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**University of Southampton**

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Economic, Social and Political Sciences

**The Three Cultures: Towards a Cultural Understanding of a Third Sector  
Organisation**

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/D1334>

by

**Taryn Elizabeth Collins**

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2019



# University of Southampton

## Abstract

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This thesis is intended to promote a cultural understanding of a third sector organisation as having a culturally heterogeneous ontology. That is, the organisation focussed on here is constituted by three different cultures; its ontology is realised by the discursive and social practices of these cultures. Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory was applied to the case study to provide an analytical framework and theoretical lexicon with which to empirically demonstrate the organisation's cultural heterogeneity. This new understanding of a third sector organisation is an intentional counterpoint to the conventional politics-and-policy influenced conceptualisation of third sector organisations as being, in the main, social policy constructs. Indeed, a critical analysis of current academic knowledge of third sector organisations shows that they have principally been analysed within a social policy set of literatures in which social policy analysts are the predominant thinkers and knowledge creators. This has produced very particular definitions and conceptualisations of these organisations based on a limited set of ontological assumptions that this case study provides a critique of.

The case in point is a large Citizens Advice charity (comprising of eight advice centres) spread across a county in England; multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork was conducted over a six-month period between 2014 and 2015. Importantly, the fieldwork was conducted during a period of organisational change which provided a refined lens through which to glean the participants understanding of themselves, who they preferred to be in social solidarity with and how they wished to be socially regulated in the moment of organisational flux. Finally, how the participants began to manifest their cultural differences was based on their separate understandings of what the organisation was, what its purpose was, and therefore, what they believed the best way to respond to the changes were.

One of the organisational changes was the introduction of a new Localism Policy mandated on the organisation. Cultural Theory had utility in enriching the analysis of how the organisation's participants in their different cultural groups began to grapple with and confront implementing the localism policy in ways that were consistent with their cultural preferences, but also were, in some instances, discordant with the intended policy outcomes. Cultural Theory therefore had both theoretical and practical utility in demonstrating not only the cultural heterogeneity of the organisation but also how this influenced policy implementation in uneven and unstable ways that were not necessarily consistent with the aims of the localism policy.



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# List of Accompanying Materials

<https://doi.org/10.5258/SOTON/D1334>



## Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name:	Taryn Elizabeth Collins
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Title of thesis:	The Three Cultures: Towards a Cultural Understanding of a Third Sector Organisation
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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature:		Date:	
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## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the Economic and Social Research Council for its support of my research by way of a 1+3 Studentship. Also, I would like to express my gratitude to the trustees of Gates County Citizens Advice for kindly granting me permission to conduct ethnographic fieldwork in their organisation, and to the participants who co-operated and gave me their time so generously.

Particular thanks must also go to my supervisors for their steady, reliable academic guidance, support and common-sense advice throughout my PhD studies, especially when I needed it most.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends for their emotional and practical support all these long, difficult years.



## Abbreviations

CitA	-	Citizens Advice
GatCCA	-	Gates County Citizens Advice
TSO	-	Third Sector Organisation



## Introduction

Not long after completing a Sociology undergraduate degree as a mature student, I spent several years working in third sector organisations (TSO) which I experienced as being ‘tribal’ environments. That is, staff and volunteers grouped into different ‘tribes’ that orientated themselves to the service the organisation delivered in highly territorial ways, complete with separate identities and different notions of what exactly it was that the organisation and its service was aiming to achieve. This tendency was either exaggerated or less so depending on the organisation, its people, and its operating context. This tendency was most pronounced at a large Citizens Advice charity which had been commissioned to deliver a particularly onerous legal aid funded contract in the midst of mergers and other structural and operational changes to the charity. The challenges of the legal aid contract in tandem with these organisational changes initiated shockwaves throughout the paid staff and volunteer body and amplified the sense of tribalism I had observed. Indeed, in spite of ostensibly all working towards the same purpose and fulfilling the charity’s aim of providing free, impartial and confidential advice to the public, the changes seemed to exaggerate and foreground differences between individuals in their interpretation of the organisation’s mission and purpose. Furthermore, during this time it was commonplace for staff and volunteers to talk of the importance of the charity’s culture and where and how it (and the advice service itself) was being put at risk as a result of the changes and the legal aid contract. This raised questions as to why individuals in the same charitable organisation, given the same information (about changes or otherwise) arrived at vastly different interpretations and conclusions about these very things, and about what should be accomplished under these changing circumstances and how.

To begin to investigate this organisational phenomenon my initial foray into sociological research literature brought me to the work of late twentieth century British anthropologist Mary Douglas. Her research (1999) into the ‘plural rationalities’ (p.413) of social actors in the same setting experiencing different perceptions of their shared context resonated with my own experiences (Scott and Carr, 2003; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Douglas’s own early observations of this phenomenon started with empirical research of the cultures of the Lele and Bushong tribes in the former Belgian Congo; this laid the formative conceptual groundwork for her theorisation of culture – known as Cultural Theory – which she and her long-term collaborator Aaron Wildavsky (an American political scientist) elaborated and later applied to industrialised social contexts. Douglas defined culture in its broadest sense as ‘a way of life’ and central to her theory was an ideal-type model of four viable cultures that she theorised exist simultaneously in any social

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setting (Douglas, 1999) – like in a charitable organisation, for instance. Furthermore, the cultural types are derived from two sociability dimensions that Douglas argued are a consistent commonality across all human cultures. Firstly, a ‘group’ sociability dimension, that is, *who* individuals prefer to interact within a particular social setting, and, secondly, a ‘grid’ sociability dimension, that is, *how* individuals prefer to interact with others in their social context. In any social setting the actors will coalesce into one of the four possible cultural groupings her typology offers according to i) their sociability preferences, and, ii) their shared cultural biases (that is, ideologies and values) that justify these preferences. Douglas posits further that differences between people in the same social organisation or context are present because of divergent preferences individuals possess for ways of socially organising themselves; that is, preferences for different ‘ways of life’. Indeed, the Cultural Theory model posits that within any social setting there is *always* more than one cultural type present, but never more than four (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984; Gross and Rayner, 1985; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Douglas, 1999; Fardon, 1999; Mamadouh, 1999; Douglas, 2002 [1966]; Douglas, 2003 [1970]; Douglas, 2003 [1975]; Douglas, 2011 [1986]).

Whilst the notion that an organisation is constituted by this kind of cultural heterogeneity is conventional in organisational sociology, my introduction to third sector literature revealed that this was not the case there. Instead, this literature is focussed less on the culture (or cultures) of individual organisations and more on arguments of how the third sector *as a whole* has come to be constituted. Contributors to conceptualisations of the entire sector acknowledge various historical, political and economic contingencies (in the English national context) that have shaped the not-for-profit sector by coalescing the myriad of organisations into an ideological space that has come to be known, since the late 1990s, as ‘the third sector’. Particular attention is paid to successive New Labour governments of that period who complemented an ideological commitment to the third sector with a raft of policies and considerable financial resources aimed at the sector to be implemented across several central government departments (Alcock and Kendall, 2010). The literature also attends to how individual organisations responded to these policies and how some TSOs in turn came to influence policy and decision-making about ‘the sector’ as much as government did. The consequences of this were manifold and uneven, and researchers of the third sector recognise this, and the difficulty, therefore, in conceptualising and defining its shape-shifting ontology and identity, contingent as it is on the vicissitudes of policies and indeed other factors not directly concerned with government (Kendall and Knapp, 1996; Lewis, 1999a; Anheier *et al.*, 2001; Deakin, 2001; Alcock, 2010; Harris, 2010; Kendall, 2010; Zimmeck, 2010; Alcock, 2011; Crowson, 2011).

Whilst arguments of the influence of governments' ideological and policy priorities upon shaping the amorphous ontology of the whole third sector are persuasive in part, there is a notable, curious absence of how culture (however that may be defined) has had on affecting the third sector as a social entity, and how at a micro-level TSOs themselves may be constituted by something as intangible as culture and not, perhaps, by governmental policy determinants. Although the concept of culture is treated as marginal in third sector literature, where it is recognised to exist in TSOs in some form or other there is an overall tendency to side-step grappling with what exactly this means for the organisation's ontology (although there are some exceptions to this general principle) (Macmillan *et al.*, 2011; Macmillan *et al.*, 2013). Yet, perversely, one finds a repeated convention of describing the third sector, and therefore, of individual TSOs too, as 'distinctive', which acts as a convenient but ill-defined catch-all term that simultaneously acknowledges that culture must play a part in distinguishing TSOs from other public or private institutions but does not bring empirical scrutiny to bear on what this means *for the organisations themselves*. However, in Douglas's theoretical and empirical work (and organisational sociological literature more generally), 'culture' can and is studied across a range of organisational settings, and crucially, by applying theory to these empirical endeavours allows researchers to arrive at an understanding of culture not merely as being present *in* organisations but as constituting *of* an organisation (Crane, 1994; Demers, 2007; Corry, 2010; Macmillan, 2013b).

Indeed it was the discordance between personal experiences of working and volunteering in TSOs and the way third sector literature defined and conceptualised them in a vacuum of cultural understanding that informed my research questions and overall study design. From the outset my empirical endeavours engaged critically with the literature and my intention was to present an alternative strand of thought that investigated and theorised i) the influence of organisational culture(s) on the ontology of a TSO, and, ii) how this affected organisational engagement with, and implementation of, government policy. The intention was present an empirically informed counter-argument that a TSO is a cultural construct of which policy itself is a cultural product, or rather a process, that is practiced in ways that correspond to the cultures that constitute the organisation itself. Key to this was to utilise Douglas's Cultural Theory which has been widely applied in social sciences to investigate organisational cultures across a diverse range of settings and policy contexts. Importantly, not only did Cultural Theory resonate with personal experiences but also, more appropriately, it provided a novel conceptual and theoretical lexicon separate from

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the prevailing vernacular found in third sector studies literature with which to apply to the case study here. In accordance with Douglas's theory I proceeded on the assumption that there was more than one culture present in the TSO I focused on. This assumption, and previous experiences of working at Citizens Advice, informed the first research question: *what cultures exist in this organisation?* Secondly, two supplementary questions were necessary, 1) *what informs these cultures* and 2) *how do the cultures affect organisational policy?* The site for ethnographic exploration of these questions was Gates County Citizens Advice (GatCCA) where I had initially experienced the 'tribalism' that both hindered and helped the processes and services offered by the charity. An important factor about the timing of the study (October 2014 – March 2015) was that GatCCA was undergoing a period of change, not least being mandated to implement a new policy to revitalise a 'return to localism'. This moment of change provided the circumstances in which to explore staff and volunteers' perceptions of themselves and the organisation and the differences in these perceptions.

The evidence of the analysis and interpretation of the data generated during fieldwork enabled me to present two arguments in this thesis. Firstly, a theoretical one, that Gates County Citizens Advice has a culturally heterogeneous ontology; it has at least three different cultures that correspond to the ideal types found in Douglas's typology of cultures. Its ontology is realised by the cultures' different social practices and supporting ideological biases. In essence, this third sector organisation is a tri-cultural construct (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Douglas, 1999; Mamadouh, 1999; Demers, 2007; Corry, 2010; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Establishing this empirically-informed theoretical point led me to make a second more practical argument, that has relevance to academics and practitioners, offering insight into how and why the (return to) localism policy implementation would unfold in particular (perhaps unforeseen) ways. Indeed, extrapolation from fieldwork data enabled me to argue that i) the localism policy itself was a cultural practice of the three cultural groups present in GatCCA, and, ii) to speculate how it would unfold over the intended policy period (2014-2017). Crucially, the three cultures of GatCCA shaped the policy; the policy did not shape the ontology or identity of GatCCA. Therefore, policy was not an instrumental tool for the organisation to implement or leverage in some way, in fact, the localism policy became a competing set of ideas that were reflective and constitutive of the competing cultures of GatCCA.

By presenting the thesis as an argument in two parts I establish several points in relation to existing literatures. Firstly, I take a step towards bridging the gap between organisational sociology and third sector studies literature; in the former case the notion of organisations being cultural constructs is widely accepted, so is the idea of culture being constitutive of organisational

practices (Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Swidler, 1996; Demers, 2007; Corry, 2010). However, these well-established notions have not cross-fertilised to third sector literature in a way that could be described as enjoying any kind of mainstream acceptance. I propose a reason for this that social policy analysts have enjoyed 'dominant-voice' status in third sector studies and have focussed, understandably, on government policy which has resulted in very particular conceptualisations and definitions of the sector and therefore of TSOs too. Thus, what the argument of this thesis does, is to introduce empirical practices and conceptual and theoretical ideas found in organisational sociological to third sector literature by i) presenting the notion of culture as defining of (not additional to) a TSO's ontology, and, ii) produce a cultural understanding of a TSO from a *theoretically informed* perspective by applying Douglas's Cultural Theory to a third sector organisation. Indeed, the case study presented here is also a demonstration how to *operationalise* Cultural Theory in a TSO setting with the intention of illustrating its utility to other researchers of these types of organisation.

### ***The case study: Gates County Citizens Advice***

It is worth providing a potted history of Gates County Citizens Advice (GatCCA), comprised as it is of eight advice centres across a county in the south of England; it is also a member charity of the Citizens Advice federated network of charities across the UK. This means that GatCCA pays to be a member of the Citizens Advice network of charities, use the Citizens Advice branding and logo, and access the legal advice materials in order to deliver advice to members of the public that is free at point of delivery. As such, GatCCA delivers this 'generalist' advice service in-line with its membership agreement but also has a degree of autonomy to deliver specialist advice services and welfare contracts that meet the needs of the local population that surround its advice centres. As with all such charities in the Citizens Advice network, GatCCA is a registered charity in its own right and managed independently by a board of trustees and is responsible for generating its own income streams (usually from local government in the form of commissioned advice services). The membership organisation, or headquarters of the network based in London, has oversight over the accuracy and quality of legal advice delivered in all its members' advice centres as well as ensuring 'brand' adherence and consistency in all that they do. Furthermore, Citizens Advice determines the strategic direction of the entire national network of charities; it does this by mandating across the network certain policies that support its strategy. Finally, a word on the use of acronyms, those outside of the network of Citizens Advice find the organisational names confusing; for clarity the abbreviation for the membership organisation is CitA (pronounced sit-ay), the case study's name will be abbreviated to GatCCA when not used in full.

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GatCCA had taken several years to become the eight-advice centre entity that it was at the time of fieldwork commencement. Over several years in the early 2000s and up to 2010 many small individual advice centres run by separate boards of trustees merged to consolidate their financial resources and increase their bidding power for local government contracts and to other funders. I had previously been employed at GatCCA during a merger phase in 2010 which was experienced by staff and volunteers as being particularly traumatic and divisive. It was during this period of change to the size, scope and scale of the charity and its activities that my experience of its ‘tribalism’ was most pronounced. Thus, what made GatCCA suitable for an empirical case study was, firstly, that it was experiencing another round of organisational change, including the implementation of a new ‘return to localism’ policy at the behest of CitA. In Mary Douglas’s theoretical estimation, moments of change heighten individuals’ awareness of who and how they prefer to interact with other in response to change and what ideas (i.e. biases) inform and support their social preferences. Secondly, due to GatCCA’s large geographical spread across eight advice centres this allowed comparison between not only the advice centres but also between various types of organisational participants too; comparison being defining aspect of all social science research.

### ***The Three Cultures***

In terms of the structure of this thesis, Chapter 1, the Literature Review, provides a critical analysis of relevant empirical and theoretical literature. The focus is primarily on third sector literature that concerns itself with defining and conceptualising the third sector, and implicitly therefore, of third sector organisations too. Firstly, I critique the unbalanced attention given to the role of government policy and the argument that it has contributed to conceptualising the third sector as an ontological whole, coherent entity, and secondly, to the comparatively slight theoretical and empirical attention paid to the role of culture in influencing the sector and its organisations (Alcock, 2010; Corry, 2010). I present an alternative argument of the sector being a discursive construction of well-placed political and academic voices that have had vested interests in maintaining notions of a singular, unitary entity (6 and Leat, 1997; Corry, 2010)<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, I introduce insights gleaned from organisational sociology relating to *cultural* understandings of organisations in order to illustrate that an organisation’s culture can derive its coherency from the idiosyncrasies of its stakeholders rather than from governmental ideological and policy influences,

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<sup>1</sup> Note that ‘6’ not a typographical error, it is the surname of Professor Perri 6 of Queen Mary, University of London. His profile page can be found here <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/busman/staff/6p.html> His Wikipedia biography, which explains his surname, can be found here [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perri\\_6](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perri_6)

and furthermore that these idiosyncrasies affect the implementation of policy within the organisational context. I complete the literature review by presenting an overview and analysis of Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory. Given its widespread application to settings outside of the third sector there is empirical evidence of organisations being ontologically multi-faceted and culturally diverse. Moreover, that organisations (of any kind) are not merely sites where culture finds its place alongside other aspects of organisational life, like, for instance, strategy, planning and logos, but rather that the organisation itself is a *cultural entity* and that its ontology is realised through the practices and ideas of the various cultures that constitute the organisation (Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). This final theoretical point leads onto Chapter 2, the Methodology chapter.

In Chapter 2 I provide an explanation for why it was necessary to integrate Cultural Theory into the methodological design of the case study. Detailed exposition of theory-driven multi-sited ethnography and justification for the feasibility and appropriateness of this approach is also covered. As is customary, attention is also paid to why GatCCA specifically made for an appropriate case study to investigate the research questions proposed. I elucidate the explicit *endogenous* or *emic* perspective used to research the cultures of GatCCA; this in itself runs counter to the prevalent *exogenous* approach found more commonly in third sector studies. I provide detailed description of multi-sited ethnography and the way it differs from conventional single-site or 'bound' ethnography. Indeed, multi-sited ethnography was appropriate to this case study as it is concerned with following and constructing relationships between physical, inter-personal and ideational spaces in a social context (Falzon, 2009). This is in contrast to bound ethnography which concentrates on familiarity with a site *over time*. Multi-sited ethnographers concern themselves with familiarity of the site *over spaces*; in this case, over GatCCA's eight advice centres spread across Gateshire County. Key aspects of Cultural Theory were used to demarcate some ideational and physical boundaries to facilitate a manageable, practicable phase of fieldwork without compromising data generation. This was achieved through application of Douglas's Cultural Theory deductively to the site to provide a more limited palette from which to generate, analyse, interpret and represent the cultures of GatCCA.

The substantive chapters in this thesis – Chapters 3 to 5 – are where GatCCA's three cultures are discussed in detail, embedded in which are answers to two of the three research questions, i) *what cultures exist in this organisation*, and, ii) *what informs these cultures?* In Chapter 3 I address the first culture: Egalitarianism. As the name implies, members of the egalitarian cultural group preferred a social arrangement in which all members were regarded as collective equals; they eschewed hierarchy or authority for its own sake. A further important characteristic of this culture was that its participants were securely anchored in memories of GatCCA's traditional past

## Introduction

practices, and carried organisational memories imbued with an “emotional tone” (Swidler, 1996, p.299). Because of this, egalitarians did not identify with the organisation *per se* but rather with the plight of its clients; indeed, clients’ advice needs were prioritised above almost everything else. Thus, in their perception and interpretation of the localism policy their immediate response was to refer to past practices of localism and desire to reinstate these as a suitable response to current policy challenges. This in itself was revealing of egalitarians’ attitudes to the concept of change, that by and large they resisted it, instead egalitarians preferred to establish continuity in their practices that notions of ‘the past’ validated to them.

By contrast, Hierarchism, the culture addressed in Chapter 4 was characterised by its members’ preferences for socially organising themselves in roles that were ordered by rank and degree of responsibility. Members of this cultural type were satisfied with their relative position in a conventional hierarchical structure where the division of labour was transparent, formally regulated and commensurate with one’s position in the charity. Hierarchists reconciled themselves to the inequality that was inherent in this stratified structure due to their cultural bias: they prioritised the organisation i.e. its stability and security, and believed that hierarchical structure was the most viable way to achieve this. The charity’s clients were also important to this cultural group, but more of an implicit secondary consideration after prioritising organisational stability. Hierarchists also had a pragmatic, non-emotional attachment to the charity encapsulated in their view that ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’. This belief meant members of the hierarchist culture willingly submitted to the relative inequality of the positions they held within their respective advice centres for the good of the charity. Hierarchists were orientated to the future and as such embraced change and rejected the past practices of the charity. Thus, their perception of the newly announced localism policy was that it would institute a new era of professionalism for the charity, a vision which, long-term, held the possibility of clashing with the egalitarian vision of what present-day localism should entail.

