimising its asset of population using a collection of means including techniques, institutions and procedures. One such technique is a governance approach; this demonstrates how government promotes individual and institutional conduct consistent with government objectives (Dean, 1999). However this analysis implies that discourses of governance are problematic as power is dispersed outside of governmental institutions to new partners that incorporate the public and private sector. Or it may be that the discourse of governance, as constructed by government, is simply a tactic employed through a governmentality approach and is solely designed to give government the legitimacy it needs to govern society.

The ensemble making up the structure within which rural development agents operate is ultimately controlled by government, although influenced to a limited extent by the governed. Hence the 'framework within which initiatives are developed are related as much to discourses of control and monitoring as they are to the development of individual (self) actualisation and/or community mobilisation' (Raco and Imrie, 2000: 2203). This corroborates Foucault's paradoxical claim that while citizens receive some extra freedom, they are subject to greater monitoring and scrutiny by the state (Foucault, 1991). Hence the reality of government is one of governmentality, while rhetoric is of governance.

These theories are scrutinized further in the next section which considers the practicalities and reality behind the purported policy ideal of governance in the light of such multiple discourses.

### **3.2 Section Two: Governance Reality**

The discussion so far has focused on the emergence of rural development and regeneration policy and discourses of government. Using various schemes and initiatives, European and National policies promote a governance approach and advocate the development of partnership structures. There is a plethora of such schemes, each with their own restrictions as imposed by different funders. Their

rhetoric is thick with concepts such as co-operation, participation, representation and involvement. Nonetheless the structures that exist suggest that the traditional boundaries of government are blurred for certain functions i.e. community activity, but not for others, i.e. setting the regeneration agenda. Does government rely on the activity and involvement of partners of governance in order to render society governable? This is explored further by reviewing the reality of rural governance. The practical process by which individuals come together is examined using the Communities First-Suffolk project and the Community Energy Project, a Single Regeneration Budget project in South Suffolk.

To analyse the concept of partnerships and to illustrate their application within rural regeneration, I have borrowed from the partnership life cycle schema devised by Lowndes and Skelcher (1998). This is based around styles of governance and considers partnerships according to the following stages:

1. Pre-partnership collaboration
2. Partnership creation and consolidation
3. Partnership programme delivery
4. Partnership termination or succession (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998: 320)

This provides a mechanism for considering partnership activity in discreet phases, although as the discussion will show activity between the stages tend to overlap rather than move neatly from one to the next as the theoretical model suggests. The first two stages have been developed for the CEP partnership to examine its initial development; from coming together to forming a partnership through to applying for funding and the first stage of project delivery. This partnership did not reach the project termination stage. Hence for the purposes of my research the steps are renamed thus for the CEP:

- a) Background – pre-partnership collaboration
- b) The application process – pre-partnership collaboration
- c) Formalising the structure (funding success) – partnership consolidation and project delivery



Meanwhile the implementation of the Communities First-Suffolk initiative is considered from the perspective of the partnership focused on project delivery and termination.

- a) Background – partnership development and creation
- b) Project delivery
- c) Project termination – partnership succession

The pre-partnership collaboration and partnership creation had occurred by the time I had taken up the post of Project Co-ordinator and so stage one is considered retrospectively using file documents, observation and interviews. Meanwhile I participated in the latter two phases identified. Using these examples the use of partnership is scrutinized both as a policy delivery mechanism and as a broader policy ideal with respect to governance and governmentality.

The CF-S project demonstrates how a typical short term funded rural regeneration partnership is operated and implemented. It analyses the practicalities associated with the implementation process, including the role of the project steering group. Firstly, the CEP is examined in terms of the application process with particular attention to official and unofficial guidance material. This involves a textual analysis and so consideration is given to the use of language. In so doing, it illustrates how government policy is transformed to practice and the process involved with the formal establishment of a partnership.

### **3.2.1 Background to the Community Energy Project**

The communities of Sudbury and Great Cornard, with a population of almost 20,000, were expanded by the London “overspill” programme during the 1960's. The community was never intended to exist on a long term basis and consequently the physical, such as transport connections and housing, and social infrastructures, for instance health facilities, were inadequate for its purpose. The local authority, Babergh District Council, was conscious that the economic and social status of the area lagged behind the surrounding hinterland and indeed the relative prosperity found here masked many of the problems in Sudbury and Great Cornard. Fundamentally the partnership was formed because at the time of writing the bid, although Sudbury and Great Cornard contained 3% of the County's population, 20% of the poorest and most deprived wards in Suffolk were found in this area. Furthermore the SRB submission

document identified 'general long-term lack of investment, the lack of modern healthcare facilities and inadequate sewerage and drainage systems' (Submission document 2000:5) as major problems to the communities. Babergh District Council took a political decision to invest in the area and devoting staff to the SRB partnership was one aspect of their commitment<sup>13</sup>. Ultimately the Council was awarded Beacon Status (a local government award) in recognition of the work that it was doing.

### **Project aims and objectives**

The Community Energy Project (CEP) was a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funded partnership led by the local authority aiming to raise 'the Economic and Social Capacity of Sudbury and Great Cornard' (D-F). The objectives of the CEP project include social and economic capacity building, use of new technology, improved quality of life and maximising opportunities for individuals vulnerable to poverty. The types of organisations that were funded included Age Concern, Sports Clubs, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Volunteer Centre, a toy library, youth projects and St. Johns Ambulance.

The project brought together approximately 50 different organisations including residents groups, local authorities, housing associations, health trusts and business groups. Partners were thus drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors and were committed to share the aims outlined in the SRB submission.

'The aims of the Community Energy Project are to: -

- Facilitate social and economic capacity building throughout the community of Sudbury and Great Cornard
- Better understand the aspirations of the community and then to achieve tangible and sustained improvements for the quality of life of the residents of Sudbury and Great Cornard
- Provide a human dimension to the many substantive capital programmes that are already underway or scheduled for the future
- Maximise the opportunities available to people currently living in, or vulnerable to, poverty in order to enable them individually and as communities, to participate fully in society

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<sup>13</sup> The Anglia Estate Improvement Group was another group led by the local authority in conjunction with other agencies and tenants on the Anglia Estate. It was responsible for overseeing an investment programme on the estate that would improve the quality of housing.

- Capture and harness the benefits of new technology throughout the local economic and social community
- Begin to make long-term self-sustaining changes to the local economic and social base to enable the community to become more resilient' (D:F – CEP bid submission, 2000:5).

Babergh District Council, the local authority that led the SRB application, perceived this to be stage one of a longer term programme. They wished to enhance the skills within the community so that greater investment would follow in the future and thus physical infra-structure problems would eventually be addressed (A). Their philosophy was that economic regeneration would follow from social regeneration.

#### **A partnership?**

While the name partnership did not feature as part of the title, the Community Energy Project promoted itself as a partnership and was understood by partners to be just that. For instance the early Board minutes were of the 'Sudbury and Great Cornard Pathfinder Partnership' (26/10/00), the agreement for the CEP was between Babergh District Council and the Sudbury and Great Cornard Pathfinder Partnership. A leaflet promoting the project describes the CEP as 'a local partnership of over 40 organisations...' (Community Energy Project: What is the Community Energy Project? Leaflet).

The CEP met the criteria set out within my definition of partnership. A number of different agencies drawn from various sectors worked together over the lifetime of the SRB 6 funding to build the 'social and economic capacity' of Sudbury and Great Cornard, for the benefit of the communities in those areas. The partners were committed to a shared objective. They pointed out that the even if funding was not forthcoming the partners had made great progress simply getting to the stage of sitting in a room together. (D:F)

#### **Strategic links**

Strategically the Sudbury and Great Cornard pathfinder partnership was part of the Suffolk Pathfinder Partnership established in 1999 under the government's New Commitment to Regeneration (NCR). One of the key purposes of NCR was 'to explore flexibilities in the way that national policies are carried out locally in order to encourage greater creativity, innovation and success' (Local Government Association

(LGA, 2001:2). Thus the scheme was directly concerned with how policy was interpreted and implemented, or how policy becomes practice. This was achieved through local partnerships that brought together a range of partners from various backgrounds to work together within a particular geographical area with the aim of achieving a 'more strategic' approach to regeneration (LGA, 2001:2). No resources were available for regeneration activities; but the County level partnership did have a full-time Manager seconded from the County Council managed Suffolk Pathfinder Partnership on a daily basis.

This Partnership had community development as 'a cornerstone' of the approach (D:F). It had five key objectives

- Competitive and employed communities
- Healthy and caring communities
- Safer communities
- Learning communities
- Environmentally sustainable communities

The Sudbury and Great Cornard Pathfinder Partnership, one of a number that was incorporated within the Suffolk-wide partnership, brought together agencies from the community, voluntary and private sectors. It was co-ordinated by the local authority in conjunction with the Suffolk wide Pathfinder Manager. In the Pathfinder zone plan document for Sudbury and Great Cornard the Partnership subdivided problems and strategic objectives into four areas – social and community; economic development; health; and environment. Its vision relied on the development of partnerships from 'many different organisations, sectors and backgrounds' (p 2). One of the milestones was an SRB 6 bid. At a practical level this aspect of the Pathfinder scheme was of most importance and relevance to the communities of Sudbury and Great Cornard. Potentially it represented real resources, i.e. money to undertake practical activities within the community.

Specifically the purpose of the CEP was to 'harness the evident energy and enthusiasm that is currently available throughout the community to bring about long-lasting beneficial changes that are needed and wanted by local residents.' Among the project aims there was reference to 'social and economic capacity building...maximising

opportunities...for people living in and vulnerable to poverty...using new technology throughout the economic and social community and beginning to make long-term self-sustaining changes...to enable the community to become more resilient.’ The project was viewed by the partnership as the prelude to a much longer process due to the nature of the perceived issues. This project was about ‘building the capacity of Sudbury and Great Cornard.’ (D: F expression of interest, supporting document). Some of the anticipated projects included plans to convert disused shops to a drop-in/resource centre for the community, the development of the Volunteer Centre as a training facility and the creation of new businesses.

It is notable that the Sudbury and Great Cornard Pathfinder Partnership evolved to become the CEP Board. Early documents refer to meetings of the Pathfinder Partnership and this is replaced by the title, Community Energy Project, in later papers. A local authority committee report cited the CEP as a key element in the development of the West Suffolk Pathfinder Partnership. Despite the intention to develop the CEP as one of the objectives of this Partnership, for some time it became the exclusive focus of activity, effectively the CEP and the West Suffolk Pathfinder Partnership were one and the same body.

#### **The SRB Six bid**

Babergh District Council on behalf of the pathfinder partnership submitted an expression of interest for SRB 6 to the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) in February 2000 entitled ‘The Community Energy Project’. The SRB bid, worth just over £800,000, was considered ‘worth developing further into a Final bid’ (letter from EEDA 6.3.00 to Babergh District Council). Just three months later the ‘Final bid’ was submitted to EEDA, followed closely by an assessment panel meeting. At the beginning of August the CEP was informed that it had been selected to receive funds from the sixth round of the SRB. Subject to conditions being met and funding remaining available the Project was awarded its requested amount of £450,000.

The CEP represented a substantial partnership that was strategically linked to other initiatives. It was led by the local authority which was eager to address the relative disadvantage that existed in the partnership area. The role and importance of the community featured heavily in the SRB bid that was submitted under Round Six. The next section considers the consultation process and the activities connected to writing the bid.

### **3.2.2 The application process**

This refers to the phase leading up to the success of the SRB application and includes all of the consultation meetings that were held to negotiate the content of the bid. The local authority was the catalyst for the development of the SRB application and instigated initial meetings, discussions and the consultation forum. In conjunction with other organisations, it wrote the final submission to EEDA. Ultimately the process of developing the bid and getting to the submission stage did not follow any specific format. It evolved from one week to the next over a three month period (from the outline submission in February to the deadline for final submissions in June 2000). Having had limited experience of working with community partnerships the local authority sought assistance from and depended on partners and guidance documents. Input from these sources was therefore essential to the application process and this is discussed next.

#### **Assistance from other partners**

As well as these specific guidance materials, information and advice was available from local authorities, umbrella voluntary organisations and development agencies such as Suffolk ACRE and COVER<sup>14</sup> (Community and Voluntary Forum for the Eastern Region). Suffolk ACRE provided support through their Chief Executive who co-chaired the community and neighbourhood strand, one of three within the partnership. COVER was funded under SRB 5 to 'build the capacity of communities across the region by identifying voluntary and community groups whose work can contribute to sub-regional and regional development strategies.' (DETR, 1999c:4) They conducted a series of road shows describing the SRB 6 programme and distributing information packs. A COVER officer was assigned to each of the emerging bids with a remit to provide assistance during this development phase. Supporting agencies in Suffolk generally delivered assistance directly through development officers working alongside the community, in conjunction with other organisations.

Babergh District relied on partners for their expertise and input to certain aspects of the bid such as experience of engaging with the voluntary sector, including who to contact and how best to communicate with them. In turn other partners depended on the Local Authority for their particular know-how and experience. For instance the economic

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<sup>14</sup> Funded under SRB5, COVER was established to 'build the capacity of communities across the region.'

development department of the local authority had the wherewithal to provide a rationale for the CEP bid based on statistics and evidence of need, as required by the SRB guidance. Partners thus agreed to contribute to different elements of the bid writing and associated meetings.

### **Generating interest**

After some general meetings to raise the profile of the planned bid, and subsequent regeneration project, several key individuals were identified to assist with gathering information and to write the bid. They were drawn from a variety of partners including the Community Council, a Housing Association and the local Business Centre. Some of these individuals had led discussions at a meeting to discuss the bid with the community and they had subsequently agreed to longer-term involvement. They also identified other individuals who became involved later. This working group was therefore limited to a specific network and so may have indirectly ruled out many other legitimate individuals with relevant skills and expertise.

Common thinking within the partnership was that detailed and meaningful discussion was more likely to happen with a focused objective. Three parallel discussion groups were held within a forum meeting to further this aim. These groups subsequently developed into individual groups or strands providing an ongoing mechanism for focused discussion and contributions from individuals; they were not set up to create barriers and divisions. Different individuals led each of the strands - Local Economy and Services, Health Improvement and Community and Neighbourhood. These themed groups complemented the broader discussion that took place during forum meetings.

More analysis of the extent of participation is given in the following chapter. Critical to this discussion is the objective within the fledgling partnership of achieving a mechanism that has resonance with the governance style as discussed earlier in this Chapter. It was about more than the local authority applying for funding, there appeared to be a desire to achieve a genuine partnership that shared both power and responsibility for achieving results. To ensure the bid met the requirements of the SRB funds, and also conscious of the need to achieve wide involvement, the local authority sought guidance from written documents.

## **Official documents**

Official documentation was available through EEDA and also from central government through the then DETR. These documents were complementary to each other, with EEDAs material focusing on issues specific to the region and their function within the application process. Meanwhile DETRs documents focused on the general principles of the SRB. It produced a series of five guidance notes relating to different aspects of the programme - bidding, project appraisal, delivery plans, monitoring and financial guidance (Fordham et al, 1999) published as a single guidance manual (DETR, 1999a). This was complemented by specific guidance notes for Round 6 set out in three parts and covering the national aims of SRB, links to the RDA and finally the bidding process (DETR, 1999b).

In addition, various other publications have been developed by central government and other agencies and referred to in the bidding guidance. Some are specifically for SRB partnerships such as 'Effective Partnerships: a Handbook for Members of SRB Partnerships' (DETR, 1997a) and 'SRB 6: Involving the Community' (Chanan et al, 1999) and others relate to regeneration more generally including 'Involving Communities in Urban and Rural Regeneration – A Guide for Practitioners' (DETR, 1997b) and SRB Challenge Fund: a handbook of good practice in management systems (DETR, 1997c).

### *Single Regeneration Budget Guidance Manual*

The official central government guidance on bidding is a twenty-nine page document entitled 'Single Regeneration Budget: Round 6 Bidding Guidance' (DETR, 1999a). Set out in three parts, the first comprises the substantial part of the guide. All three parts of the guide are considered in this section.

#### Part One

It covers issues including National aims and objectives, relationship between bids and other programmes, the sorts of initiative to be supported, community participation and who can bid. It begins by discussing the overall scheme objectives which address issues such as employment prospects, skills of local people, social exclusion, sustainable regeneration, protection of the environment and growth in local economies and businesses. As previously indicated two types of schemes were to be supported those that address—



‘comprehensive action in communities in the most deprived areas and tackling pockets of need in other areas’ (DETR, 1999a:4)

The former related to large scale schemes in local authority areas ‘included in the top 50 on one or more of the four measures of deprivation in the Index of Local Deprivation’ (DETR, 1999a:4), to which 80% of the budget would be allocated. The remainder would go to other schemes not included in the Index.

The guidance continues with information on who can bid. It makes clear that bids would be supported from partnerships, new or existing, represented by public, private and voluntary and community organisations. The exact make-up of the partnership would reflect the bid content and the relevant area or group characteristics.

Partnerships were expected to have the ‘full involvement’ (DETR, 1999a:5) of the community. Page six advises that the ‘mere existence of community representatives in partnership is not enough to ensure a significant say in decisions. They need to play a full and effective role in the partnership and be supported by local structures that allow the community viewpoint to be heard and partnership decisions to be fed back to the community.’ However the guide makes no mention of how the representatives can play a full and active role. It recommends that bids ‘should engage the talents and resources of the whole community’ (DETR, 1999a:6). Furthermore ‘bids should include plans to create, through capacity building...opportunities for new...members of the community who are not yet active’ (DETR, 1999a:6). Again there are no details on how the partnership can achieve this. In fact at the end of the one page section on community participation three suggested publications are given in reference to providing detailed advice on involving communities in local regeneration, including the Community Development Foundation’s (CDF) publication SRB 6: Involving the community (Chanan et al, 1999). This is considered later in the chapter.

Those bids that make up the 20% of Round 6 funds aim to tackle ‘pockets’ (DETR, 1999a:4) of need in other areas. The partnerships were required to have representation from the private, public and voluntary sectors and the guide makes it clear that they will not be on the same scale as the larger scheme, but that they will share the same characteristics as the larger schemes. Thus the principles of urban regeneration were expected to apply to all SRB partnerships.

The next section of the guidance relates to ‘community capacity building’ (DETR, 1999a:7) without actually stating what is meant by this term. It discusses issues such as the ability of the community to ‘make a full and equal contribution to the partnership and delivery of the scheme.’ In order to undertake their role effectively the guidance suggests that training and skills development and access to resources may be required. Thus the document understands community capacity building as enhancing the ability of the community to undertake their role effectively; implicitly it is about the development of skills and expertise. As the title of the section suggests the underlying assumption is that capacity building is required only by the community with no reference to building the skills of other partners. Yet as Taylor (2000a) points out, the shift from government to governance requires the development of institutional capacity so that capacity building is applied to all partners, rather than that of the community alone.

The need for this broader approach soon emerged as the bid was developed. Various conversations with the local authority officers throughout the development of the CEP demonstrated that they had a skills gap in terms of knowing how to engage with the voluntary sector and the community. Crucially however, they did realise this to be an issue and were willing to accept their limited skills. To remain involved as full partners, the various representatives required an understanding of how the other bodies operate so that they could develop relationships and achieve objectives as a group. The suggestion of capacity building among all partners would have been a helpful addition to the guidance. As it exists the guide undermines the equality element of a partnership and in so doing challenges the very foundations on which SRB partnerships purports to be situated, that of governance.

The guide intuitively assumes that the public and private sector approach to doing things is correct and does not require improvement. This oversight is revealing. It demonstrates an underlying assumption by policy makers that non-community partners already have all of the skills necessary to undertake their role effectively. But if they do not understand the workings of their partners – the constraints faced by them or the way in which they operate, for instance – the partnership is unlikely to reach its full potential. There is a danger that the blurred boundaries discussed by Stoker (1998) are not so much blurred as shifted. That is, shifted from a mixture of methods used by the

public, private and voluntary sectors to one where the public and private sector approaches are supreme, while the community and voluntary sector is 'delegitimised'. This conforms more with the notion of governmentality than of governance with power remaining within government, and its attendant structures, as has the authority to shape, channel and guide the conduct of others.

Local regeneration schemes under SRB 6<sup>15</sup> were required to have strong links with regional priorities and to other programmes and initiatives such as New Deal, Sure Start and Education Action Zones (1999). While it is understandable that the SRB assessors would wish to have an indication of how a specific scheme fits into the bigger policy picture the question must be asked: is this really the job of the bidding partnership? These linkages might more appropriately be the job of government officials/civil servants and so in this respect government is delegating downwards. It could also be argued that by imposing this requirement central government discriminated against the smaller bids because as a Government Officer, quoted in Lowndes and Skelcher, claimed 'Small and specialised voluntary organisations haven't got the clout or understanding or strategic overview required by the SRB process' (1998:327).

Part one concludes by describing possible sources of match-funding and practical arrangements for successful bids to accessing funds.

### Part Two

This section 'links the national aims and objectives to the regional priorities identified in the RDA's Regional Economic Strategy' (DETR, 1999a:14). It represents the part of the official guide that was written by each RDA. The East of England Development Agency (EEDA) was the relevant Agency for Sudbury and Great Cornard.

In theory EEDAs role was to administer the application process at the regional level, albeit within the framework of the SRB programme as set out by central government and described in the guidance above. Initially and during the outline bidding phase (for outline applications due February 2000) very brief guidance formed EEDAs contribution to section two. This was superseded by slightly more detailed guidance

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<sup>15</sup> 80% of funds went to 'large, comprehensive' schemes with the remaining monies being allocated to 'tackling pockets of need in other areas' such as rural areas and the former coalfield areas and coastal towns.

for the final bid process. It consisted of eight sections along with the same glossary that was included within the National Guidance (EEDA, 2000 and DETR, 1999b).

The eight sections within EEDA's guide were the themes under which submissions were assessed and the guide advises applicants to use these headings as the layout for the bid. However it did not provide any insight into how a regeneration group might set about its activities.

The content of EEDA's guide can only be described as a guide to ensure that bids fulfilled the assessment criteria rather than help with how to develop an SRB bid, never mind a partnership. For instance Section B on strategic objectives, activities and outcomes states that 'without appropriate and accurate baselines you will not be able to measure the impact of your bid and you will make it difficult for us to judge what can realistically be achieved through our investment in your plans' (EEDA, 2000: Section B, para. 3). The wording is pitched in terms of what the application should contain and what the partnership will need to demonstrate and explain. The guide's primary concern therefore is of a completed application that answers the questions of the assessors; there are few suggestions on the actual *process* of developing the bid.

EEDA wished to give priority to 'good quality bids, which meet the national SRB objectives and regional priorities set out in Moving Forward<sup>16</sup>' (EEDA, 1999: 2.4.2). The guide specifically encouraged bids for a comprehensive regeneration scheme in Luton, local regeneration schemes in rural and urban areas and free-standing capacity building bids. Such priorities are quite vague and ill-defined and do not create a vision for aspiring partnerships. And yet they could be viewed as leaving room for interpretation, thus allowing each partnership to define their own particular priorities. Details aside from the amount of resources over the seven-year programme (£32-38m) were not available in the preliminary guidance issued by EEDA.

Section C is concerned with Targeting and Community Participation. It states that 'you will need to explain how local communities have been involved in devising and developing the bid. This should include reference to community groups, voluntary groups, the business community etc' (EEDA, 2000: Section C, para. 2). However, no suggestions are made or hints given as to how the partnership might actually do this.

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<sup>16</sup> Moving Forward is the Regional Economic Development Strategy for the East of England.

Similarly, bidders are instructed to explain 'how local communities have been involved in devising and developing the bid' (EEDA, 2000: Section C, para. 3). The guide goes on to ask for details of their involvement – current and future – in the decision making process and implementing the scheme. It asks for clarification on who the funding partners are. Thus the focus is on how the bid document will assist the assessment process, rather than guiding an unsure partnership through the complexity of developing its bid.

The glossary (the same as that used in the national guidance) concentrates on the definition of technical terms used in the application form such as outcome, forward strategy and milestones. Economic development terms including credit union, community enterprise and development trust are defined, but more general community development concepts such as capacity building, partnership and participation are omitted. Indeed it is notable that no clarification is given of the term 'community capacity building' (DETR, 1999b:section 1.4) in any of EEDAs guidance document even though 'most bids should have capacity building as a key objective' (DETR, 1999b:para 1.4.8) and 'it is also anticipated that the majority of bids will include some element of capacity building' (EEDA, 1999: 2.5.2).

### Part three

This is the briefest section at just under three pages long. It is concerned with the mechanics of the bid – how to make a bid, timetable, how bids will be judged and what happens when a bid is successful. It does not consider the process inherent to the bid development.

### **Unofficial documents**

Unofficial documents were available to the CEP, often having emerged from projects funded by central government that were delivered to establish best practice. Some of these guides were recommended by government to partnerships developing bids and applying for funds. They tended to be used on a more ad hoc basis by the CEP and were not advocated by the Local Authority in the same way that the endorsed government publications were.

### *The Community Development Foundation*

One of the guides recommended by central government is the Community Development Foundation's (CDF) publication SRB 6: Involving the community

(Chanan et al, 1999). It was published to coincide with the Bidding Guidance for SRB 6. In sharp contrast to the absence of explanation of capacity building, the introduction of the CDF publication makes reference to capacity building in the third paragraph defining it as 'work to build up and strengthen the natural organisations of the community' (Chanan et al, 1999:1). A full chapter is devoted to capacity building and while this provides an insight into the concept, the analysis is fairly one-dimensional and limited. It takes its definition of capacity building from the then Department of Environment and this is about the capacity and ability of local communities to make a contribution to regeneration. Thus the focus is on the community, one dimension of a typical regeneration partnership; the others being the private and statutory sectors. This is limiting as it does not recognise that capacity building is often required within organisations from these other sectors. This point was well understood by a Local Authority officer who stated:

'We have learned a lot from the CEP. We now have a better idea of how to work with the community. Before [the CEP] we didn't really know how to do this' (A<sup>i</sup>).

A number of helpful, practical tips are given about how schemes can ensure they are achieving equality of opportunity, for instance the need for flexible arrangements for public and committee meetings that ensure they are convenient and accessible for all. In a similar vein it suggests limiting the use of jargon and abbreviations.

The guide gives a useful insight into why the community should be involved, it provides a comprehensive overview of the voluntary and community sector and it also makes suggestions for Delivery Plan targets. However the document assumes some knowledge or experience of community involvement. In describing what a good scheme will look like, the guide does not suggest how a partnership might actually set about achieving this in terms of where to start. It suggests that a good scheme will 'make efforts to reach individual residents, and minority and disadvantaged groups' (Chanan et al, 1999:16). While this might involve calling a meeting of different agencies, or tapping into existing networks, no such suggestions are given. In other words there is no simple plan that charts out the practical stages involved in developing a bid such as how to identify and involve disadvantaged groups.

Other oversights exist within the booklet. For example acknowledgement is given to the short timescale allowed for bid preparation. Following the government's recommendation (1999b) partnerships are advised to include a year zero which will allow minimal activity while the community is 'brought on board' (Chanan et al, 1999:17). But this seems to ignore the fact that the final bid is required to provide information on the purpose of the proposal. If the community is not widely involved then the overall bid is likely to omit key information relating to the community's needs and aspirations. While the process allows specific projects identified by the fledgling partnership to be included, those falling outside the original bid objectives and identified in future years will be ineligible.

Taken at face value much of the information given in the CDF booklet is a valid and useful general guide for partnerships involved regeneration. However, when applied to the specific SRB programme, as it is intended, it becomes clear that the subtleties and limitations of the programme are not fully appreciated by the authors. Furthermore it identifies the existence of multiple meanings of partnership.

Through the lead partner, Babergh District Council, the CEP marshalled help from many different partners depending on the skills required and those available. Furthermore groups were established to encourage the extensive involvement of the community. In addition the Council sought advice from regeneration and SRB guidance manuals published mainly by government. Such documents outline what is required by a successful bid but fail to describe the detail of *how* such success might be achieved. For instance they encourage and require full involvement of the community but fail to give adequate insight into the process through which this occurs. The documents also require a bidding partnership to outline how it fits into the bigger policy picture, something which many small voluntary organisations are unlikely to have the power to provide. Hence the documents assist the bid assessment phase more than the bid development process.

A fundamental gap in the understanding of capacity building existed across the documents with the concept deemed essential and described in terms of developing the skills of the community. This assumes that a gap in skills exists among voluntary sector groups but not within the public and private sectors. The discussion then highlighted how this could lead to a partnership failing to achieve its potential as it

ignores the skills of public sector organisations and so potentially they would not be developed sufficiently to maximise their involvement in the process.

