'A lot of friends. A lot of appreciation and a phone that never stops ringing': Voluntary action and social exclusion in East London - a pilot study

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December 2000

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

This is an exploratory study of factors involved in voluntary action for twelve people in East London identified as 'community leaders'. We interviewed them about their volunteering experiences, how they became involved and what sustained and inhibited their participation. We suggest some tentative implications for public policy and practice.

Our investigation is prompted by policy debate on how people's voluntary action in their communities can be increased and how this can contribute to combating social exclusion and promoting social inclusion. The policy questions are set beside a broad and fast-growing literature which we have attempted to map in outline (section 2). From this review, supplemented by our professional knowledge in some areas, we crystallise questions for investigation (section 3). Within this scope, we inquire into the relationship between voluntary action and people's views of the place where they live, prompted by findings in Davis Smith (1998a).

The interviews were set in communities ranking as among the most deprived in the UK and demonstrating features of social exclusion. The issues raised were wide-ranging, and the participants' experiences were explored in depth. We aimed, as a pilot study, to gain understanding of people's experiences and help formulate research questions for future systematic study.

Our analysis of the interviews (section 4) discusses:

• what motivated or triggered individuals' voluntary activity, how it was shaped and supported by institutional and individual factors;

• what lessons can be drawn for policy and practice, how state and public agencies can enable people to be involved in voluntary action in their communities.

From this analysis we explore implications for current thinking, contributing to development of theory related to the policy debate, and suggest fruitful lines of investigation for future research (section 5).

2. CONCEPTS IN POLICY AND RESEARCH

A literature of policy concepts, theoretical development and empirical research is growing rapidly with complex interconnections. In this paper we sketch-map the conceptual frameworks and bodies of knowledge which help frame current policy propositions. The literature has multiple roots and tendrils leading in different directions to many subjects and disciplines, and here we can only indicate areas of inquiry and, within them, some key points and examples of relevant research.

2.1 Policy development

Volunteering or voluntary action has generally been regarded in the UK as a good in terms of public policy throughout the development of the modern state as a means of advancing and complementing public provision of services and a cause for individual satisfaction (eg, Beveridge 1948). The New Labour Government of Tony Blair has made the encouragement of voluntary activity a central feature in its programmes, though its thinking is not spelt out in theoretical or practical detail. There is not a comprehensive rationale such as that of Beveridge (1948).

People's voluntary involvement is attributed a fundamental place in the individual's relations with society. In what he proclaimed as 'my first speech as Prime Minister' - on the Aylesbury Estate, Southwark (2 June 1997) - Tony Blair (1997a) talked of the need for a 'radical shift in our values and attitudes':

> 'The 1960s were the decade of "anything goes". The 1980s were a time of "who cares?". The next decade will be defined by a simple idea: "we are all in this together." It will be about how to recreate the bonds of civic society and community in a way compatible with the far more individualistic nature of modern economic, social and cultural life.'

> 'The basis of this modern civic society is an ethic of mutual responsibility or duty. It is something for something. A society where we play by the rules. You only take out if you put in. That's the bargain.'

Among eight bullet points of 'concrete terms' (which covered welfare, employment, education, crime, discrimination) was:

> 'We should engage the interest and commitment of the whole of the community to tackle the desperate need for urban regeneration.'

As he expanded on the 'ethic of responsibility', he proposed to back the 'thousands of "social entrepreneurs" - those people who bring to social problems the same enterprise and imagination that business entrepreneurs bring the wealth creation':

> 'There are people on every housing estate who have it in themselves to be community leaders ...';

and community leaders in his definition included police officers and church leaders as well as the 'person who sets up a leisure centre'.

He featured voluntary activity at greater length in addressing the annual conference of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations in January 1999. He called for the millennium to be marked by an 'explosion in giving' and looked for people to define the nature of society by their involvement (Blair 1999).

The New Labour Government's promotion of volunteering has been carried forward through its Millennium Volunteers programme (Locke and Davis Smith 2000), locally based demonstration projects, Time Bank and other initiatives, co-ordinated through the Home Office Active Community Unit. Policy for community self-help has been formulated by Policy Action Team 9 (Home Office 1999), aiming to increase the amount of volunteering and community activity in poor neighbourhoods, and set in a strategy for neighbourhood renewal developed through the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU 2000).

Howlett and Locke (1999), analysing Blair's NCVO address and the literature of the Blair Project, show that its underlying concept of the Third Way (eg, Giddens 1999) has voluntary action as central. Through voluntary involvement in their communities, individuals would redefine relationships between citizens and the state. These relations would not be static, but potentially progressive and improvable. Voluntary involvement would build social capital, trust and capacity for associating, and would lead to a transformation of relationships between individuals and between individuals and the state, heightening trust and cohesion.

This policy debate relies on notions of 'social capital', which can be accumulated within 'civil society', and of 'social exclusion', which can be combated through people's voluntary action and recognition of responsibilities, and we turn to this literature below.

Terms

Before proceeding, we need to clarify our usage of the phrase 'voluntary action'. The terms of the policy debate about volunteering or voluntary action have shifted in the period of the new Labour Government. Previous policy, such as the Major Government's Make a Difference initiative (Davis Smith 1998b), was focused on 'volunteering' as a definable phenomenon, but the Blair Government's policy development is crossing boundaries between volunteering and activities described, variously, as 'community involvement', 'community development' and 'public participation' (see below). As just noted, Blair's Aylesbury Estate speech includes as 'community leaders' people engaged in their paid employment as well as those working voluntarily.

The currency of the words used is changing. 'Volunteering' and 'voluntary action' have been familiar terms, each having slightly different usages, which could be a matter for argument, though not clearly or consistently so. For a while, it seemed as though the Blair Government's preferred term was 'voluntary <u>activity</u>' which could be interpreted as a lowest common denominator among terms; it does not carry the undercurrent of activism in 'voluntary action' or the more established and institutionalised aspect of 'volunteering'. The responsible Home Office Minister Alun Michael referred to 'voluntary activity' (Michael 1998). Tony Blair initially spoke of the Giving Age. However, most recently the phrase 'community involvement' has been preferred, implying more reciprocity than the 'giving age' but also directing attention - intentionally or not - to concepts of community and community development.

We note that for the purpose of this study we are concerned with community leaders who were <u>voluntarily</u> active in the sense of acting of their own volition and unpaid. We are calling this 'voluntary action', 'voluntary involvement' and 'volunteering' - though, as we found, some of our interviewees described it differently.

2.2 Conceptual frameworks

Behind the policy debate lies a tangle of themes including not only the 'big ideas' of social capital, civil society and social exclusion but also the practical methods of developing voluntary action and community involvement. The key concepts of the policy debate such as 'social capital', 'civil society' and 'social exclusion' are ambiguous, and the competing definitions and analyses require more space than we can give them here. Literatures on these topics have been recently reviewed by a number of writers: for example, Powell and Guerin (1997) review literature on civil society and citizenship as a basis for their inquiry into voluntarism in Ireland, and Hall (1999) as a basis for assessing social capital in

the UK through memberships of voluntary organisations, whilst Smith (1998) draws on a history of ideas as a context for a focus on East London.[1]

Empirical research on this group of topics has tended to concentrate on the more public manifestations of these phenomena and on quantitative exercises to assess the civic state of the USA. Central - and emblematic - is Putnam who in 'Bowling alone' (1995) compared statistics for people's games of bowling in the USA, comparing club and individual participation, and concluded that the country's civil society was on the wane; the discussion of Putnam's hypotheses and reworking of data from a range of sources have become an industry in North American academe.[2]

However, the research about volunteering or voluntary action and about community involvement or participation tends to feature often small scale and detailed empirical evidence at the levels of individual action and of voluntary organisations and local authorities, offering technical guidance on policy and practice.

Here, we attempt briefly to outline the background for the current study in terms both the 'big ideas' and more detailed evidence and to signpost the links into different bodies on literature, which may be drawn on for future research and for development of policy and practice. At the end of this section, we offer a synthesis of the propositions underlying the promotion of voluntary action.