Individualism is the third and final cultural group explained in Chapter 5. Members of this culture did not act as a collective so much as disparate individuals following their own instincts. However, because of this similarity, individualism could be spoken of as a coherent cultural group of GatCCA. Other similarities between members of this type were that they preferred loose social bonds with other stakeholders in the charity and resisted activities that required collective effort, preferring instead to act autonomously. Their individualism meant that they prioritised their own needs above that of other individuals within the organisation – whether they be clients, paid staff or volunteers; indeed, they prioritised their needs above that of the organisation and the advice service as a whole. What motivated individualists’ preferred means of social organisation was a

cultural bias based on self-interest which meant they had an emotionally detached relationship with the charity and its clients. They conceived of GatCCA as an *opportunity* to reap from it what gratified and satisfied them *as individuals*. This shaped how they believed the localism policy should be pursued – in ways where they could act independently without restraint, capitalise on their own skills and abilities and in doing so distinguish themselves.

In this chapter I also explicitly answer the final research question: *how do the cultures affect organisational policy?* Although time-limitations of cross-sectional research meant that it was not possible to analyse the long-term implementation of the localism policy, I was nonetheless able to make some empirically informed judgements in order to answer this question. I used my interpretation of data and the analytical contours of Cultural Theory to present a speculative argument of how the policy would have unfolded post-fieldwork during the intended policy period (2014-2017). In presenting these empirically informed speculations I simultaneously address a key criticism of Cultural Theory; in particular that it is a static and rigid typology that does not do justice to the fluidity, instability and immutability of culture (or cultures) if understood as a *process*. However, in my speculations of how the three cultures of GatCCA would compete for cultural hegemony in the organisation, I illustrate the *dynamism* of the cultures in which the members migrate from one group to another, altering the relative size and influence of the cultural groups in doing so. This, I argue, has implications for how the localism policy was likely to be implemented in the longer term. It most likely was manifested or *practiced* in the way envisaged by the culture that gained cultural dominance, and by my analysis that would have been the hierarchist culture.

Chapter 6 is the Conclusion in which I conclude the arguments and present a final word of Cultural Theory's theoretical and practical utility in offering an alternative approach to analysing and theorising TSOs' ontologies as being culturally constituted. As I evidenced, Cultural Theory is particularly useful for teasing out and revealing the "relationship between institutional form and epistemological foundations" (Fardon, 1999, p.227). Secondly, Cultural Theory also provides a lens to examine how the political and instrumental ends of policy are interpreted and acted upon in *cultural ways* based on the separate rationalities and practices of the three cultures of GatCCA (Thompson *et al.*, 1990). Finally, I close the thesis by attending to the epistemological possibilities and limits this case study presents. I suggest that the appropriateness of the methodological design, rigour of the data generation and analysis, and, trustworthiness of its interpretation through Douglas's theoretical lens results in a representation of GatCCA that is credible, and the arguments made plausible when situated within existing bodies of literature and accepted knowledge (Golafshani, 2003).



## Chapter 1 Literature Review

This chapter is a critical analysis of three separate sets of literature germane to the research areas covered in this thesis. Combined these literatures form the empirical and theoretical contextual backdrop to the case study. Firstly, I critique third sector studies literature pertaining to how the third sector, and, by extrapolation, third sector organisations are defined and conceptualised; that is, how their ontology has traditionally been understood. Secondly, I turn to organisational sociology literature which offers alternative approaches (not usually adopted in third sector empirical studies) to conceptualising organisations as cultural entities. Organisational sociology acts as bridge from third sector studies to the third set of literature covered in this chapter, the theoretical and empirical work pertaining to Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory. This is the theory used throughout the case study, which, as will be shown, when applied to a TSO setting provides a original cultural and theoretical understanding of its ontology as a culturally heterogeneous construct.

### 1.1 Conceptualising the Third Sector: critiquing holism

When reviewing research literature of the third sector one is inevitably drawn into the debate that centres on the matters of conceptualisation and definition of the sector (Kendall and Knapp, 1995; Alcock, 2010). Whilst there is no single agreed upon definition, researchers broadly coalesce their conceptualisations around several key characteristics. Firstly, that it operates a not-for-profit ethos, secondly, that organisations in the sector very often utilise a volunteer workforce in the delivery of their work and services (Deakin, 2001; Harris, 2010). A third feature is the diversity of the organisations in the third sector; there is a profusion of charities, voluntary and community organisations, mutuals, co-operatives, social enterprises and 'umbrella' governance and lobbying bodies (Harris, 2010; Alcock, 2011; Macmillan, 2013a). Finally, there is the relational aspect of the sector, this point was most clearly articulated by Nicholas Deakin (2001) in his public, private and third sector triad which, in a British context, has been an influential and longstanding conceptual touchstone for both researchers and policy makers when thinking about the third sector (Macmillan, 2015). Few researchers however draw hard-edged boundaries between the three sectors, rather it is commonplace to emphasise that the boundaries between the sectors are, in practice, 'blurred' (Lewis, 1999a; Billis, 2010). Residing in these blurred spaces are even more hybrid organisational forms (Billis, 2010) which operate across multiple contexts, providing an array of welfare and public services (Lewis, 1999a; Macmillan, 2013a; Macmillan, 2013b). Whatever hue definitions of the third sector take, it is important to note that a key qualifier is

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routinely acknowledged, that conceptualisations of the third sector ultimately depend upon and therefore vary according to the national context in which they are located. Above all, the third sector and its constituent organisations are context specific entities contingent on the history, political-economy and socio-cultural dimensions of the national settings in which they operate (DiMaggio and Anheier, 1990; Salamon and Anheier, 1992; Alcock, 2010; Harris, 2010; Macmillan, 2013a).

The contradiction that lies at the heart of emphases on contextualisation and specificity is that the term 'third sector' is itself a non-context specific term, in fact it has a distinctly international and therefore generic timbre to it. The term exerted international influence from the early 1990s onwards, particularly in the work of Salamon and Anheier (1992) and DiMaggio and Anheier (1990) who unified the diversity of organisations and institutions that comprise this broad field (irrespective of national setting) under the genus 'the third sector'. By the late 1990s the term had gained traction in Britain, most notably embraced by the New Labour government of that time. It has since become widely used as a semantic short-hand to describe not-for-profit organisations in the policy arena, and, however problematic the term, continues to exert influence in academia too. The notion of a third sector is problematic because conceptually it implies holism; it totalises the heterogeneity and plurality of organisations and stakeholders that comprise a complex area of public life into a unitary, homogenous whole. However, where this conceptual shortcoming is acknowledged, the alternative offered does not fare much better. Indeed Kendall & Knapp's (1995) ubiquitous and frequently cited loose-and-baggy-monster conceptualisation of the third sector attempts to recognise its diversity and difficulty in defining it, but ultimately fails to break with the underlying notion of holism; instead it reproduces it in the form of an amorphous behemoth, 'monstrous' in its proportions.

### 1.1.1 Third sector as ontological construct of policy makers

The idea of a whole unified third sector is based on what Alcock (2010) refers to as an *exogenous* view of the sector, that is, it is understood and defined from an outsider's standpoint, more specifically from the vantage point of successive governments' social policies directed at the sector that assumed it was (and is) an ontologically objective entity. It is perhaps unsurprising that social policy plays the important role it does in conceptualisations of the third sector given that academic interest in the voluntary and community sector was sparked during the late 1970s and into 1980s – the decade of so-called 'social policy revolution' as Crowson (2011, p.491) points out – under Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government (Anheier *et al.*, 2001; Deakin, 2001; Zimmeck, 2010; Alcock, 2011). During that period a sea-change in the relationship between the

state and what the government of the day referred to as the voluntary and community sector was addressed in writ-large neoliberal policy terms, primarily through the mechanism of the New Public Management of public services. The voluntary and community sector was perceived by the Conservative government as having instrumental value in decreasing the overall cost of the welfare bill by funding these not-for-profit organisations to deliver specific welfare services that had formerly been the state's remit (Lewis, 1999a; Lewis, 2003; Carmel and Harlock, 2008; Harris, 2010; Crowson, 2011).

By the late 1990s under New Labour this policy approach manifested more explicitly in a centrally co-ordinated way (Zimmeck, 2010) by what Kendall (2009) first referred to as hyperactive mainstreaming of policies aimed at the sector across key central government departments (Zimmeck, 2010). Moreover, the diversity of the voluntary and community sector was unified, ideologically and semantically by the newly-coined term 'the third sector' which became the intended object of New Labour's social policy ambitions. Policies that rested upon the assumption that i) the third sector was ontologically objective, and, ii) imbued with unique characteristics essential to it accomplishing public service delivery in ways the state was unable (or unwilling) to do, either cost-effectively or efficiently. This revealed a prescriptive understanding of what New Labour believed the sector was capable of achieving (Harris, 2010; Kendall, 2010; Crowson, 2011). Indeed, as Kendall and Anheier (2001) emphasise, the ideological momentum behind New Labour's third sector social policies consolidated both the assumed instrumental value of the third sector (to transform public services) with its assumed intrinsic value (its potential for civic renewal through volunteering). The fruition of this policy impetus culminated in The Compact between government and the third sector in the late 1990s (Commission for the Compact, 1998). Then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, wrote in The Compact that collectively organisations in the third sector "bring distinctive value to society and fulfil a role that is distinct from both the state and the market" (n.p). Successive governments have continued to view the third sector through a set of unexamined ideological and policy-driven beliefs which has perpetuated the notion of it as whole, unitary sector. This has subsequently influenced the academic conceptualisations and understandings of the sector as being, as Corry (2010) succinctly states, a "coherent whole – a sector with its own distinct type of social form and practical logic" (p.11-12).

Put another way, Corry (2010) states that this exogenous conceptualisation adopts an *ontological* approach to understanding the sector which relies upon the aforementioned assumption that it is just one alongside two other assumed ontological realities: the state and the market. Consequently, the third sector is characterised and defined in oppositional, residual terms as opposed to enjoying the primary categories and definitions usually attributed to the private and

public sector. This inadvertently essentialises the third sector ascribing it with fixed characteristics from which unfounded generalisations are made. Resultant of this is the risk of overstating the assumed inherent differences between the three sectors and understating their similarities. This ontological (or exogenous) understanding of the third sector enjoys is if not an entirely consensus view then certainly one that predominates in the literature. Indeed, it maintains its presence to the extent that even when academic researchers acknowledge its limitations and the impossibility of making generalisations about the third sector due to its vast, complex and multifaceted character, they nevertheless follow the convention to do so.

### **1.1.2 Third sector as discursive construction of researchers**

The notion of a whole 'real' third sector was forcefully countered by 6 and Leat (1997) who presented a counterargument that the sector was a discursive construction and not an ontological reality at all; that it had been constructed by many influential 'voices' in Britain which included not only policy-makers but academics too. Margaret Harris's (2001) work added weight to this argument by stating that this phenomenon also applied to the United States, that the notion of a whole not-for-profit sector was "'invented' by researchers and those who fund them" (p.750), and, more worryingly, that "scholarship played a key role in re-framing ideas about philanthropy in ways that addressed public policy concerns" (ibid, p.750). Whilst their argument challenges the self-assured conceptualisation of the sector being an objective ontological reality, it nevertheless is a marginal argument in a body of literature dominated by a strand of thought that favours the third sector as being a whole, fixed entity.

A crucial point that 6, Leat and Harris's argument draws attention to is something that is seldom acknowledged in third sector literature, and that is, the role of the researcher (or collective body of researchers) in constructing and maintaining a certain idea(l) of the third sector and the tendency to discuss it in writ-large terms. If we accept for a moment the validity of this claim, then it is not unreasonable to assume that when discussing factors that are considered relevant to the third sector, this will be, to an extent, a matter of individual researcher emphasis, reflecting his/her theoretical biases and the particularities of his/her disciplinary norms. As such, returning to a point made earlier, social policy researchers appear to have enjoyed a hegemonic voice in third sector studies (in Britain at least) and have argued for the influential role social policies have played in affecting not only the operating context of the sector at various historical junctures (6 and Leat, 1997; Harris, 2010) but also, as a consequence, how the third sector itself has come to be defined and understood in light of these policies (Lewis, 1999a; Lewis, 1999b; Anheier *et al.*, 2001; Deakin, 2001). What this has led to is a collapsing of any conceptual boundaries that may

exist between the third sector and individual third sector organisations themselves; indeed it is commonplace for the terms to be conflated and used interchangeably (Alcock, 2010; Macmillan, 2015).

It is this dominant ontological conceptualisation of a whole third sector that was this study's point of departure from the research literature. A personal dissonance with the notion of 'the sector' and the implicit conflation and subsuming of individual TSOs into this understanding was anathema to personal experiences working in and volunteering for third sector organisations. The concept of a 'whole third sector' had little resonance with me, as opposed to the nuances of individual TSOs. Moreover, the assumptions the ontological conceptualisation rests upon for coherence could not, I believe, be unproblematically mapped onto individual TSOs, for instance. Rather, if, as some researchers assert, the concept of the third sector is a discursive construction then taking their argument to its logical conclusion individual TSOs must be a discursive construction too – by those who research them, and, as I will argue in this thesis, by the social actors therein. To proceed with empirical research on this basis meant unpacking the detail of the assumptions of the ontological approach of the sector in order to offer alternatives on which to base a new empirical endeavour and to propose an alternative theoretical, cultural understanding of a TSO.

## **1.2 Ontological approach**

### **1.2.1 Critiquing assumptions**

The key assumption of the ontological conceptualisation of the third sector is that social policies that have been directed at the sector offer both a description of and explanation for the sector. This is atheoretical but nonetheless some researchers have made unevidenced generalisations about the sector from this assumption. For example, the woolly term 'distinctiveness' is used frequently in both the characterisation of the sector and in discussion of its capabilities (Macmillan, 2013a) and often without empirical substantiation. Goodin's (2003) work is an exemplar of this inclination, he states that the sector is "motivationally and organizationally distinct...capable of doing many things that neither the state nor the market sectors can do reliably or well" (p.359). However, as Macmillan (2013a) points out utilising the term in this way sentimentalises and idealises the "specialness" (p.39) of the sector especially related to its mission and values (Goodin, 2003). Extrapolating from this latter point has resulted in some researchers making further assumptions that the sector is structurally and operationally superior to either the public or private sector in delivering certain welfare services (Billis and Glennester,

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1998). However, making such claims is a failure to acknowledge that distinctiveness is in fact a policy-based descriptor of the third sector not a theoretical concept. Therefore, arguments based on the assumed distinctiveness of the sector and its unique ability to deliver welfare services have a speculative timbre to them not based on empirical evidence to support this claim, of which Billis and Glennester's (1998) work is an example.

Intriguingly, the (mis)use of distinctiveness in academic literature and its implicit essentialising tendencies of the third sector stands in contrast to what I would argue is another example of poorly defined policy jargonese. 'The Big Society' is a concept that has been resisted by academics and repeatedly been brought under cold intellectual scrutiny and empirical examination (in a way that distinctiveness has not) and been found wanting in substance and meaning (Glasman, 2010; Milbourne and Cushman, 2012; Corbett and Walker, 2013; Lindsey and Bulloch, 2013; Macmillan, 2013b). And yet, by contrast, distinctiveness has long held an entrenched place the academic (and policy) imagination about the third sector. Furthermore, picking-up Margaret Harris's point (2001) of the extent to which academic work uncomfortably echoed public policy drives in the United States, in the UK context it appears that distinctiveness and its conceptual bedfellow of a whole third sector that is found in academic literature mirrored New Labour's social policies of the late 1990s which promoted this very image. Yet academics do not have to accept policy conceptualisations and descriptions (of the third sector or anything else); their remit is to treat these with scepticism, unpack, reveal and critique their hidden agendas and lay bare the ideologies they promote and what the consequences of these are for the actors involved. Ironically, it was Parliament who played this role by taking a critical view of New Labour's ontological conceptualisation of the third sector.

A House of Commons Parliamentary Select Committee published a report in 2008, two years after Office of the Third Sector was established, which scrutinised New Labour's policies related to the third sector innovating welfare services. These were criticised as being largely hypothetical, prescriptive and lacking in empirical evidence to support policy aims. More particularly the committee was flummoxed by the government's willingness to encapsulate the diversity of the sector under a single homogenising remit of 'the third sector' which the report stated actually stymied best efforts to understand the sector as it actually was as opposed to what the government wished it to be (House of Commons, 2008). Secondly, the committee could not corroborate the government's policy aim that the so-called third sector should be at the vanguard of innovation of welfare services, nor did it support the claim that the sector's alleged distinctiveness would naturally yield beneficial outcomes for those individuals accessing welfare services delivered by the third sector. Crucially, the select committee's criticisms were supported

by evidence presented by leading practitioners and commentators from across the charity, voluntary and community sector. Indeed, Martin Narey, then CEO of Barnardo's, succinctly summed up the general timbre of the committee's findings when he stated that he had "tried to bury the word distinctive and remove it from the Barnardo's lexicon" (ibid, p. 24). Moreover, he undermined the ideology that had underpinned government policy since the late-1970s when he stated that "there is nothing that the voluntary sector can do that the public sector or private sector cannot do just as well" (ibid p.23).

This leads onto a second assumption imbued in the holistic concept of the third sector, which is, as an ontologically objective entity it is aware of and acts, to an extent, in accordance with government policy. Indeed, Alcock (2010) stated that policy makers' discourse when "formally expressed, carry the weight of government power and the democratic process – policy makers aim to shape perceptions and to change practices" (ibid p.13). He and Kendall (2010) have also argued that under New Labour that key third sector stakeholders worked in partnership *with the government* to influence policies directed towards the sector delivering welfare services and stimulating civic renewal. Yet the trenchant evidence-based criticisms of the select committee report undermine this; indeed, stakeholders from TSOs had somewhat different understandings of how they defined their organisations in the first instance, and secondly, how they worked in ways which resisted policy ideas. Alcock and Kendall (2010) acknowledge this as a reality in some sections of the sector but still reaffirm the idea that hyperactive mainstreaming of New Labour policies directed towards the third sector established a general *strategic unity* of the *whole* sector, but with important qualifiers. Firstly, that this unity enabled *some* stakeholders to gain political capital and influence in discussions with government about the very policies they would later tender for in the contract culture of the early 2000s. Secondly, Alcock and Kendall acknowledge that smaller TSOs did not automatically enjoy a privileged seat at the policy-making table and some felt excluded from the partnerships that were forged between government and certain larger national charities.

### **1.2.2 Alternative assumptions**

The ontological conceptualisation of the third sector and its concomitant assumptions are situated in what will be referred to here as a politics-and-policy paradigm of third sector literature; to challenge this view with an alternative approach I moved from third sector literature to organisational sociology that illustrates epistemological approaches to representing and understanding organisations – whether they be in the public, private or third sector (Swidler, 1986; Binder, 2007; Corry, 2010). An epistemological approach is concerned with how organisations are,

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as Corry (2010) states, “structures...or identities; [how they] come to be made real, defined, and authorized, and how different perspectives generate different understandings of them” (ibid, p.12). This underlying area of enquiry requires researchers to hold separate assumptions from those of the ontological view, in the first instance that an organisation is engaged in an *active process* of coming into being, as opposed to being a static ‘object’ onto which the state paints its policy objectives (Tonkiss and Passey, 1999). Secondly, this active process is apparent through the ideational and symbolic practices and behaviours of all social actors involved in the organisational setting. This assumption recovers the idea of *culture* being crucial to the *process* of organisational ontology becoming manifest (Crane, 1994; Taylor and Wilson, 2015), a notion that is rarely if ever attended to in third sector studies. Importantly, an epistemological approach does not exclude the external context of the organisation, rather it recognises that the internal dynamics of an organisation cannot be understood without reference to its wider context (Taylor and Wilson, 2015). This means regarding individual TSOs and their relevant social actors as being in a continual process of actively constructing the ontology of the organisation through negotiation, contestation, engagement with, and resistance of, amongst other things, state policies and other external factors that impinge upon them.