### **3.2.3 Formalising the structure (funding success)**

The Local Authority Officer had worked closely with EEDA during the development of the bid and so it was able to inform the partnership that flat rejection of the bid was highly unlikely. At the final assessment phase, which was conducted by EEDA, two members of the partnership were invited to attend a brief meeting of the assessment panel at which they were to answer any outstanding questions from panel members. In August 2000 the project was awarded funding subject to EEDAs conditions.

#### **The funding agreement**

The contents and style of the offer letter reveal much about regeneration partnerships under the SRB scheme. Little et al (1998) show that the majority of the applicants to the SRB are Local Authorities and the language used within the offer letter indicates the type of SRB lead partner that is expected. It was sent from EEDA and addressed to the Chief Executive of Babergh District Council which was the accountable body. In general the letter is daunting at nearly three pages long and is highly technical using phrases such as ‘appraised and approved’ (para 4b), ‘Delivery Plan’, ‘outcomes, outputs, partnership processes and milestones’ (para 4a). Section h) refers to the applicant (in this case the district council) identifying an auditor (D-F).

While *responsibility* for delivering the contents of the bid lies with the partnership through the Board, true *accountability* remains with a single body, the local authority. This is clear in the offer letter with requirements on the ‘systems that the accountable body will rely on to provide proper accountability for public money’ (para 4e). The onus is on the applicant organisation to ensure the funds are spent in accordance with the guidelines. The issue of partnership accountability is explored in some depth by Whittaker et al (2004) in their analysis of Objective 5b funding. They argue that accountability arrangements have been too contractual and are typically confined to state administrative bodies. ‘One inevitable outcome of this has been their reluctance to take risks with funding’ (2004:191), such reluctance reduces opportunities for risk to be spread between partners. This in turn lessens prospects for less familiar and potentially riskier initiatives to be funded. It aligns this type of initiative to a governmentality approach, contradicting governance, as power is retained by public bodies and rather than being spread beyond traditional boundaries of government.



### **Identifying a structure**

The offer letter was received by the district council who then set about informing CEP partners. Letters were sent to partners and forum and strand meetings were held. Working group meetings were held with the core group of individuals who had developed the bid thus far. This was a phase of negotiating and selecting appropriate systems and structures with judgements taken on what was perceived to be the best avenue given existing constraints such as resources (human and financial), funders requirements and time.

It has been shown that problems can arise with the onset of formality as inclusiveness, flexibility and innovation may be compromised. In their study Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) discovered that the voluntary and community sectors were often relegated to the periphery due to the formalisation of hierarchies. Carley et al (2000) warn that partnerships suffer tension between the need to be inclusive and the need for efficient, streamlined decision and management processes. The core group developing the CEP was conscious of these challenges – it faced the issue of integrating the forum and the strands into the management structure in a meaningful way, while at the same time developing a structure that was effective but not cumbersome.

Certain elements of the final partnership structure were fixed – ultimately EEDA required that a single organisation take responsibility and be accountable for implementation of the project in conjunction with a management group made up of representatives of the community and voluntary, public and private sectors. The local authority was keen to maximise efficiency and wished ensure that all groups within the structure had a meaningful purpose. In a similar way to some of the partnerships studied by Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) that maintained network-style relationships alongside more formal ways of working, the CEP decided to retain the strands and the forum as an informal mechanism for developing projects and for two-way communication. These structures were parallel to the formal board with the functions of encouraging new groups to join the CEP and of providing a communication channel and ‘nurturing ground’ for new projects.

### **Formal structure**

Ultimately the project was organised into three sections each of which incorporated some of the structures that had emerged during the bid development phase. The CEP emerged with various elements:-

- **A Board:** to provide a strategic direction and ensure the CEP achieved its basic targets. It would make recommendations to the accountable body, the District Council. Its membership was drawn from the following groups:

**Babergh District Council**

**CEP Forum**

**Sudbury Town Council**

**Great Cornard Parish Council**

**Suffolk County Council**

**CEP Strands**

**EEDA**

**Suffolk Pathfinder**

- **Three Strands** representing the following themes - neighbourhood and community, health and business and the local economy - liaised with its respective communities on each of these matters. They provided a communication channel between interest groups and the Board and so it was envisaged that they were more focused on specific issues than the Forum. It was also expected that this mechanism would help to identify the difficult to reach groups (SG).
- **A Forum** provided opportunities for wider consultation and informed the work of the Board. It also existed to keep the community in touch with the progress of the CEP. In addition the Chair of this group was also a member of the Management Board 'in order to ensure full communication between the two groups' (Meeting notes 24.08.00)

Finally, a Project Manager, employed by the local authority, was appointed by and responsible to the Board.

#### **Protocols and terms of reference**

Terms of reference or protocols are often drafted and agreed by partners. These determine roles and responsibilities of partners and set out how the partnership will operate. Such agreements can be useful for avoiding the 'paper partnership' that Little et al (1998) discuss where a partnership is put together on paper, with little idea of what joint working actually signifies.

An agreement between Babergh District Council and the CEP partnership was prepared. This brief document made reference to various other texts including the Management Board objectives and the Delivery Plan. It thus covered everything from financial administration to general project management. This was in addition to the contract that the Council had with EEDA to deliver the project.

This section considered how policies of rural governance were implemented through the specific example of a regeneration partnership. Certain structures were required by the funding body including accountability by a single organisation and general responsibility by a Project Board. As the formalisation of the project structures increased, so the complexity of associated tasks intensified. Hence the partnership was in danger of relegating to the periphery groups and individuals less skilled in bureaucratic procedures, such groups were typically from the voluntary and community sector. The co-existence of formal and informal structures provided a number of ways in which this sector could participate, albeit from the margins with power remaining in the hands of the public sector. The true extent of this peripheralisation and its appropriateness is examined more closely in the next Chapter. Of note to this discussion is that the governance approach as suggested within regeneration policy rhetoric is in tension with a reality of governmentality as revealed by this Case Study. This is discussed later in the Chapter, before that another example of a partnership project, CF-S is reviewed.

### **3.2.4 Background to Communities First-Suffolk**

The development of Communities-First Suffolk is described in detail in Chapter 3 and it is not my intention to repeat that information here. In this section I explain Hastoe's motivation for leading CF-S in terms of organisational culture and contacts before considering aspects of the project delivery.

#### **Organisational culture**

Hastoe Housing Association has a long association with innovation. Numerous annual reports and project work bear testimony to this. For instance in 1997 the Chairman's report identifies innovation as one of the three themes of the Annual Report for that year (Hastoe Housing Association, 1997). In his synopsis of innovation he refers to the work of Sustainable Homes as promoting 'environmentally friendly practices among housing associations'. The Chairman goes on to mention the publications Affordable Water and Housing Plus in Rural Areas, both of which emerged from specific projects.

Finally in that year, he notes that the Association commissioned From Exclusion to Inclusion, a report considering social and economic exclusion. Anecdotally the Association is also known to innovate. While attending various seminars and conferences I was conscious of delegates picking up on Hastoe's past project work in the course of informal discussions. They were often keen to find out about the latest projects with which the organisation was involved.

Officially this theme of innovation remains prominent and Hastoe's website claims that it has three main objectives:

- To provide 'good places for people to come home to'
- To work in selected local communities to help create 'better places for local people'
- To innovate, and make a difference to the national agenda ([www.hastoe.com](http://www.hastoe.com))

The following excerpt from an annual report demonstrates Hastoe's ongoing commitment to innovation and indicates its target group for housing provision - those on low income.

'The gap between the need for affordable housing, on the one hand, and the provision of homes on the other, grows wider and wider. These are challenging times.

With our proven track-record for innovation, Hastoe is perhaps uniquely placed to seek and find new ways to bridge that gap. We have set ourselves ambitious targets and will display the courage to deploy our resources financial and human, flexibly and effectively. Putting it in a nut-shell, Hastoe intends to 'Aim high, keep its feet firmly on the ground and walk tall'. The times are not just challenging. They're exciting' (Annual Report, 2002/03). The management rhetoric is one of innovation, placing Hastoe in a unique position to respond to the 'gap' in the market.

Despite this effusive rhetoric the reputation of innovation was not shared by everyone. Hastoe was viewed by some professionals as 'paternalistic' and 'not necessarily innovative' (SG<sup>1</sup>). Many of the agencies were surprised that it was developing the CF-S project and 'there was suspicion of the project more widely in the community' (D: RJ). Furthermore some staff within the Association became disillusioned with the gap between rhetoric and reality. On the one hand Hastoe portrayed an image of

innovation and of working with its tenants while at the same time certain small practical arrangements did not accommodate this. For instance the Tenant Liaison Officer was keen to work during the evening when tenants would be at home and he could make contact with them. However the Head Office would not support his request for flexible working arrangements and suggested that he would have to be at work on the mornings that he had planned to work until late in the evening. Eventually he became so frustrated that he found a job elsewhere and left.

Nonetheless Hastoe presented an image of change and innovation. And while this may not have been shared by everyone, a great number of influential organisations supported this agenda as demonstrated by the number of projects externally funded and led by the Association.

### Contacts

The discussion in Chapter 2 demonstrates that Hastoe is a well-connected organisation. The membership of the committee as described earlier bears testimony to this. In addition Senior Managers were constantly tapping in to government networks, developing and using contacts with influential individuals. For instance, a consultant working on behalf of Hastoe met with a senior staff member at the Social Exclusion Unit to discuss an embryonic project idea where he 'did not push for anything more than her support' (D:F). The following excerpt from a note circulated by a member of the Senior Management Team to various Staff further illustrates Hastoe's networking abilities:-

'I spoke to Y after his speech to say that one large element was missing. How do professionals in our position change the culture of our organisations so that we listen to people and enable them to become part of the solution?' (D:F)

At this time Y was a political advisor to the Prime Minister and worked in the Social Exclusion Unit. As well as being closely connected, this statement shows that the rhetoric of Hastoe was one of change and specifically of working *with* users, giving them a more powerful role.

The official rhetoric of the organisation thus reinforced the image portrayed by Hastoe. This was tightly controlled with a member of the Senior Management Team taking a personal interest in all publicity emerging from the Association as well as all day-to-

day activities. The next section explores this further by considering how Hastoe led Communities First-Suffolk partnership vis-à-vis the rhetoric of the organisation.

### **3.2.5 Project delivery**

A project steering group was set up before Communities First received funding. Its role was to help secure funding and to advise on the development of the idea to a full-blown project. The steering group was initially a small working group of four including representatives from the then Rural Development Commission, a district council, the local community council and Hastoe Housing Association (D:F).

Initially this group consulted with other individuals and was eventually expanded to include some of these consultees when Hastoe was awarded funding for the project. The wider group included all of the funders with a number of additional agencies listed as consultees to keep advised of progress (D:F -minutes 19.01.99). CF-S was considered a partnership activity although some may argue that it does not merit the label of a partnership as it is dealing with a project (see for instance Westholm et al, 1999). It is included in this analysis as its rhetoric is one of partnership. The project was led by Hastoe 'to demonstrate the contribution that registered social landlords and affordable housing can make to rural regeneration and sustainable development in market towns and villages, in partnership with other local and national agencies' (D:F-funding application, 1998).

Many rural development initiatives use the structure of a steering group made up of representatives from different partners responsible for overseeing the implementation and development of that project. Such alliances or partnerships aim to achieve things together that would not have been possible individually. The CF-S Steering Group was set up to provide 'overall direction' (D:F) for the project and was to meet 'at least once a quarter to review progress, contribute to and approve the forward plan' (ibid). No record is given in the steering group minutes of discussion around the purpose of the steering group or of the project. Members would have found terms of reference helpful to 'ensure members were clear about their role from the start' (D:F- 22.01.02). Equally some guidance on the nature of the project would have avoided the confusion about my role. This became clear when I interviewed each of the Steering Group members individually at the start of the project. My corresponding journal entry read 'there are as many different projects as there are steering group members' (D:RJ). Each member had a slightly different concept of what the project was and of what the role of the

group was. Some members expected that I would be solely observing, always recording events but not taking part in them. Others imagined that I would be at the heart of the community activity helping to make things happen, with my observer function as a less visible activity. Hence the steering group as a whole did not have a united opinion about my position along the participation: observation continuum, instead a multiplicity of meanings surrounded the understanding of the project.

Inevitably during meetings some members of the steering group were more vocal than others. However I found little resistance to my ideas and the activities with which I was engaging. In practise the steering group had a very hands-off role leaving the operation of the project to Hastoe staff. This was reflected in meeting discussions and attendance at the steering group. For instance only one member appeared at the meeting of 17.07.00, all others including the Chair (a Hastoe staff member) sent their apologies or did not appear. There was little sense of a shared purpose or responsibility within the group, some of the basic tenets of a partnership. Similarly when the website was launched group members were to provide 'comments' (D:F 03.10.01) to myself as co-ordinator but 'no comments' (D:F 22.01.02) were forthcoming.

Unexpectedly the steering group served another function to members. During a review meeting members claimed that 'the networking has been positive' and the 'exchange of information' was 'very useful' (D:F - 22.01.02).

As project co-ordinator I worked in a capacity removed from most of the day-to-day concerns of Hastoe. The project was not perceived by staff in the East Anglian office to be relevant to its core activities. 'Its clear from today's team meeting that no-one in East Anglia can really see how my project fits with housing provision. In fact their attitude is quite negative and even if I make a concerted effort to develop links I don't see how I can overcome their lack of enthusiasm. They just want to make sure house repairs are sorted, they're not interested in Xs<sup>17</sup> pet projects'. (D:RJ 25.11.99).

Consequently I sought and received guidance from individuals from other areas. A member of the Senior Management Team within Hastoe took a personal interest in the project and conducted a number of day-trips to Suffolk from London. During these

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<sup>17</sup> X was a member of the Senior Management Team, whose identity is concealed.

visits he discussed in depth the progress of the project. A senior policy advisor within the Countryside Agency also provided input to the project. Not only was she was anxious to ensure that the project followed the direction set out in the application, but she wished to see it succeed.

Thus while officially the steering group provided strategic direction, in effect the project was steered from behind the scenes by one of the major funders along with the Senior Management Team at Hastoe. This may have been because I was viewed as a 'self-starter and so did not need a lot of guidance' and so the steering group was seen only as a 'safety mechanism' (SG<sup>i</sup>). In any case just two of the partners were exerting their power within the partnership.

Many individuals who had encountered the project associated me personally with the project (SG<sup>i</sup>, C<sup>i</sup>) and for them I was the project. Thus my skills and personality determined the value of CF-S. For some I filled a gap as 'there was no support from elsewhere with statutory organisations lacking continuity of staff' (C<sup>i</sup>). One individual understood that the aims of the project were 'to help the community, to push schemes forward and to raise awareness in the community' (A<sup>i</sup>). All of these interpretations are different to the 'official' objectives of the project that are discussed in Chapter Two.

### **3.2.6 Project termination – partnership succession**

Like many projects, CF-S was awarded funding for three years. It culminated in a 'good practice guide' called *Sustaining Rural Communities* (McAreavey, 2003). There was some debate about another phase to the project but this never came to fruition. In any case the publication and launch of the good practice guide illustrates how contacts and networks can be used advantageously. Firstly the choice of venue for the launch, Church House in Westminster, indicates that Hastoe positioned itself among a network of influential individuals. Westminster, inhabited by politicians and policy makers, is where decisions about policy are taken and rolled out across the country. A handful of individuals active in the community were invited to the event and only one who had worked with the CF-S project attended - he was also talking at the launch. In greater numbers were representatives from Housing Associations, Local Authorities and government agencies.



Thus the question arises: who was the good practice guide for? 'It is full of practical tips to help communities, based on lessons learnt by the project team during the Communities First - Suffolk project. Supporting agencies will also find useful advice and information.' (The Countryside Agency: website- publications). And yet there was no outreach programme or follow-up to the first phase by either Hastoe or the CA (Countryside Agency) to disseminate the information. It thus becomes difficult to conclude that the guide will be used by the target audience of regeneration practitioners.

### 3.2.7 Summary

The experience of these partnerships' structure and their development and delivery processes provide an insight into the reality of partnerships as mechanisms of governance. Babergh District Council as lead applicant or partner of the CEP actively sought advice from other agencies and recognised that it was unable to provide all of the skills and experience required to deliver a successful partnership. The Council was keen to involve the community and set in motion a structure to facilitate this most effectively. It referred to a range of written manuals (government and non-government publications) for further guidance on community involvement and partnership development. As a result many different partners played an active role, each offering their expertise towards the development of the partnership. Despite these varied contributions, partners' power within the partnership was not equal with the public sector retaining control throughout the process, a symptom particular to discourses of governmentality rather than governance.

Alternatively the example of CF-S shows how organisational contacts can be employed to ensure funding success rather than relying on extensive community participation. Organisational rhetoric within Hastoe was of terms such as innovation, community involvement and partnership. In reality the project was delivered with strong control from central management while the Project Steering Group helped to meet the funders' requirements. The connections that Hastoe held among senior officers within government agencies were perceived to make a crucial contribution to its success in gaining project funding.

The written guidance provided useful reference material for partnerships submitting bids to Round 6. However in the official documents, emphasis was placed on the *content* of the bids rather than on the *process* of developing a bid. They constantly

suggest the expected features of the successful bid without detailing how groups might achieve this. Nowhere in the bidding guidance are there step-by-step instructions on how a partnership might actually set about developing a bid, for instance by getting in touch with existing voluntary sector forums or by making connections with current business networks. These simple and often obvious steps to those already familiar with such processes can be elusive to individuals or organisations with little experience of engaging with various groups as was the case for Babergh District Council in the CEP.

Furthermore all of the documents discussed in this section omit a crucial component of capacity building. The community and voluntary sector does not operate in a vacuum, but as much of this current chapter indicates, it is usually in partnership with other agencies such as local authorities and quangos. Partnerships are not strengthened by focusing on the community sector alone as the guidance documents advocated. The need to provide capacity building for all partners is recognised within the literature (see for instance Scott, 2004, Taylor 2000a and Mannion, 1996). As public and private sector organisations are involved in the new structures of governance, capacity building should relate to these organisations and the individuals therein. So while it might be beneficial for the community sector – the institutions and individuals within – to develop their skills and organisation; without a parallel process within the public sector, the effects will be limited and so partnership structures will not realise their full potential. Traditional boundaries of government will remain as it ultimately retains control.

### **3.3 Conclusions**

Governance is central to contemporary rural development policy and practice within both National and European contexts. From a theoretical perspective the *process* of rural governance forms the key distinction between it and traditional forms of government. Hence policy objectives may not be any different, but the way in which they are achieved is altered by the governance agenda, typically through public, private and voluntary sector interest groups working together on a seemingly equal basis to achieve common objectives. European and national rural governance discourses were shown to embrace a number of core concepts including devolution of power, decentralisation, participation, capacity-building, empowerment and equality of rights and responsibilities. The process of governance is thus extensive and ambitious.

Nonetheless it is a common theme across rural policy, with European initiatives such as LEADER embracing the ethos and National programmes such as the SRB designed around governance principles. In summary, this overview illustrated governance as a dynamic and wide-reaching concept that typically relies on the particular mechanism of partnership to achieve these objectives.

Although policy rhetoric is focused on the notion of governance; a wider discourse that engages with governmentality theory was shown to exist within the literature. While it was suggested at the Chapter outset that this literature is frequently hazy often confusing theories of governance and governmentality, the original governmentality literature illustrates how power remains with government and is exercised through structures of government. Governance discourse conversely is about the devolution of power outside of government institutions. In view of the multiplicity of government discourses and of the evidence from the Case Studies, Chapter Three has shown how regeneration rhetoric is predominantly aligned to governance but in reality it relates to governmentality. Genuine change will therefore remain elusive as it can only happen through public, private and voluntary sector activity operating with a predominantly multi-sectoral agenda where true power lies outside traditional government boundaries.

Policy documents and literature were used to highlight multiple discourses of government and to analyse partnership theory. These discourses assert that partnership structures comprise of partners working together to achieve common objectives on an equal basis, i.e. with shared and equitable access to resources. Partnerships operate within the governance framework and so embrace the same principles. Nonetheless a paradox was revealed whereby in the case of national programmes, government pursues a governmentality approach by seeking to maintain control over key policy areas. At the same time it employs the technique of governance constructing a discourse of decentralisation, power devolution, shared responsibility and empowerment. However, in as much as the ability to influence resource allocation represents power, then it is devolved. But if power is considered in a broader sense of political control, then it is not spread among the new partners of governance. It remains firmly in the hands of government. This was evident within the case studies examined. For example the SRB programme operated within a framework administered by central government and the relevant RDA. Hence the CEP was bound by regulations set out by the RDA in addition to central government's programme

rules. Moreover a single agency, the local authority had sole accountability for delivering the project and for the associated finances. This reality contradicts the espoused rhetoric within governance of decentralisation, shared responsibilities and power dependence among partners, while concurring with governmentality discourse.

The skills required to become actively involved in rural development initiatives are complex and often parallel the expertise found within bureaucracies or public sector organisations, for example, attending meetings and writing reports. This demonstrates yet another contradiction of the theory behind governance particularly relating to the notion of participation. While lesser involvement is possible through peripheral involvement, the types of structure evident in the SRB programme illustrate that more active participation is necessary to become involved in the powerful aspects of the scheme. Finally hidden factors such as networks were shown to play an important role in an organisation's ability to participate in rural development activities. Participation is explored further in the next Chapter. Important to this discussion is the apparent inability of non-public sector agents to grasp any degree of power through participation in so-called governance activities.

Capacity-building was found to be a vague concept with a one-sided application to regeneration partners. Government and other publications were elusive on the subject of capacity-building although it was required by regeneration schemes. While on the one hand governance requires the development of institutional capacity of the participating partners, on the other programme documents discussed capacity-building in terms of the community. There is no clear guidance from government on how capacity-building may effectively be achieved beyond the fact that it is needed by the community, thus omitting agencies such as statutory sector organisations. Hence the inherent assumption in policy documents is that the public sector approach is correct and does not need to develop or change, the discursive construct of capacity building relates to developing the skills of agents outside the public sector. This belief does not align with the theory of partnership where agencies from different sectors are empowered to work together through equal means to achieve shared objectives. Instead it creates scenarios where public sector organisations continue to operate as normal but other regeneration partners are required to change their way of working.

Just as policy documents are vague on the notion of capacity building, so the elusiveness continues with community involvement. As a consequence the notion of what constitutes community involvement varies across the rural development landscape. Lead agencies largely determine the extent of involvement as they approach the task using the skills and experience available within their organisation. They may also seek assistance from partner agencies where internal gaps exist but such foresight is not always guaranteed. Alternatively regeneration agents use personal contacts and the reputation of their organisation to guarantee funding for their activities. Organisations operating within regeneration structures create different discourses of governance through partnership that causes them to act in many different ways depending on the individuals involved. Individual behaviour is dealt with more in the following Chapters.

This Chapter exposed a multiplicity of discourses and rhetorics concerned with government, governance and governmentality and their associated structures, as used by policymakers, practitioners, academics and community representatives. That a single rhetoric or indeed discourse exists for any one of the concepts or within a particular interest group is unlikely and not necessarily desirable. Indeed the regeneration landscape is enriched by multiple discourses impacting on and affecting the behaviour of individuals and groups resulting in often positive unexpected and unpredictable outcomes.

However the analysis uncovered potential tension that may arise due to confusion around the issue of power and the question of who actually controls the objectives of contemporary rural regeneration, in other words who retains political power. Although a degree of power has been given over to new partners of regeneration, this is limited to that which is required to mobilise their involvement. This is part of the process through which the population is regulated by government, or as Dean argues it is an attempt by government to 'organise the conduct of actors in specific ways' (1999: 32). As a result of these tensions, expectations of the regeneration process may not be met and there is a danger that disappointed participants will relinquish their perceived responsibility to contribute to the development process with untold consequences for government.

Given the vagueness and assorted contradictions that exist within rural development schemes much is left to local interpretation arising from the multiplicity of discourses. A significant positive outcome is that the agencies involved in governance, and thus within rural development partnerships, actually shape the emerging structure. Policy and academic rhetoric and discourse suggest that mechanisms of governance are not prescriptive or fixed; instead they are dynamic and shifting, depending on local circumstances. Ultimately however the outputs and objectives will remain inflexible as National and European governments continue to write the rules and design the programmes of rural regeneration. In other words, under these current conditions while rural policy rhetoric is of governance, the rural regeneration reality is of governmentality.

## **4 Participation**

Participation, along with partnership, stems from new governance practices where traditional boundaries are eroded and activities rely on involvement from beyond government. Whereas partnerships provide the method for organising these new arrangements, participation is a process adopted by partnership structures. Participation connects structures and agents of rural regeneration. It is about how people get involved in the rural development process whether the ultimate objective is to increase community capacity or economic regeneration.

Within this theoretical context and following findings from Chapter Three, the subject of peripheral participation is explored in some detail. Key aspects of this analysis are the meaning, purpose, legitimacy and extent of participation within rural development. Then, using the example of the CEP, the Chapter considers participation in rural development practice in terms of the process of participation and opportunities for participation. Hence the rhetoric and reality of participation are investigated.

### **4.1 Background**

The governance of rural areas relies on structures and institutions including partnerships as analysed in the previous chapter. Murdoch and Abram (1998) suggest that both active communities and active citizens are commonly suggested as new partners of government within the new institutional arrangements that have resulted in the shift from government to governance. Public participation is one method used 'to inject some notion of the 'common good' into the functioning of governmental institutions' (Murdoch and Abram, 1998:41). Participation also involves agencies and organisations from beyond traditional government structures, with newcomers such as Housing Associations participating in the new governance arrangements (Goodwin, 1998).

The increasing number of different agencies operating in the rural development sector is illustrated through membership of partnership groups for initiatives such as the Single Regeneration Budget or Health Action Zones. Groups participating in rural governance, be they from the public, private or voluntary and community sector, will each have their own interpretation of what involvement entails based on their experience, culture and organisational priorities. Consequently many different

participatory techniques are employed - local authorities seek public participation in consultation questionnaires; local action groups rely on the participation of individuals from their community at public meetings; health partnerships are based on the participation of representative agencies organised through working groups. In their survey of participatory initiatives across local government alone, Lowndes et al (2001) identify nineteen different forms of public participation such as public meetings, opinion polls and interactive web sites. The result is that the experience of participation may vary greatly depending on where it is happening and who is leading and involved in the process.

## **4.2 Section One: Participation rhetoric**

The meaning given to the concept of participation is broad. The World Bank definition of participation describes it as 'a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings' (1997:11). The elusiveness and inconsistency associated with participation is not new. In the 1960s Arnstein talked about understated euphemisms and exacerbated rhetoric around the concept, resulting in great controversy about the whole subject matter. In many respects her comparison made of citizen participation being 'a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you' (1969:216) is still applicable to rural development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as participation is seen to achieve many different things. For instance Barnes et al (2003) claim that enhanced public participation is viewed by New Labour as achieving the following - improving public body's decision making, both quality and legitimacy, having the potential to address the democratic deficit and building community capacity and social capital. The potential for the effect of participation to be overrated is therefore great with it often being presented as the solution for many shortcomings that exist in the public sector today. Or as Hayward et al point out there is a 'mythologising of the power of participatory methodologies to accomplish problem solving, emancipation or empowerment' (2004:95).

### **4.2.1 The meaning of participation**

As a result of the varied and wide claims of participation, academic enquiry into participatory rhetoric and practice continues to be popular. Much of this stems back to work done in the 1960s by Sherry Arnstein. Arnstein famously categorised participation in the 1960s using the principle of a hierarchical ladder. The ladder ranges from manipulation and therapy at the bottom where non-participation occurs to



the top where citizen control predominates. In this ultimate position Arnstein points out that in situations where final approval, power and accountability lie with another agency, in her example the city council, then citizen control cannot be achieved. The model differentiates between types of participation, distinguishing the extent of citizens' power in each category. Participation is closely connected to power as she claims 'citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power' (Arnstein 1969:216). However, the concept of empowerment itself can remain elusive. As Cleaver (2001) argues it is often unclear who is being empowered – communities, women, the poor, socially excluded – whoever these groups may be. Or as Taylor's (2003) research discovered, consultants were the only people seen to be empowered as they were able to access money. In any case Arnstein's model advocates a goal of full participation. This is not always the objective of participatory techniques in regeneration today. For instance local authorities aim to use their powers to enable rather than control (Taylor, 2000b).