Civil society

The arena for this debate is currently hegemonically conceived as 'civil society'. Broadly, this refers to parts of society which are:

- not commercial or business or market
- not state or public sector or central/local government;

though it necessarily interacts with these other sectors and cannot be precisely demarcated. The notion of civil society is conventionally rooted in de Toqueville's (1835) observations and theorising of some states in pre-bellum United States of America. It proclaims the virtues of widespread direct involvement by citizens in the governance of their societies - and manifests a nostalgia for a simpler and more wholesome America.

Such a picture of society functioning to a large extent through the voluntary action and association of its citizens has been carried into Central and East

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[1] Also, published since our review, Tonkiss, F and Passey A (eds) (2000) *Trust and civil society* Macmillan, Basingstoke

[2] Also, published since our review, Putnam, R (2000) *Bowling Alone* Simon and Schuster, New York

Europe in seeking to build ways of working together and democratic institutions after the deconstruction of state socialism (eg, Siegel and Yancey 1992), as well as around the world by the World Bank promoting civil society in the wake of its good governance policies, which are assessed within development studies (eg, Clayton 1996). In the UK, Knight et al (1998) reviewed civil society in a tradition of community action. By contrast Gramsci conceived of civil society as the 'sphere of class struggles and of popular democratic struggles' (Simon 1982). In general discussion, however, there has been a tendency to conflate civil society and the voluntary sector and to emphasise their virtues.

Through much literature on these 'big ideas' an unresolved question is how far they are being used analytically - ie, as tools of inquiry to describe and assess what is so - or normatively - ie, as statements of what ought to be so - and Greely (nd) argues social capital should be seen as a tool rather than an independent variable or indeed as a virtue. He criticises much policy debate and literature as seeing social capital as a value.

The notion of civil society can help frame discussion of the means by which individuals associate and organise, outside of the state and the market, and the environment where they do so. It suggests that these phenomena:

- are valid focuses for study and policy-making, and

- tend to be benevolent.

Social capital

A key concept underlying the promotion of voluntary action is that of social capital, drawing largely from Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993). Though Coleman is commonly identified as offering foundations for the intellectual project, the seminal work in current debate is Putnam's (1993) *Making democracy work* in which he combined data on civic involvement and political association with that on economic development in Italy to conclude that the development of civil society preceded economic development. This has been taken as signifying the importance of building social capital as an element - even as a precursor - of economic regeneration.

The definitions of social capital vary. An early and easy-going formulation is offered by Hanifan (1920) as:

> '... good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among individuals and families who make up a social unit .... If a person comes into contact with his neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social

capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient for the substantial improvement of life in the whole community .... public entertainments, picnics, and a variety of other community gatherings' (Hanifan 1920 cited in Smith 1998).

Bourdieu provides a more measurable formulation that is closer to the financial metaphor of capital:

' ... sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network or more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu 1992 cited in Smith 1998).

Putnam (1993) echoes this usage in finding that horizontal networks of civic engagement encourage co-operation:

'Membership in horizontally ordered groups (like sports clubs, co-operative, mutual aid societies, cultural associations, and voluntary unions) should be positively associated with good government' (p175).

To this, one could add Fukuyama's (1995) useful idea of 'spontaneous sociability', the proclivity to co-operate with other individuals - who for Fukuyama would be 'nonkin', ie beyond the family. This does, according to Fukuyama (1995), vary by cultures and account for the successes of business enterprise in different countries.

More fundamentally, Eisenstadt (1995) showed in different societies different levels of trust and solidarity, and analysed how trust extends from family unit to broader institutional settings. He also suggested (citing Eisenstadt and Roniger 1985) how as a downside of habits of co-operation there may develop systems of clientelism or clientism (Chubb 1982).

Concepts of trust have also been explored from a philosophical stance in Gambetta (1988) and as organisational studies in Kramer and Tyler (1996), and reviewed (up to a point) in Locke (1996) who developed a Popperian theory of trust.

A moral dimension to this policy debate can be connected to communitarian literature (Etzioni 1993), and to the proposition that demand for civil rights should be reciprocated by the citizen in their assumption of civic responsibilities. The echoes of this doctrine may be recognised in the Aylesbury Estate by Blair (1997) and frequently by his Minister Alun Michael's vision of volunteering as 'the essential act of citizenship' (eg 1998).

Wider political assets may also be ascribed to the development of voluntary action as a contribution to social capital. For instance, Dekker and van den Broek (1998) tested hypotheses about the relationships between levels of volunteering in different countries and the country's modernity and political discourse, drawing on the surveys of values and volunteering, confirming a correlation between association membership and levels of discourse.

Drawing the threads together, in policy debate, the notion of social capital as a feature of civil society suggests:

• habits of co-operation, trust and ways of working together accumulate and can be drawn upon, resonating with a metaphor of financial capital;

• this social capital can be deliberately built so as to be used as a basis for active communities and regeneration.

Social exclusion

Within the context of developing civil society by, among other things, nurturing social capital, a central policy concern for the New Labour government has been the problem of social exclusion. The definition of social exclusion has different connotations. Howlett (1999) quotes from the Social Exclusion Unit:

> 'Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such an unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown';

from Dahrendorf et al (1995):

> 'Exclusion is the greatest risk accompanying the opportunities of the new economic era. Significant numbers of people lose their hold first on the labour market, then on the social and political participation in their community';

and from Lister (1999):

> 'Discrimination and harrassment, as well as lack of money, can exclude, sometimes in interaction with each other, but not necessarily so. Social exclusion also encourages a focus on processes rather than outcomes, encouraging us to analyse the mechanisms which lead to social exclusion and, conversely, those which might set up a virtuous cycle of inclusion.'

Tony Blair (1997b) speaking for the launch of the Government's Social Exclusion Unit argued:

> 'Social exclusion is about income but it is about more. It is about prospects and networks and life-chances. It's a very modern problem, and one that is more harmful to the individual, more damaging to self-esteem, more corrosive for society as a whole, more likely to be passed down from generation to generation than material poverty.'

Against this:

> 'My political philosophy is simple. Individuals prosper in a strong and active community of citizens' (Blair 1997b).

Thus, the definition of social exclusion has a double implication for the promotion of voluntary action and community involvement:

- a consequence of poverty and unemployment can be the loss of social or community involvement, exacerbating the harm and threatening to trap people in a downward spiral;

- voluntary action can offer a route into employment (by developing skills, experience and habits of work) and a route into being involved in the community and regaining a place in society.

Thus, voluntary action may be promoted as a move along a virtuous spiral which can lead individuals from a sort of social excommunication to being evolved as citizens.

2.3 People and communities

Volunteering and voluntary action

The literature on volunteering and voluntary action comprises a considerable empirical base measuring and analysing numbers of people involved in volunteering and the factors which influence them. For the chance to theorise we would need to turn back to particular studies such as Beveridge (1948) or Titmus (1997) and, exploring on, to a philosophical ethical literature or socio-biological literature (eg Ridley 1997).

The UK National Survey of volunteering (Davis Smith 1998a) comprehensively covers levels and kinds of volunteering, attitudes and factors in people's decisions to volunteer or not. Knapp et al (1995) undertook further analysis to

identify key factors, and psychologically-based studies have sought to quantify people's motivations for volunteering (eg, Clary et al 1996). International perspectives are provided by Gaskin and Davis Smith (1995) and Independent Sector (1999). A few qualitative studies have complemented the quantitative, exploring people's actions and experiences (eg, Hedley and Rochester 1992, Scott et al 2000).

The broad findings of the body of research suggest volunteers are encouraged by information, by habits created in their youth, by their own levels of education and - in some cultures - by religion. Word of mouth or being asked is universally identified as the main trigger for volunteering (eg, Davis Smith 1998a, Locke et al 1995).

Research reviewed by Wilson and Musick (1997) demonstrates correlations between volunteering and higher grade and more self-directed employment; they go on to argue that, rather than higher levels of education and self-direction predisposing people towards volunteering, there is evidence that: 'People whose ego is boosted and not deflated by their work are more willing to give of themselves outside work.' Their suggestion that 'giving people decent jobs might go a long way towards ensuring a socially active population' would complicate the theory of social exclusion.