Fundamentally, an epistemological approach to understanding and conceptualising an organisation allows us to introduce the notion of *meaning* to the endeavour. This compels the researcher to attempt to represent organisations not as they would like them to be, but rather, as through the views of the organisation’s actors, what their views mean to them and why (Macmillan *et al.*, 2011; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Indeed, the views of actors may not be informed by awareness of any particular policy regimes, but rather in the absence thereof. Moreover, organisational actors may not necessarily possess a consensual vision of what the organisation as an entity is or what its mission and purpose is. Thus the process of the organisation’s ontological realisation is through the differences, contestation, tension and conflict between the actors’ differing ideas, views and opinions of their shared organisation (Douglas, 1982; Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Wildavsky, 1987; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Douglas, 1999).

Another aspect of an epistemological understanding of an organisation is that it compels the researcher to recognise their own role in the construction of knowledge in accessing, interpreting, analysing, and finally, representing the meaning of the organisation through the eyes of its stakeholders. Indeed, the ideas that constitute a culture are not, as anthropologist Clifford Geertz and organisational sociologists assert, about deep-seated subjectivities of other social actors, but rather about shared symbols and signs between members of the same group and discernible to others spending time with that group – including researchers (Geertz, 1983; Swidler, 1986; Geertz,

1993 [1973]; Swidler, 1996; Binder, 2007). Dobbin (1994) is also in agreement with Geertz and recognised that studying cultures in organisations is about “intersubjective agreement [of organisational participants and] is key to the sustenance of cultural forms...of a shared conception of social reality” (p.117). In a TSO context this means that the researcher must also play an active part entering into the inter-subjectivities of the participants in order to begin access and construct a level of understanding of the meaning of their cultural values and practices. Ergo, the researcher must be self-reflective of the entire research process and in particular of the epistemological implications of how s/he represents others in the final construction of knowledge about the organisation (Merton, 1972; Tomlinson, 2011). Ongoing researcher self-awareness is an unavoidably necessary part of any cultural analysis of an organisation, of which more details are provided next.

### **1.2.3 A cultural approach**

A cultural approach to studying a third sector organisation offers a counterpoint to the ontological (or exogenous) conceptualisation that enjoyed predominance in third sector studies. Instead, a cultural analysis focusses on the ideational and symbolic forms that influence the practices and behaviours of actors in the organisational setting (Binder, 2007; Demers, 2007). A cultural approach posits that technical or instrumental aspects of organisations, like strategy or branding, are also cultural processes (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Swidler, 1986; Crane, 1994; Dobbin, 1994; Corry, 2010; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Furthermore, a cultural approach necessitates a different set of assumptions to work from, for instance, that consensus may not be part of the cultural make-up of the organisation but rather that dissensus and conflict may in fact be the basis of how the culture, and therefore, how the organisation, sustains itself. What follows here is a detailed exposition of Cultural Theory developed by British anthropologist Mary Douglas in which she elucidated how ideas and symbols inform social actors’ plural rationalities of their social milieu and how this is the impetus to social action and orientation to the wider organisational context. Cultural Theory also offer insight into how researchers think about change in TSO settings; indeed, there is a tendency in third sector literature to view change as an episodic external force signalled by changes in government, for instance. This corresponds to the exogenous view of TSOs and therefore rests on the assumption that change is also perceived as being extrinsic to it. However, the cultural approach does not assume this but seeks to understand where the organisation’s stakeholders locate change and how they perceive and respond to it.

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To begin however, we must first attempt to pin down what is meant by the concept of 'culture' which is recognised as interminably difficult (Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Crane, 1994; Spillman, 2002; Jenks, 2005) and more contentious to define than the third sector. Jenks (2005) explains the notion of culture has enjoyed a long intellectual history in the West, with its roots in Greek antiquity stretching into the classical age with the Latin term *civis*, or civilisation, to denote the state of an individual "belonging to a collectivity that embodied certain qualities" (p.7). In its next etymological evolution it became associated with agriculture, i.e. to *cultivate*, with an emphasis on growth, *change* and transformation (Spillman, 2002; Jenks, 2005). Since the late nineteenth century however, culture has come to signify humanity itself, its essence (Jenks, 2005), threatened by revolutionary social changes as a result of industrialisation, modernity, material development and mass society (Spillman, 2002; Jenks, 2005). Later the notion of culture as 'human spirit' also became associated with Victorian ideas of hierarchy and progress. Culture became the yardstick by which to measure and judge other 'primitive' societies and 'native' people against the assumed 'civilised' superiority of Victorian Britain at the apogee of its imperialist project; a time during which colonial anthropologists serviced this notion of culture (Spillman, 2002).

Whilst the etymological development of culture is somewhat uncontested in the literature, its modern definitions, from the twentieth onwards, are battlegrounds over meaning. The astonishing variety of definitions on offer emanate from just a few rigid assumptions which act as foundational reference points that are fundamental to the understanding of culture. These initial assumptions are that culture is: i) concerned with collective experience as opposed to individual subjective consciousness, ii) is concerned with change or transformation, and, iii) is a process (Spillman, 2002; Jenks, 2005; Demers, 2007). In sociology, the definitions formulated around these assumptions tend to emphasise the symbolic aspects of culture, such as collectivity, shared beliefs, customs and ideologies. An influential definition that combined all these elements (Spillman, 2002) was provided in the late 1950s by the cultural theorist Raymond Williams, he argued culture as 'a whole way of life' and the semantic neatness of this became a taken-for-granted definition for 20 years. However, Clifford Geertz entered the fray in the 1970s with a definition of culture that still exerts influence today. His treatment of culture elevated it beyond the merely epiphenomenal and placed it on equal footing with society and political-economy in terms of importance to individuals and how it shapes and influences our lives (Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Spillman, 2002; Williams, 2013 [1958]).

Geertz was an American anthropologist whose work on culture came to define the interpretative paradigm in anthropology and had cross-disciplinary influence in sociology and the social sciences

and humanities more broadly. In a seminal work, *The Interpretation of Cultures* published in 1973, he drew on his fieldwork conducted in the 1950s and 60s to lay the foundations for how to study, understand and represent culture. He rejected notions of culture as a 'whole way of life', or, at the other extreme, as merely individual subjective experience, rather he proposed that culture is a symbolic system in which individuals, organisations, behaviours and practices, that is, "cultural forms, find articulation" (p.17). In this sense "culture is public" (ibid p.12) because the ideas and symbols actors draw upon to articulate themselves are "publically available symbols" (ibid p.12; Swidler, 1996) and their meaning is, therefore, publically available. For researchers of culture then, culture "is a context, something within which [events and social interaction] can be intelligibly that is, thickly described" (Geertz, 1993 [1973], p.14). Importantly, the context of culture is not stable or fixed but rather is a process of social actors making meaning of publically available symbols to construct what Geertz and others have since described as 'webs of significance' (Geertz, 1983; Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Swidler, 1996).

Geertz's concept of culture demanded a new approach to ethnographic methodology, the usual method of studying and analysing cultures. Geertz jettisoned notions of a science of ethnography which sought to uncover laws and absolute truths of cultures (Swidler, 1996), instead he revived the Weberian notion of *verstehen* (to seek meaningful understanding) with a literary, hermeneutical tradition by treating cultural practices as texts to be contextualised and interpreted. For Geertz, to study culture was to seek understanding of the culture through interpretation of the webs of significance of the participants of that culture. This therefore demanded a certain attitude (Jenks, 2005) or disposition from the ethnographer to undertake this endeavour. In practice, the interpretative attitude sought to contextualise an element of culture such as an idea or event in relation to other cultural texts in order compare, interpret and begin to understand the culture in the terms of the participants of that culture (Swidler, 1996). In this sense, Geertzian methodology situates culture as being entirely dependent on nuanced understanding of the context of the participants in an unending interpretative process (Geertz, 1983; Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Jenks, 2005). As with all interpretive endeavours what an ethnographer generates in the final analysis is, as Geertz (1993 [1973]) describes it, is "really our own constructions of other people's construction of what they and their compatriots are up to" (p. 9).

As much as there are disciples of the Geertzian concept of culture there are detractors of his work too. Their most salient criticism of his work is that he largely ignored issues of dissensus, conflict and power relations in his conceptualisation and studies of culture (Crane, 1994; Swidler, 1996). These criticisms are fair, and when reading Geertz as much as he places emphasis on interpreting

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and understanding complexity and multiplicity, it is not his habit to open the possibility of multiple cultures residing in the same place at once, or even of a single cultural text being open to multiple interpretations by different participants of that culture. He leans towards a mono-cultural interpretation – however erudite, nuanced and scholarly that interpretation may be. Furthermore, Geertz (1993 [1973]) explicitly rejected the idea that culture could be theorised, because in his words “cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete” (p.29), the cultural process of meaning making is constantly unfolding – there is no end point and therefore this cannot be distilled and abstracted by theory. The only escape available to a researcher from this inherent ‘problem’ of culture was he suggested to turn it “into institutions and classify it” (ibid, p.29). Indeed Mary Douglas, a fellow anthropologist of the late twentieth century, did something similar when she developed Cultural Theory: a typology or classification of cultural types that theorised the plural rationalities of social actors that she posited (in opposition to Geertz) existed in organisations and institutions that resulted from conflict and dissensus between the social actors.

The Geertzian approach to studying culture in organisational settings become popular in sociology in the 1980s as Demers (2007) explains, but initially it was not his interpretivist paradigm that prevailed but rather a functionalist approach which was premised on understanding culture as merely one element of an organisation amongst others – like mission statements and corporate strategy. Culture was assumed to reside in the logos and branding of the organisation. By this reckoning in order for an organisational culture to change in line with its new strategy for instance, the managers need only manipulate the culture exemplified in its logos or ‘value statement’ thus leading to the desired cultural transformation. This one-dimensional concept of culture had yet to be influenced by Geertzian (or Douglas’s) notion of culture and equally had a simplistic understanding of change too, regarding it as something spasmodic that could be managed (Demers, 2007) as opposed to a process that may have unforeseen consequences. As Demers (2007) explains this functionalist approach to studying organisational culture “underemphasize[d] the tensions and dynamism” (p.87) therein.

The intellectual trend moved away from assuming separate realms of objective, rational management strategies apparently untouched by the subjectivities of employees’ values (Dobbin, 1994) to a cultural approach that offered a counter argument to these rationalistic understandings of organisations (Demers, 2007). These social scientists – the new institutionalists – began exploring rational or instrumental management practices as social constructs, that is, as elaborate symbolic practices imbued with values, myths, traditions and ideologies (Dobbin, 1994). In their work, culture was not a mechanism that could be easily manipulated by management to achieve organisational ends (Demers, 2007), it was not an optional element of the organisation to

be attended to at will. Instead, organisational sociologists started to demonstrate empirically that organisational culture was about shared meanings between organisational actors that were involved in collectively creating the meanings of the organisation itself and of them in it. So much so, as Dobbin (1994) explains, that even where so-called “rationalised organisational practices [exist these] are essentially cultural” (p.118). Consequently, “strategy, structure and power relations [were] seen as expression[s] of the culture” (Demers, 2007, p.76).

### 1.3 Cultural Theory

A theorist who connected the role of ideas to organisational form was British anthropologist Mary Douglas. She developed her Cultural Theory in the 1960s and 70s as a result of extensive ethnographic research in Africa and then subsequently in the USA. At the time Cultural Theory stood in contrast to other theoretical approaches to the study of culture; for instance, French theorist Foucault’s theoretical approach focussed primarily on the role of language and discourse in promoting certain socio-cultural practices, and his compatriot, Bourdieu, placed class stratification as central to maintaining imbalances of power in cultural practices. Rather, Douglas’s Cultural Theory presupposes that the *meaning* of individuals’ perceptions of their social context actually constructs their context, the social order within it and produces a complementary set of cultural practices too. The Douglasian notion of how ideas and symbolism affect the form and function of an institution is new to third sector studies and offered the possibility of providing novel insights into how a TSO’s form is realised by the ideas and values of its stakeholders which in turn affects its activities related to policy implementation.

The specifics of Douglas’s empirical observations were that in spite of discernible variation between ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ societies she observed, that cross-societally all individuals organised themselves along two corresponding social dimensions: first, a group dimension, that is, *who* individuals prefer to relate to, and secondly, a grid dimension, that is, *how* individuals prefer to relate to others (Douglas, 1982; Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Wildavsky, 1987; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Wildavsky, 1991; Bale, 1997; Mamadouh, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1978]; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Depending on how individuals in a particular social context prefer to experience these dimensions of sociability, at either high or low levels, they will fit into a typology of social types that Douglas developed drawing on a wide range of cross-disciplinary research, including sociology, psychology and anthropology (Douglas, 1982). According to Cultural Theory there are only four feasible cultural ‘types’ in any social setting, they are: hierarchism, individualism, egalitarianism and fatalism. These types are referred to as cultures because each social arrangement has an associated cultural bias; complementary systems of ideas that arise out of,

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justify and support the preferred social arrangement. The cultural bias is based on individuals' i) personal values, and ii) knowledge (or lack thereof) of the organisation or social context they are situated in. Taken together the social arrangement and ideas are what Douglas refers to as 'culture' or a way of life. These were the conceptual foundations and theoretical assumptions of Cultural Theory that Douglas set down which subsequently developed a loyal following of social scientists in the 1980s and 90s who applied Cultural Theory to a range of research questions and refined the theory in doing so. Cultural Theory has been most successful in illuminating how and why different social actors within the same context hold wildly divergent perceptions and interpretations of their organisational context and of the same information that is available within that context. Below I explain the most complete and widely articulated and applied model of Cultural Theory (Douglas, 1982; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984; Gross and Rayner, 1985; Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Douglas, 1999; Mamadouh, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1978]; Douglas, 2011 [1986]).

In the first instance, Cultural Theory opposed prevailing rational choice theories which valorised and prioritised the autonomous, subjectively rational individual in decision-making (Douglas, 2011 [1986]). By contrast Douglas wished to offer a theoretical and analytical approach for understanding *collective rationalities* as a social, not individualised, process (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983). Indeed the dominant theoretical position of Cultural Theory is that collective rationalities arise out of interactions *between* individuals; therefore purely subjective perceptions are subordinated to the group perception, that is, the collective cultural consciousness. This is not a negation of individual choice – indeed the four cultural types of Cultural Theory are premised on the choices individuals make based on who and how they wish interact with others in a particular social space. Furthermore, Cultural Theory also states that tensions arise between the four cultures over which is most the most appropriate form of social arrangement and complementary cultural bias in that setting (Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). The theory provides us with the conceptual and analytical tools to investigate these tensions and conflicts.

Research that focussed on this latter point was evidenced in Douglas's fruitful collaboration with Aaron Wildavsky (1983), an American political scientist, which also brought Cultural Theory to the attention of a wider audience of social scientists. Famously, they applied Cultural Theory to the arena of public perceptions of acceptable levels of atmospheric radiation and contentious public policy pertaining to building nuclear power plants in 1980s America. Douglas and Wildavsky demonstrated a novel analysis of how 'the social' and 'culture' could be studied simultaneously, instead of dislocating 'culture' from its social milieu. This led to an understanding of how cultural bias provided a frame through which individuals perceived social phenomena and how they

preferred to socially organise themselves in response to particular phenomena (6, 2005). They powerfully illustrated how different stakeholders in the debate – including environmentalists, politicians, scientists, and the public – perceived the issue of acceptable radiation levels from radically different points of view which stemmed from differing political and moral frames of reference that were based partly on how they preferred to socially organise themselves in their particular fields (with either high or low levels on the group and grid dimensions of sociability). Since the publication of their seminal study, Cultural Theory gained traction across a range of disciplines including political science, health sciences, anthropology, ecology, geography and been applied to a diverse range of research topics and questions (Mamadouh, 1999). In particular the theory has been used extensively in studies of risk perception but also in areas such as perception and preference formation in parliamentary parties and the ideological underpinnings of third sector policy-making (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Douglas, 1990; Boholm, 1996; Bale, 1997; Rippl, 2002; Scott and Carr, 2003; Tulloch and Lupton, 2003; Taylor-Gooby and Zinn, 2006; Kendall, 2010).

### **1.3.1 Group/Grid social dimensions and cultural typologies**

In this section I explain the key concepts and characteristics of Cultural Theory in more detail. The starting premise is that there are two social dimensions from which Douglas devised her typology of only four possible cultures in any given social context. The first social dimension by which individuals start to socially organise themselves is what Douglas referred to as the group dimension; this is the extent to which individuals are incorporated and committed to other individuals in a social context. Group dimension is the degree to which a social actor prefers to be bound by group solidarity. A visual representation of this dimension is shown as a horizontal axis (see Figure 1). Negative or 'low' degrees of group commitment on the left end are associated with those social actors who prefer weak, loose social bonds with others. Moving to the right end of the axis to higher degrees of social commitment are where individuals who prefer to be strongly incorporated into a group with others are situated. The group dimension, and indeed where social actors are pitched along it, derives from what Douglas considers as one of the most basic considerations of human psychology: deciding *who* to interact with in a social setting. This is encapsulated in the question *who do I want to be with?* (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Mamadouh, 1999). Answering this question, even at an unconscious level, will decide if an individual regards themselves as someone seeking impersonal, unfettered social relations (located on the left of group axis) or as someone preferring intimate and close ties with a whole collective of others (situated on the right of the group axis) (Douglas, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1986]).

Having established *who* we prefer to associate and interact with Douglas posits that an individual's second consideration is *how* to interact with others; this she called the grid dimension of sociability. We establish our grid dimension by asking ourselves *how do I want to be with others?* (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Mamadouh, 1999). 'Grid' relates to the regulatory mechanisms that exert social control and prescribed codes of conduct over the social actor in a social setting. Grid is about social regulation on two levels: how the individual social actor behaves in the social context and how the cultural group they are part of is regulated as a whole. Once again, Douglas states that the grid dimension can be represented as a vertical axis (see Figure 1) crosscutting the group axis with corresponding high and low levels of grid preferences at either end. Being positioned at the high end of the grid dimension expresses an individual's preference for high degrees of prescriptive behavioural norms with clear reward and disciplinary conventions to maintain behaviour standards. Individuals pitched at the low or negative end of the grid axis prefer to be only minimally subject to control by the rest of the group they are part of; they have a preference for fewer rules and regulations over their behaviour.

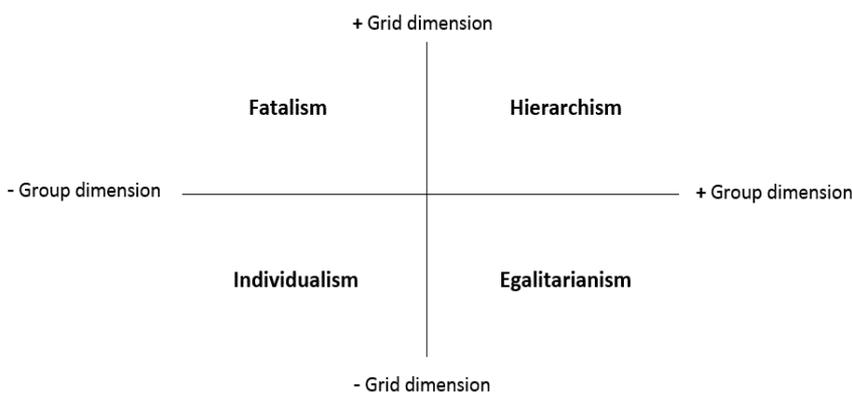


Figure 1 Group/Grid Dimensions and Cultural Typologies

The group (social commitment) and the grid (social regulation) dimensions intersect at right angles creating four quadrants, each of which signifies four types of social arrangement – hierarchism, individualism, egalitarianism and fatalism – the members of which share by varying degrees of group and grid characteristics (Douglas, 1982; Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Douglas, 1999). Importantly, the epistemological claim Douglas makes with Cultural Theory, is that whilst we may 'see' what appears to be an inestimable variety of social arrangements around us, when analysed against these two social dimensions the apparent infinite variety distils to one of these four possible modes of social arrangement. A further claim is that that within any social context

be it a small sports club, a religious association or multinational corporation, for instance, that a maximum of four social types can exist, sometimes fewer than four and always more than one. Ergo, an organisation – like a charitable organisation, for example – can never be just one of these types, i.e. just hierarchical or just egalitarian. Indeed a crucial aspect of the typology is that the social groups exist in relation to each other and are mutually, albeit oppositionally, sustaining of one another (Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Furthermore, members of each type of social arrangement construct a corresponding *cultural bias* of ideas, values and principles that justify their social arrangement and act as ideational reference points to draw upon when the group is threatened (Gross and Rayner, 1985). These ideas and values are also the moral and behavioural yardstick by which members in other groups are judged. The social arrangements along two dimensions (group and grid) and the cultural bias (ideas) of the groups combine to form ‘culture’ or more particularly *cultures*.