Rural development seeks to improve the economic, social, environmental or cultural quality of life through processes of community participation and involvement. It is an ongoing process of change leading to improvements for groups of people (Buller and Wright, 1990). As discussed in the previous chapter this occurs in a governance framework and is typically achieved through a partnership structure, where power is shared among partners and they participate equally in activities. Democratic renewal may result from rural development practice; similarly community empowerment may be a secondary product of regeneration or even a prime objective. Hence rural development practice typically has a broad agenda where the balance between process and goal must be found.

Currently, enhanced public participation is central to the Labour government's modernisation agenda for British local government (Lowndes et al, 2001a). Lowndes et al (2001a) considered public participation as attempts by local government to encourage participation in local affairs beyond the traditional processes of political engagement i.e. voting and party membership. They found that the importance of gaining citizens' views was seen to be useful for informing council decisions as well as being linked to service improvements. In other words from the local authority perspective, participation helps them to function more effectively by providing valuable information. Crucially, 'the goals of empowering citizens or increasing their

awareness were largely secondary to the more tangible benefits of improving decision making' (2001a:211). The local authority respondents indicated that ultimately the final decisions on whatever issues were raised via participation should always lie with elected members. In as much as this represents participation in local affairs beyond the traditional processes of political engagement, it can be seen as having the potential to contribute to a process of democratic renewal (Lowndes et al, 2001a).

Alternatively participatory activities may happen outside of the democratic process per se. They may be about involvement in activities designed to implement particular policies. For instance participating in an SRB initiative is by design not an overtly democratic process as the management group are not elected. Instead they tend to be selected at least in the first instance and the selection often includes elected representatives from local government, as was the case in the CEP. Similarly the work of community groups is not necessarily related to that of parish councillors. In the Stradbroke Local Villages' Project the councillors took only a remote interest in the group's activities. Nonetheless the group was involved in implementing a broad governance agenda where traditional boundaries between government, other agencies and local communities were eroded. Furthermore in both of these examples citizens were able to have an input into what happened in their area. Hence New Labour's ethos of co-operation and collectivist approaches rather than individual solutions are realised (Williams, 2003) along with the ideal of community capacity building (Barnes et al, 2003). Similarly within European rural policy, support is given to community-based initiatives and capacity building (Ray, 2000, Shortall, 1994). This is exemplified through the LEADER+ initiative as described in Chapter Three.

Williams' definition of participation is much broader than that used by Lowndes et al (2001a). In his analysis he adopts 'the widely held view that community involvement refers to any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to, close relatives, or to benefit the environment' (Williams, 2003:532). He further distinguishes between formal community involvement i.e. through local organisations and 'informal' involvement where participation occurs in 'micro-level one-to-one aid' (2003:532). Williams' definition is concerned only with unpaid activity and there is no outright relation to wider societal benefits. Questionable collective activity may thus in theory be considered under this definition as valid community involvement.

Hence I define participation as involvement in community activities that further the development and implementation of public policy. This is deliberately broad and the link to furthering public policy may be indirect but the definition takes account of formal and informal activity. Thus it includes the implementation of Community Action Plans by local communities that are facilitated by Community Council Development staff, the funding for these posts typically coming from a central government agency. Participation can also have more direct links to public policy, such as a consultative exercise by a local authority on proposed housing developments. However my definition does eliminate the inclusion of voluntary activity of groups with aims and objectives that are not in the public interests such as extreme political organisations.

Nonetheless, participation in regeneration activities that fall within my definition is not always done in a positive way. Participatory processes can be manipulative and harmful to those supposedly empowered (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Edwards et al (2001) cite the example of individuals getting involved in rural partnerships because they feel that they cannot afford to be left out or because they feel threatened by the partnership and do not want it to develop policies that will challenge their own interest. Thus participation 'generates enthusiasm and hostility in equal proportion' (Croft and Beresford, 1992:20). Despite these mixed attitudes and with a few other exceptions (see for instance Hayward et al, 2004, Shortall 2004, Cleaver 2001 and Shucksmith, 2000a) academic enquiry has tended to assume inherent benefits of participation. There has been little debate around the legitimacy of non-participation. Often quantity is desirable and so participatory techniques tend to measure success according to numbers involved. For instance public meetings with higher numbers of attendees are more desirable than those with less, regardless of the quality of debate. These issues are explored further throughout this chapter.

#### **4.2.2 Participation dynamics**

Participation can be considered from a couple of different perspectives. Firstly the amount or extent of participation is a recurring theme within the literature with a resulting spectrum ranging from full to non-participation. Somewhere between these extremes lies marginal and peripheral involvement. Closely connected to this idea of the extent of participation is the question of the values attached to participation or the ethos behind it.

Different individuals drawn from a range of sources have a variety of beliefs about the nature of involvement and as a consequence many techniques are used to achieve participation. In reality participation is multi-faceted and dynamic as will be demonstrated later using the CEP. This section focuses on the dynamics of participation in terms of the scope for involvement in and the purpose behind participatory exercises.

### **The scope of participation**

The extent of participation that is desirable is the subject of ongoing debate. Some participation models follow the hierarchical approach as used by Arnstein (1969) where full participation, along with citizen control, is an ideal. Government policy often continues to encourage full participation even though citizen control is no longer an objective of contemporary government policy. Williams (2003) points out that as recently as 1999 the idea of a hierarchy for participation was used in a Home Office publication, the report of the Policy Action Team (PAT) on Community Self-Help (Home Office, 1999). The report by the PAT recommends that public authorities should facilitate increasing involvement that encourages people 'to 'graduate' to greater engagement with their community' (Home Office, 1999:30).

At the same time as the PAT report advocates full participation, and as in Arnstein's model, it de-legitimises non-participation. Despite this some of the literature challenges the common assumption that participation is a good thing and the associated notion that the more individuals that are involved the better (see for instance Hayward et al 2004, Shortall, 2004 and Cleaver, 2001). Hayward et al (2004) develop the notion of non- or peripheral participation. Having reviewed other studies they challenge the assumption that 'broad based participation is always a social good' (2004:96) which is a positive empowering experience.

Hayward et al (2004) implicitly show how participatory activities can lead to displacement, citing the example of the inability of a community to raise a football team due to the success of the local internet café. This suggests that communities have a saturation point for community based activities and so full participation in one initiative may limit participation in another. Full participation is thus not necessarily an optimum position for community regeneration and so it is more appropriate to consider participation that legitimate, relevant, and inclusive. For instance it may be

the case that such involvement is non-participation in rural development activities. Barnes et al (2003) suggest that to examine participation more closely it is necessary to look at the notion of representation. Whose interests are being represented?

Criticism has been waged against inter-agency regeneration initiatives that are dominated by professionals, often with little accountability or transparency to the local community (Hall and Mawson, 1999). Hence there is a danger of professionalising rural regeneration where, on the one hand expertise is essential to tap resources but on the other hand, the majority remain on the edge of the process (Storey, 1999). Indeed the process involves activities done by groups made up of non-elected individuals who may be perceived as bypassing the democratic system. If considered against the ideal of representative democracy their legitimacy is questionable. However, partnerships that exist as a mechanism under rural governance are not necessarily about achieving representative democracy, although as Lowndes et al (2001a) argue they may contribute to democratic renewal. As the discussion in Chapter Three highlights, they exist as a new way of achieving things. They form part of a wider framework alongside more traditional forms of government where elected representatives have a place. Hence partnerships adopt a dual bottom-up/top-down approach to implement policies. Top-down schemes are applied because the public sector retains responsibility for certain issues such as unemployment and poverty (Geddes, 1998).

If, as is the case in rural regeneration, an objective is to achieve the participation of the community then there must be some concept of what that community is before it can be represented. This is a challenge and has been the subject of many debates and theories (see for instance Bell and Newby, 1971 and Cohen, 1986). The dynamic and heterogeneous nature of any given community means that achieving a cross-representation of a community is likely to remain complex. Hayward et al (2004) warn of participatory methods that promote the voices and values of the most articulate and accessible within the community thus reinforcing and reproducing existing structures. Hence existing barriers and exclusions are retained. Relevant participation should therefore be considered in terms of what the group seeks to achieve in the broader context of rural development. The skills, knowledge and expertise that are necessary will vary according to the particular task in hand and this will shift over time as the rural development process evolves. Hence the degree of participation from an individual within the community will vary.

Nonetheless the existence and validity of non-participation should be recognised. Wenger (1999) argues that relations to communities of practice involve both participation and non-participation. Hence not everyone identifies with everything or everyone encountered and so it is normal for identities to consist of experiences of 'being in' and 'being out' (Wenger, 1999:165). Consequently not all members of a community will identify with a regeneration scheme for their area and so will choose participation accordingly. According to Hayward et al (2004), while non-participation may indicate social exclusion, the act of non-participation does not imply social exclusion or lack of empowerment, but it may actually be an act of empowerment. Individuals, their research demonstrates, may choose not to participate and yet remain an active member of their community. Thus applying Wenger's principles to rural development, individuals who do not identify with particular activities exist on the outside of that boundary, in this case the rural regeneration boundary. Individuals may choose to opt out of participatory activities for various reasons such as consultation overload, lack of time, dislike for the participatory method selected or lack of interest in the particular theme of the initiative (Hayward et al, 2003 and Lowndes, 2001a). It may also be the case that individuals believe in the value of participation for the good of their 'community' but for them personally there is no benefit; that is the costs and benefits fall differentially (Cleaver, 2001). Or quite simply for some the idea of participation may be more appealing than the reality (Lowndes et al, 2001b). In other words there are legitimate and valid reasons for non-participation often based on rational choice. This is in contrast to common rhetoric that designates it as undesirable.

Non-participation through choice is different to imposed non-participation. As Hayward et al (2004) suggest, the act of non-participation may indicate exclusion. This occurs where barriers exist that prevent certain individuals and groups from participating to the extent that they would otherwise choose. Hence Wenger (1999) identifies marginal groups among those who participate less than fully arguing that this occurs because full participation is *prevented* by a form of non-participation. In other words barriers to full participation prevail. For instance a community may be so used to the dominance of the local authority in shared activities that the norms of the local partnership reflect formal approaches of that local authority. This leads to comments

and questions such as ‘are we allowed to do this?’ as the culture of non-participation in power holding is so ingrained among those on the margins.

Problems arise in marginalised participation because barriers exist to full participation. For instance if formalised groups only are recognised by a partnership and thus given places on a committee, informal voluntary groups are marginalised. This is exemplified in Williams’ (2003) critique of the PAT report discussed above. He highlights how on the one hand the document considers increased involvement as activity occurring through formal voluntary or statutory organisations, while on the other had it discusses the development of informal activity to more structured action (p20). Thus Williams concludes the Community Self-Help report reinforces the notion of formalised groups as constituting more superior or legitimate participation than any activity that occurs outside this highly structured sector. Williams (2003) warns that, if the government continues to adopt this rigid approach, areas with more informal community involvement will lose out to those areas with traditions of highly formalised community participation. Non-participation or less than optimal participation through marginalisation is therefore problematic. Barriers need to be considered, identified and overcome and this can only happen when the objective and purpose of participation is understood.

Less than full participation also occurs when some degree of non-participation is perceived in a positive way. Wenger describes this as peripherality and it can be identified when some non-participation is necessary to *enable* a kind of participation that is less than full<sup>18</sup>. Thus in community regeneration individuals may choose to contribute to the group that organises the family fun day while opting out of the working group set up to write a funding application. Although their participation is not maximised in the sense that they are involved in everything, they make a legitimate and relevant, albeit peripheral contribution.

As I have shown in the previous chapter ultimately the rules of engagement of regeneration are in the domain of the public sector. Chapter Three also illustrates how funding systems tend to be complex and intricate and require a particular level of expertise. Hence the participation of those representatives with no experience of the funding system is unlikely to be high in relation to the direct task of writing funding

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<sup>18</sup> This is different to full blown non-participation which occurs when individuals actively and completely opt out.

applications. However as Wilkinson and Appelbee (1999:16) argue ‘local people know most about local conditions’ and so they will know how to develop existing community networks or they will know whose interests are not represented. Hence it is likely that many individuals will exist at varying degrees of the periphery as they participate in some activities, but not all. They choose ‘to participate within self-defined limits’ (Hayward et al, 2004:101).

The level of participation from different partners and representatives in partnerships is thus subject to debate. If there are no barriers to full participation, their non-participation in certain activities or peripheral participation is not problematic. It is the individuals who are completely excluded or who exist at the margins that are of more concern – how can they be identified and the barriers to their participation removed?

### **The ethos of participation**

Participation is not something that is done as a one-off activity with a single, tangible output. Hayward et al (2004) call attention to the view of participation as both means and end thereby highlighting the value of intangible as well as tangible outcomes to projects. It is an ongoing process that relies on various approaches. In this way bringing people together and achieving community interaction and participation can be as valuable as the task that they have come together to do. As the Community Strategy guidance recognises ‘the process by which community strategies are produced is as important as the strategy itself’ (ODPM, 2000:5). It recognises the value of participation in the manner suggested by Hayward et al, as a means as well as an end.

One of the difficulties of recognising participation as interplay between ‘means and end’, is that of measurement. While it is clear from the excerpt above that the government is committed to the principle of participation as a process, funding schemes do not always provide a way of recognising intangibles. Focus is normally reserved for the most obvious of project outputs and so called ‘deliverables’ such as a refurbished community centre or a new play area, at the expense of process related achievements such as stronger community identity or enhanced links between community groups and government agencies. Hence the more formal and measurable outputs tend to receive the most attention. For instance the example of official SRB guidance and documentation reviewed in the previous Chapter illustrates that accounts for how projects should be delivered are included – through instruments such as specific outputs and contractual arrangements – while crucial detail about *how* to get



people involved is omitted. Schofield (2002) examines the linkages needed between the regeneration guidance issued by regional government and making community involvement a reality. In his specific example of the SRB he suggests that adaptation is required from managers to align their working practices to the needs of the community. Given such guidance as 'be clear about why you are involving the community...to map out the existing networks and to enlist community support' (2002:674) he raises the question of how such advice can become reality. De Souza Briggs (1997) notes that the 'how to' guides on public meetings and other media are terse on points of power and culture. Organisations may thus struggle with the practicalities of participation, leading to pseudo-participation where they operate a participatory exercise with the final decision being made elsewhere (Deshler and Sock, 1985). Participation thus becomes an end in itself, with little attention paid to the process.

Attention needs to be given to participation on an ongoing basis. Hence Shortall and Shucksmith (2001) argue that capacity building ought to continue even after collective action has arisen to engage groups that are slow to participate in the development process. One of the ways in which effective involvement can be achieved is through paying attention to support and access (Croft and Beresford, 1992). Access for the community to various mechanisms including relevant committees, forums and institutions and also to information will help to achieve empowerment and involvement. Croft and Beresford (1992) explain that without support it is only the most advantaged, confident and resourced groups and individuals that are likely to become involved. They identify four different forms to support – personal development, skill development, practical assistance and help for people to get together and work in groups. This backing is needed not only to give people the competence to participate but also because people may not know what is possible or how to get involved. Working through a rural development group and driving forward a local agenda may be incredibly radical for some people, particularly if they have always been dependent on the state doing things 'unto' them. So support is as much about enlightenment as it is about education.

Schofield (2002) illustrates how SRB managers attempted to teach empowerment to residents on the grounds that it cannot be assumed. This recognised that support is about showing people there are options and then giving them the skills and opportunity

to explore alternate ways of working. Otherwise individuals with extensive experience of rural development continue to drive initiatives forward, while those who in the past were excluded continue to be excluded. Aspiring to group membership that mixes those with previous experience and those without should help to overcome the risk of reinforcing existing barriers and norms while also acknowledging the importance of the balance between means and end. A range of techniques must be employed if participation is viewed as a means in itself and is recognised implicitly as a valuable process within rural development.

### **4.2.3 Summary**

Participation has many and varied meanings and is frequently seen as a panacea for social issues. In the past it was closely aligned to citizen empowerment and control. Contemporary rural governance does not necessarily aim to achieve these objectives and participation is frequently used to enable rather than control helping government agencies function more effectively. Rural regeneration structures place emphasis on processes of community involvement.

The scope for participating in rural governance is broad, ranging from full involvement to non-participation. This review of theory suggests that full participation is not always a legitimate objective nor is it a positive thing. Individuals may be manipulated or harmed as a result of community involvement activities with the retention and reinforcement of existing barriers and exclusions. Furthermore evidence suggests that communities have a saturation point and so displacement of projects can occur where too many participatory projects are encouraged and delivered.

Non-participation can indicate the existence of marginalised groups and individuals. However, it also results from acts of empowerment with individuals or groups choosing not to get involved or to take part in peripheral activities. This is legitimate and valid aspect of community involvement.

Participation was therefore shown to be a dynamic process that requires ongoing and active attention. It cannot be dealt with as a one-off activity nor is it achieved as a discrete task. The way in which participation is played out in regeneration practice is examined in the next section.

### **4.3 Section Two: Participation Practice**

In its guidance on preparing Community Strategies (ODPM, 2000), central government recommends that partnerships offer various opportunities for participation using techniques that apply to their local circumstances. This notion of flexibility is echoed in the literature with suggestions of a 'spectrum' (Williams, 2003:532) and 'repertoire' (Lowndes, 2001b:449) of participation. The use of various participatory techniques is sensitive to individual group and regional approaches and so provides a means of legitimising many different forms of participation. Hence 'different participation approaches may be more suited to the needs of particular types of organisations' (Lowndes, 2001a:209). Agents involved in participatory activities can select an approach most suitable to the needs of the circumstances.

Flexible approaches remove the superiority of the previous hierarchical approach advocated by Arnstein (1969) where for example partnerships between power holders and citizens are considered superior to participation where public bodies boast community representatives.

Lowndes et al (2001) identify nineteen different forms of public participation used by local authorities such as public meetings, opinion polls and interactive web sites. They are broken into five categories thus:

1. Consumerist methods e.g. complaint schemes
2. Traditional methods e.g. public meetings
3. Forums e.g. service user
4. Consultation innovations e.g. interactive web site
5. Deliberative innovations e.g. focus groups

Lowndes et al (2001a) found that most authorities use more than one form of participation, using on average nine different forms of participation during each census year. When this was examined further, the smaller district councils (tending to be in less urban areas) generally used only eight. Resources were the main factor inhibiting participatory initiatives but despite this the main stimulus was corporate strategy followed by Departmental policies (Lowndes et al, 2001a). Many of these policies emerge as a direct response to central government initiatives and requirements. As a

result the number and range of participatory schemes emerging from local government has proliferated.

With no given budget at their disposal and limited resources, regeneration groups have less choice about the type of technique that they adopt. Hence particular techniques which are advocated by support agencies tend to predominate among community based regeneration groups. For instance the Countryside Agency's Vital Village Scheme offered financial support to communities undertaking a Village Appraisal (this scheme closed in 2004 - <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/VitalVillages/Index.asp> 28.08.04) and this was complemented by support from Community Council Project Officers. The Appraisal consists of a survey that is carried out by a community group and distributed to every household. Viewpoints of residents are sought on issues affecting their lives. The appraisal process can involve the use of the 'Village Appraisal for Windows' software as developed by the University of Gloucester and this approach including report writing, printing and photocopying costs in the region of £1500 (Spedding, 2003).

A close correlation between the availability of funding and support and the choice of technique can be problematic as it often results in a community undertaking a task simply because it is advocated by external agencies (D:RJ) even if that activity is inappropriate to the situation. For instance in Great Cornard one of the Parish Councillors was also a senior employee of the local Community Council and he promoted the Community Appraisal approach. This was virtually identical to the Village Appraisal Scheme and so it involved the use of questionnaires and computer software. The process necessitated a lot volunteer time and expertise and soon the technique itself became the focus of the group. Meetings focused on the problems associated with the process such as the lack of volunteers. Eventually those community members who were involved walked away from the process as they became frustrated with the seeming lack of progress and failure to deliver any tangible community projects (D:RJ). The questionnaires ended up in the offices of the Community Council without a single shred of result or analysis and the community group had long since disbanded.

Selecting an appropriate technique is a significant task. Various good practice guides exist for this purpose including the New Economics Foundation's guide entitled

Participation Works! (Lewis et al, 1998). This document directly addresses New Labour's Clause IV which promises a new system of government where communities are involved as far as possible in taking decisions that affect their area (Lewis et al, 1998) – hence the emergence of the governance approach as analysed at length in the previous Chapter. Participation Works (Lewis et al) is an A-Z of participatory techniques from Action Planning (1998:7) to Team Syntegrity (1998:45). It recommends that for all participatory approaches groups consider issues such as values, involving the less articulate, the use of experts and the availability of resources – both time and money before selecting their technique(s). For each technique methods are offered along with advice based on a Case Study. For instance Participatory Appraisal offers brainstorming, diagrams, community mapping and timelines among others as suggested methods to achieve an appraisal. Suggestions for resources required and options for further support in terms of contacts, publications and training is then provided (Lewis et al, 1998:33-34). This is as close as a group is likely to come to learning about a technique short of direct experience.

Even if a group carefully considers its position in the terms suggested within the Participation Works guide (Lewis et al, 1998) there is no guarantee that their experience will be problem free. In Stradbroke, the Local Villages' Project Group chose to undertake a community consultation that did not fall under the commonly recognised Village/Community Appraisal technique. The Group devised a questionnaire and following its distribution and subsequent collection the analysis commenced. At this stage difficulties arose. As the Group was reliant on an individual within the Local Authority to conduct a computer generated analysis they encountered problems when he changed jobs and his post failed to be filled immediately. This caused a hiatus of approximately six months as the individuals from the Group attempted to retrieve the completed questionnaires from the local authority and find an alternative route of analysis. In the end I personally was able to bring sufficient skills to complete this task and the results were duly presented to the wider community. However, this demonstrates that the use of techniques can be problematic for various, and often unexpected, reasons.

The above participatory processes often occur in tandem, be they the result of statutory obligations, the outcome of a proactive community or the consequence of regeneration agency activity. The upshot from these copious participatory techniques is that

individuals living in any given area may be spoilt for choice regarding the plethora of opportunities to participate. However, if little changes as a result of their involvement or if their expectations are not met, they are unlikely to participate in future activities. The remainder of this chapter will use the case study of the CEP to illuminate the theoretical considerations that I have elaborated.

### **4.3.1 The Community Energy Project**

The background and objectives to the Community Energy Project are provided in Chapter 3. Further relevant information relating to the concept of participation is provided in this section. Community networking and participation were considered key approaches to achieving the objectives of the CEP (SG<sup>1</sup>). It is interesting to note where community participation within the project began and the extent of that participation. Effectively the question of whether or not an application would be made was not up for discussion – the scenario was presented as an 'opportunity not to be missed' (D:RJ). The option of not applying to the SRB was not available to the community as the local authority presented a strong case in favour of submitting a proposal. The consultation with the community therefore rubber-stamped the decision made by the local authority to commit resources in the form of officers and apply for SRB funding.

Primarily the issue up for negotiation was whether or not the community wished to see particular themes included in the bid and what type of projects would be given priority. The Local Authority explained that since the administration of government regeneration funding was evolving, with new and expanding roles being given to Regional Development Agencies (RDA), it was important for Sudbury and Great Cornard to make a mark on the regeneration map. This map was one outlining the priorities within the geographic area that was under the remit of the RDA. The Local Authority saw this as an important part of making the RDA aware of the needs of the respective communities. It was also suggested by the Local Authority that there was nothing to lose by submitting an application to the SRB fund - the partnership would apply to the competition and the worst that could happen was that funding would not be given. In this case, the local authority explained, the partnership would then be able to consider other ways of raising resources to implement their project ideas. They believed that ultimately links between different agencies would prove invaluable for future activity. In effect the local authority implicitly stated the benefits of the process

itself; that is the means as well as the ends of participating in the development of the Community Energy Project.

Senior officers were assigned from the Local Authority to spend time leading the bid - not an insubstantial commitment that included initiating the application process, organising meetings and developing working groups. The local authority officers coupled with voluntary member and staff input from other (mostly public and voluntary sector) organisations eventually wrote the final application. This represented a large amount of public resources dedicated to the project. However the community was never consulted on whether it wished to see these resources used in an alternative way.

The local authority faced a dilemma – it wished to respond to the tight timetable of the SRB programme while also engaging in a meaningful way with the local community in which the project would be delivered. The objective of the partnership was to be fully open to any member of the public of Sudbury and Great Cornard as well as to all organisations with a remit in the area. The emerging partnership faced the possibility that the usual suspects, rather than disenfranchised groups, were primarily involved. The partnership made great attempts to ensure wide involvement leading the forum chair to state in an early meeting that ‘the partnership must not be exclusive and although 30 organisations have been invited to the meeting, there will be other important organisations who will hopefully wish to become involved and that one of the purposes of the discussion groups would be to identify other contributing partners’ (D:RJ).

Indeed throughout the application process the fledgling partnership aimed to keep participation and involvement open and transparent and was explicit about this in correspondence. An excerpt from an invitation letter to a strand meeting to discuss the bid encouraged the addressee ‘if you can identify any group that you feel should be invited please feel free to copy this letter to them’ (D:F 28.03.00). The core group sent out mailshots that alerted potential interested parties of planning meetings. A number of different mailing lists were used including Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations (SAVO), the Primary Care Group and the Business Centre. This was in addition to the mailing contacts within the established Sudbury and Great Cornard Pathfinder.

Lowndes and Skelcher (1998) claim that the collaboration phase is characterised by informality and emphasis on personal relationships but as they point out, for those who feel excluded or marginalized, this collaboration is viewed as cosy. Interviews with local residents confirmed that some of those outside the formal structure perceived the CEP as elitist when they claimed that the 'scheme was for the council and not for us' (C<sup>i</sup>). This perception of elitism and cosy relationships may have been a hangover from the development of the strategic partnerships (the Pathfinder Partnerships) in the district and the County and so relationships had already been established. As part of a wider government agenda, the Pathfinder initiative was conducted without additional funding and operated through existing local professional and voluntary networks. Disenfranchised groups may have not been interested in joining for various reasons, including lack of time and perceived lack of short term benefit. Although the CEP emerged from this professional and voluntary network, a view within the community was that it was not for them.

The partnership was aware of the need to achieve broad involvement in the application process. Time and resources militated against this happening to the extent that it may have done in ideal circumstances. It recognised that if the partnership was to be fully relevant to the community then the involvement of individuals and organisations from within that community was essential. But they also needed to respond to the funders requirements demonstrating a certain degree of consultation prior to the submission of the outline and later the final bid. It was pragmatic to use existing networks and connections to kickstart this process on the basis that wider and deeper participation would follow. Prior to submitting the bid, over 12 meetings were held with the involvement of 35 organisations. The final bid secured the support of over 40 organisations with contributions including audit, knowledge and skills, financial and premises.

Attendees of consultation meetings participated within the framework set by the local authority – that of shaping a specifically funded regeneration project – and did so through a series of techniques. Their involvement was restricted by SRB rules and regulations as well as the more general confines of the local authority. Closer inspection of the emerging structure of the CEP helps to elucidate the opportunities for, or indeed limitations of, community participation.



Whether associated with an organisation or not assuming that members of the community believed that the CEP was relevant to them, their participation in the CEP was possible through several different mechanisms. The opportunities for getting involved were via:-

1. Writing the application
2. The Forum
3. The Strands
4. The Board
5. The projects

**1. Writing the application**

A lot of time and energy went into developing the CEP. Professionals from the local authority, in conjunction with a few experts drawn mostly from public sector organisations led this process. Initially the involvement of the private and voluntary sectors was peripheral and confined to informing and advising through associated structures, in particular the forum and strands as discussed later.

The overall task of writing the application included a number of smaller jobs that required technical astuteness. These were to conduct working meetings to review policy and funding guidance documents, to provide input to the development and content of the bid document and to devise a management structure for the operation of the project. Moulding the content and style of the CEP was therefore a critical and influential task with participation at this stage representing an opportunity to influence not only the contents of the application, but ultimately the nature of the project. This could have a large impact on the communities of Great Cornard and Sudbury. Therein lay a dilemma – between technical competence required for the task in hand and understanding local circumstances.

The local authority focused on the technical skills necessary for the job in hand making it a very focused and practical task. They wished to include those with a valid contribution to make and they considered this to be individuals with practical funding experience or analytic skills (RJ). The local authority was keen to avoid wasting the time of staff and volunteers through inappropriate involvement. The plan was to bring others, including key community leaders, on board through alternative but more

relevant channels thus allowing the needs of the community to be fed into the process, albeit indirectly. The danger with this approach according to Wood et al (2001) is that views can be represented quite differently when filtered through representatives compared to when they are expressed directly.