Studies have raised questions about levels of volunteering among minority ethnic communities, and this appears to represent a problem about what is defined as volunteering - in that among some communities informal helping of extended family and immediate community may not 'count' as volunteering (Foster nd). Recent research (eg, ARNOVA conference 1999) has suggested that when data-analysis is corrected for education and wealth volunteering is at similar levels in minority communities as in the dominant community in the USA.

Another body of studies has shown the benefits which individuals gain from volunteering (eg, Davis Smith 1998a). Davis Smith et al (1998) review research on how volunteering can contribute to people's employment, and Hatch and Gay (1984) and Gay (1999) demonstrate benefits for individuals in gaining employment.

Attention in public policy has focused on how central government can encourage or enable more people to volunteer, and commonly this has been seen in terms of increased information (eg Locke et al 1995 - though we hinted that volunteers volunteered when the time was right for them) and improved management of volunteers by organisations. Issues in organisations' volunteer management are identified by Davis Smith (1998a) and by more specific organisational studies (eg Harris 1998); Gaskin (1998) explores how young people's volunteering can be encouraged.

Thus, research on volunteering has found:

- factors in people's motivations to volunteering in broad terms, notably the overwhelming significance of 'being asked', and conversely in obstacles to volunteering;

- aspects of volunteer recruitment and management which suggest how policy and practice can be improved.

It raises questions about:

- how, given the correlation of volunteering with higher grade employment, volunteering is to be encouraged in disadvantaged communities;

- how definitions of volunteering may not encompass equivalent activities in different communities and cultures, and thus policy and research may neglect ways in which different communities are active.

Voluntary organisations, networks and memberships

The means of increasing voluntary action are often sought through voluntary organisations, and voluntary organisations can be seen to act as 'mediating structures' (eg Stephenson 1994). This raises questions:

- is it through voluntary organisation(s) that individuals first get involved in voluntary activity?

- do voluntary organisations connect individuals into 'official' power structures either by providing a bridge for them or transmitting their needs and demands?

Smith (1998) doubted whether the proliferation of voluntary organisations in Newham should be taken as representing an accumulation of social capital by local residents, contrasting low levels of membership with the small elite of professional voluntary sector employees. Campbell (1999) argued that it is networks of women who hold communities together.

Questions about another aspect of people's social inclusion - their membership of voluntary organisations and social movements - have usually been treated separately from that of volunteering. Literature has divided over whether people's membership is better explained by their political views or by their friendship patterns, though it is hard to disentangle the difference; Smith (1994) comprehensively reviewed the factors. The origins of this literature were framed in political studies, eg Almond and Verba (1963).

Participation

The formulation of the policy debate by the New Labour Government leads us to connect in to what has also traditionally been a separate literature, that on participation.

Much of this material has been concerned with the kind of 'what works' questions at the heart of the Blair Government. Lowndes et al (1998) inquired into local authorities' and citizens' perspectives on participation, concluding with principles for local authorities on selecting strategies and methods in terms of 'fitness for purpose' (p85). They argue the outcome of participation should be assessed not only in terms of policy-making and service delivery but also 'in relation to the process of developing <u>"social capital" and citizen competence</u> within a locality' (p85, their emphasis).

Guidebooks on techniques of participation, such as Wilcox (1994), and on committee processes (eg, Locke 1980) could also be consulted for practical advice. It would be hard to avoid referring to Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation.

Discussion of participation could also lead outside our scope to:

- 'modernising' local government in the UK;

- a longer established literature about participation;

- broader debate on governance and political philosophy.

Regeneration

In current policy, a major location for questions about social inclusion are posed in the context of 'regeneration' and attempts to generate partnerships between private and public sectors and the community. A variety of official institutions and agencies are intended to encourage participation; eg, regeneration agencies, tenant management organisations (TMOs), school governing bodies, participative planning models (Carley 1996, Hastings et al 1996), joint planning and consultative procedures on health, City Challenge and SRBs (eg Fearnley 1999).

Among a range of tightly focused empirical studies: Clapham (1996) reviews ways in which residents' attitudes and perceptions have been incorporated in regeneration programmes; Fordham (1995) asks how capacity building could be

built into short life programmes; Fearnley (2000) evaluates people's involvement in an Agenda 21 project within an SRB.

Taylor (1995) finds that community involvement is most effective where there has been a strong base of community activity. Hastings et al (1996) see strength in existing community activity (predating the initiatives) and a sophisticated level of organisation by activists, but finds that although there was know-how on involving communities it was not happening in a meaningful way; she formulates questions to explore the problems.

Community development

The Government's policy development for community self-help by Policy Action Team 9 (Home Office 1999) and recent reviews by Chanan (1997) and Knight et al (1998) draw the traditions of community development and community action together with current policy concerns. Thus, policy debate is pointing towards a literature which seemed to have been in abeyance, on community development and community action. This could take us back to Batten (1957) or Taylor et al (1976) and - radically - to O'Malley (1977). Midgley et al (1986) distinguish between community development and community participation, and textbooks (eg Popple 1995) offer typologies of community development and community work and their ideologies.

The current vogue is to articulate the means of enabling people's community involvement or participation in terms of the capacity within communities and their organisations (eg Alcock et al 1999).

Thus, studies of regeneration and community development focus attention on the complexity of voluntary involvement in the community and the importance of focusing on:

- historical and contextual factors, and

- the problems of making progress.

2.4 Policy propositions

From reviewing the policy development and literature, for the purposes of this working paper, we offer a synthesis of propositions shaping the Government's promotion of voluntary action:

It is <u>subjectively beneficial</u> for the individuals in that their voluntary involvement gives satisfaction, skills and experience (which may help get

paid employment), structure to their lives, sense of purpose, sense of belonging etc.

It is <u>instrumentally beneficial</u> for society in that people's voluntary involvement helps run activities and services for themselves and for other people, in providing or joining in the activities, in funding them and in governing them; and, further, helps contribute to the governance of their community.

It adds to <u>social capital</u>; people's voluntary actions build up the stock of habits and ways of doing things, trust and confidence, and capabilities, which they and others can draw upon to develop other activities, including economic or commercial activities.

It gives individuals a locus in a framework of <u>rights and responsibilities</u>, offering the opportunity to fulfil responsibilities to community or society which entitles the individual to draw on others' reciprocal responsibilities or claim rights.

Thus, voluntary activity may be seen as a way in which individuals establish their <u>inclusion</u> in community and society. This may, then, imply some reciprocal rights, entitling people, broadly speaking, to live as others do, to have similar opportunities. Overall, it may imply a sense of social cohesion.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Questions

From our analysis of current concepts in policy debate and of the body of knowledge, a number of questions emerge, which we crystallised to help frame our interview schedule and analysis.

1. What impacts of institutional and social contexts can be identified?

1.1 In what ways do central and local government policies, structures and resources have an impact?

1.2 Are there signs of people drawing on social capital?

1.3 In what ways do people use, or get supported, by networks?

1.4 In what ways do voluntary organisations act as 'mediating structures'?

1.5 Is there evidence of 'capacity' in the community which enabled the actions of individuals?

1.6 How does people's voluntary action relate to the place where they live?

1.7 What evidence is there of cultural factors?

2. What individual factors can be identified in the origins and development of their voluntary action?

2.1 What is the motivation or trigger?

2.2 What underlying factors can be identified? (Eg family upbringing, political convictions, religion, friends)

2.3 What keeps people going? How are they supported?

2.4 How far is the experience of community leaders like that of volunteers as identified in other studies?

2.5 What consequences of their voluntary action can we identify?

3. How would we weigh up the impact of structural and individual factors?

And what structural factors could be engineered by state policies and practice?

4. Does voluntary action combat social exclusion?

3.2 Methods

Interview schedule

We developed a semi-structured interview schedule to explore and probe the questions identified above (see Appendix). We recognised from previous experience that the interviews would need to be face-to-face so we could collect accounts of experience in people's own terminologies and could follow up points raised by interviewees.

We conducted semi-structured interviews in two phases:

1. exploratory interviews, raising issues identified from review of previous research and seeking to collect people's experience in their own words (7)

2. semi-structured interviews which followed a similar approach but focused questions more explicitly and also prompted interviewees so as to check out points they had not mentioned (5).