The first cultural type in the top left quadrant is hierarchism; being both high on group (social solidarity) and grid (social regulation) dimensions hierarchism is commonly associated with bureaucratic processes. Members who gravitate to this cultural type prefer to be tightly bound in relationships of group solidarity that are maintained partly by rigidly prescribed roles assigned to social actors in the group who also prefer to observe a clear chain of command. Hierarchism is fundamentally based on inequality between its members, therefore those in the upper-echelons must act to persuade others in the lower-echelons of the cultural group why this is justifiable and reconcile all members to this mode of social organisation as being the most beneficial for the group *as a whole*. During periods of crisis or change, justifications for lack of parity between the upper and lower orders of the group will need to be reiterated in order for the culture to remain stable (Gross and Rayner, 1985). The supporting cultural bias of hierarchism invokes the notion of law-and-order as providing resilience against the vicissitudes of life and as justification for the lack of parity between its members. This cultural bias provides a constant, stable point of reference which makes hierarchies adept at problem solving through careful division of labour and maximisation of available resources, extracting the most out of the wider social system and co-ordinating the whole to this end (Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). In hierarchism, leaders are respected; however a corresponding weakness of this is that trust can be misplaced in those who do not possess the abilities and talents to lead the group. Indeed leaders are prone to accepting the plaudits for group success but where failure is concerned blame is placed on social deviants who have attempted to disrupt the hierarchy and the carefully calibrated positions of members within the culture (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Wildavsky, 1987).

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The second ideal type Douglas posits is diagonally opposite the hierarchist culture, this is the individualist culture. This culture is weak on both group and grid dimensions, as such members in this group prefer weak social structures and minimal social ranking. Douglas compared individualism to the laissez-faire market system in which constraint and interference of the individual is an affront to their 'natural' freedom. Hence, social roles are not prescribed as they are in the hierarchist culture. Furthermore, equality is only subscribed to in so far as it means all individuals are equal to compete with each other and the wider social system in which they operate. Individualists are largely self-interested in their actions; any social ranking that may exist within the culture is determined by competition between members of the group pursuing their self-interests. The cultural bias that supports this social arrangement is the view that personal success and accomplishment is the desired outcome of any situation or action, moreover, that success is entirely attributable an individual's merits (not group effort) and failure is therefore also a matter of an individual's incompetence. Individualism's cultural bias sees neither intrinsic nor extrinsic value in tradition and laws, rules and regulatory controls over behaviour; these are regarded suspiciously as a threat to competition and personal freedom. This culture is therefore vulnerable to poor decision making and co-operation with others as members of the group prefer to act self-interestedly and in accordance with group interests.

Egalitarianism is the third cultural type situated in the lower right quadrant; members of this group register high on the group dimension but low on the grid dimension of sociability. As such the members prefer to be closely bound in a collective of equals and are resisting of regulations and rules by those who try elevate themselves above the collective. Solidarity and the ritual of maintaining the delicate balance of equality acts as an implicit regulatory function by disciplining or shunning of deviants who flout the social order by attempting to control others within the group (Douglas, 1999). The cultural bias that supports this social arrangement is a pre-occupation with maintaining the solidarity of the group and guarding its boundaries by a commonly held threat: outsiders. This manifests itself in an almost morbid attention paid to potential contamination of the purity of the egalitarian arrangement. Paradoxically, the commitment to maintaining harmonious egalitarianism can result in internal strife as these cultural types find it difficult to make decisions. The imperative to reach consensus on all things is almost impossible to achieve and capitulating to the will of another is interpreted as an inappropriate exertion of individual authority and discordant with the group's values thus resulting in stalemate in decision making. During periods of crisis or when 'bad things' happen egalitarians blame i) 'the system' because individuals cannot themselves as being culpable as no-one is allowed that much influence over the cultural group, or, ii) attributed to uninvited infiltration by an external force contaminating the group.

Cultural Theory posits that in any organisation or community these three cultures tend to prevail, meaning most individuals in a social setting will position themselves unconsciously in one of these cultural groups. However, there is a fourth type to complete Douglas's typology: the fatalist culture. Fatalists are characterised by low group dimension, meaning they experience very weak or non-existent group solidarity. Instead they tend to be isolated from others either through individual choice, or because they have been expelled from cultural types for deviating from their expected norms. Indeed fatalists' atomisation from other actors within a social setting is profound – not only within their own cultural (i.e. with other fatalists) but also from other cultures. Yet fatalists are also defined by high grid commitment meaning they are subject to and willing to accept the heavy regulation and social control over their actions and behaviour. However, their resigned apathy means that members of this cultural group do not wish to exert power over or blame others, make rules, or organise themselves, rather they capitulate to the rules and regulations imposed upon them by other more dominant cultural types. The fatalist cultural bias is therefore one of benign acceptance of events believing as they do that fate is the guiding hand behind all circumstances; a shoulder shrugging resignation of what-will-be-will-be. As such, adverse events are attributed to 'fate' and outside the scope of human agency. Thus fatalists are characterised by inertia and unwillingness to strategize as planning seems futile in the face of supra-organisational forces such 'fate' or 'the Gods'.

These four cultures are not viable as individual cultures in a social context, as Douglas claims, instead their coherence is achieved in opposition to each other; the cultural consciousness of each group is vigilant in maintaining its sense of self-definition by what it is as much as by what it is not. The oppositional character of the typology also means that the cultures are held in tension with one another and that their interaction is based on conflict and a contestation over which culture offers the most appropriate, feasible and desirable way to socially organise in a particular context and in response to change. Moreover, the adversarial character of the cultures also rests on the members belief in the inherent 'rightness' of their culture rendering all else an 'Otherness' to them and affront to the 'natural' order of their culture (Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Douglas, 1999). Finally, there is a tendency when things go wrong for members of the cultures to blame another group that they detect in the organisation and that they believe undermines the organisation as whole (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Thompson *et al.*, 1990).

### 1.3.2 Criticisms and refutations

The most frequent criticism directed at Cultural Theory is the questioning of a typology that contains only four types of social organisation. Whilst Douglas acknowledges that in reality social arrangements may appear infinite, she questions the utility of 'infinity' or 'infinite variety' in both theoretical and empirical terms (Wildavsky, 1991; Douglas, 1999). Instead the deliberate economy of Douglas's typology is that it has *explanatory* utility when applied empirically. Moreover, the types are theoretical abstractions and therefore are exemplars, or heuristics, to illustrate an empirical point (ibid). Equally, this also allows for comparison between social types and their corresponding cultural biases to be made – a crucial element of social science endeavour (Gross and Rayner, 1985). Furthermore, the theoretical types are not arbitrary imaginings on Douglas's part, they were developed out of the conceptual fruits of years of fieldwork observing that humans organise themselves along two complementary social dimensions: with whom, and how, they choose to interact. Thompson (1982) put forward a fifth social type – the hermit – however, this is by definition an asocial category, total removal of the self from the social condition to have no effect on, nor be affected by, societal forces (Thompson, 1982b; Thompson, 1982a). Whilst there is no doubt this phenomenon exists, in both objective and theoretical terms, it has been explicitly avoided or quietly dropped by researchers who have applied Cultural Theory in their empirical efforts. The utility of the hermit type is severely limited in a theory that was developed to explain the socialised individual. In sum, even counting the possibility of this unserviceable fifth cultural category existing, no critic of the 'limitations' of the typology has mooted a sixth cultural type.

Extrapolating from the criticism of the limited typologies comes the second criticism that the cultural model "becomes an over-powerful interpretative tool" (Douglas, 1982, p.2) encouraging a "static mapping of values onto organisational features" (Douglas, 1999, p.412). However, this criticism fails to understand that the dynamism between the cultural types arises from a crucial element of Cultural Theory, which is based on Douglas's definition of culture (Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984). She described culture as a 'way of life', a complementary symbolic and ritualistic set of 'certainties' which justify a particular cultural type. The certainty of a culture's biases is such that opposition is regarded as unorthodox and threatening of its social order (Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Hence, self-definition of each cultural group is *oppositional* in character. This notion informs a further theoretical assumption that *conflict* is the basis of cultural interaction as the members of the cultures clash over meanings, over 'certainties' and over which 'way of life' best serves the set of social circumstances in which their culture is manifest. The cultures compete for dominance by recruiting members from rival cultural groups by providing an alternative vision of what an ideal

community is and that their 'way of life' offers the realisation of that idealised vision. This is where the dynamism of the model lies, in members migrating from one cultural group to another and increasing the size and influence of that culture thereby legitimising its values and biases as normative (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Douglas, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1986]).

There are many examples across the disciplines that bear out the dynamism of the model and that when applied to a variety of settings researchers discover its utility and flexibility realised rather than its limitations (Wildavsky, 1987; Selle, 1991; Boholm, 1996; Mamadouh, 1999; Rippl, 2002; 6, 2003; Scott and Carr, 2003; Ney, 2004; Verweij *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, these studies represent the clear understanding that culture is always in flux, is never static, and that the 'certainties' must constantly be (re)produced as part of an endeavour to legitimise itself in the minds of those that inhabit the culture (Wuthnow *et al.*, 1984). Indeed, the empirical record confirms Douglas's central claim of a consistent picture of cultural conflict and inter-group competition beneath the thin veneer of apparent unity of a group or organisation (Bale, 1997). Equally, in organisations where cultural conflict and tensions are held in equilibrium the organisation is sustainable and has longevity. However, in organisations where there is disequilibrium between the cultures this can be destabilising of the organisation negatively impacting its ability to perform its services and, in the worse cases, render it unsustainable (6, 2003). Wishing to demonstrate this point, Bale (1997), in his application of Cultural Theory to British parliamentary parties, showed that Cultural Theory had utility in illustrating how apparent "surface cohesion [of an organisation] ... reflects an equilibrium between forces pulling in different directions, not a unity obtained by a single, united thrust" (quoting Rose, 1964, p. 25).

Acknowledging the assumptions that Cultural Theory's central claims rest upon for coherence allows us to counter a further criticism that is levelled at it: that it condemns social actors to a fixed ontologies in their respective cultural types with limited agency to move to another cultural type (Selle, 1991). This criticism is perplexing, not least because Douglas is explicit in explaining the *social* basis of perception and interpretation in *socialised* individuals in *social* contexts (Gross and Rayner, 1985; Wildavsky, 1991). As such, the theory assumes a relational and fluid ontology between social actors sharing similar cultural frames of reference, like for instance, when we exercise our agency or free will to join a charity to participate in voluntary work. Once we enter the organisation or community we then gravitate to one of the four possible cultural types because it is in accordance with other pre-existing values we carry with us from other parts of our lives. Individual ontology is fluid because, as just explained, the cultural types work to inculcate members from other cultural types to their own culture by capitalising on any dissatisfaction or disillusionment detected in other actors. If persuaded to do this, a social actor will transition from

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the cultural consciousness of one type of culture to another. (Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Wildavsky, 1991). To do this individuals must have agency exercised in relation to others and be in possession of a fluid personal ontology (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983).

Finally, it is worth qualifying that in the case study here Douglas's Cultural Theory is not intended to be 'the last word' but rather as "our starting point, not the end point" (Thompson *et al.*, 1990, p.262) in introducing and demonstrating an understanding of a TSO being a culturally heterogeneous construct; that it is ontologically constituted by and via cultural ideas and associated social practices that challenge the ontologically whole, homogenous conceptualisation that enjoys a privileged position in mainstream third sector literature.

## Chapter 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Research questions

In this thesis presents a new theoretically informed cultural understanding of a third sector organisation as having a culturally heterogeneous ontology; an ethnographic case study provides empirical evidence for this new conceptualisation of a TSO. The problem I sought to address at the outset of the study was an epistemological one relating to how the third sector (and implicitly therefore, TSOs) has been analysed and conceptualised, principally within a social policy set of literatures in which social policy analysts have been the 'dominant thinkers' and knowledge creators. This, I argue, has produced an epistemologically policy-centric and atheoretical understanding of not only the third sector but also, by implication, of TSOs too. The politics-and-policy paradigm has been based on a limited set of assumptions that policy makers and social policy analysts have relied upon, not least that the third sector is defined by ontological holism shaped by the prevailing government's policy environment.

This thesis challenges this conventional assumption by proposing an alternative theoretically informed approach to understanding the ontology of a TSO as being a multi-faceted *cultural* construct, as opposed to a whole *policy* construct. Critical to the presentation of this argument is Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory which is the analytical lens and theoretical framework applied to all aspects of the case study methodology. Applying Cultural Theory from the outset of fieldwork and data generation enabled me to, firstly, deviate conceptually and analytically from social policy-influenced assumptions of TSOs and instead apply an alternative set of *cultural* assumptions in a self-reflexive way. Secondly, this self-aware cultural approach also informed subsequent data analysis and development of the argument of there being three cultures constitutive of Gates County Citizens Advice. This explicitly theoretically-driven approach not only embedded the study design in a widely applied theoretical approach but also immersed me, the instrument of this ethnographic research, in a particular theoretical vernacular that was crucial to analysing, interpreting and representing the organisation as a cultural construct.

The guiding research questions were, a primary question, *what cultures exist in this organisation?*, and two supporting questions, *what informs these cultures?*, and, *how do the cultures affect organisational policy?* These questions compelled a qualitative, cross-sectional case study design.

## Chapter 2

In this chapter, detailed explanations are provided for the case selection, delineation of the field, appropriateness and feasibility of the methods used to generate the data and its subsequent analysis. All the necessary ethical considerations adopted during and post-fieldwork are attended to throughout; this includes using pseudonyms for the organisation, its geographical locations, and the participants, to ensure full anonymity. Justifications for the underlying philosophical and theoretical principles and assumptions which underpinned the methodology are also attended to. When taken together, these enabled rigorous analysis of the data in order to evidence an argument that sits plausibly within the epistemological context of existing third sector and organisational sociology literature pertaining to how TSOs are conceptualised.

## 2.2 Multi-sited ethnographic case study

### 2.2.1 A marriage of methodology and theory

Practicing theoretically driven ethnography is not unusual but for some proponents of conventional inductive or grounded ethnography it is apostasy; they claim that theory should never inform a researcher's experience or insight to the field prior to entry (Hage, 2005; Agar, 2006; Hine, 2007). This suggests an impossibility however, that the ethnographer must somehow enter the field *tabula rasa*. Rather, it is a truism that all social researchers' perceptions are coloured by their positionality, and this includes having prior knowledge of various theories of the topic they have an interest in researching. I was more sympathetic to the school of thought that argued that our, that is researchers, prior academic training means that we come to the field with pre-existing theoretical knowledge that cannot be disposed of, it shapes how we think, the questions we ask and how we make our case selection (Seale, 2005; Burawoy, 2009; Tavory and Timmermans, 2009; Wilson and Chaddha, 2010). The more crucial point, of course, is to be self-reflexive and transparent about these unavoidable intellectual (and perhaps personal) biases. Influential on my thinking were ethnographers Burawoy, Marcus and Falzon who are all avowed proponents of theoretically driven multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995; Marcus, 1999; Burawoy, 2009; Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 2011).

As these ethnographers and those of their specialism argue, sociological theory is indispensable to construct boundaries in a multi-sited case study in order to provide the ethnographer with a narrower field of focus. This was the case here; indeed, the ethnographic site for my case study was *Gates County Citizens Advice* (GatCCA) a charity comprised of eight advice centres situated across a wide geographical area in a large county in southern England (I gave this county the

pseudonym Gateshire County). The physical and symbolic boundaries of GatCCA could, in principle, extend in innumerable directions both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally the organisation comprised of eight advice centres but also had contracts with other stakeholder organisations in the county and relationships with clients and other individual stakeholders in the communities around the advice centres. Vertically, GatCCA enjoyed relationships with central and local government and its own membership organisation – CitA. Moreover, the charity was impinged from all directions by social forces, such as social justice issues that affected its clients, as well as competing ideologies from within and without the organisation that discursively weaved between the stakeholders as to how to address these social injustices. Overall GatCCA as a charity was an established, relied upon and indivisible part of the civic fabric of Gateshire County. Where, therefore, did its boundaries lie? A more salient question in the context of social research, where should I construct and justify delineating its boundaries? Indeed, if the notion of boundlessness or infinity is valueless in the context of empirical research, as Douglas (1999) has argued, so in order to conduct an achievable phase of fieldwork I required theory to place, as Douglas (1999) argued, indispensable limits on the site preventing it expanding into unmanageable directions. By choosing to employ a theoretically driven ethnography two things were achieved with this case study, i) it addressed the practical issues of how to conduct realisable empirical research in an unstable and potentially unbound social setting (Marcus, 1995; Marcus, 1999; Burawoy, 2009; Falzon, 2009; Marcus, 2011), and, ii) allowed me to begin to analyse, interpret and explain this nebulous organisational context. What follows here is a short, but necessary, intellectual history of ethnography in which I contextualise and justify the appropriateness of the theoretically driven approach. Indeed, it is worth knowing what theoretically driven, multi-sited ethnography is as much as what it is not, and what epistemological claims can and cannot be made in its name.

### **2.2.2 Bound ethnography: immersion over time**

As a methodological approach, ethnography is often regarded as an art form or 'craft' that is frequently wrought with ethical issues in its practice and prone to being value-laden in its narrative expression (Hammersley, 1992; Wacquant, 2003; Seale, 2005; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Yet, in principle, there is no right or wrong way of conducting ethnography, rather ethnographers who are the instruments of their research aim to justify their particular style as being appropriate to addressing the research topic in light of more pragmatic or logistical considerations (Wacquant, 2003; Seale, 2005). However, some researchers are less accommodating of what they claim are unacceptable innovations in ethnographic methodologies (Agar, 2006). Indeed, in debates surrounding what 'counts' as legitimate ethnography, I suggest

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that naturalistic, single-site or 'bound' ethnography continues to enjoy an elevated position as the preeminent form of the craft. This type of ethnography was cultivated in the early to mid-twentieth century by anthropologists and is characterised as having both a noble, and, at times, ignoble history due to its association with colonialism as early ethical controversies related to the representation of others testify to. Yet, in spite of a problematic history, naturalistic single-site ethnography continues to exert influence as a powerful point of reference from which contemporary ethnographic approaches must constantly differentiate and justify themselves in opposition to.

Historically the anthropological approach to naturalistic ethnography was preoccupied with the 'otherness' of people and communities in remote parts of the world (Harris, 2001). Characteristic of this was a pronounced power asymmetry between researcher and their so-called 'informants', and, the extended length of time ethnographers spent in the field detailing the social minutiae of that apparently 'bound' context (Silverman, 2013). This methodological approach rested upon the ontological assumption that both the boundaries of the field and the informants were objectively self-evident, that they were 'out there' to be studied. Furthermore, that the informants need only be observed and in doing so the complexity of their culture would 'reveal' itself to the researcher who 'captured' and faithfully documented the data. Furthermore, that the ethnographer enjoyed what Mason (2004) has called a "privileged epistemological" (p.85) position relative to the informants in that s/he understood their culture supposedly unsullied by value-judgements and bias. The final representation of the informants' culture was in a narrative form and taken as an 'objective' explanation of the ethnographer's observations from the field (Geertz, 1983; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Mason, 2004). Thus, the ethnographer practiced social science in much the same way as a natural scientist did, by observation and recording data to produce objective findings. However, the unmistakable positivistic-bias of this naturalistic approach rendered ethnography vulnerable to quite reasonable criticisms of it being a *product* rather than an unfolding *process* (Harris, 2001; Nadai and Maeder, 2005). Nevertheless, the seeds of anthropological ethnography cross-fertilised to sociology and were germinal to the Chicago School of 'urban' ethnography; itself an important intellectual school and defining cornerstone of what would mature into other sociological ethnographic practices. Initially however, urban ethnography retained some of the features of positivistic ethnography but melded this with the symbolic interactionist paradigm that eventually led to sociological ethnographers pioneering the inductive analytical techniques used in Grounded Theory (Tavory and Timmermans, 2009).