Ultimately the way in which individuals got involved with writing the application was fairly ad hoc. As with typical community projects, many people were unable to commit due to lack of time. Thus the availability and willingness of individuals with regeneration skills and experience made them attractive partners to the local authority. Consequently initial approaches were often made through personal contacts and by word-of-mouth communication. For instance I made contact with the Economic Development Officer from Babergh District Council as I knew it was his remit to coordinate the bid to the SRB. At a one-to-one meeting I was able to demonstrate the potential value of my skills to the embryonic group – I had experience of writing and reviewing funding applications as well as working on community activities. From this point I became a member of the working group and eventually went on to play a key role in the development and management of the CEP. As far as the local authority was concerned regarding my involvement there was nothing planned, I merely got involved in some self-promotion to the local authority. My professional agenda was to be involved in the CEP while the local authority's objective was to secure the input of individuals with skills desirable to the group. Both goals were met and a useful relationship was established.

The professionals involved represented organisations with an agenda of working in the geographic area and often they personally had relevant skills in regeneration funding – in the first instance that is how they each came to sit round the table and write the bid. There were few individuals drawn from the broader community or from the voluntary sector in the working group writing the application.

## **2. The Forum**

Within the CEP the local authority was eager to encourage extensive involvement of and endorsement from individuals and organisations within Sudbury and Great Cornard. The primary mechanism for individuals from the wider community to participate was created through the Forum. Officially they gave their endorsement to the project by signing a partner commitment. However anyone with a connection to Sudbury or Great Cornard could legitimately get involved with the Forum, they did not

have to be affiliated to an agency, nor did they require specialised skills, nor did they have to sign the partner commitment statement. It was at Forum meetings that general information would be provided on the nature of the CEP and also if attendees wished to get involved in any of the other groups they could do so.

An integral part of the management structure, the Forum provided the means whereby the community could influence the CEP and it was also a mechanism for the Board to disseminate information to the community. When designing the organisational structure of the CEP the Local Authority envisaged that communication would be a two-way process, from the community to the CEP management and vice versa using the vehicle of the Forum. To assist this, the chair of the Forum was also given a place as a member of the Board.

Initially there was much interaction between the group writing the bid and the Forum. At this early stage (in the 3-month phase during which the partnership developed the bid from an outline to a full proposal) the Forum was used to consult with the community over the proposed content of the project. Two meetings were held in different schools across the communities with attendance of approximately thirty people at each. They were advertised by word-of-mouth, by placing posters in public areas - including shops, community centres and schools – and through direct invitations to agencies and community groups. A number of techniques were used within the meetings to engage with attendees including public discussion, focus groups, and networking. This was achieved by a meeting format that began with coffee and networking, followed by general discussion that was interspersed with focus groups concentrating on one of three themes (later to develop into ‘strands’). A general question and answer session concluded the Forum meeting.

The working group responsible for writing the bid planned the Forum meetings under the direction of the local authority. They were chaired by a community representative who was involved in a voluntary capacity in parish affairs and health bodies. Other members of the working group helped with their general organisation and also facilitated focus group discussions.

Eventually the CEP project Manager had a key role in formulating the structure of the Forum meetings, always after discussion with the Board. She often attempted to have

the meeting focus on a particular topic or theme. For instance the meeting of 27.09.01 was themed 'Funding opportunities for voluntary organisations and community groups' (D:F) and its format illustrates a typical Forum meeting. It included informal presentations from umbrella organisations such as COVER and Suffolk ACRE as well as from locally based voluntary organisations. Local groups involved in fundraising spoke about their experiences with fundraising. Other business at this meeting was an update of the work of the CEP and the election of two representatives from the voluntary sector to the Management Board. The Forum meeting began with tea and coffee at 5.30, with the business starting at 6pm and ending just after 7pm following an open question and answer session.

A predominantly older population dominated the Forum meetings. Many of the attendees expressed concern over the health facilities available locally. This suggests a number of issues. Firstly attendees did not understand the purpose of the forum; they wrongly believed that the consultation was an all-inclusive affair incorporating any issues relevant to Sudbury and Great Cornard. In fact it was a participatory process bounded by the Single Regeneration Budget rules. It was actually for the regeneration of the area in terms defined by the SRB. Secondly the low number of young people attending the meetings may have been indicative of the inadequacy of the consultation techniques used and also of the promotion for the meetings. But a final more essential point relates to the degree to which non-participants had a desire to get involved in a community regeneration initiative. Non-participants may have actively taken a decision not to get involved in the project. For instance if they were satisfied with their quality of life they may have had no desire to change anything, or their personal circumstances could have mitigated against participation. For many different reasons individuals may have actively made a decision to opt out of the process.

The possibility of individuals actively opting out of involvement with the CEP was explored during the launch of a community play area where local residents were interviewed about their interest in the CEP. While some had never heard of the initiative, many had and they believed it had nothing to offer them and equally they had nothing to offer the CEP. They perceived it to be a local government initiative, but were not convinced it was relevant to them. These members of the local community rationally opted out of participation; they had little desire to be involved. The fact that they attended the launch of the play area in their Estate demonstrated

their willingness to get involved in certain community matters, even if not in regeneration issues, as defined by the SRB.

### **3. The Strands**

The CEP was structured around three themes –

1. Community and Neighbourhood
2. Local Economy and Services
3. Health Improvement

Three Strands, reflecting each of the themes, were created so that organisations with a particular interest in any of the themes could influence the CEP. This ‘layer’ was created to allow expertise or professional input to the Project. For instance in the invitation to the first community and neighbourhood strand, voluntary and community sector organisations were asked to participate to ‘identify high priority needs’ for their group and ‘to ensure all relevant voluntary and community organisations are represented within the bid’.<sup>19</sup>

The individuals who led the three different focus group discussions were assigned the responsibility of further developing their respective group or Strand. This was legitimised and endorsed by the so-called wider community via the Forum. This responsibility was reflected and formalised through the management structure which specified that the co-ordinator would also have a place on the Board to ensure a direct link between the two groups.

While anyone could attend strand meetings, the intention was that it would be people with a genuine interest in the strand topic. For instance, the two co-ordinators of the Community and Neighbourhood strand sought to work with community groups in the area. They brought together different organisations that were working with various elements of the community, including disaffected youth and older people. This Strand therefore worked through existing bodies such as the local volunteer centre in an effort to communicate as broadly as possible and ensure the maximum input to the project. They sent open invitations to these groups and also encouraged them to speak with the co-ordinators directly or if preferable, direct their comments via the relevant umbrella organisation. Options for participating in different ways were given.

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<sup>19</sup> Letter to community groups (using SAVO mailing list) 28 March 2000 from Strand Co-ordinator.

Getting interest in the Strand meeting was difficult initially. Eventually curiosity was aroused after the funding body (East of England Development Agency) accepted the initial expression of interest from the partnership. As the possibility of accessing additional funds became a reality organisations requested, and in some cases demanded, further information about Strand activities.

Conscious that they had inherited their role as co-ordinators, attempts were made by the co-ordinators both inside and outside of meetings, to identify other individuals to take up the responsibility. However, no-one appeared to be interested and the Strands proceeded with the original co-ordinators in place. The Strand Co-ordinator's main task was to set up meetings where focused discussion and analysis on the particular subject area of that Strand would occur. In due course each Strand developed a strategy mapping out priorities for the forthcoming year. Other tasks involved setting up meetings – identifying suitable dates and venues, distributing invitations, agendas and minutes– and also ensuring the strand was kept up to date with progress of the whole CEP. The role of Strand Co-ordinator was potentially powerful given the link into the CEP structure and the accompanying seat on the Board. Paradoxically the role of co-ordinator was both mundane and influential and it did not appeal to everyone. Some individuals considered that their time was better spent simply representing their various interest groups at meetings rather than using it, as they perceived, to help administer the CEP. In other words they personally identified and selected appropriate, albeit peripheral, participation in the project.

The Strands were created at the forum meeting held in March 2000, just after EEDA invited the partnership to submit a full application. In comparison to the Forum the Strands were a driving force for the development of the bid with many more meetings being held and very specific issues being discussed. For instance the community and neighbourhood strand held five meetings in April and May. At the first of these an overview of the SRB process was given, along with the expected structure of the CEP. The main discussion was concerned with identifying gaps and developing opportunities in the area, with consideration given to existing agencies and organisations and the services they provide. The Strands represented an opportunity for agencies and organisations specialising in a particular topic to participate in the CEP. They continued throughout the project to have this role and provided a mechanism whereby such organisations could directly influence Board Members.

Once the CEP was operating as a funded project, Strand meetings were held quarterly. At these meetings typically the Project Manager would give an update of bids for funding. The community and neighbourhood strand meetings followed a routine agenda discussing projects that were being developed, for instance a young persons' drop-in centre, considering gaps in the CEP and areas that might benefit from funding, and finally deliberating on structural issues such as joint Strand meetings.

#### **4. The Board**

The Board was set up to oversee the implementation of the CEP. Among its agreed objectives was that of negotiating 'the unfolding vision of the Community Energy Project with all partners.'<sup>20</sup> Other aims were strategic development, monitoring and development and implementation of the CEP delivery plan. Typical agenda items were development of the delivery plan, Forum Meeting feedback, the CEP website, links with the County Council, the Project Manager's standard report and items of local interest to the Board.

The individuals who were instrumental in writing the SRB application became the de facto Board after funding was awarded. In developing membership further it sought representation from areas where gaps were believed to exist. To enable it to function most effectively the Board sought to address perceived gaps in female representation and also of individuals from the health sector. Existing members identified individuals whom they believed fitted these needs, thus hand picking the balance of Board members.

While some Board members were residents of the area, this tended to be incidental; their function was primarily to represent an organisation or sector. Aside from the parish and town council representatives there was no individual on the Board whose membership was based on the fact that they lived in the area; they were all associated with a particular organisation, agency or group. For instance minutes of the Board of 28.02.02 illustrate the nature of the Board's membership:-

Babergh District Council

Hastoe Housing Association

Sudbury Town Council

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<sup>20</sup> Agreed at Board meeting 12<sup>th</sup> September 2000

Bury St. Edmunds Primary Care Group  
Great Cornard Parish Council  
Ipswich and Sudbury Enterprise Agency  
Suffolk ACRE  
Suffolk County Council  
Sudbury and District Volunteer Centre  
The Bridge Project

The eventual membership of the Board comprised statutory sector officers and voluntary sector representatives. These included individuals from the district and county councils and from the health authority, members from Sudbury Town and Great Cornard Parish councils, the local community council, housing associations, the volunteer centre and the Enterprise Agency.

Individuals appointed to the Board had numerous ways in which they could participate. Attendance and input to Board meetings was required, but they could also get involved in smaller task-based groups and with the project appraisal process. For instance a small group of members were responsible for the recruitment and appointment of the SRB manager. They devised the job specification and description in conjunction with Babergh District Council and took part in shortlisting, interviewing and selecting the Project Manager.

After her appointment the Project Manager would regularly seek volunteers for various working groups including project publicity and a family fun-day. Thus a range of skills were required to participate in the Board.

At some stage all Board members participated in the project appraisal and approval processes. Unintentionally the system for appraising projects was designed with two opposing purposes. The Board wanted project appraisals to be as transparent, simple and accountable as possible. This was at odds with the actual SRB programme monitoring requirements that were complex and drawn-out; this detail had to be reflected in the application forms to allow for an adequate appraisal. The application form was designed by the Project Manager using SRB criteria and approved by the Board. Consequently the main application form was fifteen pages in length. However, in the first instance applicants completed a four-page outline application that also



doubled as a full application to the Community Chest. The Chest provided funding of up to £2500 and was not subject to the rigorous appraisal and approval process of major projects (anything above £2500)

It could be argued that the ideals of transparency, accountability and simplicity got lost in a mire of systems, procedures and regulations as the appraisal system became complicated and protracted generating a high volume of paperwork. However the process reflected the requirements of EEDA and entailed distinct appraisal and approval stages. The appraisers were drawn from a pre-selected pool made up of Strand Co-ordinators, the Project Manager and the Senior Accountant at Babergh District Council. They had attended the necessary EEDA SRB appraisal training course. Appraisal panels were called as necessary and the Project Manager tried to rotate within the pool but often the panel mix was dependent on individual diary commitments. The appraisal panel verified eligibility of applications and provided an element of quality control by checking 'that all the criteria have been met' (D:F - CEP Management Board, 30.08.01). Those that were successful were then sent to an approval panel whose job was to 'recommend[s] approval or not, as well as prioritising bids' (D:F - CEP Management Board, 30.08.01). A different set of individuals was responsible for approving these appraised projects. The approval panel of five was selected every six months from the Board (no training was necessary) and met bi-monthly.

Even though the appraisal and approval panels had powerful roles overseeing the point at which the CEP funding was spent in the community, Board members were not keen to take up them up. When volunteers were called to join the appraiser pool many people found excuses or a way of legitimising the reason for their ineligibility to take part. For instance the strand co-ordinators negotiated their way out of having a legitimate approval position due to transparency. Their argument was that they were in danger of favouring applications from the strand that they co-ordinated, placing the other strands at a disadvantage. In reality this could have been balanced by ensuring they did not appraise or approve projects from organisations within their strand.

The Board members held a powerful position as they made decisions about how the CEP funding should be allocated, albeit within the SRB framework. Given the degree of expertise required to participate as a full member of the Board, it may be unrealistic

and overambitious to expect that all individuals should move to this degree of involvement, setting aside the issues of whether or not they wish to get involved at such a level. The participation of individuals with little experience of regeneration funding in the Board requires skill development to enable them to participate without the existence of barriers. Opportunities for future involvement are considered later in the chapter.

## **5. The projects**

In addition to participation in the structure of the CEP, individuals could get involved via projects funded through the project. An insight into the types of projects supported by the CEP is given by the following sample of Community Chest funded initiatives (up to £2,500):-

- Evaluation of environmental, conservation and access needs for the future of the meadows
- Creation of a reading group for carers, early retired and socially and economically isolated people
- Equipment for Great Cornard Youth Club
- Information and Communication Technology equipment for people with learning disabilities
- Interagency training in community development for staff working in Sudbury and Great Cornard
- Promotion of exercise through gymnastics
- Improvement of playing surface for Sudbury Cricket Club

In addition a number of larger projects were funded via the larger grant (over £2,500) application process including:-

- Citizens' Advice Bureau Volunteering Scheme
- Age Concern Resource Centre
- Age Concern homecare service
- Room fitting for a charity whose clients had learning difficulties
- Volunteer Centre: Community Development support for new local groups and services, the provision of an information centre and help with setting up a network for local groups to improve community transport in the area covered by the CEP.

The Project Manager also worked with various agencies on projects identified. Many of these were highlighted in the original application to the SRB and featured as indicative projects. For instance the idea to develop a row of derelict shops to a drop-in/computer facility for residents in Great Cornard was a priority project for the Manager. She worked with various local agencies to help progress the idea.

Thus the range of initiatives supported by the CEP reflects the breadth of the overall aims including to 'achieve tangible and sustained improvements for the quality of life of the residents of Sudbury and Great Cornard' (D:F - CEP Delivery Plan 3 February 2002). The beneficiaries of the successful projects were participating in the CEP, although they may not have realised this.

Potentially many different projects within the geographic area could have been funded through the scheme, with many different individuals benefiting. However as the discussion earlier points out, the application process was not straightforward. Even for the Community Chest funds (providing grants up to £2500) the applicant had to be confident and competent enough to complete a four page form and to obtain match funding, normally an amount equal to that requested from the Chest. Any projects seeking more money than this in addition had to complete a fifteen page form. The Board members (including the Project Manager and the Strand Co-ordinators) recognised this barrier and made it very clear that they would meet with any prospective applicant to discuss the application process and provide guidance where necessary. The Project Manager was the primary source of application assistance, with Strand Co-ordinators providing such help to a lesser degree.

#### **6. Opportunities for future participation**

Members of the Board did not agree on the issue of how individuals would be able to participate in the future. While the management model was designed with a participation progression route in mind; the time period over which this was expected to happen was greater than the life of the CEP. The local authority envisaged that an individual resident from Sudbury or Great Cornard (not necessarily affiliated to a group) could take a lead role in the work of a Strand and eventually would be appointed to the Board. This would provide opportunities for individuals with little experience or skills in the area to develop them through time. In time it was felt that

direct community representatives would emerge through the system (RJ). The rhetoric was therefore one of inclusion, skills development and capacity building.

The reality did not completely correspond with the rhetoric. As already mentioned the time period for progression to the management structure was great, but also one-to-one interviews with local authority officers leading the CEP revealed some gaps within the official progression route. The way in which individuals would become involved in the management structure remained unclear, as no specific measures were taken to ensure their initial recruitment. The Local Authority Officers believed that the skills required for the post necessitated individuals with regeneration expertise, but there was no mechanism by which such skills could be acquired or learned. Furthermore they believed the role of Strand Co-ordinator required some degree of continuity – at least over the life of SRB funding.

Some of the Strand leaders had different ideas to the local authority officers. Along with the other Community and Neighbourhood Strand Co-ordinator who worked for the community council, I did not wish to continue as co-ordinator indefinitely. We saw our position as being useful for helping to get the project off the ground and, so long as no others were available or willing, we were happy to do the job. Ideally, however we wished to see someone else step into the role. On the other hand the Local Authority Officers believed these individuals were best placed with the necessary skills necessary for the job. Officers within the Local Authority did not wish to change any of the Strand Co-ordinators during the time of SRB 6 funding. In any case my position became available as the CF-S project was brought to a conclusion. This was made known to Strand members in advance of a decision to select a new Strand co-ordinator. Rather than leave this entirely to chance and after discussing it with other members of the CEP Board I approached the volunteer representative from the Volunteer Centre who was eventually selected to the position.

### **4.3.2 Summary**

The CEP was used to consider the practice of participating in rural regeneration. Specifically the participatory opportunities provided through the project were analysed. Critical issues to this process that emerged include the unpredictable nature of participation, the lack of time and resources, the short timetable for developing projects, the expertise required, the lack of innovative participatory solutions and the lack of real guidance on participatory techniques.

The degree and extent of participation within the project was explored. The partnership was shown to use a range of opportunities for getting involved from bid writing to applying for funding. It sought to maximise community involvement across the emerging structures. Key issues emerging were that the more powerful and central positions of involvement required complex skills and expertise and that not everyone believed the regeneration activity was for them.

## **4.4 Conclusions**

This Chapter set out to explore the interplay between participation rhetoric and reality. A review of literature and policy documents provided an overview of rhetoric of participation. This demonstrated the range of possibilities for degrees of participation from full to none; each with their own tensions as well as legitimacy. It also drew attention to the debate around the value of participation in itself as opposed to it simply being used as a tool for achieving other objectives. Although no broad consensus exists around the extent of participation that is acceptable, the rhetoric is predominantly thick with the intrinsic value of participation with only some commentators noting its negative aspects.

The value of different participatory techniques is recognised by governmental and non-governmental agencies within policy documents and good practice manuals. They advocate the use of different types of approaches within regeneration practice. The activity of statutory agencies reveals that they engage in a range of methods and local authorities often do this as part of the government's modernisation agenda. However factors constrain the breadth of techniques used by regeneration agents including shortage of skills and experience, lack of resources and inadequate time. There is an associated danger that the groups and organisations facing these restrictions are beholden to other larger agencies that can lend or provide the necessary resources. Typically these groups are the smaller community and voluntary organisations. This is problematic resulting in loss of control over the group's direction and agenda and manipulation by the supporting organisation. Some groups may even discover that they are using approaches or doing things that they would not normally engage with.

The degree and extent of participation among residents of Great Cornard and Sudbury varied. The research discovered that non-participants existed because individuals had

never heard of the scheme. Alternatively they believed it had nothing to offer them nor had they anything to give to the project. Firstly a communication gap existed as some individuals knew nothing about the project. However the other non-participants, while happy to take part in a community event launching a new play area, had proactively taken a decision to remain outside the main part of the project. This is a legitimate form of peripheral involvement.

The individuals who did not attend even peripherally proved the most elusive category of non-participant. They chose not to attend even a family fun day and while there may be reasonable explanations for this, barriers to their involvement may also exist. Non-participation was thus either an act of empowerment or due to marginalisation. The CEP did not undertake further exploration of this matter. The practitioners involved were too busy with more administrative and bureaucratic matters to pursue the issue of complete non-involvement, including servicing the different structures within the project and fulfilling the funder's requirements.

Nonetheless there were various ways in which the community could get involved including bid writing, joining a Strand or applying for funding for community activity due to the different structures that had been developed. Some mechanisms were more formal and powerful e.g. the Board than others e.g. the Forum. It was notable that the more powerful mechanisms required bureaucratic skills and expertise and were typically those found in government agencies. This reflected the approach of the lead partner, a local authority.

On the surface a range of opportunities existed for community groups to get involved. In reality unless they had sufficient time, resources and skills to commit to attending meetings, reading documents and undertaking bureaucratic tasks, their opportunity to participate in the powerful project structures was limited. However if participation is measured in terms of scope of activity then there were more adequate opportunities for less skilled individuals to become involved in other, albeit more peripheral activities. The CEP did not explicitly debate the issue of appropriate involvement although Senior Officers from BDC did inherently perceive that involvement should maximise the skills of the individuals in hand. Thus it did not anticipate the Board eventually having membership drawn from individuals within the community with no experience of meeting procedures. There is a danger within this approach that barriers are

reinforced as the powerful retain decision making positions while the less empowered are marginalised from such central processes and functions.

Participation was not an all encompassing activity. It was bounded by a series of rules set by agencies that reflected the chain of accountability for SRB funding within government which included central government, EEDA and the lead agency which was ultimately accountable. Thus participation within the CEP represented an enabling role, helping the lead agency achieve its function of delivering the SRB funding and so fulfilling the policy of central government. The extent of empowerment within the community is not easily judged, if this was ever an objective. More apparent were improvements to the quality of economic, social, cultural and environmental life for the residents of the area; this being an over-riding objective of rural development policy.

Participation practice is evidently a complex process. It displays many different nuances in relation to involvement and levels of appropriateness and so cannot be considered in extremes of all-or-nothing. As a result it requires ongoing and proactive attention. Policy rhetoric reflects the need for this flexible approach but the structures and mechanisms that are established do not necessarily encourage or support this objective. Rural regeneration agents thus find themselves operating with rules and resources that constrain the extent of their activity and the degree of participation that they are able to nurture.

## **5 Micro-politics**

This chapter positions micro-politics within rural development practice. Concerned with the 'intangibles' that bind groups together, the first section of the Chapter gives a theoretical overview of the term. By intangibles I mean trust, power and personal perceptions and motivations. This Chapter sets a theoretical context for each of these as they are key elements of micro-politics. The following section reveals how these micro-politics are manifest within the rural development group. The Chapter moves on to consider the causes of and factors affecting micro-politics before concluding with a discussion on how they may be managed within rural regeneration.

### **5.1 Locating micro-politics**

Rural development/regeneration literature typically implies the importance of micro-politics with little outright or explicit reference to the significance of these intangibles and subtleties. Listening in to any casual conversation in the regeneration sector demonstrates that people on the ground understand the role of micro-politics. For instance the practitioner will grasp the importance of holding a meeting in what is perceived to be a neutral venue, or in any case rotating the venue to avoid a particular interest group dominating the process. Equally those directly involved in the group appreciate the need for spending time on clarifying objectives; such time spent does not transparently contribute to the achievement of goals.

One of the difficulties with exploring and analysing micro-politics lies in their very elusiveness. I suspect that few involved in rural development would argue against the importance of having effective meetings, positive consultation or useful participation. A group of people come together to achieve specific things, but what actually happens? How do they go about running their meetings? How do people interact? Given similar funding and development opportunities what is it that makes one process more effective than another? These questions I believe can be answered through analysis of the micro-politics of rural development practice. The importance of micro-politics and micro-processes is starting to be recognised and labelled within the literature. Barnes et al highlight the importance of 'micro processes' (2003:397) in constructing notions of representation and legitimate participation, calling for analysis of 'micro-politics' of interactions rather than sweeping statements (2003:396/7); Murtagh (2001) and Scott (2004) each investigate micro-processes within partnership structures. Meanwhile



Taylor's research discovered that members from the community and voluntary sector felt that they were simply involved in the micro-politics as they 'were working within rules that determine how 90 per cent of how its got to happen' (2003:191) citing the fact that the community simply has control over few things.

There is a general belief that people form voluntary alliances because they have a common interest; this is often to exert pressure and to make change (Croft and Beresford, 1992). People get involved with rural development because they believe they have a valid contribution to make to a particular situation as well as a benefit to be gained. Individuals' contributions are wide ranging and extend from having specific technical skills that are relevant to the group to broader support including time and willingness to attend meetings. Common to all rural development activity is interaction with other people due to some shared interest.

Getting a grasp on rural development group minutiae can be complex. Rural development is presented for 'the community' and emphasis is placed on the ideology behind the community coming together. But as the previous two chapters demonstrate, and Taylor (2003) argues, the rules of the game require a steep learning curve and heavy workload which rules many people out. Consequently regeneration projects latch onto 'stars' (Taylor, 2003:194) and so the reality tends to involve a few key individuals who take on the role of volunteer or champion within their community.

For instance in Stradbroke on average no more than eight people attended meetings, with normal attendance of about five or six and few apologies. This contrasted with turnout at the beginning of the appraisal process when closer to ten individuals attended with another 10 sending apologies. Meanwhile the CEP Board comprised of 10 individuals. Most of the Board members showed their commitment by turning up to regular monthly meetings, or sometimes more frequently to participate in specific working groups. As Croft and Beresford (1992) note, this is in contrast with the rhetoric of community development, which is of large scale and broad based involvement. In Stradbroke the Local Villages' Project group met during the day on a monthly basis when making plans for the compilation of their questionnaire. As activity progressed group members met more regularly on a Saturday morning. Not only did they increase the amount of time given to the project, but they also gave up weekend time, normally considered more precious than weekday evenings. Essentially

the progress of 'the group' relied on the commitment of a core of individuals each of whom spent a lot of time attending meetings or completing tasks between meetings.

A core of individuals under the guise of a 'community group' thus becomes the bedrock of the rural development activity. The meeting forms a critical mechanism for the group's success as it is typically the place where the individuals involved make decisions and advance their core objectives. On the surface the procedure of holding meetings seems mechanistic and routine – from gathering people together to meeting at suitable times and locations to devising agendas and ensuring meetings are well chaired. However, the outcomes are not guaranteed; the success of groups varies across the regeneration landscape. Some groups work well together while others do not. Ailing groups may have outright spats and disagreements and so exist in an obvious state of difficulty. Group dynamics were so poor within a group in Brandon that a consultant was paid by the Countryside Agency to facilitate a number of public meetings to avoid out-and-out arguments as had happened during some earlier meetings (D:F). Problems can be more subtle than this, happening over a longer period of time and include declining attendance levels, bad mouthing of group activities and individual members and the development of factions. In Great Cornard the village appraisal group went from being a focused group with a concrete task to one which limped gradually out of existence as interest waned and attendance dropped. It never did analyse the results of its community survey.

Conversely, thriving and healthy groups develop meaningful inter-personal relationships and actively enjoy the process of coming together. New friendships emerge or unexpected activities spin out from the group. These groups have a definite 'feel good' factor. A community member of the fledgling CEP group acknowledged that even if the bid for funding was not successful they had made progress and achieved great things simply by forming a vibrant regeneration group (D:RJ). While some of this point was a political one made for the benefit of the local authority who was seen by some members of the community to have 'ignored' this geographical area, it was also about the positive intangible aspects of the group. This is the 'glue' of rural development and regeneration. It is not always visible or obvious and is infrequently measured by funders but it is an untold consequence of community participation and involvement: it occurs when individuals interact and can be described as the micro-politics of rural development.

The interaction of the core group of individuals in a rural development group is pivotal to the activity of that rural development community. Successful rural development relies on the positive interaction and dedication of [typically small] groups of individuals. Moreover people remain involved with initiatives because they enjoy the benefits of intangibles such as social interaction while achieving other specific and common goals. Individuals also become disillusioned with rural development because of negative consequences such as personality clashes as was the case in the regeneration of Brandon. From a policy point of view such interaction is often an unintended consequence of rural development – it is not something that policymakers and funders can readily measure. Rural development rhetoric places less emphasis on micro-politics or group processes than on group objectives and outputs. However the reality is that groups are caught up with these matters and they are a vital part of rural development often making or breaking a process.