As a pilot study, part of our purpose was to develop and test a research instrument for future research. We found the interview schedule applied in the second phase proved effective, and with minor modifications we put it forward for future research (see 5.4).

Selection of interviewees

Our twelve interviewees were identified as 'community leaders' either directly by ourselves through our research projects in urban regeneration and community development, or through our networks. All were involved in marginalised communities in areas of deprivation in East London.

As a pilot project, we left open the definition of 'community leaders'. As will become evident, not all of the twelve proved under questioning to really fit a definition of 'community leader':

• Adam was a 'community leader' in that he was a church leader but did not see his current community involvement as voluntary action; it was his paid employment; however, he had a history of voluntary action prior to becoming a professional;

16

- Tim was heavily involved as a volunteer but he was not in a leadership role and his voluntary action was initiated as a placement on a retraining programme;

- Edith also was recently heavily involved but not in a leadership role and gave her motivation as 'boredom' in her retirement from paid employment.

We considered whether to discard one or more of these interviews but retained them in this pilot study, seeing the impossibility of drawing a sharp demarcation among people and their voluntary action and believing that some helpful comparisons emerge in the report. A future project will need to decide whether to plan a preliminary stage to identify people who are 'leaders' before interviewing them in depth (see 5.4).

4. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

We have analysed the interviews against the policy issues identified in a review of literature and policy concepts.   We can group our questions into three sets of issues:

Initiating voluntary action (see 4.1)

- what prompted these people to engage in voluntary action, and

- in what ways can be attributed to individual or structural and contextual factors

Keeping going (see 4.2)

- what has helped sustain people in their voluntary action

- how has their voluntary action affected the rest of their lives

- how is voluntary action related to the place in which people live

- how people think of voluntary action

Testing policy concepts (see Section 5)

- does voluntary action provide a means of promoting social inclusiveness

- how could governmental policies and practice encourage voluntary action

- how do people's experiences test policy hypotheses of social capital.

4.1 Initiating voluntary action

Individual factors

Six of our interviewees began their current voluntary action because they identified something practical they could do for their estate:

- Karim saw the need for childcare provision on her estate.

- May wanted the proposed tenant management organisation (TMO) to run their estate.

- Paul realised his estate had a stigma and decided to do something about it.

- Colin joined a steering group of tenants 'who wanted desperately to do something about the conditions there'; after moving, he started getting very angry about the way people were treated.

- Samantha moved onto an estate and found no community facilities; she started by drawing up a petition and taking it from door to door; then she met up with people from the tenants' association and worked with them.

- Liz 'got involved purely because they took our post office away and we needed a post office without having to go miles and miles for one'.

A broader but nonetheless practical agenda was also identified:

- Maureen described: 'I first got involved with this particular organisation - it was a black women's organisation - 20 years ago, and there were lots of issues. There are still a lot of issues but then there was lots of issues that weren't being addressed. Basically like women's health, education,... lots of black kids were not doing well within the education system; everything that … could affect women generally. So … we began to campaign, to raise people's awareness.... Instead of sitting indoors and moaning about it, women were involved to come out and take an active role....' And she talked of self-help: supplementary schools and health awareness.

She recalled meeting another woman through her son's nursery who asked if she would come, and three other of our interviewees were prompted initially by being asked and having opportunities pointed out to them; they have since become heavily involved in a range of voluntary activities:

- Celeste became involved because a paid worker for a voluntary organisation coaxed her into volunteering on a project, and from this she went on to become chair of a tenants association.

- Sarah was on a course on social awareness at a centre for young people not attending school when she heard about a local voluntary organisation and had an interview with them for voluntary work.

- Edith was approached by an old work friend: 'One day I was coming back from the market and she told me about the club down there and they needed help, and she said how about you coming round and giving us a hand.' She said it was 'boredom' in retirement that motivated her.

One started his current involvement as a placement on a <u>retraining</u> course:

- Tim was on IT training run by a voluntary organisation, and the placement officer decided on a placement for him initially for six weeks, but he stayed on voluntarily.

The twelfth interviewee is a church minister, and he saw his community involvement as part of his paid work, but previously he had experience of volunteering:

- Adam had a long history of volunteering from community action at school through to involvement at university in gardening work, a newspaper for blind people and a club for deaf people. His motivation was more general, including anger at injustice and inequality, enjoying being with people, needing to be needed and seeking to gain experience.

Most people linked their voluntary action to a broad <u>political commitment</u> or sense of justice, though no one mentioned party politics:

- Colin related his involvement to a 'bit of a passion for housing and housing related issues' and involvement in the squat movement; and 'I'm interested in real people taking charge of their own lives'; he never wanted to be on the side of the establishment.

- Sarah was moved to get involved with disabled children whom she felt were not given a chance. She was motivated by her own sense of how her exclusion from school was unfair and her experience of school phobia: 'I went through all this, and I thought why should kids have to put up with what I had to go through.'

- Maureen related her experience as a black woman who was working (in The City) with two children 'but I was able to put my finger on a number of things that were not right.'

No one in the first set of interviews mentioned <u>religion</u> as a motivation for their voluntary action, though we presume Adam's volunteering could be related to his religious upbringing and his subsequent employment as a vicar. In the second set of interviews we specifically checked for religion as a motive, but it was only acknowledged as a contextual factor by two people:

- Samantha commented: 'I wouldn't say I was a holier than thou person. I am religious … but not as far as pushing my values on people.' Prompted further, she went on: 'I feel it's important that you support what is actually around you, that was the motivation.…[A]lso to the fact that basically this is where my children would be growing up.'

20

- Edith volunteered with an organisation run by religious sisters of her faith, but said it was not her religious values that encouraged her: 'My values are being there to help people in need'; and she talked of how the group had helped her neighbours.

- Liz responded to the questions: 'I am not political. I am not religious. I am just me.'

Some people told of their <u>family background</u> in volunteering:

- Colin's father was 'a great volunteer' and ran local air training corps; 'There was always something going on somewhere.'

- Celeste grew up in a family which always looked after those less fortunate; her father was a government minister in an African country.

- Maureen described how her father's family in the Caribbean had been much involved in the church, YMCA , YWCA and musical activities.

- Edith led from talking about her own volunteering into talking about how she had always encouraged her children and grandchildren to do their best in life.

- Samantha saw no volunteering in her family background, though she recognised she had been brought up to help each other.

Before the current period of voluntary action, some had a <u>history</u> of voluntary action:

- Karim had volunteered in an under-5s centre when her son was eight months old, helping out and fund-raising (even before her child went there), which she explained as not liking to spend time calling on others' houses and gossiping. She had also helped out neighbours by watching out for small children in the play area when parents on higher floors sent them down.

- Colin's first experience of working voluntarily was in his mid-20s, with young people through Barnardo's 'which quite interested me'. He was also involved in a squat movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s years, 'opening up empty properties.

- Tim - though his current volunteering arose from a training placement - had been volunteering in national voluntary organisations for 30 years.

- Liz and Samantha had been actively involved in their communities for about five years, progressing from one woman campaigns to the tenants association to other local groups.

But for others their current voluntary action was their first:

- May had not got involved before because she didn't want people knocking on the door.

Thus, of our twelve interviewees, seven - Colin, John, Karim, Liz, Maureen, May, Samantha - have common histories in that they were moved to voluntary action by seeing a practical way of benefiting their community; and they may be typified as 'community leaders'. They do not appear to have been looking for a way of volunteering in general or seeking an outlet for time and energy. By contrast, Sarah, Celeste, Tim and Edith and Adam seem to have been reaady to volunteer in general terms and then got involved with a particular activity; perhaps they have more in common with the profile of people who volunteer formally through organisations.

Overall, whilst we can see that there was often a specific incident or opportunity, we can also tentatively identify different forms of predisposition, whether in their orientation to getting practical things to happen or, more generally, in their sense of justice, their upbringing or their readiness to help others. But, although, we could interpret everyone's stories as having some predisposition to voluntary action, it is different in almost every case. What is evident is the complexity and individuality of factors. For the people most heavily involved as community leaders, their own sense of identity acted as a catalyst with an issue or cause that was immediate in the place where they lived.