Since its early twentieth century origins ethnography has diversified significantly; apposite to my purposes here is to discuss the pivotal moments of challenge to conventional practices of bound

ethnography which sparked methodological innovation. Firstly, it was in the 1980s when intellectual shifts to post-positivistic theoretical and analytical paradigms in the social sciences sparked trends such as the ‘cultural turn’ and ‘crisis of representation’ which signalled a move to more interpretativist analytical approaches (Delanty and Strydom, 2003; Schwandt, 2003). These movements promoted an understanding of culture as a process, and therefore, that traditional ethnography was antithetical to studying culture as being dynamic rather than fixed and immutable. A second related development was feminist scholarship’s ground-breaking insight into the epistemological relationship between research *practice* and a researcher’s *positionality*, that is how the researcher’s identity, subjectivity and embodiment is profoundly implicated in and constitutive of knowledge production (Harris, 1990; Harris, 2001; Delanty and Strydom, 2003). Whilst a radical insight at the time, this methodological point is arguably now a conventional matter to be attended to self-reflexively in the course of all interpretative social science research. A final change to bound ethnography was globalisation and the academic concepts employed to explain this cross-cutting phenomenon, such as time-space compression and problematising of global-local boundaries and spaces. These accelerating intellectual and socio-political shifts were the elements that gave impetus to methodological innovation for a new kind ethnography to emerge.

### **2.2.3 Multi-sited ethnography: navigating space**

Thus, ethnographers that departed from the conventional approach of assuming an ontologically objective bound space in which culture was assumed to be a product of that bound space were responding not only to the rise of post-positivistic critiques of this approach but were ready to respond to the rising collective awareness of humanity’s interconnectedness – socially, politically and economically – through the accelerating processes of globalisation. Consequently, the new constructionist paradigms these ethnographers worked within rejected notions of an objective, bound site in favour of understanding how, as Silverman (2013) states, social spaces and “social realities are produced, assembled, and maintained” (p.374-5) through symbolic and ideational forms that may operate anywhere between local and global registers. This relied upon a different assumption that the researcher (and their positionality) was fundamental to the *process* of constructing, delineating and representing what constituted the field for ethnographic research (Hine, 2007). In a globalising world the argument was that there could be no local site hermetically sealed off from global influences (Nadai and Maeder, 2005). It was therefore incumbent on the ethnographer, such as it was in my case study, to (self)consciously and self-reflexively select and navigate where the boundaries of the field should lie (Burawoy, 2009; Falzon, 2009; Tomlinson, 2011). In principle, the boundaries of a field could exert outward to infinity by

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following the paths of interconnectivity with various social forces and actors, but, applying theory at the outset is useful in setting some boundaries (how artificial they may be) in order that the field be empirically manageable and that research questions can be plausibly answered (Wilson and Chaddha, 2010).

Indeed, the fundamental principle ethnographers of the newly coined multi-sited ethnography established was that it “defines as its objective the study of a social phenomena that cannot be accounted for by focusing on a single site” (Falzon, 2009, p.1). This methodological principle was itself keeping pace with the academic understanding of globalising societies and the trend towards ‘spatial turn’ in social sciences in the 1990s. Multi-sited ethnography therefore confronted the issue of ‘space’ as a concept and embraced it as something that is socially constructed and under constant construction by the social actors in a particular space and by observers of that space. Moreover, the ethnographers who promoted this view also stated that ethnography does not only pertain to physical spaces but also to awareness of the multi-sitedness of ideas, symbols and signs, and of people in terms of their shifting identities and perspectives (Marcus, 1995; Marcus, 1999; Delanty and Strydom, 2003; Wacquant, 2003; Burawoy, 2009; Wilson and Chaddha, 2010). Therefore, the kernel of multi-sited ethnographic practice is that it is about following these connections and relationships between physical, interpersonal and ideational spaces. This is where Clifford Geertz (1993 [1973]) would suggest one can begin to map out the webs of significance between these spaces. And to paraphrase Falzon (2009), if ‘bound’ naturalistic ethnography is about attending to the ‘roots’ of site then multi-sited ethnography is about attending to its ‘routes’ (p.7) – following them, constructing them and representing them.

Whilst I believed adopting a multi-sited ethnography was appropriate to this case study, there was a trade-off for this; indeed, all researchers’ methodological decisions inevitably lead to losses and gains that they must weigh up in the context of their research. The practice of movement between spaces as opposed to the rather more stationary experience that bound ethnography entails means that a certain amount of depth was compromised in my data generation. Therefore, the so-called thick description that is the long-standing hallmark of ethnographic case studies is sacrificed in order to gain *breadth* of data across a large site comprising of eight advice centres. I was prepared to lose some fine-grained detail in order to make a bigger theoretical argument that answered my research questions. Losing depth, I believe, did not compromise the *substantive* material that I generated or undermined the research process. Indeed, it was logistically sensible given the scope of the site and limited time available to conduct fieldwork.

#### 2.2.4 Case selection and delineating the field

Clifford Geertz's (1993 [1973]) authoritative statement on ethnographic research was that the researcher does not study *the social site* as much as the social phenomena taking place *in the site*. This is true; ethnographers do indeed study social phenomena in particular sites – to a point. However, there is a subtle complexity between the interplay of social site and phenomena. Indeed, not long after Geertz made this claim an alternative view cast doubt on the sensibility of his position. Hard on Geertz's theoretical heels in the late 1970s Mary Douglas challenged his position by claiming that a person's experience of the various geographical and physical spaces (or sites) they find themselves in influence the values and ideas they hold of themselves, of others, and more particularly, of the setting itself and what they think the purpose of that setting is. Therefore, it was nonsensical to assume that the site itself does not have relevance to how the social actors in that space think and behave. For instance, a person's identity and behaviour at work may not be the same at home, at their sports club or in the organisation they volunteer at (Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Taking Douglas's cue, I positioned my case study based on the assumption that Gates County Citizens Advice was an interplay between i) its history of emergence through years of mergers and funding obligations, ii) being bound to the Citizens Advice brand, and, iii) its cohort of new and longstanding staff and volunteers whose experience and knowledge of the charity contributed to its operations and service delivery.

More particularly, Gates County Citizens Advice was the voluntary organisation where I had experienced the most noticeable and pronounced 'tribalism' (as I colloquially referred to it) and had first questioned why people within the organisation had such profoundly different ideas of how to go about delivering the mission and aims of the charity. As Harris (2001) has pointed out, those who volunteer for or are employed by TSOs tend to find themselves drawn into the organisation in a way that it becomes "part of [their] everyday world" (p.758) and furthermore, that these experiences may excite an interest in wishing to study the organisation, its people and activities in more formal way (as was Harris's own experience). Indeed, she writes of her own long involvement with her local Citizens Advice in both a voluntary and research capacity. A pragmatic consideration in my own study was that to negotiate access to the charity for research purposes I could capitalise on the trust former colleagues and trustees already had in me. As such the board of trustees of GatCCA, facilitated by one of the senior managers who acted as gatekeeper, generously agreed to host my PhD research by granting permission for me to conduct ethnographic fieldwork from October 2014 to March 2015. I produced an outline (see Appendix A) of my study's aims – wanting to explore how the charity responded to change – which the trustees approved.

As a multi-sited case study GatCCA was suitable to investigating my three research questions for several reasons. In the first instance, it is large countywide charity (not a small, isolated or unique one). Both within the wider Citizens Advice UK-wide federation of charities and within Gateshire County itself GatCCA is a juggernaut due to its geographical spread, number of advice centres and volunteers, and volume of clients that it services. Its scope and scale was realised by relationships with other not-for-profit institutions and stakeholders not always in its immediate locale but of crucial importance to its existential condition, either through funding relationships or the supply of manpower and premises. Its multiple interconnected sites created Geertzian webs of significance between it and local government funders, other TSOs whom it subcontracted services to (for instance, Shelter and Macmillan), and the national charity, CitA. Secondly, GatCCA's staff and volunteers were a diverse pool of individuals who were multi-sited in the sense that some were peripatetic moving from one advice centre to another in the course of work, and others juggled a combination of both paid and voluntary work and inhabited the separate identities that defined these different roles. GatCCA also had established, but not always harmonious, relationships with other Citizens Advice charities across the network with whom they attempted knowledge exchange and best-practice tips. Overall, GatCCA offered both breadth and depth in the multiple physical and figurative spaces that constituted its reality as perceived by the participants of GatCCA themselves.

A final consideration was that GatCCA was undergoing a significant period of structural and operational change, which the trustees and senior managers announced in person to staff and volunteers in their respective advice centres. Moments of change, as Douglas argues, is a crucial element to analysing individual differences in the same social context because it prompts actors to consider their group and grid dimensions of sociability when responding to change. GatCCA's changes were related to network-wide policy and strategy changes that CitA had initiated, which were themselves responsive to much broader national political exigencies affecting the entire charity-scape. Indeed, prior to fieldwork, in August 2012, CitA issued policy guidance advising how the then Coalition government's Localism Act 2011 would transform the operating context of not only the Citizens Advice network but also other not-for-profit organisations too. The essence of the Localism Act was that communities and their stakeholders would be empowered to initiate solutions to local problems in locally appropriate ways. Moreover, CitA's policy document in response to this Act linked the government's political agenda to its continuing economic austerity programme, the document stated "*[I]ocalism and the austerity measures go hand in hand and*

*local authorities will be looking to local organisations to come up with innovative ways of implementing localism within the limited resources available” (2012, CAB BMIS, p.3)*<sup>2</sup>. Two years later, in 2014, CitA set out its strategy for the network to respond to the national call for local welfare initiatives by positioning itself and its activities in ways that were commensurate with the wishes of not only local communities but also with that of local governments. CitA’s *Local Government Strategy 2014-2017* stated that “*local government is a natural partnership for Citizens Advice since the focus for both is addressing the particular needs of the communities we serve*” (p.5). Indeed, under the guise of ‘localism’ CitA wished to maintain close relationships with local government commissioners as this was in the long-term strategic interest of the Citizens Advice network. Consequently, advice centres were urged to “*take this area of work seriously, assign it a high priority and ensure that everyone involved is clear about what needs to be done and why*” (2014, CAB, p4)<sup>3</sup>. This explicit directed purpose of ‘returning to localism’ to maintain the favour and funds of local authorities was not expressly addressed by GatCCA’s trustees and senior managers. Instead the chair of trustees emphasised that the era of change he was instigating at GatCCA was to ‘give back the advice centres to volunteers’ to pursue localism in ways they saw fit.

Thus, in contrast to immersion in a single bound *place*, as is the principle practice of conventional ethnography, in this study prioritisation was on navigating the physical, interpersonal and ideational *spaces* of GatCCA during this period of change and returning to localism. And although, arguably, all ethnographic sites compel the ethnographer to delineate the spaces or boundaries of the site (Falzon, 2009), this may be done more or less consciously by the researcher. Good practice, it is argued, is that when setting these boundaries, the researcher is aware of *why* s/he did so and what the consequences were for his/her research (Falzon, 2009). My approach was to ascertain from GatCCA’s participants (that is, staff, trustees and volunteers) at an early stage of fieldwork what their view of the eight advice centres were. Popular opinion confirmed by the statistics GatCCA generated was that Westgate and Lowgate were the largest advice centres as measured by volunteer numbers and were busiest by client footfall. Therefore I set boundaries on the site by focusing on these advice centres in particular and added an additional two; Eastgate which was a base for senior managers and other paid staff working on specialist areas of legal advice, and Greengate, which although small in terms of staff numbers and quiet by comparison

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<sup>2</sup> CAB Bureau Management Information System (3 August 2012) *Localism: what does it mean for bureaux and local authorities?* (p.1-5) [Guidance relevant to England only]

<sup>3</sup> Citizens Advice Bureau (December 2014) *The Citizens Advice Service Local Government Strategy 2014 – 2017*. (p.1-22).

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to other advice centres, hosted many of the centralised functions of the charity, like human resources, the finance department and the training team. Thus, from the outset I followed 'routes' suggested by the participants that in their own estimation were important to the charity as well as carving out new avenues, new routes, to delineate a fieldwork site that comprised of four primary advice centre that covered all aspects of organisational life. Secondly, I used the remaining four advice centres (Littlegate, Ashgate, Hillgate and Rushgate) as secondary sites to cross-reference data that I generated in the primary sites. Taken together the eight advice centres presented me with an opportunity to investigate where the continuities and discontinuities, similarities and differences in cultures that manifested across the charity. This also presented me with an opportunity to expose anomalies or peculiarities of just one advice centre, for instance. This delineated physical spaces but not ideational or interpersonal spaces, to do this I employed Cultural Theory's two dimensions of social organisation as orientating themes to begin to my guide data generation. I kept in mind the group dimension: who people choose to interact with, and the grid dimension: how they wish to interact, and what the reasons were for these preferences. Combined these were the physical and symbolic boundaries I constructed to navigate the spaces of GatCCA throughout fieldwork.

As with all methodological approaches that a researcher selects it is as much about pragmatic and logistically practicable decision making as it is about self-reflexivity confronting the relative gains and losses one makes in choosing one approach over another. The trade-off in my multi-sited ethnographic case study was in the writing of the ethnography itself. The distinctive hallmark of single-site traditional ethnography, where the reader expects to read thick description often in infinitesimal details of the sights, smells and fine-grained descriptions of the physical settings of the social context, is absent here. Certainly the inclusion of this detail would add a certain *texture* to my thesis, however it would not have added *substance* to my thesis. Thus, I traded this aspect of ethnography in order to gain the possibility of answering my research questions in such a way that allowed full theoretical expansion. Minutiae of detail would compromise the scope of theoretical expression I wished to make and the desire to contribute something original to our academic understanding of a TSO's ontology. It is vital to state that this does not mean that what is presented here is not ethnography, it is, in method and approach, but in expression it offers a different hue that nonetheless could only have found its substance and meaning in methods and philosophy of ethnographic fieldwork. Indeed, I claim that the argument of this thesis could only have been achieved by adopting the ethnographic methodological principles I chose. The higher level of abstraction of the participants' reality (as they understood it), and my interpretation of their biases and preferences, is my ethnographic voice employing the language of Cultural Theory.

## 2.3 Methods

### 2.3.1 Positionality and ontology

My introduction to the field as a researcher was facilitated by one of the senior managers who, when I made contact with her to set a commencement date for fieldwork, invited me to attend a series of 'roadshow' meetings (as she referred to them) that were delivered to all eight advice centres in late 2014. The intention of these meetings was for the trustees and managers to announce to paid staff and volunteers a significant organisational restructure and attendant personnel changes. At each of the roadshow meetings I was given an opportunity to introduce myself and my research. I explained what it involved (an initial phase of observation followed by a second phase of interviews) as well as the ethical parameters in place which meant, amongst other things, that the research was conducted by participant consent and that there were no mandatory expectations of participation. I also contextualised my research with reference to my previous employment and familiarity with the organisation and some of its people and its recent history and politics. My intention was to mark myself as having insider-knowledge of the organisation and therefore establish my position as less of a researcher and more of a compatriot of sorts, returning with renewed interest in the organisation and its people.

I wanted to avoid a relationship with participants that relied on needing to choose between a simplistic binary of insider/outsider researcher roles that yield either etic/emic perspectives; these tend to characterise the methodological literature and that appear to be a legacy from naturalistic, positivist ethnographic practice (Gold, 1958; Merton, 1972; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Nadai and Maeder, 2005).

Instead, my commitment to an interpretivist approach to cultural understanding of the field problematised these very binaries and attempted to see beyond them. Furthermore, I considered my own identity genuinely multi-sited in terms of being i) a previous employee of GatCCA, ii) inhabiting a new status as doctoral researcher, and, iii) a myriad of other identities located in my personal biography and values and other markers of difference I carry in terms of gender (woman), race and ethnicity (white, British), class and so on (Gold, 1958; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Harris, 2001; Tomlinson, 2011). By extrapolation, it seemed reasonable therefore to conceive of the participants in Gates County Citizens Advice to be just as multi-sited in terms of their identity (Collins, 2010; Costley *et al.*, 2011). The implications of this were that I adopted weak subjectivism as my ontological approach to participants; that is, I assumed them to be subjective individuals with multiple identities dependent on context but sharing common experience of being either paid staff or volunteers of GatCCA. This means I could access a reasonable but unavoidably

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incomplete level of understanding of their perspectives as seen through my interpretative and theoretical lens (Geertz, 1983; Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Cunliffe, 2011). Indeed, it is a prerequisite assumption of using Cultural Theory that organisational cultures are *intersubjective* and that social actors therefore produce *plural* rationalities, that is, modes of thought that individuals share between them. This follows from the Geertzian idea that cultures are produced from *public* ideas and symbols, not personal, private ones. Thus, when I introduced myself to participants at the roadshow meetings, I used reminiscence, memory and storytelling of things that had happened in the past that I knew we had in common. As such I tentatively started to establish discussion points with participants based on our shared knowledge and understanding of the organisation and its people. Indeed, their own revelations to me were in form of exchanges that were, as Collins (2010) explains, an “interconnected process...[of]...self, story, memory and dialogue” (p.238-242).

### 2.3.2 Participant observation

Participant observation is usually the primary method for data generation in ethnographic research and it was no different in this case study; it constituted the first phase of the study design. In the first few weeks of fieldwork I spent time in all eight advice centres to build a sense of familiarity of me as the researcher and awareness of my research amongst the staff and volunteers. I conveyed my presence as a “participant-as-observer” (Gold, 1958, p.220) in order to emphasise the overt nature of the observation phase of the study in an attempt establish myself as a benign presence and to facilitate my engagement with participants in an open and unguarded way (Gold, 1958). When engaging with participants I took opportunities to demonstrate my insider-knowledge of aspects of the organisation to accelerate building interpersonal trust and to encourage in them a sense of being able to disclose their views with me in confidence. Observation at this stage was useful as an exploratory exercise to begin to observe unobtrusively (Silverman, 2011; Silverman, 2013) the interactions between participants in the course of delivering the advice service and through this how they viewed their work, each other and the organisation as a whole. I did this by attending staff and volunteer team meetings, the board of trustees meetings as well as other events such as the annual staff conference and general social interaction and dialogue between participants. In particular, I observed and was privy to the post-mortem conversations after the roadshow meetings in which they expressed their initial responses to the three changes the trustees announced at these meetings.

One of the first challenges of the observation phase was attempting to gain informed consent from volunteers in particular. This was frustrated by the fact that most volunteers work only one day a week and because GatCCA did not know exactly how many volunteers they had ‘on the

books' as one senior manager put it, but guesstimated approximately 250-300 across the organisation. Compounding the unknown quantity of volunteers there was also no formal procedure for communicating to them *en-masse*. Indeed, communication practices varied across the charity; supervisors in different advice centres adopted their own approaches to communication, some were ad-hoc methods and others took a more controlled approach ranging from providing bulletins on noticeboards, newsletters, and giving verbal announcements in team meetings. The success rate of these methods was highly variable. Email was used rarely and the intranet was so dense with information and difficult to navigate that it was, by and large, ignored by volunteers. Thus, communicating my research purpose was thwarted by this lack of procedure and process and I abandoned my attempt to gain informed consent from volunteers for the observation phase. I did however use the multiple ad-hoc communication channels to at least widely publicise the study so as not to be regarded as conducting covert research.

In general, the volunteers were non-plussed by my presence; some showed interest and asked questions, others were civil and polite, some rebuffed my well-intended questions of interest, and many more simply ignored me whilst they conducted their advice work. My attempts to ingratiate as a benign presence in the advice centres was successful by degrees in the main sites (Greengate, Lowgate, Eastgate and Westgate Advice Centres) where I spent the majority of my time (one day a week, every week), but less so in the centres I visited only occasionally (Littlegate, Ashgate, Hillgate and Rushgate) (one centre for one day, each week), which I anticipated. Where there was little interest in my presence, this presented me with an opportunity to observe unobtrusively. My engagement with paid staff however was noticeably different to that of volunteers; I used email to communicate details of my research to which I received prompt responses and signed consent forms (see Appendix B). They showed interest in the study more generally and approached me to express a willingness to participate and were curious as to what eventual 'findings' would be.