### **5.1.1 Micro-politics, not social capital**

Micro-politics are typically difficult to pin down. They could generally be described as the unintended subtle or intangible aspects of rural development that emerge through face-to-face meetings. They are characterised by comments such as:-

‘Tom just took over our last meeting. You couldn’t get a word in edgeways. If he does it again I’m definitely not going back.’ (D:RJ)

‘We all knew Rick would be voted into the chair, it’s hardly a democratic system.’ (D:RJ)

‘This project has nothing to do with our community, it’s Sue’s retirement project, not to mention ego-trip.’ (D:RJ)

‘There was a real buzz about the place.’ (D:RJ)

Inappropriate meeting behaviour, meetings outside meetings, bad mouthing the group and snide remarks further symbolise negative micro-politics. New friendships, new groups, the ‘feel good’ factor and positive social interaction are more positive aspects of micro-politics. In short both positive and negative aspects relate to what happens in the *process* of achieving broader rural development (social, economic or

environmental) goals as opposed to the ultimate objective. They relate to the factors that are not instantly observable - the surface must be scratched and investigated to reveal the micro-politics at play. These are similar to the 'structures and processes beyond what is immediately perceivable' as described by McDowell (1992: 213) on the subject of elite interviewing. They help to make the story behind every good or bad project. This story is not necessarily the one that funders or other officials hear or wish to hear about, but is often more revealing than an annual report or list of achievements. *Traditionally* micro-politics are the intangibles for which there is no direct financial support. That stated funding may not be given unless a community has demonstrated that it has paid attention to some process issues as is the case with participation in the Single Regeneration Budget (DETR, 1999b). From such processes, micro-politics emerge.

Micro-politics matter to rural development practice. They exist because of its reliance on the interaction of a number of individuals each of whom has their own personality, traits, values and act in different ways. Interaction is most likely to be face-to-face through public meetings, open sessions or casual conversation. It is therefore crucial that individuals are able to communicate effectively with one another. De Souza Briggs (1998) warns of the danger of meetings struggling along at needlessly high levels of confusion, distrust and resentment when effective understanding of, and response to, face-to-face encounters does not exist.

Ineffective meetings impact greatly on the success of a particular scheme. In Brandon the community dived into a consultation process that revolved around a completed questionnaire analysing perceived needs and priorities. When the results emerged the group was not clear about how it would actually achieve any of the changes that people in their community had highlighted as desirable. Not enough time was spent at the outset deliberating on and discussing the process on which they were about to embark. Meetings consisted of repeating discussions or revisiting decisions made at past meetings and of personal abuses being exchanged between particular attendees. People failed to communicate effectively and had various understandings of whose responsibility it was to be to make the changes identified through the community consultation. Any trust that existed was then eroded as the individuals who had initiated the process were blamed for lack of progress – many group members believed local authorities and other agencies were responsible for undertaking the identified

tasks and activities. In turn local authorities and other agencies believed that a joint or partnership approach to potential projects would be adopted. Failure to establish clear lines of responsibility and to nurture personal relationships from the outset had damaged the fundamental understanding of the function of the group.

The importance of these face-to-face encounters and their associated intangibles is not always appreciated causing them to go unnoticed and unmanaged with untold consequences. As the previous example demonstrates people can find themselves in a meeting, not really sure why they as an individual are there and unclear about how as a group they are supposed to achieve their goal. And yet these face-to-face meetings are critical. Bloomfield et al (2001) state that trust is still most easily engendered by regular face-to-face discussions over an extended period. Trust itself is crucial as it is often seen as the starting point of voluntary association and Putnam (1993) argues that along with involvement and co-operation it is also an essential ingredient of networks of affiliation which in turn form crucial ingredients of society. Trust refers 'to ethical relations which are not conditioned by an external framework of controls' (Tonkiss and Passey, 1999: 258). Indeed many of the factors contributing to micro-politics relate to ethical relations that are beyond the control of official guidance and policies. In other words, micro-politics are not always formally recognised and accounted for and can be difficult for groups to manage. For instance official documentation is unlikely to provide guidance on power, such as its hidden dimension identified by Lukes (1974) which occurs when individuals covertly influence issues discussed within meetings. Consequently lack of experience and appreciation of micro-politics can hamper progress in rural development.

Micro-politics are about the norms, shared knowledge, perceptions, understanding, social networks, values and traits associated within a rural development group. In some of the literature these intangibles have been aligned to and described as social capital (see for instance Dhesi, 2000). Nonetheless I have avoided labelling micro-politics under a broader 'social capital' umbrella for several reasons including the confusion around its meaning and the emphasis of social capital on the positive outcomes. These matters are discussed further below.

Social capital as a concept has found popularity among many academics and policymakers alike. See for instance Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), Portes (2000),

Shucksmith (2000a), Svendsen and Svendsen (2000) and Putnam (1993). Complete books have analysed its application across the disciplines (see for instance Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000) and Bill Clinton found inspiration in it for his State of the Union address in 1995 (Portes, 1998). Many definitions and meanings are offered within this literature. Consequently social capital has 'become a hot topic among social scientists of late....the term has been used so often to mean so many different things that it has become the equivalent of an empty container, readily filled with whatever meaning the user- or the listener or reader- brings to the conversation' (Servon, 2003:13).

Secondly and as Portes (1998) points out literature on social capital tends to focus on the positive consequences. Indeed the manner in which social capital is used implicates it as a panacea for many of the difficulties facing communities (see for instance Putnam, 1993) and this in turn has caused debate on whether social capital is a cure-all for modern society's ailments (Maloney, Smith and Stoker 2000, Body-Gendrot and Gittel, 2003). Focusing only on the positive aspect to social capital ignores negative outcomes such as the exclusion of outsiders and excess claims on group members (Shortall, 2004 and Portes, 1998). Consequently Portes (2000) and Bridger and Luloff (2001) conclude more work needs to be done before social capital is adopted as reliable public policy.

While it is not my intention to enter a more detailed debate on social capital it is recognised that the micro-politics discussed within this chapter may have commonalties with the characteristics of social capital. Indeed some of these intangibles or micro-politics may contribute to the issues that are the focus of social capital debates. Hence while this chapter attempts to focus on some of the issues that have been aligned to social capital such as trust and power, it is not an analysis of social capital. I present my definition of micro-politics as the intangible issues occurring within a group as a result of the interaction of a set of individuals meeting together.

While discussing planning issues Lowry, Adler and Milner voice concern about the way that group processes are 'sometimes designed and conducted in ways that – intentionally and unintentionally – limit participation and manipulate consent.' (1997: 178). They go on to call for greater attention to explicit and implicit group processes to help guide those working in the planning field. The same is true for the rural

development sector – sensitivity to group procedures, including covert and overt practices, is essential.

Assuming that the process of rural development ultimately relies on a ‘group’ working on behalf of its community, its success is dependent on how a few individuals work together as a group rather than how the ‘whole community’ comes together.<sup>21</sup> The group is anything from a number of individuals working together on an informal basis such as in Stradbroke, to a more formally structured partnership responsible for spending a specific budget in a geographic area, to a publicly facilitated consultation meeting as was the case with the CEP. Synergy is a key rationale behind group activity in that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Thus the way that individuals interact within a group is critical if synergy is to occur.

As I suggested above the rural development group will undertake mundane and routine tasks. At first glance much of this can seem mechanistic with little room for divergence between one group and the next. While it might appear that procedures within groups are habitual and fixed, analysis of micro-politics reveals another dimension. Practical matters are not always as clear cut as they might first appear.

### 5.1.2 Summary

Micro-politics are intangible aspects that arise due to groups of individuals interacting and working together on shared activity, they relate to processes that occur within a group. Typically difficult to pin down and identify they are not instantly observable and so close scrutiny of the group is required to identify these processes. Relating to both positive and negative aspects of rural development group dynamics, micro-politics encompasses trust, norms, shared knowledge, perceptions, understanding, social networks, values and personality traits. As both positive and negative impacts result from micro-politics, they are different from social capital.

The remainder of this chapter considers micro-politics in the context of the rural development group. It does this through two key elements that impact on the group processes; they are the relations within the rural development group and norms that emerge within the group and at meetings.

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<sup>21</sup> Although the ‘whole community’ may be invited to attend a larger public meeting, ultimately this is still a representation of that community and the meeting itself is designed by a core group.

## 5.2 Identifying micro-politics

The previous section locates the meaning of micro-politics within the context of contemporary rural development literature as well as hinting at how micro-politics can be recognised. This section concentrates on further identifying micro-politics by revealing their application in power games, communication and meeting styles.

### Power tactics

The exercise of power is apparent when the actions of one person results in another changing their behaviour or action (Foucault, 1982). Lukes describes how one person may exercise power over another by ‘influencing, shaping or determining his very wants’ (1974: 23). Hence Latour (1986) argues that it is relations and associations that are powerful rather than an individual or organisation and so power is not given, it is circumstantial. One way in which people act together and exert power in a rural development context is through group discussions and decision making.

Arnstein (1969) analysed in detail the relationship between citizen power and decision-making demonstrating its complexity with circumstances ranging from manipulation to control. Groups handle general discussion and decision making in a different way – some strive for consensus on everything while others are content with majority rule. The CEP for instance operated a majority rule approach. The favoured decision making method is likely to be put to the test sooner or later especially where there is conflict and potential for differing interests. As the group in Thurston planned its public meeting it had to be clear that a majority rule approach, rather than consensus was more practical.

However as Lowry, Adler and Milner point out ‘too much emphasis on decision making can cause us to miss the subtler ways in which power is used in participation’ (1997:182). Power can be exerted through agendas and the resultant debate that occurs. Decision making intricacies are thus about more than who is actually in control of decision making and how decisions are made. Crucially they are also about *what* decisions are made by a group and this is often controlled by the agenda. A popular anecdote among local authority officers is that of putting the most important agenda item at the end of a long meeting on the basis that by this stage the councillors will have exhausted discussion on more trivial items and so will allow through the



substantial issue as they wish the meeting to end (SG). Hence people can manipulate the decisions that are actually made.

The Chair of the community action plan group manipulated a public meeting for his own personal agenda. Being chair of the parish council he had other local politics on his mind, namely the lack of primary care facilities. He facilitated a public meeting during which the result of the village questionnaire was to be presented, discussed and actions prioritised. The public meeting should have been an opportunity for the group to gain new membership and support for the broad work of the action plan group. Instead the meeting became a mechanism where discontent about the lack of primary health facilities was aired. The action group had spent a lot of time and effort distributing and analysing questionnaires and the meeting did not do justice to its work. It was hijacked by another agenda and the focus of debate and discussion was on the lack of primary health facilities. Although Stanley provided a lot of support to the group he was also directing it in a very particular way. Individuals involved in rural development need to take account of the voices within that community and not just use the name of the community as a vehicle for furthering their own personal agendas which, on balance, may not represent their community.

Less obvious tactics can be employed. Lowry et al (1997:186) indicate the importance of questions that are suppressed as well as those that are addressed. So what is not on the agenda for discussion is as important as the matters under debate. In planning the public exhibition and meeting that represented the culmination of the work of the Thurston village appraisal group, some members suggested inviting officers from various organisations that provided services to the community. The rationale behind this was that these organisations were spending money in the community and as a provider of services they were likely to be interested in learning of the priorities identified by the residents. Moreover they argued that opportunities for multi-agency working might be identified and subsequently more efficient use of resources would ensue with better services for Thurston as a result. Effectively decisions made by the group at the public meeting would not occur in a vacuum but would be evidenced by individuals with the authority to do something about them. The chair of the appraisal group (also of the parish council) had different views. He was driven by the original desire to see a primary care facility in the village and did not want the public exhibition diluted by detailed discussion on other issues. His argument was that this

exhibition was for the local population in the first instance and would be followed by further meetings as decided by the whole community of Thurston – the whole community being the attendees of the public meeting. Eventually he was persuaded that it might be worthwhile to have other agencies represented. In the event the PCT was invited and given a seat on stage along with district and county councillors. Other agencies were present but not given such a profile. The upshot from this was that decisions made by the group relating to anything beyond those falling under the remit of the local authorities and the PCT were less likely to be pursued. The Chair had successfully implemented his own agenda.

Furthermore Bachrach and Baratz (1962) describe a situation where consciously or unconsciously barriers are created around raising divergences; one person is prevented from bringing forward issues whose resolution might be unfavourable to another. Consequently a situation is created whereby the scope of debate is limited to issues that are comparatively harmless to the person influencing. Hence the powerful individual or representative may decide that only certain topics are open for discussion and so the content of a meeting is limited. This happened during the meeting organised by the local authority about whether or not to apply for SRB funding for Sudbury and Great Cornard. They did not present the options as allocating local authority resources to working on the CEP versus an alternative use of these resources. The matter under debate was whether or not an SRB application should be submitted. Hence a barrier was immediately created preventing those individuals who did not agree with this use of local authority resources from entering the debate. They were prevented from raising their viewpoint on this matter and so they appeared to agree with the decision to submit an application for funding to the SRB. These individuals may not have spoken up because they felt uncomfortable about questioning what appeared to be a consensus among the group and they did not have the self-belief to publicise their anxiety about the issue under debate. The exclusion of conflict of interest is cited by Lukes (1974) as a hidden dimension of power; consequently he argues that those outside control have not only been omitted from the political process but they have been denied entry. Thus the scope of authority of the regeneration community in this example was limited with the local authority remaining in control. In addition the power of the local authority was legitimated by a decision that on the surface appeared to be participatory and even-handed. In fact they shaped the very decision that was taken.

In reality important decisions, such as the example above about whether or not to allocate local authority resources to an initiative, are taken away from the public arena. Power is exerted in restricted areas within informal networks where access is limited to social and political elites (Woods, 1998a and 1998b). These backstage spaces are located away from the formal decision making processes, intervention from opponents or the constraints of regulation, hence alliances can be developed and decisions agreed. Such decisions and alliances can then be consolidated during the formal meeting. The group is powerless as it 'rubber stamps' decisions made by certain individuals rather than the group. According to Woods (1998b) it is the elite who have privileged access to or control over particular resources necessary for the exercise of power. So for instance Hastoe developed a close relationship with the then Rural Development Commission as it developed its ideas for the Communities First-Suffolk project. In so doing it became familiar with the priorities of the RDC. When the time came to make a formal submission for funding Hastoe was in a position to make a strong case and ultimately had a favourable outcome. This alliance was noted by another agency who felt that if it had submitted an application for the same project it would have been unsuccessful (SG). Such alliances have knock-on effects. The group that went on to steer the project was seen by many as one which did not actually possess much power given the networking that had been done away from official and formal procedures. Hence some partners felt that their involvement was a token attempt by Hastoe and the funders to be seen to be inclusive (SG).

### **Communication**

However a group is formed and whatever its purpose, it will have to embark on human interaction, in other words people will have to communicate with one another. Each of the groups mentioned above relied on individuals coming together and engaging in a form of communication. The ability of group members to understand each other's language and to articulate their own opinions and viewpoints in a language that is understood is crucial for communication. If this fails it can lead to ineffective and futile interactions.

The rules of rural development can create specialist language, but many other language subtleties are used within a meeting. As well as being a vehicle for understanding, language can positively contribute to the development process. As Bloomfield et al (2001) suggest, it is not passive but is part of the process. They go on to argue that it is

'reflexively constructed in relation to the contributions made by other participants, emphasising interpretation, feedback and revision' (2001: 503). So language builds on what has been said before, with the latest contributor adding their own understanding on discussion to date before adding their personal contribution. Goffman (1959) notes social actors perform differently between different audiences. Hence people say different things depending on the audience at the time (de Souza Briggs, 1998). He discovered that various dynamics influence language including institutional interests, ethnicity, gender, class and personality. Consequently within CF-S and CEP partnership meetings the contribution of each member differed according to their status; furthermore individual contributions differed between groups. For instance one of the local authority officers made a conscious attempt to use language that was not riddled with jargon when contributing to CEP Board meetings. This contrasted with his more formal style within smaller working meetings where group members consisted of professionals. Equally the language used by the Hastoe Regional Development Manager was very different at the CF-S steering group to the Hastoe Committee. In the latter circumstances he borrowed heavily from the rhetoric of Hastoe and of the Managing Director and had a very formal style whereas at CF-S meetings in his position of Chair he used a more relaxed communication style.

Scott (1990) investigated social performance through face-to-face behaviour and domination. He argues that those actors experiencing domination will keep information hidden until they feel that it is socially safe to raise particular issues. So in the context of rural development this could happen where the group is trying to make a decision but are unable to do so because they do not have adequate information. A member of that group could be withholding necessary information because they think it is controversial. Indeed Scott (1990) claims that the more threatening the power, the thicker the disguise used. Thus the stronger the imbalance of power or emerging conflict then the more obscured are the meanings and motives behind behaviour, and so they are more difficult to identify. Human beings naturally adopt a persona for different circumstances and so for instance an individual's behaviour at a community meeting is likely to vary to their demeanour at home. However, problems can arise if a person continually masks a concern within a group. It may be as fundamental as anxiety about the group's focus, as happened with members of the Great Cornard appraisal group. While the couple concerned were rumoured to have misgivings about the lack of progress within the group they never actually articulated this at meetings.

Ultimately they withdrew their support for the group by failing to attend any further meetings.

Language subtleties are not always apparent to everyone and those attendees not clued into the language might remain oblivious, taking the meeting at face value – they do not appreciate the politics and the undercurrents/ subtexts that lie within the meeting. Clearly those individuals who cannot follow the dialogue and the politics of language are at a distinct disadvantage and are in danger of losing sight of what the group is working towards. The example given above of the personal style of the CEP Chair was a reflection of the chair performing to the other members in an attempt to be taken seriously by the professional members of the group. The serious, businesslike image was projected very deliberately and consciously as his style within the community forum for the same project was quite different. It was more relaxed and more encouraging of general discussion, with less emphasis on moving discussion along. Herbert claims that such ‘subtle behavioural variations reveal a deep and sophisticated cultural knowledge...that cannot be unearthed without abiding familiarity with the group’ (2000:557). The CEP chair played out various roles in accordance to what he believed to be appropriate given the different circumstances, indicating a true comprehension of his audiences.

Language is one element of communication and to be effective requires a listener. Listening can pose problems and de Souza Briggs (1998) warns of the danger of planners listening to proposals previously endorsed and agreed by the group – if the advocate is not present or if she has lost her influence then they may not ‘hear’ what is being proposed. They may not like what the group is suggesting due to resource shortages or preference for alternative arrangements. Or it could be that the ‘officials’ have not grasped the issues sufficiently to understand the intricacies of the solution being proposed. This contributed to the problems faced by Brandon – there was a mixture of groups within groups, each of which had a clear idea about what was best for the future of the community. Various different meetings with local authority officers to further these proposals caused problems because different representations met with the officers. The message to the local authority was mixed and caused confusion; the local authority was not sure what ‘the group’ wanted to do. In fact it was a misnomer to think in terms of a single group within the Brandon initiative as

various, but often divergent interests existed. The commonality was the geographic location of the community that they were all purporting to represent.

Communication is helped by the atmosphere in which any interaction occurs. In the context of participatory approaches Krebs (1997) has indicated that we can appreciate our own interests of others better by understanding the interests of others. Thus by deliberating in a decision-making process public debate, reasoning and critical judgement are promoted (Estlund, 1997). Judgements are made by considering all options in an environment that is open and conducive to debate. As issues are considered in some depth from various perspectives; errors and difficulties are likely to be identified before they become problematic. People should be free to explore issues, rather than creating confusion by skimming over the issues. This was the thinking behind creating so many different structures within the CEP. The creation of three themed Strands, the Forum and the Board represented increasing degrees of formality. The local authority hoped that these provided sufficiently varied mechanisms for the members of the community to articulate their viewpoint.

#### **Style of meeting**

The general ambience that is created within the first meeting of any group is highly critical and must be pitched just right. If this misses the mark untold damage can be done – any volunteers that had been persuaded to get involved and who attend a meeting that is not attractive to them are unlikely to come back, never mind remain committed. All too often little thought is given to the general atmosphere of the meeting. A relaxed, casual and informal atmosphere is more likely to appeal to individuals feeling anxious about getting involved with a group for the first time than a meeting that is stuffy and formal.

The dress-code of the group contributes to the formality of the meeting. A formal and business-like atmosphere is likely where suits predominate whereas a more relaxed and casual affair is likely to emerge where no ties and shoulder-pads are present. Selecting appropriate dress can be tricky. As a professional working at a number of different levels within the community I had to make a conscious effort to understand the circumstances and wear something appropriate to the occasion. Among those groups that I attended regularly meetings with I took a decision about what my image would be – typically casual. At other meetings where I knew most of the attendees were paid professionals I wore more formal clothes. I felt that I would not be taken seriously

otherwise. I was particularly conscious of my image when I was establishing a track record and gaining access to specific communities and networks.

While not explicitly defined, the style of dress that predominates can strongly influence who gets and remains involved. A retired blue collar worker is unlikely to feel comfortable attending meetings - in his spare time - where everyone wears smart business attire. Similarly a volunteer may feel inadequate showing up in her jeans when everyone else is wearing business suits. Equally if a professional has been especially invited to a meeting to give their expert opinion on a group's constitutional issues they may lose credibility by appearing in fashionable ripped jeans, while wearing a highly tailored suit can instantly put up a barrier between them and the group.

Meeting style is also concerned with the satisfaction gained from participating in a group. The degree of the feel good factor within a meeting is indicative of the level of enjoyment that participants are gaining from the experience of their involvement. This will also affect the micro-politics within a group. If members are content the meeting style will reflect that feeling of contentment and will have a positive atmosphere. Conversely groups with a strained mood face problems ahead as conflict may emerge and the common objective becomes side-lined due to negative micro-politics.

### **5.2.1 Summary**

Micro-politics are displayed through various mechanisms within a group. They are evident through individuals engaging in power games, communicating with others and from meeting styles all of which emerge as a result of individuals interacting within a rural development group. These features affect group development as they can reinforce existing barriers and divisions. For instance individuals use their positions to influence the types of issues addressed by the group. An individual's power exists through relations and associations with others and so perception and image are crucial. Hence communication affects micro-politics. Language is used to convey information and ideas, but it is also used as part of the development process. Meeting style is another factor used to identify micro-politics and includes the atmosphere and ambience created within a group. This can result from the dress code chosen by attendees, the formality of the meeting and the sense of satisfaction that group members derive from their encounters. The causes behind micro-politics are explored in the next section.

## **5.3 Causes of micro-politics**

As power games are played out within the rural development group the symptoms of micro-politics identified above develop into a rhythm of group norms. These norms are influenced by various factors including the regeneration framework, group representatives and legitimacy, group and individual motivations and meeting venue. These categories constitute factors affecting micro-politics. The previous discussion shows how micro-politics are played out within the group; this section focuses on the causes of micro-politics.

### **Group and individual motivation**

A useful starting point for causes of micro-politics is how and why people get involved including the circumstances leading to a group's first meeting. This affects people's perception of their potential contribution and of the group more generally— its importance, its objectives and its capacity to achieve results. It will also affect their behaviour at a meeting and within the group. Ultimately individual perceptions influence whether people decide to join and will also affect the nature of their ongoing involvement.

Typically individuals get involved in rural development in a voluntary capacity or as a professional member. There is a commonly held perception that a volunteer has a strong belief in something, such as the role, responsibility and rights of a citizen or simply that sheer altruism drives involvement in regeneration. Similarly the main motivation for the professional is often assumed to be the factor that differentiates the professional from the volunteer –money, hence the belief that professionals do a job because they are being paid to do it. With the professionalisation of the community and voluntary sector this latter argument is strengthened as terms and conditions of employment have improved. However many professionals in regeneration are committed to working for the greater good of society and that is why they work in this sector. They try to make changes at the local level that will benefit those in most need and in so doing are striving for a more equal society. This motivation can differ from that found among volunteers. They tend to get involved because they are committed to the greater good of their own specific community, independent of society more generally. The following discussion will demonstrate how personal motivation affects individuals' commitment to and behaviour within the rural development group.



The rural development group can be set up as a direct response to a funding opportunity or as a mechanism for dealing with a local contentious issue such as the closure of the local pub or the lack of vital facilities. For instance in Thurston the lack of primary care facilities was a driving factor behind setting up the village appraisal group. But it was one particular individual who personally persuaded enough other people to get involved; eventually he became chair of the group. He managed to gather enough interest and support for the village appraisal and throughout meetings it was obvious that some people were there because they saw the appraisal as a means of getting a doctor's surgery. Others viewed the appraisal as an end in itself; it would improve life for the residents of the village by raising issues and triggering further activity. People joined the village appraisal group on a community involvement/improvement ticket or on the primary care issue. Thus the person activating the meeting can send all sorts of messages to the attendees; they can add their own 'spin' often including an explanation of the group's objectives that appeal to the prospective member in question.

In addition, looking at the profile of some of the individuals reveals further useful background to their motivation and behaviour within the group. The Chairs of both the Thurston and the Stradbroke groups were retired professionals. They were used to being busy in full-time jobs and their behaviour suggests that each of them viewed his retirement as an extension of a full-time job. The Chair of the Local Villages' Project in Stradbroke kept a full schedule where his time was divided between working for a number of different voluntary organisations. Similarly the Chair of the Thurston regeneration group was also Chair of the Parish Council and these activities kept him fully occupied. Consequently both took their positions and the role of the respective groups very seriously. When compared with the profile of some of the other group members the potential for problems to arise emerges. For instance in Stradbroke a number of the other members were working in addition to their voluntary role within the group. They did not have endless time to commit to group meetings, activities and deliberations therein. This caused some tension and some individuals reduced their willingness to take on tasks between meetings.

Once people actually attend a meeting it is important that their expectations are met to some degree. Croft and Beresford (1992) point out the perception of involvement is not necessarily synonymous with its practice. To ensure ongoing involvement it is

essential that people's experience is analogous to their expectations. In Great Cornard the village appraisal group spent a long time deliberating over the process of distributing and then analysing the questionnaires without getting to the stage of prioritising action. It was clear that this latter point was of interest to many of the community representatives who lost heart and left the group (D:RJ). Meanwhile the key sponsors of the group believed that a particular community appraisal process was being successfully followed and could not understand what the problem was. People involved with community initiatives can have different viewpoints on what it is they are trying to do, this potentially has disastrous consequences for the group if mismatched perceptions are not addressed. If individuals participate in a group because they believe it will be an enjoyable experience and a formal, businesslike style of meeting emerges, it is highly unlikely that they will continue to make a meaningful contribution.

Alternatively as Chapter Four illustrated a professional may drive forward the agenda of their own organisation as was the case with the Great Cornard Appraisal. In this example the professional advocated the application of a particular technique even though sufficient resources did not exist for successful execution of that method. Thus in addition to difficulties arising from personal agendas, group tensions emerge as a consequence of professional motivation. Professionals have targets to reach, such as my own of working with at least three communities in CF-S (D:F - CA/HC application). As the longevity of the organisation or in this case the Communities First project relied on achieving these targets, then Hastoe was bound to push for rural development activity in three communities. The question of whether it is actually in the best interests of those communities becomes a side issue, with the drive for project results. The Suffolk ACRE Community Action Plan project measured its achievements, not on whether changes were achieved within the communities in which it was working, but by the *number* of community action plan projects either underway or completed. This approach was problematic as the project officers presented the community action plan as the sole activity that that community ought to pursue. Hence both Hastoe and Suffolk ACRE staff imposed their organisational agendas onto the community.

Motivation can also be considered in terms of the overall group. By the nature of their initiation and with regard to style, some regeneration activities such as the CEP are

akin to pseudo-council projects while others appear to have a genuine community based drive. The regeneration activity in Stradbroke and Thurston could be considered under the latter category. This affects the overall direction and motivation of the group as a whole. For instance the CEP Board was focused on delivering the requirements of the formal Delivery Plan document as the contract between EEDA and the Local Authority required them to. Although much discussion during the early stages of the Project was about how it would undertake other initiatives, the reality was that the SRB funding alone was sufficiently complex and provided enough work for the Project to focus on. Meanwhile smaller regeneration initiatives driven from within the community tend to focus on what they want to achieve and pursue small pockets of funding in a more ad hoc way. As previous Chapters have demonstrated this is for a variety of reasons, including the lack of expertise and resources within the community and from agencies supporting such community based groups. Group motivation along with personal impetus thus affects how the group conducts itself and the emerging styles and norms within that group.

### **Regeneration rules**

Perceptions are further distorted and motivations challenged by the regeneration framework within which groups operate. Taylor (2000b and 2003) argues that the rules of engagement are firmly controlled in the public sector down to the detail of how decisions are made and meetings run. Rural development relies on public funding through regional, national and European sources, all of which are accompanied by a set of rules, with great influence on how groups operate. The Single Regeneration Budget had various documents and publications outlining the system for applying and spending the monies from both Central government and the regional development agency, considered at length in Chapter Three. Equally the Countryside Agency had particular guidelines to which Hastoe had to adhere. Many rural development groups are therefore beholden to an outside body that provides much-needed funding. These agencies retain power because the groups or individuals in receipt of funding wish to remain in that position! This affects how the group proceeds and the content of its meetings; often creating a diversion from original objectives.