Structural factors: central and local government and their agencies

Nearly everyone's voluntary action was shaped, though in different ways, by measures of central and local government and their agencies; most had seen opportunity and support in some state actions, though a few felt mostly obstructed.

Central government policies to make social housing more responsive to or controlled by tenants were key for three interviewees:

- Colin was elected as tenants' representative on the board of a housing action trust, and he felt himself more incorporated into the establishment.

- May was inspired by the proposal for a tenant management organisation, and Liz also thought a TMO was the 'only way this estate will be better'.

However, important, especially in sustaining their involvement, was the way local authority housing officers and similar staff - in, eg, environmental services - responded seriously:

- May and Colin reported housing officers listened to complaints and points raised by tenants.

- Karim found local authority housing officers helpful, though she argued with heads of department and found them less helpful. The project manager was helpful. The chief executive of a regeneration agency she found unhelpful until she got to know him directly.

- Liz's position was complex. She had no faith that the council would put resources into her part of the borough and she complained about the state of housing and the local park. Asked how she had been helped or hindered by local government, she talked of how the change in the job of the caretakers had hindered her: 'The caretakers were brilliant; they used to keep the blocks of flats clean, the bin areas clean; the community gardens were always litter free.... Now the roadsweeper is responsible.... He very rarely does the bin areas; about once a month he does the gardens....' She continued: 'I don't think they have done anything except give us the ... Centre.' However, she also talked of being a 'piggy in the middle': 'I have the ability to talk to ... local residents. I can explain things to them. I can help them, whereas they won't talk to local housing officers or ... the police.' She herself always now went straight to the heads of department in local government, the commander in the police and the MP: '... if I need anything I pick up the phone and get it done, only because I know the right bodies to go to ....'

However,

- John reported: 'A particular difficulty is building trust with new officers. Like when you first meet officers it's very difficult to earn their trust because they have been in such situations where they have been attacked and abused..... It's not us and you, us and them situations, it's all of us work together.... '

Public provision and funding had supported voluntary action:

- Sarah and Tim heard about volunteering possibilities on courses.

23

- Karim's pressure for an under-5s centre was achieved through meeting an organisation with funding but no premises.

- Samantha reported the local authority had paid for the full-time workers In the community centre.

- Colin reported: 'The momentum just built up, then the Council itself actually started putting resources behind the tenants.'

Thus, the institutional influences through state agencies were significant and complex. They were often equivocal even within one person's current experience. Paradoxically, some ways in which state agencies encourage voluntary action have been by driving people to despair and anger, but the seriousness with which staff respond to community activists has been central in enabling voluntary action. Specific policies intended to promote participation in housing management have had an impact, and some funding and course provision has supported voluntary action.

Structural factors: voluntary organisations

Voluntary organisations were present in all the histories, though in the experiences of community leaders it was less formal and local organisations that were more important. Tenants organisations were particularly significant:

- May found the tenants association, which had been running for about 30 years, as a step to the TMO.

- Colin started in grassroots activity, and then got involved in tenants organisations, which then became listened to by the LA..

- Samantha and Liz both got involved with newly formed TAs soon after beginning campaigns on their own initiative; Liz commented: 'I just needed their backing.'

National and larger local voluntary organisations figured more in formal volunteering:

- Celeste was badgered to volunteer by the worker of a national voluntary organisation which was providing a community flat on the estate, for after school and play projects for children. Her involvement led to being chair of the TA.

- Sarah volunteered in a local voluntary organisation, and her involvement spread into training as a volunteer youth leader, volunteering in a community gym and giving talks in schools.

- Tim and Adam had long volunteering histories in national voluntary organisations.

And in the social entrepreneurial activities:

- Karim's children's facilities were developed in partnership with voluntary organisations.

Although involved now in local community groups, Colin and Edith recognised that in their next phases of voluntary action they might want to do something different and they identified national voluntary organisations as offering opportunities.

As we will discuss later, community leaders' stories tended to be based on getting involved themselves and then finding people and groups to work with, rather than joining up with an established group initially. The more formal voluntary organisations feature more where people have entered volunteering more out of interest or broad motivations than on account of specific issues, though they may then have involved themselves in a specific issue. Roughly speaking, about half our interviewees were initiated through established voluntary organisations, and half started more on their own and then joined up with others.

4.2 Sustenance and support

We have identified interacting individual and institutional factors in prompting people to voluntary action, and will return to weigh up these factors (see 5.). In this section, we consider factors that have supported people and kept them going.

Social capital

There were signs in all stories of co-operation between people and of drawing on habits of co-operation, such as are involved in the concept of social capital.

As noted above, some people engaged in voluntary action through established associations or organisations, at varying degrees of formality:

- Colin - the squat movement

- Colin, May, Liz, Samantha - tenants organisations

- Maureen - a black women's organisation

- Celeste, Karim, Sarah, Edith, Adam, Tim - voluntary organisations

Informal networks often made the initial contacts, representing 'loose ties' rather than close friends:

- Colin referred to a group of tenants he joined as 'people who were desperate'.

- Karim started with a neighbour with whom she had been on a child care course.

- Maureen got involved through 'people from the nursery where my son attended at the time that I was friendly with but … they weren't my friends as such'.

In the way the stories were told to us a strong sense came through of how co-operation was built through the voluntary action:

- May said it was 'not only me; I have a committee of about 12 members …. They are alright … they don't do as much as me.' The people appeared to have bonded and get on with it. She has met new people.

- Colin talked of people spurring him on, asking him to be on this board and that board; his link with others who trust him enabled him to get involved and now do paid work. He found everyone was working for the same goal. The impact of Colin getting involved was that others got involved too and that people believed in him and put their trust in him to represent them.

- Karim - after her involvement in the under-5s centre - went on to sit on the SRB board because 'people said if you don't we'll lose out…. I couldn't let them down …. [We] needed a new centre.' She was later nominated as chair. Karim developed a supportive group of people used to working together, though having to go out and lock up the centre after other people's events at 11.00pm appeared to stretch their 'social capital'.

- Sarah has developed trust in the organisations and in the people she volunteers with, and she talks about how she gives and how they depend on her.

26

The building of co-operation featured more strongly in people's accounts than did any drawing on existing organisations or capacity in the community, though it may be that the way people join in with organisations is less remarked upon.   However, our interviewees had found opportunities through voluntary organisations, and some people progressed from initial, informal campaigns into more formal organisations; in these ways people may be regarded as drawing on the social capital invested in these organisations:

- Liz had in about five years moved from a one woman campaign, through chairing the TA to involvement in national meetings.

- Colin after a lifetime in the squat movement and now employment as a community worker, looked to national voluntary organisations for different volunteering opportunities.

But others' recent experience raised doubts about how much of the co-operation built through individuals could be thought of a 'social capital' to be drawn on in future:

- Karim's grouping may be slipping away; since she left, others have left too and 'it's not the same'. People now keep trying to keep her involved.

- May sees herself getting the organisation on its feet and then handing over, and then she wouldn't go to every meeting.

- Celeste, having been ready to co-operate with others, has found trust between her and other volunteers breaking down. She volunteers full-time but has found others have left to get jobs, and there is no-one to co-operate with. She has also been in fights with the chair of another organisation.

- John was only staying 'because there isn't anyone else … there's nobody there at the moment that can do or has done the same amount and can control it.... I'm hoping that the community development worker that comes here can take 50 per cent of my workload off me so that I can have more time to develop something else.'

Most people talked of the capabilities they have developed through voluntary action which may be 'in the bank' for themselves and others to draw on in future, eg:

- Karim feels she can speak to anyone now.

- May has a lot of confidence, as well as experience of organising a committee.
- Colin knows how to represent people who trust him.

- Liz rings up the heads of council departments and the police commander.

Training

We found some instances of training and education which had supported voluntary action, though it did not feature largely in people's accounts:

- Colin did an Open University course and started to realise he could get involved.

- Maureen and Samantha had done degree courses, arising out of their experience in community involvement.

- Sarah and Celeste went on training courses to support their voluntary work.
- Karim started this period of her voluntary action after going on a child care course; she knew she could run childcare provision. Then, she went on a course on chairing. Karim thought she had not got more skills than others, but saw some people as frightened to mix; she already had entrepreneurial skills.