What was notable in the observation phase was that the different ways that volunteers treated me (some welcoming, others not) reflected how they treated paid staff in the organisation. Reflecting upon my observation in a conversation with Maggie, a long-serving senior manager, she commiserated with me and explained that in spite of having been employed with the organisation for over ten years she still experienced being flatly ignored by some volunteers. This revelation along with my own experiences cast light on what was not a methodological challenge to overcome (which I was initially concerned it was) but rather indicative of a substantive matter and entry point to the first of Cultural Theory's social dimensions, the group dimension, that is, *who* participants preferred to engage with. In this sense, I had begun to fully inhabit my role as

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participant-observer as I both observed and participated in the experience of inconsistency of communication and uneven engagement with participants as much as a senior manager, for instance, did. Equally, a further interaction I experienced with some but not all participants was the degree to which they trusted me with their disclosures. For some, I found myself making constant efforts to reassure them that they would be anonymised in the thesis – they would not be able to personally identify themselves or others. Secondly, I took pains to reassure them of their confidentiality in the course of fieldwork by not divulging their views to their colleagues. Other participants were less concerned, or not at all, by issues of confidentiality and this was indicative of varying degrees of trust not only between me and them, but also, as I generated more data, of levels of trust between the participants themselves. This developed in me experiential awareness of the second social dimension of Cultural Theory, grid dimension, that is, *how* participants wished to relate to each other either with high or low levels of interpersonal trust (Geertz, 1983; Geertz, 1993 [1973]).

I wrote my observations as single set of combined field notes and research diary. I found that these data were generated through a lens of both analytical reflections and more emotive reactions to the day's activities against a backdrop of service delivery that involved overhearing staff and volunteers discuss clients' distressing personal circumstances, often involving children. At this stage of fieldwork I found it impossible to siphon off and differentiate between personal insights and more analytical or theoretical ones; reflecting back on my field notes they were in fact a combination of both. I took care to write as self-reflexively as possible but always with the aim that my observations were framed by Cultural Theory's two conceptual reference points. The field notes reflect that it was through both passive observation and active engagement in discussion with participants that I started to gain an understanding of what Geertz (1983) referred to as "experience-near" (p.57) concepts. These are those concepts or ideas that participants use unthinkingly and in colloquial vernacular to explain their social context and their position within it. These were apparent in some of the recurring themes and metaphorical tropes that participants drew on to elucidate their opinions and experiences of GatCCA. These proved invaluable in making the leap, as an ethnographer must, to a higher level of abstraction in the analysis of the data to "experience-distant" (ibid, p.57) concepts. These are concepts used by researchers in their interpretations and theoretical explanations of the field and are unlikely to be known by the participants (Geertz, 1983). Drawing on both experience-near and distant concepts from my field notes and research diary I designed the questions for my semi-structured interviews which comprised the second phase of fieldwork.

### 2.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

Participant observation was an opportunity to meet some of the staff and volunteers across the charity and to deepen an understanding of the demographics of the eight advice centres. It had already been disclosed to me that the charity did not know exact figures of how many people volunteered for the GatCCA due to poor recording keeping practices. I choose to develop a sampling strategy that was as consistent with the volunteer and staff make-up of the individual advice centres as I observed them to be, and by taking account of the assumed number of volunteers across the charity (between 250-300 in total). Throughout the first phase of the study I set about developing a purposive sampling strategy for possible interviewees. I aimed to select a range of participants across the organisation (Baker and Edwards, 2012; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). This included participants from all eight advice centres at all levels of seniority, whether paid staff or volunteers, including several trustees. I selected a combination of long serving staff and those who were relatively new to the organisation. Equally, I balanced my sample with participants with whom I had established relationships from my time working for the charity as well as those I did not know. In the volunteer cohort I included those who, by the force of their personality and vocality (by their own admission), appeared to dominate in their respective advice centres with those participants who were quiet and unassuming, as well as participants who fitted in somewhere 'in between'. A similar application of criteria I applied to paid staff; I included a combination of those who had leadership or management roles and those in support functions and service delivery roles. I initiated contact with prospective participants by emailing an information sheet (see Appendix C) and consent form (see Appendix D) inviting them to be interviewed, or I approached them in person, which I followed-up with a confirmation email if the participant agreed to be interviewed. Of the 34 potential participants invited for interview 32 consented and two did not respond; working on the assumption that there were approximately 300 staff and volunteers in GatCCA as whole, the sample represented just over 10% of organisation's population (see Appendix E). The interviews were audio-recorded (with the exception of one) and held in private offices or meeting rooms in the advice centres except for three interviews which were held off-site at local cafes at the interviewees' request. Whilst it is inappropriate to speak of representativeness in qualitative sampling techniques, I was satisfied that I had succeeded in achieving a range of participants that inhabited the diverse roles in and across the advice centres of GatCCA as I had observed during phase one of the study design.

Semi-structured interviews were appropriate to me introducing general topics to the interviewee but with enough latitude for the participants to express themselves freely and in their own terms. The interviews were a space in which both the participants and I could enter into more nuanced

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discussion for me to attempt to gain access to a level of understanding of their perceptions and interpretations themselves, others and of the organisation. As well as introducing general topics to interviewees (principally the three changes the trustees announced at the roadshow meetings) I also posed more specific theoretically informed questions related to Cultural Theory's two social dimensions. For instance, I operationalised the group-dimension concept by posing questions related to how the participant viewed themselves and their role in relation to others at various levels of the organisation. To establish the participants' preferences for strong social regulation I devised questions relating to the participants motivations for keeping them engaged with others and the reasons for why this was. Interview questions were adjusted slightly to be appropriate and relevant to whichever participant I was interviewing and where they were situated in the organisation (i.e. trustee or volunteer advisor) whilst striving to maintain the integrity of the underlying point of the questions to achieve a level of consistency. Through the ensuing dialogue with the interviewees I gained an understanding of their views as informed by the multi-sitedness of their own lives and experiences and through the interpretative and theoretical lens of my own experiences at GatCCA as a former colleague and now researcher. The "back and forth" (Geertz, 1983, p.69) between the interviewees' opinions and views and my own interpretations of these through the concepts of Cultural Theory brought me to an understanding of the varying views of the organisation and "parts that actualise it" (ibid, p.69) i.e. the participants themselves.

### **2.3.4 Document analysis**

Documents can be viewed as product of cultural practices as much as any other aspect of material culture. Far from being a static (Prior, 2007; Prior, 2011) resource they are produced and consumed in particular contexts and used instruments of identity construction as well as conveying action to be taken in the form of directives, guidelines and orders (Prior, 2007; Prior, 2011). Moreover, documents may become relativized and manipulated to advance a particular mode of thought or course of action. How they are produced, circulated or hidden and censored is revealing of the social context in which they were produced and of the social agents involved in this process (Prior, 2011). For social researchers documents yield to the hermeneutical tradition of interpretation so it is not unusual in ethnography for document analysis to be used a third method to triangulate with the observational and interview data generated (Silverman, 2013). However, it is worth noting that using documents with a view to adding equal weight to the importance of textual analysis in triangulation of data may in some cases be an over-anxious attempt to assert the 'validity' of qualitative research, a case of 'the more the better' mentality. Silverman (2011, 2013) recommends honesty as a better practice if a researcher's study is partial in attaching more significance and weight to one particular method of

data generation than another. This was the case with my study, whilst my intention was to add equal importance to the three sets of data, in practice I was compelled to emphasise the observation and interview data due to the scarcity of documentation available of Gates County Citizens Advice. Once again what initially appeared to me as a methodological setback in the early stages of fieldwork soon showed itself to be revealing of more substantive matters pertaining to the organisation.

Indeed, it was a striking irony that I found it impossible to access information and documents (like strategy and business plans) relating to many aspects of GatCCA in an organisation that specialised in being an information service with vast and easily accessible up-to-date legal information with which to provide clients reliable advice. The absence of documentation was not obfuscation or secretiveness on GatCCA's part, in some cases the documents simply did not exist (and had not existed for some time) and writing and producing some of these policy documents for instance was a task to which some members of staff were occupying themselves. On one occasion, my request to access a business plan document was met with shame-faced reluctance to give me a copy due its scant detail. The lack of 'things written down' (as this organisational habit was described by one senior manager) was an ongoing source of frustration for her and other managers. There was no documentation available of what GatCCA's strategy or plans were for the foreseeable future, especially in regards of the three changes that the trustees had announced to the entire organisation. Seen in an oblique light, the problem of no data in fact *was the data*. The few documents I managed to collate over the course of fieldwork were also multi-sited in that I accessed them through the intranet, internet, noticeboards and individuals who maintained a rudimentary filing system (there was no central repository of key organisational documentation). These were a small collection of trustee meeting minutes, the annual report and accounts and a few other documents relating to the organisational relationship between GatCCA and CitA. Indeed, by contrast, the most accessible and by far the most informative and useful documents I accessed through the CitA website, in particular documents that gave details on the new localism policy and the funding environment that a revival of localism was intended to address.

## **2.4 Data analysis**

### **2.4.1 Thematic Network Analysis**

It is usual for qualitative researchers to provide explanations of their methods of data generation but details of data analysis are sometimes curiously absent (Attridge-Stirling, 2001). This is short-

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sighted as it can strengthen their epistemological claims and how they were arrived at if the researcher discloses their analytical approach (Attridge-Stirling, 2001; Seale, 2005; Silverman, 2011). The preferred method of analysis used in this study was thematic analysis. It is a synthesis of different analytical approaches that qualitative researchers across social sciences, in particular qualitative health science research, have used for some time (Guest *et al.*, 2012; Clarke and Braun, 2013). It is only recently, however, that the procedure for organising data in this approach has been demonstrated by researchers and formally recognised as a rigorous analytical technique. Its utility is that it can be used for both inductive and deductive coding and can be applied to various data types (Attridge-Stirling, 2001; Guest *et al.*, 2012; Clarke and Braun, 2013). I applied a slight variant of the thematic analysis which is thematic network analysis. This approach enabled me to make connections between the data in order start to organising them as a visual representation of an interconnected network of codes producing “web-like illustrations that summarise[d] the main themes” (Attridge-Stirling, 2001, p. 385), or in the Geertzian sense, building the webs of significance in the data.

I elected to code without the use of software; the first procedural step I undertook was combination of familiarisation and reduction of the data. This involved reading and rereading the field notes/research diary, interview transcripts and organisational documents to get an overall sense of and intimate familiarity with the dataset. This guided me as to which elements of the data to use to reduce to text for the coding framework. Coding did not merely reduce the dataset but was an important first step in taking an initial purview of the data with theoretical concepts in mind (Clarke and Braun, 2013). The codes I used were concise labels, for instance a two-word phrase that succinctly summarised a piece of data in relation to the research topic or interview question. My intention was to reduce the volume of text in the dataset and to code it in ways that consistently referred back to the topic/question. In the case of interview transcripts I coded each one in whole speech parts, this ranged from a short paragraph in answer to an interview question, or even a simple sentence in some cases. I avoided ‘double coding’, that is coding a line of interview text twice if the substance of it had previously been coded. I applied a combination of inductive and deductive coding techniques; inductive codes were derived from the data and peculiar to the GatCCA setting, the deductive codes I derived from Douglas’s Cultural Theory (Attridge-Stirling, 2001). This inductive-deductive technique was intentional to leave open the possibility of surprise and anomaly in the coding the data and not simply to impose theoretically driven codes that were not germane to the data, research questions or my ethnographic experience (Wilson and Chaddha, 2010).

By way of example, a basic code I identified relating to the first change (return to localism) and from which I developed themes that ultimately aligned with Douglas's egalitarian cultural type was: i) '*awareness of other external stakeholders*'. Some participants, when discussing their views on the announcement of the return localism had made reference to their awareness of how their advice centre was geographically situated relative to other welfare organisations in the town and whether professional relationships were established with these organisations. For instance, statements such as "a big unwieldy organisation that had somehow disconnected with the local community" (Pete, Lowgate), and, "working in partnerships and trying to hit common goals" (Sue, Greengate), and, "localism is basically forming relationships...local partnerships in a specific geographical area, not too big, [and] not all over Gateshire County" (Alexis, Rushgate). A second complementary basic code to the first one was: '*awareness of clients' needs*', again some participants were concerned that clients visiting GatCCA should receive a seamless, convenient, 'local' service that may include referral to other geographically close organisations that GatCCA had established service agreements with. Staff and volunteers made statements such "[localism is] being aware that each advice centre's clients have their unique problems and needs within that locale...being aware of that and being able to provide whatever unique service people need" (Ed, Eastgate), and, "if a client comes in and is homeless [then] the volunteer contacts the local food bank and the local Council and services" (Simone, Lowgate).

Following the phase of developing a coding framework, a second phase was initiated which was to identify *themes* from the basic codes. A theme encapsulated the substance of all the basic codes that fitted under that theme title and that related to the research question. Abstracting themes from the codes was an iterative process (Clarke and Braun, 2013) in which I developed themes where relationships and patterns between codes existed and that resonated with my experiences of fieldwork. Building a thematic network requires three levels of themes. *Basic themes* were the lowest level of abstraction from the codes; these could only be understood in the context of other basic themes and not in isolation of each other. Then there were *organising themes* at a higher level of abstraction which captured the key elements of the basic themes (Attridge-Stirling, 2001). Finally, the highest order theme from the data framework were *global themes*; these encapsulated the substance of the two lower order themes. I used global themes (there were more than one) to specifically address the research questions (Attridge-Stirling, 2001; Clarke and Braun, 2013).

From the basic *codes* described above I extrapolated some basic *themes*, these were i) '*inter-personal relationships*' (with other stakeholders in external organisations), ii) '*prioritising clients*' (especially by staff and volunteers involved in the frontline, client-facing service delivery), and, iii)

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'close geographical proximity to advice centres' (of staff/volunteers and other organisations in order that deep knowledge of local clients' problems could be understood and responded to in appropriate ways). From these three basic themes a higher level of abstraction to *organising* themes was extrapolated, the first of which was '*flexible collectivity*', meaning that participants expressed views or acted in ways that demonstrated a flexible sense of collective consciousness with stakeholders both in *and* outside GatCCA if they were client-facing. A second organising theme was '*factionalism*', this was present in participants' data where they expressed or acted in ways that were supportive of *flexible collectivity* but were not client-facing in their own roles and therefore were 'invisible' to their colleagues who were. Finally a third organising theme was the '*role of the supervisor*' in mediating the sense of *flexible collectivity* and *factionalism*. Finally, two global themes emerged – '*passive participants*' and '*active participants*' in the expression and practice of the basic and organising themes. Taken together these were some of the themes that provided the framework of characteristics of the egalitarian cultural type.

Coding from basic to global themes required both inductive and deductive analysis to build a complete thematic network of the ideas, practices and perceptions of participants in the field as viewed through my analytical lens (Attridge-Stirling, 2001). During analysis I kept in mind the "the unit of analysis [was] the socialised individual" (Wildavsky, 1991, p.358) and also that the two dimensions of sociability (group and grid) I was assessing participants against were "polythetic scales...[t]hat is: they include a series of aspects, but those are not necessarily present in each case observed" (Mamadouh, 1999, p.397). Indeed, in the third and final stage of analysis I took each participant's interview and observational data and analysed these against the themes (and cultural groups I had ordered themes into) in order to allocate the participant to which ever cultural group their data corresponded to most consistently. Some allocations were on the basis of the participant being exemplars of the cultural type, whereby much of their data fitted comfortably into a cultural group's themes. Others' data however fitted weakly into a cultural type *but* with sufficient characteristics of the type to be allocated satisfactorily within it, and crucially, could not feasibly be allocated to different cultural type. Appendix F provides an example of a small selection of a participant's data organised under some of the egalitarian themes which led to this participant's allocation to the egalitarian cultural type. It is important to note however that this was *analysis* phase and not the *interpretation* of the analysis. This came later in an iterative process of working with the elements of Cultural Theory and the themes to build the argument and narrative that is presented here and that answered the research questions. During the interpretative process my own role in recalling the context of interactions and conversations during fieldwork was vital (Geertz, 1983; Geertz, 1993 [1973]).

When considering the epistemological possibilities of interpretative analyses the perennial question that presents itself to the researcher is how their claims (and the study as whole) meet the exacting standards of validity, reliability and generalizability. Collectively however these are the measures of the quality and value of positivistic research and are something of a *bête noire* of qualitative researchers whose work is situated in interpretative paradigm. Nevertheless, it is not unusual to find interpretative researchers valiantly defending their research and contorting their studies to meet these positivistic benchmarks. However, validity, reliability and generalizability are inappropriate criteria by which to judge the quality and worth of qualitative, interpretative research (Geertz, 1983; Hammersley, 1992; Geertz, 1993 [1973]; Golafshani, 2003), precisely because these terms derive their semantic, philosophical and methodological coherence from the positivistic paradigm and research protocols that are incompatible and indeed antithetical to interpretivist knowledge production. Thus, research situated in the latter category must be judged and evaluated by other criteria, on its own terms.

Hammersley (1992) argues that the rather the more relevant issue in interpretivist studies is the issue of the representation of others. However, underscoring such concerns is the realist notion that it is somehow possible to get under-the-skin of the social situation to access one true objective reality and ensure this is what is being represented. This is rejected by the interpretative paradigm, rather its assumption is that reality as individuals perceive it is a matter of *interpretation*. Indeed, the Cultural Theory is premised on how multiple rationalities and experiences of a given social event or situation is *interpreted* in wholly different ways, using different frames of reference, leading to different courses of action by the actors involved. Notwithstanding this, I attempted to get as close as possible to understanding these actors' perceptions and interpretation of their organisational context. However, as Geertz notes, the final analysis is a matter of my interpretation of their interpretations; thus, the only first order interpretations are those of the participants themselves. Nevertheless, what is produced in this thesis offers "evidence for wider inference" (Silverman, 2013, p.306) to other third sector organisations. This is a plausible claim based on several factors, including the appropriateness of the research questions as they pertained to a new approach to understanding the ontology of a TSO contra the politics-and-policy conceptualisation, and, the completeness of the methodological approach, data generation, analysis and subsequent interpretation of the data (Nadai and Maeder, 2005).



## Chapter 3 Egalitarianism

In October 2014 I entered Gates County Citizens' Advice by attending a series of so-called 'roadshow meetings' with staff and volunteers in each of the eight advice centres across Gateshire county. These meetings, hosted by the trustees and newly incumbent senior management team, were in the immediate aftermath of a contentious management team restructure which included several redundancies and removal of the chief executive. The purpose of the 'roadshow' was to quell anxieties about the restructure by announcing three new changes to the benefit of the charity, its staff and volunteers. In the roadshows meetings, the chair of trustees, Seb, explained that the restructure was necessary, in part, to 'liberate' GatCCA from a period of 'calcification' (as he described it) under the former centralised management structure and attendant organisational practices that obligated its advice centres to use and refer clients to national welfare services rather than local ones. Seb explained that the restructure was a preparatory step in 'giving back' the charity to volunteers and staff. In order to facilitate the empowerment of volunteers and staff taking 'ownership' of the charity once more, the trustees announced three additional changes to this end. The first change was a 'return to localism' which was met with widespread relief and vocal approval by all those in attendance at the meetings. What the trustees omitted to mention however, was that renewing a commitment to localism was a recent policy mandate from Citizens Advice (CitA), the membership organisation. The policy documentation which was available on the CitA website stated an explicit directed purpose of returning to localism: to maintain and strengthen the relationships between the Citizen Advice charities in the UK network with their local authority and local government funders. This crucial imperative was absent in the Gates County trustees' announcements. Instead, the chair of trustees reiterated a more simplistic principle of returning to localism that it was about 'giving back' the eight advice centres to the volunteers and staff to enact in ways they saw fit, with no mention of needing to maintain the favour and funds of their local authority.