The CF-S project had to submit an annual progress report before the next instalment of funding was released and so it was unlikely that Hastoe would have done anything that the CA viewed as unacceptable or controversial. Thus Atkinson (1999) points out that while working in partnership brings some of the benefits to the disadvantaged, it can

also reinforce existing relations of domination and control. He suggests that it can legitimate a particular re-presentation of reality that is not necessarily conscious, but can be so ingrained in the culture that it is difficult to reverse.

Consequently there is a danger that communities restructure themselves to demonstrate that they fit with government requirements (Atkinson, 2003). This may entail re-inventing the wheel, so that previous models of success are replicated. Mimetic isomorphism is where authorities follow the examples of those who have gone before them and been successful (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). This is often encouraged through 'best practice' examples and visits to other communities. Suffolk ACRE's Community Action Plan Officers were obliged by their funders to produce a certain number of action plans using a specific methodology. They 'encouraged' community groups to adopt this approach, in a prescriptive way, suggesting that if a community wished to do anything from refurbishing their play area to building a village hall, it was better done in the context of a their Community Action Plan scheme (D:RJ). By adopting an approach dictated from elsewhere, be it through another community or an external agency, specific relationships between various individuals have not been worked through, nor have actual roles and responsibilities. In spending time to debate and discuss these issues the group members develop trust and respect and in turn working relationships emerge. This was apparent in the Great Cornard village appraisal that was advocated by Suffolk ACRE, but in reality had little support from within the community.

Alternatively the Local Villages' Project Chair believed that while prioritising action within a broader programme of consultation was the best approach, the specific methodology promoted by the ACRE project was inappropriate from them. They resisted applying a direct replica of the methodology and chose a tailor-made approach. Consequently the support of the Community Action Plan team from Suffolk ACRE was not available and this made the possibility of accessing funding from the CA tricky as they encouraged communities to use this approach. When the group was applying for funding from the CA a number of its members ensured that the application was worded in such a way that it was clear that the group was conducting a community based initiative that would be recognised in the same way as a Community Action Plan, although it was not using the approach advocated by Suffolk ACRE. The language used in the application guidance was reflected back in the text of the

application and fortunately it was a success. However this decision to use an alternative, non-mainstream approach could have had devastating consequences for the project had the group been unwilling to engage with any of the regeneration rules and re-package their project in appropriate language. The rules of engagement exert powerful influences on the activity of the group and less astute (Ward and McNicholas, 1998) or unsuitable groups (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004) lose out. In the latter case they pursue the 'wrong' development strategies or respond through inappropriate means such as protest (Herbert-Cheshire and Higgins, 2004:300) and so are not eligible to access funding. Hence we see the 'revolving door' syndrome where the same neighbourhoods appear in policy initiative after policy initiative (Taylor, 2000a:1020).

Aside from exclusion from regeneration initiatives, inexperience within the group can lead to reliance on group members who are familiar with rural development activity and the associated 'rules'. They are likely to suggest approaches which they have seen being used elsewhere and perceive to be successful, as was the case for the CEP. This has the advantage of being tried and tested, but the disadvantage of reinventing past problems and deficits if it is not adapted for the task in hand. It may also inhibit creativity and dynamism of the group as it is less likely to think about other ways of working if an 'off the shelf' method seems accessible. This often results in what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe as 'institutional isomorphism' whereby community institutions reflect the structures of their public sector partners. The Community Energy Project adopted a culture and approach that had many of the hallmarks of a local authority committee..

CEP business was conducted through a committee i.e. the CEP Board, at whose meetings paper became an important tool. Documents were circulated prior to meetings, including some for information only; minutes were written up in the style of a local authority committee. The majority of attendees to the CEP Board were mostly male and wore suits and ties. The chair had a very specific approach where he used language that tended to be particular to local government calling for things such as 'value added', 'a scrutiny day' and 'benchmarking' while describing progress and activity of the partnership in terms of 'milestones and outcomes'. The latter terms reflected the language used within the funding guidelines. The atmosphere of each

meeting tended towards formality, this all despite the fact that from over fifty partners, most of them were locally based voluntary organisations.

These standards were partly enforced on the group through SRB requirements and the accompanying rules and regulations. But part of it emerged as the norms assumed by powerful group members from the public sector and also from the Chair of the Board. He frequently reminded people of the time spent on agenda items and moved certain discussions on while giving others more leeway. Down to the physical seating, he assumed the same seat from one meeting to the next, with many others following his lead to sit in 'their' seat. Soon everything was fixed and given; the meetings were frequently sluggish and predictable. Meetings tended to focus on mechanical issues and specifics with which the manager of the CEP should have been authorised to proceed. There was always concern over the next report due to the Development Agency administering the regeneration funding. Time was rarely spent discussing the 'bigger picture' or strategic matters such as how the group related to the community or how it would access future additional funding.

Ultimately certain members of the group become disenfranchised as they felt they could not contribute effectively to discussions. They did not understand some of the terms used and made this point publicly at Board meetings only to be dismissed by the Chair. Thus language was divisive. It was in danger of eroding good working relationships and jeopardizing the development of new alliances. A culture of mistrust was created with suspicion over why people felt the need to hide behind 'fancy' words (D:RJ).

Initiatives such as CF-S or the Community Energy Project may be affected by funders rules from the outset as they were specifically formed to access regeneration funds<sup>22</sup> and so always operated under the funders framework. Hence the dynamic of the scheme is one in which the funder sets the rules. For other groups who apply for funds after they are established, meeting funders' requirements can seem far from the group's community objectives and challenge even the most committed voluntary members. This is also true where a group evolves to pursue funding. There is a danger that the funding framework over-rides the original driver for rural development. As groups pursue funding they become exposed to 'rules' of rural development with

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<sup>22</sup> The CEP emerged from previous alliances – see Chapter 3 – but its specific structure was set up in response to the SRB funding.

the danger that their original sense of purpose is diluted or sidetracked. The rules of engagement inevitably influence, in some cases dictate, the culture within the group affecting group interaction and individual gain from group membership. They also have a direct relationship on the membership of groups and the representation achieved within them.

### **Representation**

Achieving adequate and appropriate involvement and representation is not always straightforward, with power issues emerging. Shortall and Shucksmith (2001) note how in area-based community development existing powerholders are often made more powerful as the poorer groups remain socially excluded. Even if a group seeks out individuals that are not involved with existing organisations there is a danger that they then become the empowered, boosting the local elite (Edwards et al, 2001). Ward and Jones (1999) discuss how the issue of who governs at the local level, tends to be shrouded in ambiguity. Skelcher (1998) reveals that structures within local governance are characterised by non-elected individuals equivalent to nearly three times the number of elected local councillors. In reality groups can be so desperate for membership and involvement that it is easiest to select the usual suspects. This is evident in the membership of many community groups as they contain a core of individuals re-appearing in different guises across the community. Subsequently there can be a resulting lack of diversity among community groups in any given area, with grave consequences for the rural development process.

Baum (1999) points out that a lack of diversity can result in those governing a community group implementing projects that diverge from the community which they purport to represent. This will also in turn discourage new membership and ongoing involvement. In the context of micro-politics it can mean that group membership should not automatically be taken at face value. Just as some are involved for very specific reasons, others may not be involved or end their involvement for reasons that go beyond the lack of time to devote effort to an initiative. They may disagree with the priorities of the group as was the case during a particular meeting of the Thurston community project.

‘During one of [the Chair’s] rants about the lack of health facilities I caught Joan’s eye. For a brief moment there was a flicker of understanding as she rolled her eyes skywards. I assumed she was bored by [the Chair’s] incessant ranting! Not everyone

felt the same way as he did and I started to wonder just how much of ‘the community’ shared his point of view. But at least I felt as though something finally clicked in place with the ‘ladies’ of Thurston.’ (D: RJ)

Shortly after this meeting the attendance of this woman and her friend became more sporadic. Thus while at some level these women felt that the objectives of the group were relevant to them, it emerged that they did not feel that the health issue should have been central to the focus of the group.

Hence power tends to lie in the hands of the few who are key players to rural development activities and claim to represent their community. The chair of the Community Energy Project was also a district councillor, chair of the local housing improvement group and was involved in the local authority tenant liaison group, in addition to his full time commitment as a teacher in the local school. Other members had multiple functions within the community and they all seemed to know each other from their various roles. The danger was that the group was elitist and exclusive attracting cronies of the chair and discouraging others from getting involved. Other members of the community felt that the CEP had nothing to do with them and was something that the council had set up (C). Thus the individuals that got involved in turn influenced future group membership – they affected the group’s profile and also others’ perception of the group. Ultimately residents of the Anglia Estate did not recognise the legitimacy of the group as furthering the community agenda – they perceived the CEP to be another ‘council’ activity.

### **Legitimacy**

The capacity with which people become involved in a group influences micro-politics as it will affect their perceived legitimacy and actual power within that group. An individual who has been voted on by an umbrella organisation representing a large proportion of community groups in the area potentially has a very powerful voice during discussions. The number and breadth of interest groups represented through an individual’s membership helps to legitimise this position. This was the case for one of the community representatives in the CEP Board. On the other hand I represented a small housing association that had no houses in Sudbury or Great Cornard (although it did own housing stock in Suffolk County). In terms of legitimacy I was in a less powerful position than the community representative. In the community I did not have



a profile – as an individual or as a housing association – and so I did not have access to community networks or be perceived to have access to such a network.

Lowndes (1999) suggests that there can be confusion around where different representatives draw their legitimacy if the various mandates (election, appointment, common experience, professional expertise, and leadership skills) are not mutually recognised. Representation therefore requires careful consideration of perceived and actual legitimacy and thus power and status of the selected representatives. Some of the community and voluntary sector failed to recognise the role that I had in the process of developing the CEP. Hence any contact that I had with them was limited and one-sided on my part. In terms of legitimacy and power the community representative was perceived to be more powerful. However I had the potential to raise my power in the group. Not only was I employed by a Housing Association but I was also co-ordinating a community project that was sponsored by government agencies. I had access to resources and also access to a network of contacts that existed beyond the communities of Sudbury and Great Cornard. Eventually I was able to use this to my advantage. I was given the semi-formal position of leading the community and neighbourhood strand – one of three within the CEP. From this point I had no difficulty in achieving mutual communication with the local volunteer centre. This was most poignantly demonstrated by the invitation from the Volunteer Centre to brief their network on the emerging bid (D:F). The co-ordinator recognised the legitimacy of my position whereas beforehand she had not.

However as Croft and Beresford (1992) point out such involvement and empowerment is not a zero sum game and so individuals do not have to ‘lose out’. Instead it is about altering relationships between participants and creating opportunities for influence. My semi-formal position described above was gained in exchange for my skills and experience in consulting with communities elsewhere. Babergh District Council offered me a place on the [small] working group responsible for the development of the SRB project and eventually asked me to lead the group concerned with reaching out to the community. This gave me legitimacy in the eyes of the communities of Sudbury and Great Cornard which gave me a valid position within those communities. Playing the empowerment game was important for the Communities First project as it allowed me to trade one area of influence off another. This was critical for gaining access and acceptance and ultimately participating in the rural development activity.

Trading sources of power is commonplace among community participants. One of the community representatives involved in the periphery of the CEP knew that he was an important link between the community and Babergh District Council. This same Council was viewed by some as being remote from its community (D:RJ). The link to the community was strengthened as Babergh developed their bid for Beacon Status, a kudos award from central government reliant on partnership with the community. The local authority treated the community representative with great care, perceiving him as a great asset in their bid for Beacon Status. They allowed him to make derogatory statements about the local authority. In other circumstances he may not have been able to get away with such statements, but they wanted him to be part of the team presenting the case to central government (A).

Knowing and appreciating positions such as this encourages irregular behaviour, in this case the community representative was confident about making critical comments. These individuals understand and are confident with their legitimacy and so are likely to participate fully in a meeting environment, using their position to full advantage. While the individual who does not have this confidence tends to be more accepting of the general consensus, the confident participant will make maximum gains from a particular situation. Thus legitimacy can be seen as a hidden dimension of power affecting behaviour and performance of members and the micro-politics of a group.

### **Venue**

The style of a meeting – its ambience, the language used and the general feel of a group – is affected by venue choice. Basically the chosen venue of a meeting affects how it is perceived. The Economic Development Officer considered using the local authority's council chamber for meetings about the development of the CEP. The small working group considered that people might conclude, rightly or wrongly, that the local authority wished to retain power and its attempt of involving the community was a token gesture. Even ignoring this strong argument against the use of the council chamber these surroundings, with microphones, fixed seating and wooden panelling, could be considered very intimidating to individuals with little experience of attending meetings in such a formal setting. Furthermore the style of meetings was likely to be seen to mirror to local authority committee meetings thus projecting an image similar to that of the local authority rather than creating a separate profile for the CEP. The staid surroundings were perceived by the CEP working group as being incompatible to

developing meaningful working relationships between those involved as they included representatives from non-statutory sector backgrounds. (D:RJ).

Ultimately meetings were held in various schools, but as some partners claimed that this might not attract all prospective partners, the council encouraged the use of different venues for other meetings. Consequently meetings were held in a number of locations including the volunteer centre, a sheltered housing scheme and a business centre. This was a success in that each venue attracted different attendees. Had the partnership continued to meet in the schools alone it is debatable if the variety of individuals would have got involved. Despite this the Single Regeneration Budget guidance does not suggest venues for partnership meetings and yet this can be such a critical element in developing trust and getting a project off the ground.

After the CEP was successful in getting funding from the SRB the Board accepted a venue offer from one of the partners. This was in the local business centre and all Board meetings were held here (although ongoing forum meetings were held in various locations throughout the community). This seemed to give a very clear message out to the community – the CEP was a serious operation, positioning itself in a business environment. Not only may this have alienated certain interest groups within the community, but also it may have estranged the CEP from part of the geographic community that it was claiming to represent; the business centre was in Sudbury, the town adjacent to the village of Great Cornard with which it shared the regeneration funding. Part of the underlying motive for the Council driving forward the CEP was an effort to bring together Sudbury and Great Cornard. The move to hold Board meetings in the business centre was largely pragmatic – a free, regular and convenient meeting place. The Board did consider rotating the venue but rejected it on the basis that no other alternative was offered.

### **5.3.1 Summary**

The above discussion illuminated the causes of micro-politics. They were revealed to comprise a disparate cluster of issues. They include group representation and legitimacy, the rules of regeneration, group and individual motivation along with the venue used for group meetings. Group relations within rural development are thus complex, dynamic and often fragile as they are affected by a curious and often unexpected mix of factors.

## 5.4 Managing micro-politics

Some aspects of micro-politics, such as the creation of factions, achieving effective communication or retaining a friendly, informal style of community meeting can be actively managed. This can be achieved within the scenario presented by the current regeneration environment and in the face of the influences that are discussed above. This section considers how group relations are typically positively managed within rural development practice.

Maintaining informal relationships and processes alongside more formal ways of working can be vital to the longevity of regeneration partnerships, especially in the face of increasing bureaucracy (Lowndes and Skelcher, 1998). The CEP Board meetings were prefaced by thirty minutes where sandwiches and coffee were available. This provided an informal opportunity for Board members to meet each other and to discuss issues not necessarily connected to the CEP. As a member of this Board the casual tone of the pre-meetings provided a sharp contrast to the, often tedious, formal style of the Board meetings proper. However the down side of running such 'networking' opportunities was that they became the place where pre-meeting decision and agreements were sometimes made. Maintaining positive group relations is crucial for a group but requires expending much effort.

If this is not done group relations become fragile and the group simply falls apart. Lowry et al note the increased use of facilitation services within planning in Hawaii due partly to the fact that 'project controversies are problems based on personality conflicts, miscommunication, and misinformation rather than more fundamental matters of value or principle' (1987:181). Following the completion of its Community Action Plan, the regeneration group for the market town of Brandon had conflicting views about what should become the priority for the community. After several meetings, during which no priorities were identified, an external consultant was used with a specific remit to facilitate a public meeting designed to prioritise action and so help the community make progress. The facilitator was instantly seen to be objective and not affiliated to any particular faction (although the Countryside Agency were in fact paying for his fees). As a result the day was viewed as a success. Whereas in the past stand up arguments had been the norm at public meetings, this public meeting contained plenty of discussion but little animosity and, possibly more importantly, was viewed by most individuals concerned as a success. In this case a seemingly

'objective' person from an organisation outside the community was perceived to be more suitable than the usual suspect who chaired virtually every small group in the community.

Ground rules are designed, not only to minimise conflict within the group, but also to keep these processes flowing efficiently. However standardising procedures, such as creating ground rules or imposing agendas can be very difficult as it involves formalising intangibles such as trust and friendship. Trust is something that is difficult to produce, it exists organically and as Tonkiss and Passey (1999) point out, formalising trust within organisations can undercut its resources of trust. It can imply a basic lack of trust in the first place and thus draw opposition and hostility as other members feel that their commitment is being questioned. It can devastate trust that freely existed as informal arrangements are replaced with rules and measures which are designed to enforce confidence but can have the converse effect.

Introducing rules may also erode creativity and spontaneity resulting in energy being spent on adherence to seemingly trivial ground rules making the process more arduous than is perceived to be necessary. Groups such as Thurston resisted adopting formal processes such as setting agendas and keeping minutes. Here group members felt that they were replicating more official (e.g. council) structures by having formalised agendas and minutes. However they eventually found that they needed some record, however brief, of past meetings and activities. This happened because a decision previously made about inviting certain people to the public exhibition was ignored by the Chair, without a record of that decision the group members had little to argue about.

In the emerging rural development group, procedures such as ground rules and rules for taking decisions can be scarce. This has serious implications for progress when things are not going well as the group can flounder without clear guidance. On the other hand introducing ground rules can be problematic for the reasons just mentioned and are not necessarily an indication that things will work out as planned. A possible solution to this is the creation of 'rules of engagement' (Scott, 2004:58) so that partnerships have a common framework within which they operate.

Positive group relations may also be supported by professionals working with them where support and direction is provided. It was largely in this capacity that I worked with the communities involved in the CF-S action research project. Croft and Beresford (1992) note the tension between support and direction. While the enabling and supportive role seems to be consistent with encouraging people's involvement, the organising role can be divisive creating a leader/follower relationship. This is tricky to balance given that the same community will require support and also direction depending on its particular circumstances at any given point in time. In Stradbroke the community champion had a very clear idea of the process that he thought the village appraisal should take. Having had a life-time professional background in community development he was prepared to give this process a generous amount of time. Others however soon tired of the endless public meetings. They also gave up their spare time, but the lack of direction and apparent lack of progress of the group resulted in falling attendance and participation.

As a professional working with this group I faced the dilemma of whether to risk alienating the community champion by suggesting the need to increase the pace and keep everyone else engaged but in effect criticise his chosen method, or to say nothing and watch involvement decline further. In the event, and in conjunction with the Community Council's Involvement Officer, I interpreted a particular funder's guidance notes relating to community involvement. This was an attempt to ensure that the wider group membership remained on board and we over-emphasised the need to produce results and to share the task of organising events. It meant that the champion had to relinquish some of his power and allow other willing community members to have a greater involvement. The rules of the funder became a tool with which we influenced the champion to consider an agenda beyond his own and also for us to strike a balance between supportive and directive approaches.

As the earlier discussion illustrated, power is exerted by individuals through interaction with other group members. It has many, often hidden dimensions. Politicking occurs with participating individuals trading power to help enhance their own validity and legitimacy. Hence the activities that the group *does not* engage in, such as decisions not taken, as well as those it does, must be considered. To ensure that this happens many groups resort to planning events, often labelled strategic planning. These are different to community planning days and tend to focus on

activities that the group engaged in and those that it did not during the past year. It also considers barriers that have prevented achieving group objectives as well as debating the intending action plan for the following time period. This provides an opportunity for all members to air their opinion and is typically done with the assistance of an external facilitator who is viewed by members as being objective. Such was the case for Brandon as described above, but this was done as a crisis management exercise rather than as routine forward planning. The many community groups that cannot afford to employ a facilitator for a day could draw on the expertise of a Rural Development Worker employed by the Local Authority or Community Council. Furthermore, if a group has a relaxed style it may prefer to do this in a very social way, devoting one particular meeting to planning their activities and doing so over light refreshments. This was planned for the CEP Board, but was never executed due to the difficulty of finding a mutually agreeable date among members.

## **5.5 Conclusions**

This Chapter reveals the complex nature of micro-politics showing how group dynamics should not always be taken at face value as they are affected by a number of factors. The analysis began by outlining the emerging importance of micro-politics within regeneration literature. Micro-politics were identified as the intangibles of group processes. They arise due to groups of individuals interacting and working together on shared activity. Typically difficult to pin down and identify, they are not instantly observable and so close scrutiny of a group is required to identify these processes. Rural development group dynamics including trust, norms, shared knowledge, perceptions, understanding, social networks, values and personality traits give rise to micro-politics. Micro-politics were thus distinguished from social capital as they have negative as well as positive impacts.

Micro-politics are displayed through various mechanisms within a rural development group. They are displayed by individuals engaging in power games and communicating with others as well as through meeting styles. Power exists as a result of people acting together. Relations and associations are powerful rather than individuals and so perception and image are important aspects of power. Power tactics are exerted within decision making and agenda setting – what decisions are made, what decisions are not made, how and where decisions are made, which issues are discussed/which are not, who influences and controls the agenda? Consequently the

process of decision making and agenda setting can favour one rural development agent over another. For instance by operating behind and beyond the group's agreed meeting format, backstage elites take decisions around potentially contentious or important issues. The less powerful group members feel unable to contest or question their action. Such hidden and subtle dimensions of power reinforce existing barriers with the less powerful individuals remaining in a weak position.

In addition, the existence of micro-politics can be identified by communication within a group. Communication relates to the ability of group members to understand each others language, relying on individuals sending and hearing messages. Specialist languages are often created in rural development, for instance among professionals, to the exclusion of individuals and groups that are not familiar with such language.

Individuals perform according to circumstances, often disguising problem issues through the use of masks. As a result they may fail to communicate openly their discontent with a particular course of action to other group members, even though they thoroughly disagree. Communication subtleties such as body language can however indicate true emotions, but such nuances are not always easily identified.

As well as a tool for exchanging ideas and information, communication can contribute to the development process. It is a process that builds as discussions progress; people interpret what they hear and respond according to that interpretation. Furthermore rural development agents perform according to the circumstances in which they find themselves and the image that they wish to project. This in turn impacts on their perceived power and so affects their authority within the group. Hence a confident sounding individual using technical terms in a meeting is likely to impress group members who are less confident and unfamiliar with rural development terminology. Individuals need to be able to understand such communication and language subtleties to make a full contribution to the rural regeneration process; otherwise communication serves to reinforce barriers and divisions.

Identifying the causes of micro-politics helps to further illuminate micro-politics; they can be considered in terms of motivation (from an individual, group or agency perspective), rules of regeneration, representation, legitimacy and meeting venue. Sources of motivation within a group and the resulting expectations can be very



different causing problems as the group struggles to identify common ground. An individual may believe strongly in the purpose of the group and that will lead to particular behaviour such as exertion of power and dominating group proceedings. Alternatively a group may be set up as a direct result of a funding opportunity and so its structure and culture is completely designed around a policy or funding framework bringing with it a particular meeting style. If the group is pursuing particular activity because it is manipulated to do so by a supporting regeneration agency, members' motivation to drive the group may become damaged as their expectations are not realised. Strained group relations can result from different and/or inconsistent motivating factors.

The type of activities that a group embarks upon is affected by the rules of regeneration as this determines the funding that is available. This in turn impacts on the type of individuals who are attracted to, and become centrally involved in, the rural development process. For instance, reliance on individuals who are familiar with the rules of the regeneration 'game' can result in a group replicating the activities of another community. At the same time individuals with creative ideas are sidelined as power is bestowed on those with relevant experience and perceived know-how. Hence positions of status are entrenched as power holders retain their position and those peripheralised and marginalised never gain power. Eventually the image of the group is projected as one where the usual suspects are involved and others are discouraged from ever becoming involved. As this occurs existing participation from certain group members may also diminish because they feel that the group does not represent the interests of the community.

This can also happen at the group level where alternative ideas are seen to be unsuitable to funding agencies as they are unfamiliar and untested. If this happens factions may emerge within a community. Consequently mixed messages are communicated to funding bodies as various groups purport to regenerate their geographical community with untold implications for that community.

Understanding the motivation for activity helps to illuminate micro-politics; this can be considered from an individual, group or agency perspective. Motivation and the resulting expectations can be very different causing problems for the group overall as it struggles to identify common ground. An individual may believe strongly in the

purpose of the group and that will lead to particular behaviour such as exertion of power and domination of group proceedings. Alternatively a group may be set up as a direct result of a funding opportunity and so its structure and culture is completely designed around a policy or funding framework bringing with it a particular meeting style. If the group is pursuing particular activity because it is manipulated to do so by a supporting regeneration agency, members' motivation to drive the group may become damaged as their expectations are not realised. Strained group relations can result from different and/or inconsistent motivating factors.

Perceived and actual individual legitimacy plays a large role in micro-politics. The individuals' status influences the amount of power they can exert within a group. Hence if other group members do not recognise a person's position, the individual will have problems operating as an active participant. Such recognition is derived from the mandate with which members join including through election or appointment due to qualities such as common experience, professional expertise, resources or leadership skills. Mutual recognition of these skills within the group provides areas from which trading may occur. An individual that recognises such skills personally and in others has the potential to exert even more power throughout the rural development process.

It was stated earlier that micro-politics, by their very nature, are elusive. In the same way this section has shown that pinning down their causes is a challenging task. Often diverse and unrelated, these triggers come together through group interaction within particular meetings and so recognising their source is complicated. However, once achieved the next issue for a rural development group is to manage the micro-politics.

Once identified and their causes are understood, groups can take steps to manage micro-politics. These are often simple measures by nature but are not always straightforward to implement successfully as they may require additional resources or may be met with opposition. For instance achieving a balance between formal and informal relations helps to ensure that both styles are catered for within meetings. This may entail using two types of meetings rather than a single one to further group objectives, so requiring additional resources. Equally challenging is the task of managing group relations through ground rules that outline group processes, as this can generate suspicion or erode intangibles such as trust. Furthermore using such measures may also represent the difference between an enjoyable and sociable experience and

one which is laden with procedures and regulations. While support from external agencies may help alleviate poor group relations some group members may believe that such outside advice is not appropriate or necessary. The group's control may also be compromised through alliance with a regeneration agency. In any case the task of managing micro-politics is complex, reflecting their very essence. Accordingly some groups appear to be much more successful than other similar groups for no apparent reason. However, this Chapter has unearthed an important and complex array of intangibles that account for such mysteries. These are the micro-politics of rural development.

## 6 Discussion and Conclusions

This study set out to consider the rhetoric and reality of rural regeneration by exploring its policy and practice. It is concerned with the mechanisms, techniques and processes that are used to translate government ideals to community activity. Specifically the thesis posed the following research questions.

### 1. What is the rural development policy framework?

Chapter Three set out the policy context for rural development practice. It shows how both European and National policies influence the creation of policy objectives and ideals relevant to rural development. Within these geographic dimensions the traditions of agriculture and urban regeneration feature strongly, both of which exhibit the intent of governance. The rhetoric of rural governance was analysed in detail in order to present the policy background for rural development. This research showed how the concept of partnership working is typically used as the mechanism by which policy makers expect rural governance to be achieved and what it is expected to achieve.

### 2. What are the mechanisms used to implement rural development policy?

The rhetoric of rural governance was compared to the reality by using the examples of the CEP and the CF-S projects. The analysis focused on the associated practical activity including the application process and project delivery. In particular Chapters Three and Four considered the practical structures employed, namely partnership, by rural development practice. The methods for achieving participation within modes of governance were analysed along with the question of who participates. This led to the suggestion of a specific type of community that participates in regeneration and the idea of legitimate degrees of participation.

### 3. What actually occurs within rural development practice?

Chapter Four considered what actually happens within the practice of rural development. Building on the analysis of participatory methods it provided an insight into the participatory *process* that accompanies typical rural regeneration projects by

showing the activity with which real regeneration groups engage. A further dimension of the reality of practice was provided in Chapter Five, the subject of which was the micro-politics of rural development practice. Micro-politics were shown to be about intangible group processes including trust, power, norms, perceptions and motivations. The discussion then moved on to consider how micro-politics can be identified within a group by revealing its characteristics before discussing the factors behind them. The importance of managing micro-politics concluded this Chapter, thus completing my analysis of the reality of regeneration practice.