- Edith had been trained to work the till and deal with customers.

But Liz had learnt through common sense and watching others.

Achievement and responsibility

Our interviewees had been reinforced in their voluntary action by their achievements:

- Adam found he had a role and his gifts were being used, that he gained confidence, got to know more people and to understand things better.

- May reported a lot of satisfaction: 'You can see those issues materialise and you can see the outcomes.'

- Colin: 'You get a feeling of responsibility and you take things on and once you step in and take something up .....'

- Celeste, who had been off on long-term sick, said: 'It fills my day, gives my day purpose.'

Their significance for other people heightened their sense of responsibility:

- Sarah said: 'I'm like a sister to them'.

- Karim is kept going by the need of the people on the estate and her sense of responsibility: 'I've achieved so much.' Sometimes she felt 'lumbered' but there was always some reason why she couldn't back off.

Subjective benefits have been highly significant:

- May - like many others - saw herself as having more confidence and thought that had helped her cope with her paid employment.

- Maureen talked of being helped in her involvement by her 'personal development': '… the need to give something back…. It has been a learning experience for me, very humbling, when you see others in a worse situation. You can relate to them when you first started your involvement…. It's what I went through.' And of receiving 'spiritual cleansing' through working with elderly people.

- Edith commented: 'I got great happiness out of volunteering. I made many friends…. I am getting a bit ancient. [T]hey laugh at me when I say that I was feeling a little bit out of place because of my age; they say oh I wish I was as young as you.'

- Liz talked of: 'A lot of friends. A lot of appreciation and a phone that never stops ringing.'

Personal and family life

Several people spoke of the stresses and pressures of time which followed from their involvement. As we noted above, people's sense of responsibility to others was instrumental in keeping them going, but - especially looking back - there were feelings of undue pressure from colleagues or feeling 'obligated':

- Liz talked of being 'railroaded' into being chair of the TA.

Asked how her voluntary action fitted the rest of her life,

- Samantha commented 'very difficult': 'You have to juggle a lot of things…. You are talking about managing a family and sending them off to school, and … you try to focus meetings or encourage people to have meetings from 10 o'clock until 3 o'clock… And then it's going away and making the dinner, and then sometimes you have late meetings…. Public meetings are always at 6, 7 o'clock in the evening … so it's actually to move around your

family life. My husband has not been in voluntary work and he does not understand that you can give your time up for nothing … and when it interferes with your family life he cannot understand the reason why.… He doesn't see what I get out of it.'

And others spoke of negative impacts on family life:

- Celeste's son complains he never sees her any more.

- Karim says it has taken up so much private time, a 24 hour a day job.

- Colin's thought that the break-up of his marriage and subsequent homelessness might have been because he spent 'a little bit too much time with other people's things and not enough focusing on my own interests.'

- Maureen spoke of a 'long-suffering' partner and of the need to be careful it does not take over your life.

Employment

Two people got jobs directly from their volunteering:

- Colin - as a community worker for the local authority.

- Karim - running the childcare facility for which she had campaigned.

Others saw their involvement had given them confidence and skills which had been useful in getting jobs:

- Maureen had gained experience which had helped 'sell' herself in applications.

Place

The issue of place was central; people were engaged in voluntary action where they lived, on their estate. Only Adam and Sarah did not refer to the location of their volunteering as their community or estate.

But the role of place was equivocal. People's readiness to improve or provide facilities for the estate does suggest they were committed to the place, but the voluntary action was sometimes prompted by negative feelings about it:

- Colin said the estate where he was moved was 'such a dreadful place to be; the environment on this estate was the pits', and his anger triggered his involvement.

- Paul told how kids on the estate had got some recycling bins and made a barricade ('...it looked like Toxteth ...'), then burnt a car, and then threw bottles at the fire brigade: 'As the fire engine went past one of the firemen poked his head out of the window and using four letter words called us a "bunch of scumbags". Now I was the one who rang the fire brigade ... so I got in the car and chased the fire brigade back to the station.... I came back and said to my next door neighbour "I'm not putting up with this, we've got a stigma now".'

- May was concerned about the environment of the estate, cleaning it up, parking, vandalism; she wanted people to be happy to live there.

- Karim had been involved over the years informally in looking after children in the play area on the estate and now saw the need for child care facilities, although her own children were by then over 5.

- Liz and Samantha both campaigned for facilities on their estates and related that to their commitment to living there.

Their actions indicate a commitment to the place but do not tell us they felt good about it (cf Davis Smith 1998a). The actions were as much a protest or resistance, but their continued voluntary action was sustained by seeing the place get better.

'Voluntary action'

Some people were not easy with the term 'volunteering'. Asked what they called their voluntary action,

- Colin answered 'I don't call it' and referred to all his work being in the community

- Liz said 'community work'.

- Adam saw it as a 'way of life'.

- May referred to it as done on a 'voluntary basis'.

- Karim commented, 'Voluntary, yes unpaid, you can put it how you like really.'

- Celeste, Edith and Tim talked of 'volunteering' and 'volunteers'.

Some people did not make a demarcation between paid and unpaid work:

- Colin reflected: 'I suppose all my work it's been involved in the community so I have sort of seen it [unpaid work] as part of community work but I tend to do that in my paid work as well so there's quite a lot of overlap'. Of his earlier involvement in the squat movement, he commented: '... I've never really thought of it, I suppose that was voluntary'.

- Karim put in 100 per cent as a volunteer otherwise you don't achieve, not distinguishing unpaid from paid work.

Colin and Karim got paid jobs through their voluntary action and continued to see their paid and unpaid work as interwoven. Liz said a salary would be nice but was not available for her activities.

Adam, who could be described as a community leader given the high level of participation in community matters, saw this as part of his paid job as a vicar.

Others drew a distinction between their 'unpaid work' and her 'volunteering':

- Maureen said she was in 'unpaid work' in her current organisation in that she was helping out as an adviser and but not on the committee or appointed as a volunteer.

- Samantha talked of the pressures mounting such that her volunteering became 'unpaid work'.

By contrast,

- Tim was unsure whether to accept paid employment doing the same tasks as his volunteering because he didn't want to 'feel obliged'.

Attempts to define 'volunteering' with some precision that are needed for research as well as policy and social administration are not matched by the interviewees.

5. FINDINGS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Individuals and institutions

Voluntary action involves a mixture of individual volition and institutional framework.   Individual volition, broadly speaking, tended to fall into two categories in this study: some interviewees took the initiative themselves; some were asked to get involved; though there was sometimes an indistinct situation where the individual was willing or ready to act and responded to another's encouragement. People's initiative was mostly triggered by seeing something needed to be done in their immediate neighbourhood, but some people had a less specific interest or a wish to expand their experience.

Given the overwhelming evidence from the literature about the power of word of mouth or being asked in initiating voluntary action, which is corroborated by some of our interviewees, it is notable that some individuals just got going themselves: they identified a problem and starting to tackle it, then linking up with other people to help them tackle it. Around half our interviewees could be seen in these terms; this does not indicate any generalisable scale; it seems likely to characterise those who are seen as community leaders as distinct from non-specific volunteers.

The individual factors were very varied, even among a dozen people, and could be seen as a combination of predisposition and trigger factors.   The predisposition was variously identified in family background or sense of injustice or belief in practical improvement. People did not see their religion as a factor. The trigger was mostly their own identification of an opportunity or event but could also be 'being asked' or 'badgered' by someone. The trigger was often to do with their feelings about the place where they lived, but this was in some ways a negative experience (see below).

We note that the person who did the asking was often an acquaintance or someone with common interests as distinct from family or close friend; these represent 'loose ties', corroborating an analysis of co-operation. It also may reflect on Davis Smith's (1998a) finding that volunteers had wider networks of social contacts, though without establishing a causal link; it may suggest the network could be a pre-condition, but it is clear too that people extended their networks through voluntary action.

The specificity of these people's voluntary action is notable; most identified something particular and practical. Only a few of our interviewees sought volunteering opportunities in general.