The second and third announced changes were driven by the specific demands and needs of GatCCA's advice centres, the trustees and seniors managers explained. Indeed, the second change they announced was the introduction of two new volunteer job roles that would be made available in each of the eight advice centres. These posts were designed to support the front-line face-to-face advice service to the public. They would be formally advertised on the noticeboards for existing volunteers already in traditional advice giving roles who were desirous of taking on enhanced responsibilities (like deputising for paid supervisors) to apply for. The practice of volunteers assuming different and elevated responsibilities above and beyond conventional

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'advisor' duties was something not tried in the organisation before, but that the trustees were keen to introduce. This announcement followed onto the third and final change, which also signalled a novel introduction to GatCCA. The trustees were instigating a new policy shift from a non-fundraising to a fundraising organisation with a long term ambition of raising enough funds to sever ties entirely with GatCCA's local government and local authority funders. This came as somewhat startling news to staff and volunteers and not without trepidatious murmurings of how exactly this would be achieved.

Prior to these roadshow meetings, I had been informed by Barbara, one of the few remaining senior managers, of how divisive the restructure and loss of significant personnel had been for everyone in the organisation. She explained that the three new changes, in particular re-invigorating localism, were intended by the trustees to signal an inflection point for the charity, a figurative laying to rest of a traumatic recent past and fresh start with positive intention to embrace the changes and new vision for the charity. It was these organisational circumstances that provided the contextual foundations from which I initiated fieldwork exploring three research questions: i) *what cultures exist in this organisation?*, ii) *what informs these cultures?*, and iii), *how does this affect organisational practices?* Adopting a deductive approach by applying Douglas's cultural typology to my data generation from the outset was key. This was because an explicit assumption that Cultural Theory rests upon is that moments of change provide a refined lens through which to analyse and understand social actors. Change heightens individuals' sense of uncertainty and need to protect themselves and their culture; that is, the way they socially organise themselves and the associated beliefs and ideas that justify their preferred modes of social organisation. Indeed, change sharpens the dual aspects of social interaction that govern participants in any given context (Verweij *et al.*, 2011). These being their group commitment, that is *who* individuals choose to associate with in the moment of change; the second being their grid commitment, that is the social regulations individuals are willing to accept (or not) during periods of flux (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Rippl, 2002; 6, 2003). Relying upon these theoretical assumptions provided not only what Jenks (2005) suggested are a useful "context of intelligibility" (p.61) for the many varied participants I observed and engaged with during fieldwork, but a two-dimensional framework to begin to structure the data generation and subsequent analysis.

During my first forays into fieldwork soon after the roadshow meetings I was introduced to an implicit assumption held by the GatCCA participants, particularly senior managers and trustees, that the organisation was culturally homogenous. Indeed, when the trustees announced the three new changes at the roadshow meetings they alluded to me afterwards that they did not expect their implementation (including the localism policy) to manifest with any significant variation

across the eight advice centres. Although, in subsequent conversations, they suggested to me that *some* variation between the centres was anticipated, depending on the idiosyncrasies of each centre, but not much more. The possibility of organisational cultural heterogeneity, and more particularly, of variation operating at an *interpersonal level* as opposed to being a peculiarity of geographical quirks between advice centres was not considered – nor how this may affect the implementation of CitA's localism policy, for instance. However, as I argue in this thesis, as the organisation's actors (regardless of their position or paid or voluntary status) began orientating themselves to the new changes and articulating their understanding of them, what came into ethnographic view was participants in the initial stages of making *meaning* of their new changing circumstances (Spillman, 2002); meanings that drew on the staff and volunteers' own value systems and perceptions of what they believed the purpose of the charity was in light of the changes. When these meanings were shared and resonated with others they created, as Douglas (1999) and others have shown, plural rationalities, that is, coalescences of similar ways of thinking and acting in response to change. As I began to traverse, analyse and construct a representation of these rationalities and the social practices that complemented them, I began to identify the three separate groups – cultures – that they coalesced into. These cultures transcended the geographical spaces of the advice centres; rather they had coherence *between individuals* in different advice centres *across* the organisation.

In this chapter, I address the group of participants whose views and social practices in relation to the three announced changes were consistent with Douglas's *egalitarian* ideal type. The egalitarian culture drew its membership from a mix of volunteers, paid staff and trustees and was the largest of three cultures I will argue exist in GatCCA. It is worth qualifying this latter point, although I could not be certain of how many members each cultural group was comprised of, I relied upon my estimation based on listening and observing whilst in the field, reflections written in my research diary and field notes, and subsequent data analysis. Egalitarianism was the largest culture in the organisation and several evidential points support this view. Firstly, it was comprised of many volunteers (but not exclusively so) who had been at GatCCA for years and were unified by a cultural consciousness that was rooted in a particular understanding of the Citizens Advice brand and service that drew on the past as a reference point for how to navigate the future. This gave those participants in the egalitarian cultural group a certain confidence in how they inhabited their culture characteristics. Members of this culture enjoyed extremely tight highly committed social bonds but with a very low tolerance threshold for social regulation; they were a unified and coherent culture but paradoxically also the most riven. Each change that egalitarians grappled with presented new factionalism within the group, especially between

volunteers and paid staff. Yet, for each of the participants I assigned to this cultural type their ideological commitment to prioritise clients' needs above all else was a constant unifying touchstone to which all egalitarians returned which prevented fragmentation and open acrimony.

### **3.1 Egalitarian group dimension: social solidarity**

#### **3.1.1 Cultural bias: prioritising clients**

During casual conversations, observations and semi-structured interviews I began exploring what localism meant to Gates County volunteers, staff and trustees; how they defined and hoped to revitalise it, which, there was general agreement upon, had 'been lost' in recent years as many participants lamented. There was a palpable sense of excitement that the charity was correcting itself after a hiatus in which telephone-based advice and referrals to national services were the norm. In articulating their views, the participants opened a window into their values and principles albeit filtered through particular types of knowledge (or absence thereof) they held of GatCCA and its purpose. The melange of personal values and experiential knowledge produced participants' understanding of localism that allowed me to ascertain who, in the course of (re)establishing localism, they intended to interact with and to what extent they felt solidarity with others in this endeavour. 'Localism' therefore was a viable concept to operationalise the first of Douglas's two social dimensions: *the group-dimension*, that is, the extent of an individual's sociability, *who* they preferred engage with. Where differences between high or low levels of sociability existed between participants, this provided a demarcation of the different cultures of the charity. Indeed, some preferred high levels of strong social solidarity and others preferred weaker, looser social bonds.

Operationalising localism allowed me to ascertain not only *who* participants wished to associate and work with, but also, *why* (Douglas, 1982; Mamadouh, 1999). Establishing 'why' was important because it demonstrated the ideas – that is, the cultural bias – which justified and supported how cultures socially organised themselves, with either high or low levels of social solidarity. The most prominent and well-defined cultural group in GatCCA which expressed a preference for high levels of social solidarity in the course of reviving localism, was the egalitarian cultural type. Salient of its members, in the first instance, was a propensity to focus on prioritising clients' advice needs to the exclusion of almost all other considerations. Whilst the charity's mission to provide free, impartial and non-judgemental advice to the public (i.e. clients) was well-known and iterated by all staff and volunteers, it was members of the egalitarian culture who mentioned clients most often in impassioned speeches and declarations; something that was absent in members of the

other cultures. Indeed, the announced change of a return to localism brought this conspicuously egalitarian tendency sharply to the fore with fulsome expressions in casually observed conversations and in interviews with me. Maggie, one of the most experienced senior managers at GatCCA stated that in the drive to revive localism prioritising clients *“should be [our] rock, it should be our ‘this-is-what-we-are-here-to-do’. For us, if we don’t meet the clients’ basic needs then there is no point”*. Moreover, she believed this client-centred impetus to localism was shared by all staff and volunteers in the organisation, *“their objective is to help the clients”*.

Maggie’s belief was not misplaced; the impulse to help clients was one that other members of the egalitarian cultural group strongly identified with too. Saul, an administrator who had worked at Citizens Advice centres in London for many years before joining GatCCA had originally joined the charity *“not through great ideological conviction”* but rather, he explained, that working with clients *“just feels more worthwhile”*. For others, like long-serving volunteer, Lizzie, in Lowgate Advice Centre, her commitment to clients was expressed through her frustrations at experiencing multiple changes to funding regimes that eroded local resources that, she explained, had been *“limiting not only to us but to the clients [too]”*. For paid staff like Tom, who provided a quasi-advocacy service to the public, his commitment to clients was at a more philosophical level; helping others was the basis of society itself, *“society is not created by people who help themselves and help their own problems all the time. Well, you know, if everybody did it for themselves why would you have a community? Life is too difficult to empower yourself and do everything [yourself]”*.

Visiting advice centres and discussing the return to localism with volunteers and staff, a second aspect related to ‘helping clients’ emerged alongside this foundational principle of localism. This was that both clients *and* volunteers had to reside in close geographical proximity to their advice centre before any kind of localism could be practiced. Maggie explained that in her position as manager she had received *“a lot of staff feedback...that volunteers had lost their local identity, from what I heard the volunteers were saying ‘I volunteer at ‘X’ advice centre and I want to deal with clients in my community, I want to support my community”*. Alexis, a supervisor in the small but busy Rushgate Advice Centre echoed this observation, *“volunteers who live here and work here, they want to give something back to their own community, and so they volunteer in this sort of geographical area where they live”*. So important was the geographical emphasis that volunteers specified an ideal distance: *“five to ten mile radius”* stated Grace a Southgate Advice Centre volunteer. Former volunteer and now supervisor across multiple advice centres, Catriona, agreed with Grace’s estimate, she told me *“about a five mile radius”* from the advice centre was the optimal distance of both clients and volunteers. She clarified further that affiliated referral

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services for clients should be within this distance too, that clients should not be referred to “*a national service, like we have now...[but] be based around about Southgate Advice Centre or within that locale*”.

Yet, this was still not the essence of localism, instead helping clients and close proximity to advice centres were prerequisites for the third vital element of egalitarian localism. Peter, a supervisor in Lowgate Advice Centre explained to me, “*many of the volunteers are deeply entrenched locally with other organisations and churches, and they bring that with them [to Gates County Citizens Advice]*”. Indeed, by virtue of these deep, pre-existing, locally-embedded civic engagements in and around the Gates County advice centres some volunteers had developed a nuanced understanding and sensitivity to the locale’s changing socio-economic demographics and where client need was located. Examples of such civic-core egalitarians in possession of this knowledge were a lay deacon, a local magistrate, solicitors, teachers, councillors and others who also volunteered at different charities and voluntary organisations in and around their respective advice centres (Mohan and Bulloch, 2012). One such stalwart of civic life, Lizzie, a local resident and volunteer of over twenty years standing in Lowgate observed, “*the demographic of this area is multinational...so you have to be very aware of all subjects, [like] immigration....and you have to take consideration of culture...whereas we feel an ‘a-b-c’ answer [is right], it is not that simple, you have to look at the bigger picture. So that is new in a sense from when I first started, Lowgate has grown in people... you have to be very aware*”. Another locally well-known pillar of community life in Greengate was Grace, a retired primary school teacher and volunteer with various charitable organisations, she stated “*in this area I still know the person who works with Alzheimer’s for the Aged and a lot of the GPs [we ask] to [complete] the Disability Living Allowance forms*”.

Being in possession of nuanced knowledge of local life meant that the problems and issues that clients presented in advice centres could be responded to in more personalised ways, therefore providing a superior quality advice service. An example of this attentiveness to a client’s specific needs was pointed out to me whilst I was observing in Lowgate Advice Centre. A Mauritian client had been booked an appointment to receive advice from a volunteer advisor who not only spoke French but also understood the distinctive Creole patois spoken by the client. A subsequent conversation with the advisor suggested that she also had a culturally sensitive approach to managing the client’s expectations and needs of what could be reasonably achieved in the one-hour appointment. Volunteers reminisced about a time when this level of attentiveness to clients was customary, Grace told me that there had been a time when both volunteers and supervisors “*knew almost every client that came in*” and that the benefit of this was that volunteers could give their supervisors a lot of “*background information [about the clients’ issues] that never gets*

*written down, but which is sometimes helpful*". Grace continued that local knowledge of not only clients but also of other welfare services was what made localism in the past work, *"we knew...all the things that were available locally, within about 5 mile radius and that was what people who came in needed. They needed advice of where to get information and things within the vicinity"*.

Even at this early stage of fieldwork it was evident that those in the egalitarian group had a clear sense of their identity and who they preferred to associate with in the course of localism. As a culture the membership was bound by a pronounced sense of solidarity not only with each other, i.e. those who help and advise clients, but also to the client group who egalitarians considered to be part of the community they were serving (6, 2005). Reflecting on some of the early data generation I made, a second identifiable aspect of the egalitarian cultural consciousness that the change to localism demonstrated was a sense of cultural *re-emergence* after a period of hiatus. Indeed, returning to localism was the catalyst to egalitarians reminiscing and revisiting past ways of doing things and an expressed desire to reinstate this. An unshakeable loyalty not only to the past but also to each other (Thompson *et al.*, 1990; Bale, 1997) held egalitarians together in spite of tensions which soon became evident and which I move onto next.

### **3.1.2 Interpersonal relationships**

Egalitarianism's intense commitment to prioritising and understanding clients' needs also meant recognising that the Gates County advice service would not necessarily be able to meet all their advice needs thus harnessing the assistance and expertise of other local welfare services was necessary. Indeed, soon after the roadshow meetings members of the egalitarian culture had already started to re-establish relationships with external stakeholders in charities and advocacy organisations. Importantly, these relationship building exercises were helpfully facilitated, in some instances, by the prior associations between supervisors, volunteers and the external stakeholders in activities unconnected to the work of GatCCA. Pete, a trained solicitor but relatively inexperienced supervisor had initiated (re)establishing relationships with various stakeholders in the near locale of his Lowgate Advice Centre. He explained to me, *"I mean I don't know what the other [advice centres] are doing, but certainly in Lowgate we have made huge strides in a very short space of time, I am re-engaging other organisations... I have made first name contacts with people which helps us no end, and I think that is what was missing [previously]"*.

He went on to say further, *"[it's] good because you have a greater sense of what is out there"*. Who or what was 'out there' was reference to an ever-increasing stock of knowledge and broader

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perceptual field of what support services were available in the community and which referral pathways to these services existed to provide clients with an integrated network of welfare support. Indeed, other volunteers and supervisors in the egalitarian group had also started to engage other not-for-profit organisations and pro-bono solicitors (with a view to mitigating the vacuum of specialist legal advice left by Legal Aid cuts) who were within the close geographical distance of the advice centres. In establishing these connections with other stakeholders a decided emphasis was placed on *“connecting on first name terms with people in [these] organisations”* Pete told me. As with other egalitarian impulses, these personal as opposed to organisational relationships were an important part of providing a seamless net of support for clients, which Pete explained further, *“like today for instance, you might know that there is a Young Persons’ Housing Officer somewhere in the Council, actually I’ve got her phone number and I know what her name is, and I am on first name terms with her...that makes a huge difference, it is similar with the Family and Children’s Centre in Lowgate and the people at The Night Shelter, it makes the wheels go around and it is better for clients”*.

At the crux of these first-name connections with external stakeholders was the egalitarian belief that they were part of and engaged in a wider community of close, professional relationships with others who shared their commitment to local clients. For them, these types of professional relationships were not (in the egalitarian estimation) easily achieved at a county or national level. In any event, relationships at the level of advice centres or at the supraorganisational level were considered to be inter-*organisational* working agreements by formal arrangement of GatCCA’s senior managers and trustees and not the inter-*personal relationships* egalitarians had a preference for. Rather egalitarians were clear that they sought solidarities and participation with other *individuals* – with other *people* – who were situated in welfare services in the immediacies of their advice centres. This outward motivation to associate personally with others was on the basis of non-competitive co-operation serving a higher purpose of providing uninterrupted service provision to their mutual service-users. Intriguingly, this outward-facing commitment to other individuals working in similar areas of social welfare also acted as a social cohesive for the egalitarian culture itself within the confines of the advice centres. Pete in Lowgate Advice Centre recognised and harnessed the potential of the external relationships he had started putting in place, he believed they had utility in raising levels of commitment from volunteers within his advice centre to the clients’ cause, he explained *“it gives you more buy-in from the volunteers because they can see that you have some gravitas in Lowgate area, you can ring people up and make things happen [for the client]”*.

In the context of reviving localism the external relationships egalitarians were initiating presented an initial impression to me of a culture enjoying high levels of social solidarity tightly bound in collective social action with like-minded others focussed on a fixed purpose: prioritising clients' needs. The ideological commitment to serving clients (particularly in face-to-face transactions) drawing on services external to GatCCA to facilitate this meant that egalitarian sociability was flexible and generous (particularly demonstrated by supervisors and volunteers), because they included external stakeholders into their cultural identity of a tightly-bound, cooperative community. However, because of the specialised local knowledge and experience of clients that these egalitarians and their external compatriots held, it created a somewhat closed community: a community defined by people who worked directly with clients which made it difficult for those not directly engaged in this work to penetrate (Mamadouh, 1999). Indeed, it created perceptual blinkers and barriers to building relationships with others – not least with those members of the egalitarian culture who worked or volunteered for GatCCA but who were not directly involved in client-facing service delivery.

### 3.1.3 Factionalism

My field notes and early analysis of my observations, informal conversations and formal interviews with members of the egalitarianism led me to consider the culture as being characterised by harmonious relationships, particularly because these members were predominately (although not exclusively) volunteers and supervisors working supportively together in advice centre duty rooms<sup>4</sup>. However, Douglas's cultural typology allows for the egalitarian cultural type to, in some instances, be disposed to factionalism. In the early stages of fieldwork, I had initially assumed this would not be the case in GatCCA. However, as I generated more data discord within and between members of the egalitarian culture began to emerge. The first signs of tension became apparent when I engaged with egalitarians in parts of the charity who were not client facing but nonetheless subscribed to the client-centred approach of reviving localism. In the main, these were operational and support staff to the volunteer-led advice service. These staff discussed with me how important they considered the close external relationships and partnerships volunteers brought with them to the Gates County advice service. Furthermore, that volunteers were the anchor of these relationships and their presence in GatCCA drove the singular commitment to and focus on clients' advice needs, *"I think volunteers are very much*

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<sup>4</sup> The duty room is the designated office space in advice centres where volunteers and their supervisors (i.e. paid staff) worked during the advice sessions that were open to the general public.

*going into the [advice centres] to do their volunteering day and see their clients and that is all, they are focused on that, which is great, and fantastic for the general public”.*

However, there was also a perception of significant drawback to this too. The outwardly-focused commitment to stakeholder relationship building by some volunteers in the course of localism was considered by support staff as being at the expense of building more co-operative relationships with them i.e. GatCCA staff not directly involved in frontline advice delivery. Indeed, these operational staff supporting the volunteer-led advice service believed a divide existed characterised by an attitude of *“‘them and us’ between paid staff and unpaid staff”* Stephanie reported. Moreover, there was a long-held perception that volunteers worked to the exclusion of relationship building with paid staff *within* and *across* the wider charity and concentrating their efforts instead on working with other volunteers and external partners in the immediate vicinity of their advice centres. *“The general culture I think is that volunteers still see themselves as individual advice centres. The people here are Greengate advisors, they work at Greengate Advice Centre...that is very much the vibe that I pick up...it’s a ‘I-am-not-part-of-a-wider-network-of-advice-centres-in-Gates-County-Citizens-Advice’... it is just ‘I-am-this-person-in-this-advice-centre”*, explained Stephanie. It was unclear at this stage how this unsettling fault line running through the egalitarian culture between paid ‘back office’ or support staff and volunteers could resolve itself.