4. . What is the meaning given to rural development throughout the policy and practice process?

All of the chapters illustrate how meanings are attached throughout the process and how they are often subject to chance events such as the personal experience and values of core of individuals involved. By exploring both the rhetoric and the reality of rural development my study shows how meanings attached at the policy level do not necessarily equate to meanings within the regeneration group. Furthermore, many groups do not concern themselves with intangible concepts over which policy gurus ponder.

Before any of these questions were considered the thesis began in Chapter Two with an analysis of the methodological framework for the research and background to the research problem. The rationale for conducting an ethnographic study was presented along with the nature of the investigation that relied heavily on participant observation. Hence background to Hastoe Housing Association was given before highlighting the key research methods within my Ethnography.

From my study it is apparent that rural regeneration policy and practice has a mixed heritage. Urban regeneration experiences have informed the design and delivery of rural policy, resulting in rural regeneration schemes such as the Single Regeneration Budget. But rural policy has also been influenced by a European agricultural agenda which in turn affects a particular dimension of National policy which is distinct from the urban regeneration heritage. This is generally labelled rural development and emphasis is currently placed on a spatial, integrated approach resulting in schemes such as the LEADER programme and the Rural Development Programme. In a parallel way

the literature used within my research draws from two main sources; that of rural development and of regeneration, the latter relating to both rural and urban traditions. Each of these contributes to the broad theme that comprises rural studies. Consequently as I pointed out earlier I have used the labels regeneration and development inter-changeably throughout this thesis, although there is doubtless further work to be done on the impact of these traditions and the resultant meanings attached to the two concepts.

Despite its mixed heritage, a common theme within rural studies is the concept and popularity of governance and the application of partnership as the main form of achieving rural development practice. This study has shown how governance is operationalised to become a real activity within a community setting. The different stages involved in the transformation of policy rhetoric to community reality through rural development practice are illustrated. Along the way concepts such as participation, consultation, representation and empowerment are utilised to ensure that the mode of rural governance, typically a partnership, meets the requirements expected of it. These approaches are part and parcel of the mechanism that partnerships and the communities they represent must employ to access funding for their activities. Unexpected matters surface as a result of these ventures such as personality clashes, power struggles within groups and regeneration cliques. This chapter discusses the issues emerging as a consequence of the operationalisation of rural development policy.

Although my study occurred in rural Suffolk, the reflexive ethnographic approach provides a macro-context to which the findings may be applied. Hence the following discussion is of issues that may be applied within the broader context of rural studies.

### **6.1.1 Paradox of governance**

The ethos behind the policies emerging within rural regeneration is principally one of finding new ways of doing things. Although governance may ultimately concern changed government objectives, it is primarily focused on a new mode of operation involving government along with other actors. Accordingly the rhetoric is one of decentralisation and subsidiarity, with attention paid to what local communities, and active citizens therein, can achieve in conjunction with government and other agencies. Consequently traditional roles, responsibilities and boundaries are blurred; shared responsibility for achieving things is advocated as part of the new way of working.

The study of the CEP and CF-S projects reveal the attributes of governing through governance.

### **Decentralisation**

The SRB programme highlights the tensions caused by decentralisation which is experienced through the practice of governance. Peck and Tickell (1994) point out that through the re-coordination process of administering the SRB programme from a single government department; there is a danger that the balance of power would be shifted away from the local level in favour of those co-ordinating agencies. The CEP demonstrated that a curious mix of centralisation and decentralisation existed within the programme. On the one hand it represented a shift in the administration of government funds from a plethora of programmes existing across various central government agencies to a single initiative devised by a particular central government department. On the other hand the initiative was managed at the operational level by the regions; albeit within a framework set by central government.

Centralisation was achieved with central government having superiority over the SRB 6 programme and so RDAs were answerable to the relevant central government department – during SRB 6 this shifted from DETR to ODPM (and eventually to DTI). RDAs had to demonstrate to, and gain approval from, central government on how their priorities were set within their Regional Development Strategy. Subsequently they reported on how their SRB funds were allocated. The body governing the SRB partnership in turn had to operate within the constraints set by the RDA as well as that of central government. The CEP illustrated that the SRB governing body was really controlled by a single organisation, Babergh District Council, rather than the partnership. It was the Council who signed the agreement with EEDA and thus was accountable for the activities of the CEP. In addition to the succession of accountability, the organisations and groups delivering projects had to comply with the requirements of the project's responsible body – the Board, but ultimately those of the local authority. Overall the community had limited power within the SRB 6 process. They got involved in the development of the CEP bid, influencing particular aspects of it albeit within the frameworks set out by the local authority, EEDA and the then DETR. The extent of decentralisation was therefore limited.

My analysis thus reveals that given the operational framework, achieving the rhetoric of shared responsibility and accountability is not possible. The CEP case study

discovered a chain of accountability and a progression of influence, with power increasing from the community, through the district council and EEDA ultimately resting with central government who created the rules in the first place. The SRB represented a paradox of decentralisation.

### **The rules of engagement**

The discussion above argues that the rules of engagement rest firmly with funding bodies; typically central government. Even with the CF-S project the funding requested from the then RDC was above a certain threshold and so the relevant central agency had to get involved and make the final decision. Both Hastoe Housing Association and Babergh District Councils, the lead agencies for the CF-S and CEP projects, made official applications for funding to government agencies. However this was complemented by other activities that mark out the terms of engagement for regeneration.

Local interpretation resulting from decentralisation led to disparities in the rules of engagement. Fordham et al (1999) point out that partnerships have different local interpretations leading to different approaches. The chain of power exhibited within the administration of the CEP demonstrates that the process is sensitive to local interpretation at various levels of authority. For instance evidence from the case study indicates that EEDA was overly concerned with awarding funds legitimately rather than encouraging innovative schemes. There was undue anxiety that the requirements of central government were met at the expense of achieving deeper community involvement. This was demonstrated in the approach and style of EEDAs bidding guidance which focused on the contents of the applications with reference to the information necessary to undertake the appraisal of the bid, as required by central government. The guide provided little information on types of activities partnerships might get involved with, or how they might set about developing their bid. Such preoccupation with procedures was possibly at the expense of flexibility and innovation and so the opportunities for funding less conformist, but more innovative and potentially risky projects, were reduced. It also lessened the likelihood of providing support to partnership projects led by partners with less experience of regeneration funding, such as a community based organisation as they are unlikely to be as familiar with safe projects as experienced agencies. While some of EEDA's lack of confidence can be explained by its lack of experience due to the newness of the organisation, this does not wholly explain their conservative style. Comparison across



regions and the associated management of the SRB would be necessary to explore this particular point further.

As per the official applications, both projects had to fulfil certain requirements, operating as a partnership, complying with the technical rules set out under a particular framework and engaging in community consultation. Babergh District Council attempted to genuinely consult with the community on the content of the CEP bid. They were concerned to involve as much of the community as possible using as many achievable techniques under the circumstances. The availability of resources and expertise were limited. In addition time was a key factor in the community consultation requirements as the turnaround period from expressing interest to submitting a full SRB bid was three months. This did not allow for complex consultative techniques to be used, or for the partnership to engage in a long term process. On the contrary it dictated the use of a speedy exercise which demonstrated the requirements set out within the guidelines. The reality of participating in a regeneration partnership are analysed more fully later. Of interest here is the fact that regeneration rhetoric suggests that local people, in conjunction with other agencies, are best placed to identify their own needs and solutions to those needs. This is achieved through governance and the rhetoric suggests that it relies on partnerships between the community, government and other agencies. This does not correspond to the evidence found in my case studies. It does not reconcile with an SRB project where accountability and responsibility for delivery rested with a statutory agency with implementation relying on limited and varied participation from other sectors including the community. Nor does it square with a Housing Association that was responsible for creating a project, virtually without community input, but whose delivery relied on some degree of participation from the community. The role of the community can therefore be incidental to the mechanisms of governance, seemingly being used by both Hastoe Housing Association and the Babergh District Council to fulfil the necessary requirements of accessing funding. Ultimately a single agency is responsible for delivering partnership projects and is accountable to another more centralised body that sets the rules. This reality does not fit with the rhetoric of shared power and responsibility for achieving locally based solutions.

The reality of involvement in regeneration activities showed that networking and politicking play a major role in success. For instance Hastoe worked very closely with

key contacts within the funding bodies, setting up a precursor to the Steering Group with responsibility for developing the bid. Hastoe had a strong organisational profile along with sound networking skills as the analysis of its structure and activity attests. Its resulting availability of contacts and capacity to network, along with its status, was evident throughout the development of the CF-S project. In a less sophisticated manner, Babergh District Council revealed a skill in politicking. It recognised the need to work with relevant Officers within EEDA throughout the process of creating the project. Not only did this provide personal contacts that were available to answer queries, but it meant that EEDA developed some sense of obligation towards the project. In other words it would have been more difficult to turn down than if it had been a cold application made on a purely formal and official basis. These rules of engagement are unwritten rules and can only be known and achieved through experience, expertise and the availability of resources. Potential regeneration partners without such a portfolio are at a considerable disadvantage.

Regeneration rules wax lyrical about the necessity of involving excluded members of the community and marginalised groups and consequently require regeneration groups to demonstrate evidence of this. Tight time scales, lack of concrete ideas on involvement techniques, complex funding regimes and politicking make up the true rules of engagement. Community groups therefore tend to rely on a key partner – be it the community champion or the lead agency – to ensure that the partnership to which they belong can fulfil the necessary requirements. The role of the community champion is considered in the section on participating in partnership working while the discussion now turns to the lead agency.

### **Lead Agency**

The style of the local authority can affect how much an area participates in regeneration initiatives. If Babergh District Council (BDC), under the auspices of the pathfinder partnership, had not identified accessing funds as a priority then the question arises: would the CEP exist? Would another organisation have taken the lead to develop the bid? As this study has shown, a high level of expertise is required to actively participate and thus the tendency of SRB and similar schemes to be led by non-local authority partners is historically low and remains unlikely<sup>23</sup>. It follows that

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<sup>23</sup> Under SRB 6 other non-local authority-led schemes in the area tended not to be all-encompassing focusing instead on an individual theme. For instance Suffolk ACRE received funding to set up credit union schemes, while Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations led a voluntary sector training project.

areas with an inactive or ineffective local authority are in danger of missing opportunities. They may not know that regeneration initiatives exist or they may not have the expertise or resources essential for participating in regeneration practice.

Furthermore the activity of the community will also affect engagement with regeneration. Some areas may have a very active regeneration community that urge their local authority to undertake projects while others may not. Even if the community is active my study shows this to be no guarantee that they will get involved in the official regeneration schemes advocated by government. This issue of non-participation is dealt with later.

The type of other agencies, i.e. non-local authorities with a rural development remit within an area affects regeneration within that community. For instance, CF-S may not have happened were it not for the activities of Hastoe Housing Association. It is impossible to equate total responsibility for subsequent activities that happened in conjunction with the project, but in the absence of CF-S, things would have been very different. The benefits of the project were spelled out by some of the steering group members

On the CEP ...'had CF-S not existed this work would probably have been less successful'. (A -25.02.02)

'CF-S has been extremely useful as there was no support from elsewhere – both MSDC and Suffolk Health Authority were very unstable with no continuity of staff.' (C- 24.04.02)

The agency leading the regeneration initiative is under contractual obligation to deliver the project with the funder as set out in a letter of offer or project contract. However for both the CF-S and the CEP this was to be achieved in conjunction with a wider partnership. This is the focus of the next section along with the resulting impact of the lead agency on the partnership

#### **Partnership structures**

The mechanism used to implement rural development policy and to facilitate its transition to practice is typically that of partnership. My study demonstrated that partnerships are the favoured mechanism under the new mode of rural governance and

accordingly are ubiquitous in the regeneration environment. However, no shared meaning of the term exists despite numerous studies into the subject. Hence within this research the broad understanding given to the term was one where the objective of the partnership furthered the realisation of rural governance.

Specific partnership structures and norms are varied. Formally, the CEP project had a multi-layered structure consisting of a number of groups each of which contributed to the partnership's governance. The Board was the place where final decisions within the partnership lay and the other structures were able to feed into this Committee. Ultimately the Local Authority could over-ride any of its decisions if it so desired. Away from the formal structures the Project Manager, also employed by the District Council, was responsible for running the project on a daily basis. She regularly liaised with a few Board members through telephone contact and one-to-one meetings. Most of these individuals were Local Authority Officers. The CEP relied on the Board to formalise decisions and used the contact achieved through the associated structures to ensure wider involvement of the community. The reality was that a smaller number of individuals, most of whom were from the Local Authority, were actively involved in the implementation of the initiative.

Board meetings were quite formal occasions and had a style which was closely aligned to that of local authority committees – the use of language, the format of the meetings and even the style of dress. The predominant culture of the lead organisation was thus reflected in the partnership structure. In a similar way the CF-S project was governed by a Project Steering Group. This group was required by the funding bodies and existed to steer the work of the project. However, the reality was that as Project Co-ordinator I drove much of the agenda of the project. I was closely directed by the Chief Executive of Hastoe and had to report to the Hastoe Committee who ultimately was accountable for the delivery of the project. Hence the mark of Hastoe was evident throughout the project.

The examples provided above both represent typical regeneration projects, a good practice initiative and a Single Regeneration Budget project. And yet their format was one of faux joint responsibility. Certainly the boundaries between different agencies were blurred, but there was no fuzziness around the issue of control and accountability. A partnership structure was required by the funder, but only inasmuch as this had to be

demonstrated to exist – there was no evaluation of the quality of the partnership. While the partnership structure involved various representatives it really served the particular function of meeting the agenda of another agency. The lead and controlling agency was responsible, solely and contractually, for delivering the regeneration project. Within both examples key individuals made a huge impact on the work of the partnerships, shaping the activities of the projects and the direction that they took. Thus personalities and personal experiences, as Chapter Five illustrates, have an important influence making up the nuts and bolts of partnership working. Fundamentally a group of individuals interact and communicate their remit and perceived legitimacy having some bearing on how this happens, but personal values and individual styles play an equally important role. These practical issues are discussed further in the next section.

The rhetoric of regeneration practice advocates joint ways of working, shared responsibility and equality of partners. However the reality demonstrates that a single agency has sole accountability. The characteristics of the partnership warrant further investigation to reveal the extent of its influence on the decisions taken and thus the potential for it to over-ride the powerful position of the lead agency. But in the meantime in the light of the above discussion the question must be asked, who is regeneration really for?

### **6.1.2 Participating in partnership working**

The reliance of regeneration projects on partnership working is apparent. Input from and involvement of local residents and professional agencies such as local authorities is required by most funding bodies. Indeed partnerships often rely on local authority expertise to facilitate, if not lead, the regeneration process. The reverse is also true; in regeneration partnerships local authorities depend upon the involvement of other partners. Individual partners in turn achieve participation from their relevant community, for instance a special needs housing agency may seek involvement from its users. In other words many different groups and agencies participate in partnership working.

This raises the issue of who is involved in regeneration - there are many different agencies, groups and individual interests in any given area. Although regeneration partnerships contain community representatives, they may represent only a limited section of a particular area and yet this is typically acceptable to funding bodies.

Shucksmith indicates that many partnerships use 'community engagement' as a 'resource' which 'must be enrolled and demonstrated to secure funding, rather than as a necessary system of accountability and capacity-building' (2000a:50). Within Hastoe community involvement never featured highly in its governance – either directly through its core committee or peripherally through project steering groups – even though its image and its rhetoric contrasted with these structures.

The previous section illustrated how governance affects regeneration activities including the impact of different types of groups leading partnerships and the specific requirements set out by funding bodies. This section explores further the process of participation - how it is achieved, what it involves and its limitations. It demonstrates that the experience of participation on the ground can vary dramatically from one community to another and also within a single community and so within a single rural regeneration initiative.

### **Techniques**

The formidable challenge of how to include the wider 'community' was unmistakable in the CEP. Despite the intention to draw in those people who are often referred to as excluded or at least who are most needy within their community, the mechanisms used by the CEP to include anyone not already associated in some way with more formalised groups was limited. It relied on word of mouth or on the effectiveness of involvement through the different groups within the CEP structure. Participation was opportunistic, relying on individuals being in the right place at the right time; whether it was catching sight of a poster at the local shop or in the volunteer centre or being approached directly by one of the key organisers. Suggestions of participatory techniques were not provided in the SRB guidance and no easy solutions were given.

The CEP attempted to use a number of different participatory techniques – from informal networking to the more formal committee meeting – all of which revolved around meetings, with great emphasis placed on the development of projects and the creation of wish lists. It had to conduct this as an accelerated exercise due to the time constraints of the funding programme; consequently too little time was given to the participatory exercise. Similarly too much concern with techniques can get in the way of the group making progress. As Chapter Four showed, focus on particular techniques, often advocated by regeneration agencies and funders, can cause over-reliance by the regeneration group on other agencies for expertise and resources

necessary to conduct the technique effectively. Subsequently simple organisational issues such as staff changes can impede their progress. The time taken to achieve what in the first instance appeared as a straightforward process for the Local Villages Group in Stradbroke ended up being prolonged and time-consuming. Alternatively, as the Great Cornard Community Action Group found out, the technique can become the central function of the group rather than a participatory tool to facilitate a process. The role of techniques to involve the community must therefore be kept in perspective, and a balance between the process and function achieved. My research demonstrates that participation does not just happen, but that expertise, time and resources are essential, and often constraining, components.

### **Expertise**

The practice of governance relies on a range of skills and expertise. Writing the bid, consulting with and ensuring participation of a community, understanding the policy context, identifying local need and managing the process are all examples of the types of tasks with which the CEP was engaged. The role of professional organisations such as a local authority in this process should not be underestimated. But the SRB process seemed to hinge on input from such professionals, with contributions from community partners being less critical. Regeneration initiatives placed much emphasis on the rules of engagement. For example, one individual who was involved with delivering a small local authority funded project felt that some of the requirements placed on her organisation, such as attending local authority training, were unrelated to the core purpose of the organisation and this was not an effective use of human resources. Equally, being obliged to undertake a community appraisal resulted in the loss of interest among the Great Cornard Community Action Plan Group. Eventually it disbanded without so much as a single result from their hard work; the completed questionnaires were stacked in the Community Council's offices waiting to be fed into a computer programme for analysis. Hence the emphasis on structures such as partnership and participatory techniques such as community appraisals within regeneration is in danger of undermining some of the richness found among very locally based projects.

The complexity of the application process varies from one fund to another, as does the assistance available. Ward and McNicolas (1998) argue that astute applicants to regeneration funding will frame their application in the language of the funding agent. This includes reflecting the language used by the funder in the application form and

notes and explains why some groups lift sections from the text of such documents. At a more sophisticated level, organisations seek contributions from funding organisations in the project development phases. Consequently Hastoe worked directly with funders to develop its projects including CF-S. Organisations may pay for consultants to undertake these activities, but such funding can be difficult to unearth and the results are not always guaranteed. Agencies such as Hastoe with substantial financial resources can afford to make this investment, but smaller and less well financed organisations are unlikely to have the capacity to do this. That these levels of resources, effort and expertise are necessary is indicative of the complexity and exclusivity of securing regeneration funding.

In research conducted by Lowndes and Skelcher a Government Officer describes how voluntary and community organisations are often excluded from the SRB process 'Small and specialised voluntary organisations haven't got the clout or understanding or strategic overview required by the SRB process' (1998:327). In any case the requirement by central government to have community and voluntary sector representatives on governance partnerships is essential within the new form of governance. Given that the types of discussions held in partnership meetings has the potential to be focused on administrative and bureaucratic procedures these may not make the best use of partners' skills. It may be better to allow the public sector officers to perform the functions that they do best such as report, administer and be accountable. This frees up community and voluntary representatives' time and so maximises their expertise by allowing them to be active in other areas. Their energies may be best placed identifying and working with their constituent groups in this way. And so the regeneration partnership would give consideration to participation that is relevant, that is *appropriate* involvement, the subject of the following section.

### **Relevant participation**

The extent of the participation of the community was more limited than the governance rhetoric suggests. Central government makes the claim that the SRB 'supports local people's capacity to participate in regeneration activities' (DETR, 1999a:2). The notion of striving to some sort of maximum degree of participation thus remains within regeneration practice. But such an approach takes little account of the fact that certain levels of participation may not always be appropriate. Not everyone will feel comfortable speaking at a public meeting, nor will developing ideas through group



discussion be attractive to all. Furthermore as Chapter Four revealed non-participation may be a rational choice and the result of an informed decision.

Full participation was never an objective of the CEP. In creating an organisational structure with groups with various functions, opportunities for involvement remained subject to individuals picking and choosing the amount that was appropriate to them. Thus peripheral involvement formed a core to the CEP. Given the design limitations of regeneration schemes such as the SRB programme, participation of the wider community (and specific groups therein) in their management structure could be seen as an inappropriate ambition. The current design and accompanying expertise requirements of these types of projects suggests that the management process is unlikely to ever be the suitable catalyst for full involvement.

Participating in the CEP Board involved individuals having the confidence to raise concerns within typically formal meetings. Not everyone possesses such self-assurance, but assuming that an individual is content to air their viewpoint through open meetings and discussion groups, regeneration projects require further skills and expertise to ensure even peripheral participation in the core functions i.e. management and implementation of activities. For instance, effectiveness of the CEP Board relied on Members discussing and monitoring the project's progress and strategic direction. However many meetings focused on procedural issues as Members struggled to grasp the intricacies of the SRB rules given the complexity of the implementation process. In the sense that it was supposed to be strategic the Board failed as it was pre-occupied with the detail of the project at the expense of the bigger picture. Not all individuals involved had sufficient skills to understand the bureaucratic procedures and so they struggled to participate as fully as possible at the strategic level due to preoccupation with SRB monitoring. There was a fundamental misunderstanding of the task in which they were participating as well as a barrier to their full participation. These individuals were therefore marginalised due to lack of expertise and insufficient comprehension of their role.

It was not only in the Board, but also in the Forum, that participants were confused about the limits of their participation. Consequently Forum meetings were often predominated by issues that were of general concern to the community, such as the threatened closure of the local hospital. The reality was that individuals were involved

in a regeneration scheme that was governed by rules determined outside of their community and led by the local authority. They were not, contrary to popular belief, participating in an all encompassing community activity.

This is also different to the rhetoric which claims that participation in regeneration activities leads to a form of participative democracy, as Shortall indicates 'their participative democracy is somewhat dubious' (2004:119). The evidence from my research suggests that achieving representation of a community will be tricky given the limits and constraints within which programmes typically operate. They are unlikely to appeal or be relevant to a single geographic community. Other factors must be considered.

Participation is often considered or measured solely in terms of how people get directly involved in the design, management and delivery of regeneration projects. As the discussion shows later this is an important consideration. However an additional means of assessing the extent of participation for the community in general may be through the benefits gained from the work of the different groups that receive funding from the project. In this way effective use is made of each group's expertise - voluntary groups are often better skilled and positioned to work with their community. Consulting through such groups provides a voice to disparate individuals from the community. Meanwhile the management group, in this case the Board, can maximise its time by concentrating on the implementation and development of the regeneration project. It can also ensure the interests of the community are represented through appropriate involvement from relevant agencies and/or the voluntary sector and their constituents. Thus while it appears attractive to jump on the bandwagon and claim participation of certain groups such as the socially excluded in regeneration committees, it may be more accurate and helpful to adopt a model that incorporates their interest at the *appropriate* level, without making claims to include them all at the management level. It is more important that they have some voice in the process. The challenge for regeneration partnerships is finding a mechanism that achieves this.

As a final point to this section it is important to state that relevant and appropriate input from the community is necessary at all levels including that of management. This avoids officials, professionals and others 'in the know' holding power and making key decisions as the group becomes wholly dependent on their regeneration skills and

expertise. Achieving this can create all sorts of tension and power games (see Chapter 5). Shucksmith (2000) warns that standard area regeneration initiatives may only reach the already powerful and in rural areas where the socially excluded are dispersed, area based intervention may be insufficient. A more targeted or innovative approach is thus required. Capacity building and skill development is essential to ensure that opportunities for individuals to participate are constantly created (Shortall and Shucksmith, 2001). Otherwise the group leading the project is in danger of being elitist and cut-off from the community that it seeks to represent, 'locking-in' individuals that have been involved from the outset and 'locking-out' those not involved. There is no guarantee that the latter group of individuals have a voice around the partnership table, directly or indirectly, and yet such groups are often mentioned in project rhetoric.

Appropriate participation, as Chapter Four discovered, consisted of varying degrees of involvement from full to none. Implicitly this is the approach that the local authority seemed to take, despite the rhetoric of wider involvement of the socially excluded. The following sections contemplate the nuances of participation.

#### **Positive non and peripheral participation**

The discussion above legitimises less than full participation along with non-participation and shows them as positive events. However, both of these conditions should be fully understood by the partnership to ensure that they do actually exist in a positive way; that is they result from rational choice or peripheral involvement. The latter occurs when an individual participates less than fully, but no barriers to full involvement are present.

Full non-participation through rational choice may indicate that an individual believes the initiative is not relevant to them or they are not attracted to the notion of rural development activities. However as O'Malley (2004) reveals it can also indicate that certain individuals believe particular regeneration activities and the requirements made by particular schemes do not respond to the needs of their community. Consequently they develop alternative schemes. This is a complicated matter and in the worst case scenario has the potential to result in spats within the community as schemes compete for the same funds. But it can also indicate a richness and diversity within a community as was found within Bures, where one group pursued the single issue of building a bridge while another sought funds to refurbish a village hall. Both projects

emerged from a shared desire to identify a project to mark the Millennium. In the end, while there was some competition between the groups, they both provided facilities for the benefit of the wider community through two distinct approaches.

Partnerships can also opt out of participation in regeneration schemes as they believe the rules, regulations and boundaries associated with such schemes, for instance the SRB, are not appropriate for them. Nonetheless such groups may carry out regeneration activities independent of such funding schemes. They face exclusion from these regeneration activities because they are not conducting their activity in a way that is advocated by funding agencies. Exploring the ramifications of this requires further research.

#### **Negative non and marginal participation**

Barriers to involvement produce involvement that is less than full and so those participating would ideally prefer to be more fully drawn in to the regeneration process but are prevented from doing so. The discussion cited expertise as a barrier to full involvement. Negative non-participation may also occur because individuals or groups have no knowledge of the activity or opportunities presented by regeneration. It is within these categories that the socially excluded exist and within the case studies analysed by my research this group remained elusive and vague.

For instance the CEP regularly referred to the excluded within the community and yet none of the groups governing the project ever focused on who these groups or individuals might be, or what the barriers to their involvement were. Similarly rhetoric within Hastoe was of working with disadvantaged rural communities without clearly defining what their characteristics were and how they could be identified. In many respects neither of these organisations can be blamed for this shortcoming as they patently fulfilled the requirements of the funding bodies. They simply did what they had to do in order to access particular funds and this did not necessitate a deep comprehension of excluded or marginal groups.

This has to be the responsibility of the funding bodies, ultimately of central government as it sets the policy agenda and writes the rules of rural development practice whether directly or by interpreting European regulations. This is where it should consider building the capacity of regeneration agencies so that they are better equipped not only to define excluded groups and individuals, but also to identify and

work with them. Otherwise the danger is of the emergence of a specific regeneration community which is active in a particular geographical location, but in reality involves a certain group of individuals and organisations who retain power at the expense of the excluded. Excluded groups and individuals may be included if their voice is represented, but under current regeneration structures this is not assured.

### **Micro-politics**

Stripping the rhetoric away from rural regeneration practice and considering it at its simplest level, it involves a group of individuals coming together to work on a particular initiative. How they interact is critical to achieving larger policy ideals. Chapter Five revealed that individuals engage in numerous and varied power games, all of which impact on the direction of the group. Micro-politics were identified as the intangibles that result from rural development group interaction. Basic group procedures and subsequently group activity are in turn affected by these group processes. Micro-politics include power tactics employed within groups, individual behaviour, meeting norms, trust and motivation. Hence a myriad of subtleties and nuances surround their very existence. Very simple matters including the words that people use, the clothes they wear, their life experiences and personal motivations are significant to group interaction. The choice of agenda items and the way in which decisions are made are often the result of power games by individuals who manipulate these processes within the group. For example, they may use their status to suppress discussion of controversial topics. Alternatively crucial decisions are taken outside meetings by a select few group members.