Institutional factors interacted with individual factors to shape what individuals did and what they achieved. Some structural factors could be considered as the intentional aspects of central and local government policy to encourage participation. In May's story - and in a later part of Colin's - the opportunity was designed by government policy to promote people's participation in housing management. Tim was involved through an opportunity for voluntary work experience in a retraining scheme. The urban regeneration agency, mentioned in Karim's story, is a manifestation of government policy to promote partnership with the community. Thus, public policies could be seen to make a difference and promote voluntary action.

The policy shift towards encouraging participation in local authority services had an impact: as Colin commented, 'The Council actually started putting resources behind the tenants...; it actually ... helped us ... campaign in the beginning.' A sense of achievement that helped keep people going (see below) was also due to the opportunities for funding public services through voluntary organisations, for example, child care services.

The responses of public officials, such as police officers or local government housing and environmental services officers, was very significant in sustaining people's voluntary action; for example, housing officers took seriously the complaints community leaders channelled through to them. Notably, however, this was not an aspect of an initiative or scheme specifically to promote voluntary action but part of the general fabric or infrastructure of public services.

Alongside this, in the stories here voluntary organisations do not figure as strongly as mediating structures as might have been anticipated. Although all our interviewees had had some involvement in voluntary organisations, only half of them had found their route to volunteering through voluntary organisations, and only three of the opportunities taken by our interviewees were explicitly through 'volunteering' schemes. Small community organisations were very significant for enabling our interviewees; four interviewees worked through tenants organisations. Among those people who could be more typified as 'community leaders', some had initiated action and then found a TA or community organisation with which to work. However, it is also significant how some individuals whose voluntary action was focused at this level also looked to national voluntary organisations for the opportunity to expand their interests.

This study did not manage to explore different cultural contexts or backgrounds sufficiently to identify patterns or tendencies, partly because the sample was small; future research could compare and test working hypotheses with a larger data-set. There were some signs that women were primary in estate-level action (though not in all cases), which would corroborate Campbell

(1999). Two women featured their identity as black women in working to tackle injustice in practical ways. However, we did not find patterns in experiences of voluntary action which could be related to people's gender or ethnic identities.

Thinking of what central and local government can do to encourage voluntary action, we would suggest that the variety and complexity of the predisposition and the triggers make it difficult to tune schemes to encourage people's voluntary action. The recognition that the trigger was often a negative reaction to the place further complicates the question of how central or local government can engineer voluntary action - presumably they would not seek to deliberately provoke people to anger.

Overall, we reflect that the institutional aspects which supported people's voluntary action have come at least as much from the general provision or infrastructure as from specific volunteering measures. Local authority support for voluntary action appears - in these initial impressions, for example - to have rested at least as much in the everyday work of the Housing Department as in schemes to encourage voluntary action. Indeed, there are not many signs of the impact of deliberate measures to encourage volunteering, although it would be impossible to rule out a hidden impact of policies or initiatives.

If this emerging thought was supported by further research, it would have significant policy implications. It might come to suggest that an active community might be more effectively supported through general public provision or civic infrastructure than through specific initiatives.

There does also appear a separation which could be explored in future research between community activism which tackles specific problems or grievances and those kinds of volunteering which offer opportunities to enhance experience or to act on a general sense of injustice. Of our community leaders, more were concerned with the former and were more involved in smaller or informal associations than formal voluntary organisations. However, it would be unsafe to conclude that the estate- or street-level community groups were more productive, for public policy and funding, of voluntary action: the different forms offered different opportunities for different people or for individuals at different phases of their lives. Given the body of knowledge, though, about volunteering in general terms, it would be particularly productive to gain more knowledge of people engaged as community leaders or activists.

5.2 Keeping going - opportunities and obstacles

People were encouraged by their senses of achievement and responsibility. As just discussed, it has been crucial that other agencies, especially local government, have responded to them and they can see their achievements.
Alongside that, people's sense of responsibility to other people has kept them going; several were on the brink of giving up but felt there was no-one else to take over the work. Some were pressured by allies to stand for committees, which, in retrospect, could be resented. We saw an ambivalence in several interviewees, complaining about the stress but also gaining satisfaction from being involved and needed.

The time people put in had affected some family lives, with complaints from children and partners; male partners were mentioned as long-suffering or failing to understand the positive aspects for their partners. One male community leader wondered if he should have put as much energy into his marriage as his voluntary action.

We saw indications of the limits people will put on their voluntary action - they don't go on and on. This raises a question for further research about the need to offer support from professional workers for people's community involvement. It also raises a question about social capital (see below).

The evidence whether people had received training and found it useful was patchy. Three people had taken up university places on degree courses; others had received skills training; others were self-taught. Education and training did not feature as highly significant for sustaining people's voluntary action.

Place

People's feelings about the place they live - the estate for most of our interviewees - were evidently significant in their decisions to undertake voluntary action. However, more of these have been negative feelings about how bad things are and about the need to do something.

We do not have sufficient evidence here to corroborate or falsify the hypothesis that people are more likely to volunteer when they feel the area is a good place to live, as the National Survey suggested (Davis Smith 1998a). Indeed, our people were prompted to action by negative factors about the place. However, people's willingness to spend time and energy may be thought to demonstrate a commitment or attachment to the place and may give them a position or identity in relation to the place.

For our interviewees it was important that their volunteering contributed to the locality, but we were not ready to explore what being local meant to people, and future research might want to explore the sense of place more fully.

Future research on this hypothesis would need to focus questions on: the history of where they have lived, and their plans for the future; patterns of friendship and networks; perceptions which define their community or place; perceptions of the area; signs of commitment such as investment of time and effort. These lines of inquiry would require us to drop some other aspect of the research if the interviews were to be of tolerable length.

5.3 Testing the big ideas

The policy hypothesis that voluntary action can be a means to social inclusiveness is confirmed by these explorations. All but perhaps one (Adam) of the interviewees could be defined as representing groups to varying degrees marginalised by dominant power structures. Their voluntary action has achieved, or strengthened, their inclusion in communities, developed friendships, co-operation and trust. For many, it has brought them into contact with politicians and professionals from local government and other agencies, accessed the machinery of the state and achieved constructive responses.

For some it has developed skills and confidence which have helped them into employment, though the relationships between individuals' voluntary action and their paid employment were not straightforward. The voluntary action had led to jobs for two people and had given confidence useful in employment for others. However, some people backed off distinguishing between paid and voluntary work in their lives, seeing a whole commitment to the community.

As well as these benefits to themselves, the voluntary action of community leaders organised services, activities and campaigns with social benefits for their communities: child care services, a community centre, a party, improving housing conditions, clearing up rubbish etc. Civil society has been enhanced, it would appear.

As for the underlying policy hypothesis of social capital, we have found many signs of co-operation and trust, which could be taken as corroboration. The evidence in these stories tells of both how people have built habits of co-operation and ways of working together through voluntary action, and how they have drawn on existing ways of working through tenants associations and other bodies such as a national voluntary organisation or the squat movement.

Interestingly, the accounts are stronger on the former (building the habits of co-operation) than the latter (drawing on existing ways of working). It would be useful to explore in future research whether this is because people more readily tell the stories like this or because ways of working are reinvented.

The accounts raise some doubts about the concept of social capital, especially in the less formal aspects of community involvement. It is unsure how the ways of working established during these passages of voluntary action could be thought to be 'banked' or 'invested' (to follow the metaphor) so they can be drawn upon in future. It may be that future voluntary action will use the organised ways of working as our people adopted the tenants association, for example. It may be that the habits of co-operation learnt or exemplified will be 'cashed' in future. However, several interviewees were anxious that things would collapse without them, and some associations appeared to be breaking up as different individuals moved on in their lives.

Possibly, even if the specific association fades or collapses, it will leave capable individuals who, in future, know how to co-operate or associate, in which case the individuals could be conceptualised as the stock of social capital - though whether this would be the most helpful metaphor may need to be re-examined. Possibly, Fukuyama's (1996) useful idea of spontaneous sociability would prove stronger and focus attention on cultural - and, we might suggest too, class - background.

By contrast, it is evident that for other interviewees the organisation would continue after they left - one volunteer more or less will not undermine a large or medium sized voluntary organisation. But if future research confirmed that ways of working are temporary unless they are incorporated in a formal organisation, it would - at least - amend the hypothesis of social capital.

We are returned full circle to the question of how people - some of whom have experience of working together and appropriate capabilities - are prompted to undertake voluntary action. The evidence of these stories suggests that further inquiries along these lines would be fruitful.

5.4 Methodology

We find this study demonstrates it would be valuable to extend these inquiries further. Interesting and sound empirical, if quantitatively limited, evidence and analysis have:

- developed the understanding of people's experiences of voluntary action and of factors which influence their actions;

- explored and illuminated policy issues and theoretical concepts.

It has shown how varied and complex are individual accounts. A larger number of accounts would be useful to:

- enter into policy and theoretical debate on a broader empirical footing, and

- assess whether similar or new patterns can be analysed.

The pilot did not produce evidence of different cultural factors for people from different communities. A larger data-set would help discern patterns and offer possibilities either of including and identifying people from a variety of ethnic origins or of targeting specific communities for comparative studies. We would also re-examine data in these interviews and other research to assess whether questions could be developed or modified, and explore whether different lines of questioning would be fruitful.

One of the possible outcomes of this pilot was seen initially as the production of a more tightly structured questionnaire which could be administered in larger numbers and which would be suitable for cold-calling door-to-door. This, we thought, could be used to compare experiences and views of people with various levels and kinds of voluntary action as well as people who had ceased to engage in voluntary action and people who had never taken part. Our experience in this study, however, emphasised the complexity of people's actions and motivations and the significance of that complexity, and we do not find that a structured questionnaire would be helpful for this line of inquiry, though this study could contribute questions within the National Survey.

So, further studies should be in selected small areas or targeted communities, and should provide a basis for comparing and testing findings against each other.

We have found the interview schedule effective and put it forward for future use. Modifications to be considered are:

- whether simply a larger number of interviews would help cultural comparisons emerge or whether other questions would probe cultural issues

- whether to bring forward 'keeping going' questions to first half of the interview

- whether to focus harder on people's current phase of voluntary action.

On the last point, we decided for this study to try to focus on people's current volunteering though necessarily raising some history; it would not be possible

to isolate current experience. One consequence is that we have evidence from different time-scales for different interviewees, and future studies should consider whether the interviews and analysis should try harder to focus on a particular phase or episode.

Another consequence of the method of exploring people's experiences is that we have more data and - to different extents - more wide-ranging data than we could use in the report. Further research should consider whether it would wish to see one of its purposes as building an archive of interviews that could be used for other inquiries.

Further research would need to make a more definite decision than this pilot either to seek to interview only community leaders or to sample systematically people with different involvements in voluntary action. For the pilot, we selected people we identified directly or through networks as community leaders but having started on the interviews recognised that a few might not fit the definition - though who would have depended on different refinements of the definition. For a pilot, this offered some interesting range of experiences and factors. If a less open definition of community leaders was required for a future study, an initial round of interviews would be needed to select them.

We find from this pilot that there are some characteristics which distinguish community leaders from the broad population of volunteers and that these are significant in relation to the concerns with combating social exclusion. Thus, subsequent studies with these policy interests should seek either to focus wholly on community leaders or to differentiate them for analysis from other people engaged in voluntary action.

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APPENDIX

Voluntary action and social inclusiveness
Pilot Interview Schedule July-August 1999

Notes for interviewers:

Phrase the questions in ways that are comfortable for you and the interviewee.

Adapt the order of questions to suit the flow of the interviewee's account. (EG: it may be Q3 flows on from Q1.)

If the interviewee has covered the content of a question in answering a previous question (EG Q5 might get answered in Q4), you don't need to put the question.

But please check that we have covered all the question topics.

Use the prompts to check points that have not come out of the interviewee's account. We do need to check out some things they don't mention (EG if, say, in Q3 they don't mention 'Religion', we still need to check it out (briefly) in case they've just forgotten it.)

Use the prompts, also, to help think of what might have been involved, eg a community worker. Add to the prompts if other things come up.

This is a pilot so we need to think about what works/doesn't about the questions, better ways of putting the questions, whether it's interesting for the interviewee, how long it takes etc.

Voluntary action and social inclusiveness
Interview schedule July-August 1999

1. Could you tell me about what unpaid or voluntary work you do? What are you involved in now?

PROMPTS
What
When/How often
Where

Follow-up -
What do you call it? Do you call what you do 'volunteering'?

[THEY MIGHT SAY: 'voluntary work' ... 'voluntary action' ... 'community politics' ... ' helping out' .... etc]

2. Have you been involved in other ['volunteering'] [USE THEIR WORDS as Q1] **before?**

PROMPTS
What, when/how often, where?   [WE ONLY NEED BRIEF OUTLINE]

Always doing something (ie continuous) ?
or having phases of [voluntary action] and then giving up for a while ?

3. For this interview can we just focus on what you're involved in these days:

[FOCUS ON ONE STORY - WHICH COULD BE INTERCONNECTED SERIES]

How did you get involved? How did it come about?
What prompted you to get involved? Why?

PROMPTS

Did something happen (an incident/event) which triggered your involvement?

Were you asked? Who by?

How did you hear about the [incident/event/organisation]

Follow-up -
What do you think motivated you to get involved?

PROMPTS
Your feeling you could do something? about what?

Your past experience?

Your politics?

Your religion or your moral views?

The way you were brought up?

Wanted to meet new people?

Wanted to develop your skills?

Anything else?

4. When you got involved in this, what other people were involved with you? How did you make links and work together?

PROMPTS
Friends
Neighbours
Networks
Who does what?

Follow-up -
In what ways would you say you are working cooperatively with other people?

PROMPT
Would you describe you and other people as <u>trusting</u> each other?

5. Are you involved with any voluntary or community organisation(s)? Which?

PROMPTS, eg:
tenants association; housing association; community group; pressure group; local or national voluntary organisation etc

Follow-up -
Did any voluntary or community organisations help you <u>get involved</u>?
[IE, when they started off, got going]

Have any voluntary or community organisations helped <u>keep you going</u>?

[WATCH OUT FOR WHETHER THEY JOINED OR FORMED ORGANISATIONS]

6. In what ways have you been helped or hindered by anything that central or local government have done?

Such as policies or funding schemes?
Or bodies/agencies set up by central or local government?

PROMPTS:
Policies and programmes (eg New Deal, Welfare to Work)
Ways of getting funded
Local councils and councillors
Local government departments and their staff (eg housing etc)
NHS, hospitals, trusts
Regeneration agencies - City Challenges, SRBs
Housing action trusts, tenant management organisations
Community workers [IF POSSIBLE, CHECK IF LOCAL COUNCIL OR VOL ORG]
Consultation exercises
Other bodies like school governing bodies, community health councils, etc

Follow-up -
Or were there things central and local government (or other bodies) had done that you were protesting or campaigning against?

7. So, overall what things have helped you in your involvement and what have hindered you?

RECAP FROM Qs 4,5,6
[IF YOU ARE CLEAR, GO TO Follow-up ABOUT TRAINING...]

Follow-up -
What training or support have you had?

PROMPTS:
Courses
Skills you've learnt
Support from professional staff
Support from other people

8. How does all this involvement fit in with the rest of your life?

PROMPTS
Time commitments (for this and other current voluntary involvements)
[IF POSSIBLE - HOW MUCH TIME OVERALL THEY PUT INTO VOLUNTARY ACTION EACH WEEK]
Families
Friends
Paid work

Follow-up -
If in paid employment, has your [volunteering] helped with getting a job?

9. How does your [volunteering] fit in with where you live and how you feel about the area?

RECAP if the estate or neighbourhood was a 'trigger' in Q1

PROMPTS
Are you likely to go on living here?
Do you feel a 'sense of belonging'?

10. What has kept you going?

PROMPTS
Satisfaction at achievements, seeing things change
Sense of responsibility, standing by other people
No-one else to do it
Support of friends and family

Follow-up -
And do you see yourself going on being involved like this? Are you planning to hand over to other people?

[IF FEEL NEED FOR CHEERFUL END, SOMETHING LIKE: If you had your time over again, would you do it all again?]

ENDS/THANK YOU

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