Communication was found to be more than a mechanism for conveying information; it is part of the process of rural development. Language is used to impress others and results in various interpretations being made by group members. It can also create divisions as specialist language is used and those without the relevant technical expertise are excluded from the process. Power may thus be exerted within a group in a subtle and hidden manner. Astute groups and group members are able to participate more in the development process as their awareness of these issues erodes barriers that other members attempt to reinforce or create.

With so many variables at play at any one point in time it is difficult to be prescriptive about managing micro-politics. Indeed the complexities ensure that prescription is inappropriate – nothing is as it seems, with performance, language and general

personal styles all concealing more complex power struggles. The strength of power lies in the perception of those being dominated, if they stop believing other actors have power or can dominate, the others' instantly become less threatening and their position is undermined. If funding agencies remain the powerful actor in regeneration and partnership body weak, such power relationships are likely to endure. Governments create policies that eventually become activities to be funded at the community level. Shrewd and pro-active community groups will continue to engage in the regeneration game to achieve their ultimate objective even if a lesser number of groups protest and opt out.

Groups deliberate over issues that are important to them. Individuals with a lot of drive and motivation tend to lead them and use certain tactics to ensure that their own, often personal, agenda is met. Hence many such groups do not want to be involved in policy development or have no interest in what is going on at the regional level. For locally based organisations, their primary objective is often to provide a locally based service. As one of the community representatives stated 'sustainable development – communities do not do this. We think in terms of: what have we got and what do we need?'(C). As long as this complements the 'bigger' policy picture then no problem exists, but it demonstrates that the community is not necessarily concerned with government's wider policy objectives.

Individuals may choose to participate in regeneration on a voluntary basis through personal motivation such as personal interest in the issue being addressed (Hayward et al, 2003), a sense of altruism or for more selfish reasons. Meanwhile individuals from professional organisations get involved in issues that are relevant to the interests of their organisation. If individuals' involvement in the group is not fulfilling personal or professional needs or is an unpleasant experience then they are unlikely to continue to support the work of the regeneration group. Alternatively individuals may feel they are being used to further another person's power games or to serve as a pawn in another organisation's plans to access regeneration funds. These intangible, but important micro-politics influence involvement at the very local level. They are significant as they influence the type of individuals that comprise the regeneration community and determine involvement in regeneration activities. Negative micro-politics can hamper a group's progress as time is spent going over old ground,

repeating past discussions or revisiting existing decisions. Consequently the overall aims of the group become sidelined as politicking takes precedence.

### **The regeneration community**

A certain type of individual – professional or voluntary – will get involved in rural regeneration: the processes involved will not appeal to everyone. Chapters Four and Five show many individuals are tied up with the business of their everyday lives and have no time or desire to get involved in the development of their area, albeit in social, economic or environmental terms. They may also feel under the threat of being 'locked-in' where those who get involved at the start of a project find no easy way of ever disentangling themselves. This is reinforced by the fact that the 'usual suspects' (Taylor, 1997:31) tend to end up on partnership boards and committees, and so the same faces re-appear within regeneration activities.

In the context of rural regeneration the community is regularly perceived as a homogenous group of individuals, referring to the mass of people that live in a particular area. By merit of the fact that they live in a certain community they are deemed suitable for involvement in community regeneration. Getting a number of individuals to take part may constitute adequate demonstration of the representation of a community. This can be anyone who is connected with an area, professionally or personally, and regeneration normally requires that economic, social and environmental interests are taken into account. Such legitimacy is often required by funders or other participating agencies as a condition of their involvement. However, the practice of participation is very specific – in the CEP it involved a particular type of activity managed in a certain way, requiring precise skills, undertaken by a limited number of individuals abiding by particular rules – and yet it claimed to occur in the name of the geographic communities of Sudbury and Great Cornard.

Just as it is assumed the community is homogenous, there is a general belief that professionals that take part in community participation are alike and that as a general mass they are the 'haves' or the power-holders. In fact many different agencies participate, from voluntary-based development agencies such as volunteer bureaux, to officers from local authorities. In between is a range of officers and managers drawn from organisations such as health agencies, housing associations and development agencies. Not all of these individuals participate on an equal basis, nor are they all

working to the same agenda. History, resources and personality all affect the way in which they take part and the perceived legitimacy of that participation.

Consequently regeneration activities appeal to and attract some, but not all agencies and individuals operating in the regeneration environment. Involvement from the wider community in rural development does not therefore refer to a complete representative or democratic portion of the community, although rhetoric can suggest that this is the case. Instead representatives of the regeneration community participate in these types of activities. The reality is that groups claiming to do things in the name of their community, such as the groups studied in Thurston or Stradbroke, are acting on behalf of a regeneration community rather than a community that is geographic or otherwise.

### **6.1.3 Conclusions**

My basic research problem was to explore the rhetoric and reality of policy and practice. A gap between rhetoric and reality was found to exist in both rural policy and within its practice.

The findings from the research conducted in East Anglia from 1999-2000 remain relevant today. The publication from the CF-S Action Research Project remains in circulation by the Countryside Agency. It is promoted by this Agency along with Hastoe Housing Association and the Housing Corporation as a Good Practice Guide for regeneration relevant to Agencies and communities engaged in these activities.

However other policy documents indicate the relevance of this research. DEFRA's (2004) Review of the Rural White Paper seeks to review the rural policy set out by government in 2001. This publication recognises 'improving governance and delivery arrangements' (2004:9) as a key challenge for the future. The review goes on to state that 'Government may need to explore the role of organisations other than parish councils if it is to deliver its objectives. Greater recognition is needed of the role the voluntary and community sector and other organisations play in delivery in rural areas' (2004:92). Hence the role of the various agencies within rural governance is recognized. Some of the gaps of past policy are documented including the promotion of communities and the lack of detail around the support for this. The report recognises that 'the rationale was not entirely clear and no thought had been given to implementation when Defra came into being' (DEFRA, 2004:92).



The role of the community, local areas and groups is also strengthened by new European Rural Policy. In July 2004 the Commission adopted a proposal to reinforce the European Union's rural development policy and to simplify its implementation. This proposal introduces a combined rural and agricultural fund, the European Agriculture Rural Development Fund (EARDF) where 'Member States, regions and local action groups will have more say in attuning programmes to local needs' (EC, 2004). Within this latest policy a new role exists for LEADER with a minimum of 7% of national programme funding retained for the implementation of local development strategies of local action groups through this initiative. Correspondingly the insight this research provides on the practicalities of working with communities in rural regeneration partnerships will be of relevance to future policy programmes and to rural regeneration communities.

As the above policy developments illustrate, the rhetoric of rural policy continues to advocate the importance of governance through partnership, with a prominent role for local groups and the community. My basic research problem was to explore the rhetoric and reality of policy and practice. Essentially a gap between rhetoric and reality is present in both rural policy and its practice.

The reality of regeneration is that a regeneration community exists which undertakes activities in the name of that community. Other members of that community opt out for numerous reasons, but that does not make them less of a member of their community. Community representation and participation therefore is a relative, rather than an absolute concept. Representatives are drawn from a pool of groups or individuals who are interested, willing and able to get involved. They are not constrained by personal choice or by barriers to participation. Participating in regeneration requires communities to jump through many obstacles. They are often obliged to undertake activities and use unfamiliar techniques such as community appraisals. It is simply viewed as a way in which funds may be accessed; as a means to an end. Consequently the regeneration community has particular skills, expertise and is willing to play the game which includes engaging the regeneration techniques and technologies advocated by funders. In summary the processes of regeneration are bureaucratic and intricate requiring very specialist knowledge and expertise.

Typically astute regeneration groups use the rules to achieve their objectives. They adopt a pragmatic approach to new initiatives, dressing their projects up to reflect the objectives and requirements of funders, paying lip service to certain issues as necessary. Often the odds are stacked against them - lack of experience, few resources and little time. They are forced to take part in a game where the rules are written by policymakers who, while expert in the principles of regeneration, may have little experience of the *practice* of regeneration or the process of transforming policy to practice. Pressure to come up with new ideas and approaches to old problems encourages shortcuts to be taken and consequently initiatives are inherently flawed. Time, risk aversion and lack of resources and expertise militate against real opportunities to experiment with participation. Hence policy initiatives often advocate risk averse and inappropriate, inflexible approaches with too little time to develop the skills and capacity required to implement them (Taylor, 2000b). Politics play an important role and so schemes become too important to fail. A real danger from adopting risk averse strategies is that pseudo-government activities are encouraged within the rural development framework. Consequently past examples are replicated and creativity and truly local solutions are curbed.

Official documentation and accountability requirements can reinforce and preserve existing systems of control. 'The complexity of accountability requirements ensures that power remains with those who have the sophistication and resources to understand and cope with these demands, and who effectively act as interpreters of the boundaries within which any partnership can operate.' (Taylor, 2000b:1024) In the case of the CEP it was the local authority that had the expertise to deal with the demands of the SRB reporting system as they directly employed the manager and also provided the services of their financial personnel. Being directly accountable for the finances of the initiative, they were conscious of only doing tasks that were capable of being audited. In so doing they contributed to the development of partnerships obsessed by undertaking essential processes in auditable ways (Power, 1997). This was at the expense of taking risks and employing innovative approaches to engage with those existing beyond the regeneration community. This also resulted in the creation of a partnership whose culture mimicked that of a local authority.

Consequently capacity building was one-sided with voluntary groups and community representatives having to adapt to fit in with the prevailing style of the group.

Community capacity is recognised by DEFRA (2004) as a goal in itself. However, this is one side of the concept, the other being the capacity of statutory organisations and regeneration agencies. They require training and assistance so that they have a better understanding of how local groups operate, how to identify different interest groups within a community, the importance of personalities within group activity and how to engage with these groups. Otherwise the issue of clarity around social exclusion and engaging with the community as identified in the Review of the White Paper will reappear in another three years time.

Government has created complex rural regeneration rhetoric of inclusion, empowerment, representation and participation; all in the name of rural governance. Clarity around a lot of these issues is required by government so that local authority and other regeneration agency staff working with local communities have some level of understanding of what is meant by these concepts. However, the pressure on communities to implement policy ideals such as sustainable development must be carefully considered. Although such rhetoric may resonate with policy gurus, it does not necessarily apply at the community group level where individuals wish to enjoy their participation in an activity that motivates them personally. Policy needs to be applicable in a practical and achievable way rather than be shrouded in rhetoric that is removed from reality. Policy concepts featuring in rural policy, for instance social capital (DEFRA, 2004) should be clearly defined and in a way that is meaningful to local groups.

Ultimately the grandness of the rhetoric of community based activity vanishes at the group level where mundane issues such as personality clashes, friendships and personal power missions dominate proceedings. Rural development reality, as this study has shown, is something which does not necessarily correspond with all policy ideals.

### **The future**

Regeneration partnerships continue to operate within strict funding regimes with specific rules whether administered from Europe and/or via central government such as DEFRA. While partnerships are dependent on government funding their degree of autonomy will always be limited. While new modes of governance represent a new way of working with shared responsibilities; the degree of autonomy and power sharing is possibly not as equal among partners as government rhetoric would suggest.

Ultimately partnerships are dominated by a few powerful partners that are in turn beholden to agencies in charge of budgets.

Consequently while partnership funding is used as a mechanism for bringing disparate groups together, funders need to be aware of the pressures that this places on these organisations. There should be mechanisms in place to allow for the time taken to establish and develop relationships, before undue pressure is placed on a partnership to deliver results. Due to current financial inflexibility and short time limits within current regimes, Carley et al (2000) call for stakeholders to develop a more innovative approach to partnership funding in the urban context, this is true also for rural areas. Attention therefore needs to be given to the groups and individuals that are not participating as well as those who are.

In the medium term, partnerships seem to be a fixed feature of rural regeneration. However the extent to which they are an effective form of rural governance is not clear. There does not seem to be any single formula to control the nature of emerging governance frameworks vis-à-vis partnerships – even where projects are funded under the same scheme, diverse approaches and structures can emerge. Such diversity is not necessarily a bad thing, but it does highlight the multiple and varied meanings given to partnership and the potential for the term to be mis-used with disparities between territories emerging. This suggests that local circumstances are highly important and merit close examination.

Nor does there appear to be a quality check on the emerging style of governance from agencies [mostly government] encouraging this approach. Agencies funding rural regeneration often measure the success of individual projects in terms of outputs, but less often do they explicitly review the effectiveness of governance structures, even though rhetoric places emphasis on process issues such as community capacity. It is more common for funders to request membership from specific agencies and organisations – but this does not guarantee meaningful working relationships or interaction. CF-S met the requirements placed by funders over its steering group membership but this group primarily became a point of contact for the individuals involved and a means of ‘information exchange’ (SG) with strategic project decisions being taken by a small minority of the partners.

Policymakers' and funders' apparent lack of concern with the quality of partnerships suggests that they are under pressure to generate them in large numbers, without consideration to the process through which they operate. As a result having access to a professional or expert ensures that some partnerships are better equipped to compete in regeneration. Such support is typically provided in an ad hoc way and often groups are self-selecting and self-promoting. Consequently power may continue to lie in the hands of a few. Or as Herbert-Cheshire et al comment, communities 'that pursue the 'wrong' development...are consequently deemed as non-responsible communities undeserving of outside support' (2004:300).

Rural development and regeneration policy continues to advocate an integrated and strategic approach with sustained involvement from local communities. However, shrewd communities will access funds at the expense of others whose need may be equally great. Regeneration processes become funding-led as a practical response to resource scarcity. This will continue unless agencies are better equipped to engage in a meaningful way with communities. By its very nature governing through partnerships is a political process.

The current 'lottery' (Stoker, 2002: 417) approach to policy raises issues about how successful approaches can be identified and mainstreamed. If the government is serious about pursuing a new governance style, it is imperative that mechanisms to evaluate and review governance processes exist. Otherwise rural governance will remain sporadic, and opportunities to harness the most effective methods will be lost. The notion of how to engage with the community will remain elusive.

Individuals and organisations writing the rules of rural redevelopment need to appreciate and support the management of micro-politics. Otherwise issues of power, representation and involvement will continue to hinder progress at the very local level. Continuing to hide reality by using 'window dressings' and 'smoke screens' identified by Taylor (2000b:1025) will only serve to exclude those already excluded, placing more power in the hands of the powerful members of rural communities. My research set out to explore the rhetoric and reality of policy and practice. It found a gap between rhetoric and reality in rural policy and regeneration practice. Unless closed the exclusions, barriers and problems outlined above will continue to prevail within

rural development structures, hampering the progress and activity of rural development agents.

## **7 Appendix One: Case study profiles**

This Appendix provides a profile of each of communities found within the Communities First-Suffolk Case Study. A brief socio-economic account is presented before describing the main aims of regeneration policy for each community. Finally, a summary is given outlining the key changes that occurred over the three year period during which the research was conducted.

### **7.1.1 Stradbroke**

#### **Socio-economic profile**

Located in the mid-Suffolk district, Stradbroke is situated with Norwich to the north and Ipswich lying south meanwhile Lowestoft and Bury St. Edmunds lie to the east and west. All of these towns are about thirty miles distant. Stradbroke has the appearance of a traditional Suffolk village, the main street featuring Suffolk Pink cottages alongside Tudor buildings. There are no large market towns nearby and so many of the surrounding villages use Stradbroke for facilities and services, only going further afield when necessary. Public transport is inadequate with most people relying on private transport for their journeys. No major roads pass through or are close to Stradbroke; it is surrounded by a network of narrow, often single tracked, roads.

Consequently, although Stradbroke has a population of just over 1000 people it has many facilities. These include a high school, primary school, bowls club, medical centre, tennis courts, football field, cricket pitch, children's play area, fire station, indoor swimming pool, gym and community centre. In addition there are several shops, including a post office, bakery, butcher and hardware store, a couple of churches and three pubs in the village. There is a mixture of housing provision made up of council estates, old and new middle income private estates and a few luxury housing units. Although some residents work in agriculture and agricultural related sectors, many travel to Ipswich and Norwich for service based employment while some commute to the city of London.

#### **Community regeneration activity**

The Village Project Steering group conducted regeneration activity on behalf of the community. Its membership included parish council representatives along with local

residents, a headmaster and the vicar. The health authority, local authority and Hastoe Housing Association were also represented.

Health was the key driving force to Stradbroke's community activity. Some local residents felt that they wanted to influence existing and future service provision relating to health. They were concerned that decisions were being made by agencies remotely on the basis of general county level information. They believed that the provision of data specific to Stradbroke could inform policy makers and ultimately service provision. Eventually a questionnaire was drawn up incorporating much broader issues including transport, housing, safety, services, quality of life and health.

In contrast to many communities that use an off-the-shelf package where questions are selected from and results fed into a computer package, the Stradbroke Project spent 16 months designing their own questionnaire. This meant that the process of choosing questions was less structured than would have been with a computerised appraisal package as there was no set framework from which to choose questions. The risk of omitting complete subject areas was therefore increased.

Four themed public meetings were held to discuss the findings from the questionnaire and options for moving forward. The topics were housing, transport, health & well-being and health & ill-health. In addition to the motivation issue of health, housing emerged as an important issue for Stradbroke during their regeneration activities. During this time a new development of 'affordable' homes was built. These houses cost much more than most residents could afford and raised consternation among the community.

The steering group sought endorsement from the parish council. Following a number of public meetings the parish council concluded that the steering group would become one of their informal committees. In the future the steering group would oversee projects emerging from the appraisal, reporting back to the parish council on a regular basis. The role of the steering group changed from action to co-ordination.

#### **Changes in Stradbroke**

- A housing task group was created with the remit of addressing the shortage of affordable housing in the village of Stradbroke.



- Supporting information was given to a bid co-ordinated by Age Concern in conjunction with Diss and District Transport Service to provide dial-a-ride, brokerage and a number of vehicles.
- Extra GP appointments were made available.
- The Gym used information from public meetings to inform its plans to enhance gym facilities.
- Plans were developed to pursue a healthy walking project.
- The village agreed to undertake a Village Design Statement.
- A successful application was made to the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages Scheme.

### **7.1.2 Great Cornard**

#### **Socio-economic profile**

Sudbury and Great Cornard are adjacent settlements found in South Suffolk, south of Ipswich, with reasonable proximity to London.

Approximately 8000 people live in the village of Gt. Cornard, which is made up of an older Victorian style village and a newer overspill settlement. The older part of the village consists of predominantly Victorian housing with facilities including a church, pub, barbershop and newsagents. These are inadequate for the population with most residents travelling to neighbouring Sudbury for their weekly provisions.

Overspill housing for London was built during the 1960s causing the population to expand greatly. The resulting accommodation consists mainly of short, parallel terraces of four to six fairly small houses, such as the Anglia Estate. At the time the research was conducted Babergh District Council was responsible for these houses and was on the verge of completing an upgrade on many, but not all, of them, as the 'Right to Buy' was exercised on some.

Many community activities revolve round the Stevenson Centre, also built during the 1960s. In addition to a primary and upper school, the village has a theatre located at the upper school.

Great Cornard lies beside Sudbury which has a population of just under 12,000 people. Sudbury is a thriving market town with a variety of shops in the centre and many other

facilities round about, including a leisure centre, theatre, restaurants, pubs and churches. Out of necessity most residents in Great Cornard go to Sudbury to access services and facilities. In addition the town acts as an important employment, shopping and cultural centre for many more people from the rural hinterland.

As a result of its geographic location many residents commute to London and so their salaries, which are high relative to local earnings, mean that house prices are pushed beyond the reach of many residents. Typically the more affluent choose to live in Sudbury and as the town attracts more residents, house prices are raised further, more people are drawn to the town, and so the cycle continues. Gt. Cornard has a scruffier appearance to its pristine neighbour, Sudbury which has streets and buildings evoking a 'chocolate box' image of Suffolk.

To the stranger passing by it would be difficult to identify the dividing line between Gt. Cornard village and the town of Sudbury. However, there is no mistaking the existence of a difference, least of all in the private housing market with houses in Sudbury commanding higher prices than their equivalent in Gt. Cornard.

The local economy was viewed by Babergh District Council as being 'extremely fragile and over-dependent upon a large branch plant automotive engineering facility' (p. 4 SRB bid). The relative prosperity enjoyed in the surrounding hinterland and elsewhere in South Suffolk had a masking effect on this area. Consequently a general lack of long-term investment resulted in a poor transportation network, lack of modern healthcare facilities and inadequate sewerage and drainage systems.

#### **Community regeneration activity**

Two main regeneration initiatives existed within the Great Cornard and Sudbury areas; the Great Cornard Community Action Plan Group and the Sudbury and Great Community Energy Project (CEP), a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funded project.

The CEP was a partnership between about 50 different agencies (including parish and town councils and local authorities) with a remit in the area of Sudbury and Great Cornard; the lead 'partner' was Babergh DC. The East of England Development

Agency allocated £450,000 to this project for a capacity building programme over a three year period. By the time partner contributions were accounted for the value of the project exceeded £1million. The spur for this scheme came from the local authority. Blamed by the local population for neglecting the area above all others within their remit, accusations came to a head when a tenant was killed during a fire on the Anglia Estate. Bad publicity led to political pressure to do something about the conditions on the estates with a direct and immediate outcome being the housing refurbishment scheme.

The needs of the area remained at the forefront of the Council's radar as they developed plans to undertake a wider and longer term improvement programme. This was spurred by various reports and statistics including 'Suffolk County Council's Anti-Poverty profile which showed that whilst containing only 3% of the County's population, they [Sudbury and Gt. Cornard] comprise 20% of the poorest and most deprived wards in Suffolk. Similarly a report from the Director of Public Health in 1996 based on Standardised Mortality Rates identified the Sudbury and Cornard wards as being within the 20 worst in the whole county (p4, SRB submission). An application to secure SRB funding was one element of this strategy and was viewed as a co-ordinated strategy to being to address deep-seated problems facing the community.

Meanwhile the Community Action Plan project had been ongoing for approximately four years. The steering group included members of the parish council and local residents. Project activity was stagnant as data gathered from a community needs analysis questionnaire circulated a couple of years prior had not yet been analysed. It was expected that funding from the CEP would progress the CAP analysis, although this never materialised during the research period.

#### **Changes in Great Cornard**

In addition to specific project achievements through the CEP, more subtle and intangible outputs occurred. These are detailed below.

- Over £200,000 was spent on community projects since the beginning of the CEP including project workers to lead the provision of a drop-in centre, a detailed health needs assessment and a Homecare Service

- Whereas in the past there was a lot of fragmentation the communities of Gt. Cornard and Sudbury began a new era of working together
- The actual creation of a partnership between agencies working in the area to improve facilities and services was viewed locally as a major accomplishment.
- There was much more knowledge among agencies about what current activities – the CEP structures contributed to ongoing information exchange and project development. The perceived ad hoc structure of agency activity no longer predominated, this fact being explicitly acknowledged by local groups. Consequently resources should be used more efficiently.

### **7.1.3 Thurston**

#### **Socio-economic profile**

Thurston lies close to Bury St Edmunds just off the A14 on the Ipswich-Cambridge hi-tech corridor; a region earmarked by the Regional Development Agency, EEDA for future development. A dispersed population of 3,000 live in a variety of accommodation – a council estate, affordable and luxury housing, as well as mid-range homes, many of which were built during 1970s. Hastoe Housing Association built 14 shared ownership properties in 1997 and continues to manage these properties.

The village contains a post office, garage and car showroom, bakery, butchers, railway station, primary and upper schools, community centre and pavilion. These are spread around the village, making it difficult to locate a central focus.

Access to Bury St Edmunds is straightforward with a regular bus service providing connections. Unlike many other villages in England, Thurston faced rapid growth and so the residents endeavoured to secure more facilities and services. A new library was built and completed in 2001.

#### **Community regeneration activity**

The Community Action Plan Steering group was responsible for managing Thurston's appraisal. Made up of parish councillors, representatives from local groups (WI, environmental group, the school) and external agencies, it constructed, distributed and analysed a questionnaire in the village. The steering group operated under the endorsement of the parish council and retained close links through a mutual chair. Having completed the appraisal process the group held a public meeting to discuss the

results. Response to this meeting attracted mainly older and retired members of the community.

A driving force behind the appraisal was the absence of a doctors' surgery. Many individuals felt strongly that Thurston should have one and this issue motivated them to instigate the appraisal. Health facilities and housing were raised extensively at the public meeting where many of those attending stated that they did not wish to see any further housing development in the village, ever.

#### **Changes in Thurston**

- Plans to develop a skateboarding project by young people
- Establishment of a new group to manage the refurbishment of the play area
- Discussions with the Primary Care Group about meeting primary care needs vis-à-vis the absence of a doctors' surgery
- Successful application to the Countryside Agency Vital Villages scheme for the implementation of the action plan

### **7.1.4 Bures**

#### **Socio-economic profile**

Containing many colourful and rendered houses, Bures straddles the Suffolk and Essex border. The village is made up of Bures Hamlet in Essex and Bures St. Mary in Suffolk, known collectively as Bures. The village appears well kept and is fairly typical of the middle to high income population predominating South Suffolk. It has a total population of about 1300 and has many amenities including a village hall, a couple of churches, several pubs, post office, hair stylists, police station, garage, doctors' surgery and a number of shops. A railway station provides connections to the mainline and so many people can and do commute to London.

A full range of accommodation is found in the village including affordable housing, small luxury developments and mid-range bungalows and houses. Residents seem content with this mix of housing stock as no protests were raised at the high cost of the newest luxury homes built in the village. Balanced against this Hastoe was negotiating with a local landowner and the local authority about the potential to build some affordable homes in the village.

### **Community regeneration activity**

CF-S had contact with three regeneration groups in Bures; the Village Hall Refurbishment Group, the Footbridge Group and the Village Appraisal Group. Both the Village Hall Refurbishment Group and the Footbridge Group emerged during 1999 as a response to a call for project ideas that would celebrate the millennium. Some members perceived a degree of competition between the groups as they sought to raise funds to achieve their objectives. In any case both projects found enough support locally to allow them to continue meeting and so progress their objectives.

The Footbridge Group was made up of representatives of the parish council as well as residents from the village. None of the group members had extensive prior experience of developing community-based projects. They worked hard to ensure adequate local participation so that more local organisations, including the local school, got involved. They successfully raised funds for the project and ultimately the project had five elements – a footbridge; a landing stage and picnic area; boards interpreting flora and fauna on the riverside; hardsurface footpaths; and a walks guide. This enhanced the facilities in the village by complementing the nearby football field and recreational area.

The parish councils were working with Suffolk ACRE, Hastoe and the Community Council of Essex on a Village Appraisal encompassing economic, social and environmental issues. The appraisal, due to take place following the research period, was expected to identify topics for further development. Meanwhile the Village Hall Refurbishment Group continued to raise funds to complete its objectives.

### **Changes in Bures**

- Increased capacity of footbridge steering group members to develop community initiatives
- Increased involvement of residents of Bures in community activity
- Creation of a footbridge linking the Essex and Suffolk aspects of the village, increasing access to the village hall
- Community Action Plan conducted
- Detailed Housing Needs Survey conducted

## 7.1.5 Brandon

### Socio-economic profile

The market town of Brandon lies in the extreme north of Forest Heath District with the Little Ouse flowing through the town and forming the boundary between Norfolk and Suffolk. Brandon was important historically as the crossroads of the routes between the ancient settlements of Kings Lynn, Bury St. Edmunds, Swaffham and Newmarket. This position, once the source of prosperity, is today seen as the reason for decline as it is no longer a busy travelling route. Brandon has become distant from everywhere.

As with most market towns Brandon has many shops and facilities, including a new supermarket, as well as pubs and churches, a community hall and railway station to support its population of just under 9000 people. The US Airforce base at Lakenheath is nearby and this contributes to Brandon's economy.

### Community regeneration activity

Although a Community Action Group had completed an appraisal, an impasse existed about how to proceed. The appraisal revealed that the majority of residents felt that Brandon was a less pleasant place to live now than ten years ago. It is possible that this discontent led to general apathy towards, and disbelief of, positive change. Suffolk ACRE worked very closely with the group to address the results of the appraisal.

Parallel to this a Single Regeneration Budget bid was developed for the Thetford and Brandon area. This was successful and combined with the existing *Fit for the Future* partnership to form the *Keystone Community Partnership* whose funding from the East of England Development Agency for the period 1997-2007 amounted to £6.5 million. In addition this partnership was responsible for managing the successful Market Town Initiative (MTI) bid and various streams of European Union funding. A range of partners were involved including local authorities, housing associations, health authorities, local learning and skills councils and local community groups.

### Changes in Brandon

- New Economics Foundation training and support event using Quality of Life Indicators methodology
- Identification of priorities and action

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