Douglas’s theoretical ideal type posits that in fact a stalemate in social relations can exist since the principle of parity between egalitarians is such that they do not seek to challenge or raise issues openly with each other (Thompson *et al.*, 1990; 6, 2003; 6, 2005). Some egalitarians however, like supervisors, who were paid staff but inhabited roles which took in the vision of the whole organisation by dint of them working with client-facing volunteers and back-office support staff, recognised this internal conflict in staff-volunteer relationships. Peter, an outspoken supervisor of this issue wondered aloud to me if *“there needs to be some sort of... I don’t know... awareness-raising of what the whole organisation does and how it all fits together...[it would]...have a positive impact and make volunteers more aware of what is going on and complement the work that we do and how we can all work more closely together”*. He continued that if localism was practiced as being more inclusive of internal colleagues (and not just of external stakeholders) this would enhance the quality of the advice service, *“if people are investing heavily in their own advice centre and they can see the difference that makes to the big picture I think they will be more inclined to invest in the bigger enterprise because then it becomes a two-way relationship... I think that really is our best shot”*. Yet, ultimately he, and others, accepted this apparent tension between those who were client-facing and those who were not as an impasse in social relations (Mamadouh, 1999) and furthermore, as Pete continued, that is was somewhat unavoidable, *“I*

*think as much as we try and encourage volunteers [to see the] bigger picture, they are interested in their town on their volunteering day; they really haven't got headspace or the will to be engaged with what is going on across the whole of Gates County Citizens Advice".*

The relevant point was that for members of the egalitarian culture who were volunteers, Gates County Citizens Advice and its work –in their view, localism – was perceived as being external to the physical entity of the advice centre itself. Therefore, the principal relationships they attended to were with others who interfaced directly with clients; other volunteers and external stakeholders in local communities around advice centres. Hence the symbolic boundaries of this local community in the egalitarian cultural consciousness did not automatically extend to others who were internal to the charity – except if they were client-facing. Rather volunteers in the egalitarian group had developed what Douglas (2011 [1986]) referred to as a “selective deafness” (p.3) to internal support staff whose work was internally focussed with minimal or no client contact but who were no less supportive of volunteers and supervisors building relationships with external stakeholders for the benefit of clients. For back-office egalitarians their internal perspective meant that the community of local charity work included them *and* the rest of the Gates County Citizens Advice. Their crisis of legitimacy within their egalitarian culture was compounded by their own short-term employment contracts meant volunteers were less inclined to invest time in them to develop positive professional relationships regarding localism or any other matter. A case of, “*oh it's only a project...they'll only be here for about two years, there is no point in engaging with their project*” (Steph, support staff).

What the localism policy allowed me to operationalise was the group dimension of participants who were members of the egalitarian culture; to ascertain *who* they preferred to associate with in practicing their ‘local’ charity work. A defining feature of this cultural type was the importance of the parity principle between members of the group. What drove their strong sense of group incorporation was a powerful cultural bias toward *prioritising clients*, and the belief that the social bonds they preferred were optimal to serving clients’ needs. Indeed, the cultural bias was so strong that it defined what they believed the *raison d’être* of the charity was and by default what returning localism was (or should be). This bound the egalitarian members in tight social solidarity whilst they *practiced* charity in the service of clients. Yet, the cultural bias, paradoxically, isolated some members who were perceived to be distant from or lacking direct engagement with clients. This did not mean that they were unequal to others in the cultural group who were client-facing, for instance, but rather merely invisible to their cultural compatriots.

### 3.2 Egalitarian grid dimension: social regulation

The trustees and senior managers' preamble to the second change announced at the roadshow meetings was to remind staff and volunteers of a staff survey they had completed several months prior. The survey results indicated that both staff and volunteers were concerned about the amount of pressure supervisors experienced during the increasingly busy advice sessions to the public and that this was negatively affecting the volunteers too. The trustees confirmed that they had also received anecdotal feedback about the increasing demands of the supervisor role. In response to this the trustees and management team devised two new volunteer posts which would be introduced into each of the eight advice centres. These positions were intended to i) alleviate the workload burden on supervisors, and, ii) provide opportunities for development for currently serving volunteers who wished to assume different duties beyond their traditional advice-giving roles. The first of the new posts was for Volunteer Assistant Supervisors, these volunteers would, amongst other duties, have the authority to deputise for the paid supervisor during the advice session or for short periods in the supervisor's absence. The second post was for Volunteer Trainee Co-ordinators, volunteers who took up these posts would be responsible for easing the transition of newly recruited volunteers into advice centres after the trainees had completed their induction training. These new roles would be advertised in the advice centres and volunteers were encouraged to formally apply to fill them.

In the wake of this announcement some volunteers quietly disclosed to me which of the two posts they intended to apply for; some believed they were already informally fulfilling these responsibilities in their respective advice centres and sought recognition of this. Other volunteers however were suspicious of the new roles and thought them unnecessary in their advice centres. Indeed, with the new posts' emphasis on role differentiation between volunteers, prescriptive duties and elevated responsibilities, they provided me an opportunity to explore how participants perceived and interpreted these features of the posts revealing how they preferred to associate with each other. Thus I used the new posts to operationalise the second social dimension of Douglas's cultural groups, the *grid-dimension*, or rather the social regulation dimension of their sociability; how they preferred to engage with each other. For instance, did the participants prefer informality with minimal, unobtrusive role differentiation, or, more formal role definition and stratification between individuals to demarcate their responsibilities and status? By analysing the participants' response to this newly introduced change to the volunteer cohort, I gleaned an understanding of how participants in the cultural groups related to others and what regulatory and behavioural controls they were willing to accept and expect to co-operate by: either highly visible formal controls, or, low discrete informal ones. Ascertaining this dimension of their

sociability dovetailed into a second theoretical point, which was what knowledge and information participants used to mediate and justify their preferred modes of social regulation and behavioural standards.

### 3.2.1 Trust and informality

The announcement of the new volunteer posts had the biggest impact in the duty room, that is the office space in advice centres where the supervisors and volunteers were based and ran the advice session to the general public. This was where I spent the majority of my time during the observation phase of fieldwork. It was here that participants would implement or reject these new roles. Amongst the egalitarians who contemplated what the roles would mean to the dynamics of the duty room it was clear that the introduction of posts that enabled some volunteers to assume enhanced responsibilities would disrupt a crucial organising principle of their culture. Firstly, it introduced the notion of organisationally recognised role differentiation and therefore structural inequality between volunteers being established. This would result in elevating some volunteers above others with duties and responsibilities usually undertaken by supervisors or other paid staff. Secondly, the centralised process of advertisement and recruitment proposed by senior managers mounted another threat: formality of procedure. Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990) have used Douglas's Cultural Theory to posit that cultural values are "continually tested in social transactions" (page: 276) and this occasion was no different. The new roles risked unbalancing the egalitarian cultural dynamic and shift in social relations between non-competitive parity between colleagues, to disparity based on unequal distribution of authority and role variation to a select few volunteers.

However, when discussing their views of the new posts egalitarians initially sidestepped confronting these fears – that they later confessed – and instead focussed on complimentary descriptions of their colleagues' abilities before broaching discussion of the new posts. Both paid staff and volunteers held each other's expertise, capabilities and professionalism in high esteem. Pete, when speaking of the volunteers he supervised, stated "*we have professional people, they are highly skilled people, they can be trusted for half an hour [during the advice session], and I don't feel the need to own everything that is going on here, it's not my advice centre, it's theirs, and there is a big element of trust involved in that*". The notion of trust underscored other egalitarians' views too; they also spoke of highly trusting relationships between colleagues. Initially it was difficult to ascertain evidence of this until I understood that trust was a necessary corollary to the informal cooperation that was preferred by egalitarians I observed in the duty rooms. This was recognisable in egalitarian volunteers undertaking informal responsibility for

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each other in ways that usually fell to paid member of staff, like the supervisor. For instance, they conducted quality control checking of the case management system to give feedback on the quality of advice colleagues gave to clients, they informally coached trainees, or, as I noted at Lowgate Advice Centre on multiple occasions, were left unattended by their supervisor for short periods to conduct the advice session without supervision. This informality and trust fostered a social ease between egalitarians that appeared to be sustaining and reinforcing of their tight social solidarity (Tonkiss and Passey, 1999).

However, to both volunteers and supervisors in the egalitarian culture, the new volunteer roles represented the risk of potentially introducing more formalized social interaction stemming from the authority some volunteers occupying the new posts would enjoy. The mere notion of this tested the parity principle of egalitarianism and its members responded to protect it. In doing so a subtle but notable distinction emerged within the culture, not between volunteers and paid staff as the change to localism demonstrated, but rather between those egalitarians I categorised in my data analysis as 'active' and others as 'passive'. Whilst there was enough shared similarities between egalitarians to be located comfortably in the same culture there were also subtle differences between members of this culture to set them apart from each other in identifiable ways. Several factors compelled me to make a distinction between these two types of egalitarians; firstly, in post-fieldwork analysis I had identified a participant (a trustee) as conforming to the characteristics of Douglas's egalitarian ideal type but in his interview with me his level of self-awareness was such that he stated moving between active and passive states in his trustee role. If this was the case with this egalitarian I worked on the assumption that other egalitarians may well swing between being active and passive too. The long-serving trustee, Gordon, explained to this to me, *"now let me go back to my roles in the past because I have been both active and passive, more recently I have been very passive because I have chosen to do that and also because there have been others who have wanted to go forward"*.

A second factor that emerged in subtle ways during my fieldwork observation phase, but more clearly in subsequent data analysis was the prominent role that supervisors played in being tone-setting of either active or passive tendencies in how other egalitarian members responded to the new volunteer posts. What I elucidate in the following sections, is how the active and passive egalitarian supervisors were pivotal in terms of mediating the degree of informal responsibility the volunteers experienced in their advice centres. In this regard, supervisors had a direct hand in arbitrating the egalitarian culture by controlling the flow of organisational information and if and how it was disseminated to their volunteers. This created a protective cocoon around the culture, as Douglas (1999) referred to this egalitarian peculiarity, as a "closed community" (p.413). This

had utility in not only being a deciding factor in whether the new posts would be adopted or not, but also in binding egalitarians closer together by prioritising the importance of equality before prescriptive managerial, that is, outsiders' diktats (Mamadouh, 1999).

### 3.2.2 Active-type supervisors

In the early stages of fieldwork, I observed trusting relationships between participants who I would later identify as members of the egalitarian culture. This seemed to eliminate the need for mechanisms of social regulation of the culture. Indeed, if trust maintained the equilibrium of equality and informality between members, than high-handed or formalised rules and regulations over members' behaviour was unnecessary. However, as I progressed in fieldwork it became evident that the balance of equality and informality that lubricates egalitarian social relations was in fact not organic to the culture, but rather regulated by an insider that other members tacitly consented to fulfil this role. This observation and interpretation of my data runs contra to Douglas's egalitarian ideal type which theorises that the culture is low on social regulation of its members. Whilst I agree that it is low on *formal* modes social regulation, I argue here that this case evidences high levels of *informal* regulation of its members. Furthermore, informal regulation was performed either actively or passively depending on the role egalitarian supervisors played in their approach to the organisational changes the trustees announced, in particular to the introduction of new volunteer posts. I will start with the role played by 'active' supervisors; the contradiction at the heart of their approach was that in taking a leading role to tactfully manipulate the social arrangements in their advice centres, they revealed a fundamental confounding principle of egalitarianism: inequality. Parity between all egalitarian members was illusory, as I will explain below, but necessary to maintain the delicate idealism of egalitarian culture.

Soon after the roadshow meeting, Pete, one of the most vocal and enthusiastic supervisors in the active egalitarian group confessed to me that he had informed one of the senior managers (who had made the announcement of new posts for volunteers) that he had already instigated an *informal* system of support to assist him and alleviate pressure during advice sessions. Furthermore, he did not wish formalise these arrangements by recruiting volunteers to the new posts and therefore would not be advertising the roles in his advice centre. Sometime later, in his interview with me, he explained more fully, "*with those roles I will decide, so I asked if I could not advertise those [posts]; [rather] quietly select people that I think are strong enough to do it. I already had a pattern of people that I have been using, so that dynamic was already set up within the group, so I have stayed with that*". By actively choosing not to advertise the new positions,

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Peter rejected i) the introduction of a role stratification structure into this advice centre, and, ii) the *formality* of a centralised recruitment process. He also symbolically placed a closed boundary around his volunteer community (whether they be egalitarian volunteers or from other cultural groups) in his advice centre and as a consequence around the egalitarian culture he was a part of. Moreover, by not making the posts available he prevented the possibility of one or more volunteers applying for one of the roles thereby breaking ranks to seek differentiation from their colleagues and disturbing the illusion of collective sameness in the duty room. Equally, for pragmatic reasons, it also meant the supervisor did not have to reject a member of his advice centre if the volunteer was “*not strong enough to do it and being told ‘no’*” (Pete).

In advice centres where active egalitarian supervisors distributed workloads and responsibility informally amongst their volunteers this was successful in maintaining the illusion of level ranking not only between the volunteers and the supervisor, but also, between volunteers – regardless of what responsibilities they took on. For instance, Lizzie, a volunteer in Lowgate Advice Centre, assumed more responsibility than others, including mentoring trainees and supervising the session whilst her supervisor was unavailable, she reported that informal enhanced responsibilities as requested by supervisors “*happens anyway*”. She eschewed the need to formalise this practice in the form of the new posts, “*all you [would be] doing is sticking a label [on it] and that is not going to work*”. Indeed, organisationally designated titles and ranking that indicated hierarchy or role distinction would be rejected outright. Lizzie was forthright about this too, and was representative of similar views when she stated said that “*[if there are] degrees of seniority, I couldn’t give two hoots about any of it*”. Attempts to formalise the pre-existing, informal task allocation that volunteers like her had already consented to would only lead to disharmony, “*I think there will be undercurrents [of tension], I do not think that is a good thing...as I say we work as a team, we listen to our supervisor, he is our point of contact*”.

By volunteers accepting the supervisor’s informal approach to responsibility distribution, this meant they were complicit in raising one of their members (i.e. the supervisor) higher than the rest of the collective culture. This was necessary however for the illusion of egalitarian parity between its members to hold in that it was the least objectionable option to an outright acceptance of organisational intrusion and imposition of role stratification into the duty room. In glib terms, it was a realistic acceptance by egalitarians that all-are-equal-but-some-are-more-equal-than-others. Simone, another volunteer who worked with an active egalitarian supervisor made comments that bear out an acceptance of his mediating role, “*because I think volunteers all take guidance from the supervisor...there is hardly ever any conflict...in the end we respect his word*”. This demonstrated Douglas’s theoretical point that Bale (1997) also expounded in his work,

that egalitarians “reconcile[d] their emphasis on both the collective and individual autonomy by stressing participative internal democracy and self-policing” (p.38).

Where this was most successful is where supervisors demonstrated well-developed communication strategies between them, their volunteers and other paid staff. These strategies ranged from weekly newsletters to everyone in their advice centre, and ‘tailored’ team meetings in which external stakeholders were invited to speak to volunteers on topical issues affecting the local client base or to provide updates and information of other welfare services in the communities around advice centres. In harnessing communication tools at their disposal active egalitarian supervisors achieved two things, firstly, they controlled what, how and when information about the organisation and advice service was imparted to everyone in their advice centres. This careful regulation of what constituted valid, reliable information about the advice service and GatCCA as a whole was fundamental in preserving egalitarianism as an impervious information culture (Douglas, 1982; Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Douglas, 2011 [1978]; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Secondly, the strong impulse to control information acted to strengthen the social bonds of the egalitarian group and enculturate loyalty amongst members (Douglas, 1999) providing them with a sense of being trusted and valued colleagues in their advice centre. As Simone said of this practice, “*[the supervisor] sends out a newsletter every week, every Friday, a round-up of that week, a round-robin thing...it makes you feel well thought of*”.

### 3.2.3 Passive-type supervisors

A significant contrast between active-type and passive-type egalitarians was the extent to which they were aware of the context of and justification for the new volunteer posts that the trustees unveiled at the roadshow meetings. Passive-type supervisors appeared to be confused by the announcement and how the new posts were part of other organisational changes that were afoot. Catriona, a passive-type egalitarian supervisor said to me in bewildered terms, “*I don’t know, I really don’t know, because we were told one thing and things are changing...and then all these jobs keep popping up and we know nothing about them*”. Interestingly, despite having attended both Westgate and Greengate Advice Centre’s roadshow meetings Catriona was not aware that the new roles were a response to feedback senior management and trustees had received of the stressful nature of the supervisor role, that is, her job, which urgently required support. She continued, “*I seriously think that the advice session supervisor is the worst job when it comes to being valued, it’s a lot of pressure on you for getting things right...it is stressful and you’re going to have a bit of meltdown if you’re not careful, you really can*”.

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Unlike active supervisors who had already established subtle informal approaches to engage volunteers in supporting them in the advice sessions and duty room more generally, Catriona working in West and Greengate and Kim in Ashgate Advice Centre, had not initiated such practices and had no intention of doing so. However, like their counterparts in the active group, they also trusted and respected the experience, skills and professionalism of their colleagues in spite of their paternalistic attitude to the volunteers in their advice centres. There was a passive acceptance of the volunteers' abilities and they eschewed capitalising directly on these to ease the pressure of their own role. Moreover, they assumed that volunteers were passive in their own right and did not wish to assume extra responsibilities but rather that they preferred rather to focus on their traditional advisor that is, advice-giving roles. Catriona justified her reservations of the new volunteer posts by stating that volunteers required protection from what she perceived as unwelcome responsibility, *"some of them do not want the responsibility of giving the advice to [other volunteers]...they don't want to be in the position of giving the final say, they have done that in a previous career, they are here for themselves now, it is as much about the social side and the interaction with their colleagues within the advice centre, some of them [have been] top senior managers, they don't want stress and responsibility that goes with it, they enjoy what they are doing and how they are doing it"*.

If active-type egalitarians were tightly bound in an *esprit de corp* where the supervisor was the first among equals, then this was absent in the passive-type egalitarians. Whereas active supervisors managed the workload during the advice session and controlled the volunteer cohort under the illusion of spontaneous informality and equality, by contrast passive supervisors merely absorbed the excess workload and pressure of the advice session in an effort to shield and protect their volunteers. This did not mean that supervisors and volunteers in the passive egalitarian culture did not view each other as equals – they did, but had passive acceptance of this and did not actively work to maintain this ethic. Moreover, passive egalitarian supervisors were cognizant that their roles were stressful ones in need of support, but they chose not to manage this and instead accepted its burdens by rejecting mobilising volunteer support even in an informal capacity on the grounds that this was something that the volunteers themselves would reject. In this way, passive egalitarian participants exercised a kind of conscious withdrawal based on apathy from having to respond to and confront the newly mooted volunteer posts in their advice centres. They maintained regulation of the culture by claiming to fail to understand or simply ignoring the new posts thereby keeping at bay wider organisational and other influences on their preferred mode of regulating the supervisor and volunteer relationships.

In sum, passive-type egalitarianism was also a closed culture to information that potentially posed a threat to their preferred status quo of social regulation. Unlike active-type egalitarians who controlled the flow of information, passive egalitarians' approach to information 'from above' (i.e. from senior management or trustees) was simply to ignore it. This was the supervisor's social control mechanism, control through apathy and dissent from the instructions of the charity; instead of responding these passive-type egalitarian supervisors simply carried on as before. Although both passive and active-type egalitarian supervisors had different personal approaches to socially regulating their advice centres - a mixture of conscious withdrawal (active-type) and apathy and inaction (passive-type) – the outcome was the same: rejection of the new posts for volunteers. The underlying principle of their approach was to close the culture from outside influence. So whilst the first change that was announced (a return to localism) demonstrated that as a culture egalitarians were outward looking to the local community which gave an impression of being open and embracing of clients and relevant stakeholders, paradoxically, by operationalising the second aspect of egalitarian sociability through the change to new volunteer posts revealed the opposite characteristic of the culture as having an inverted gaze, to look inward to their culture with a view to regulate and protect it (6, 2005). This made egalitarianism in GatCCA impervious to influences outside of their culture that they perceived as a threat or simply did not understand.

### **3.2.4 Peripheral egalitarians**

What this second change expressed was how pronounced the egalitarian cultural consciousness was that the underlying preferences of *how* they preferred to socially organise were solid even if these manifested in slightly different ways. The extent of this unifying cultural consciousness was such that even those egalitarians who were not involved in frontline service delivery (i.e. client-facing) but rather in project or support services of the charity, and therefore located on the periphery of the core client-facing culture, had clear opinions on the announcement of new roles for volunteers and how this would affect the duty room. Although these egalitarian members did not interface directly with clients (like supervisors and volunteers did) they nevertheless had the same amount of respect and trust for others in the charity who did. In particular they believed that volunteers had talents that the charity could utilise. One project staff member explained that the newly mooted posts could tap into a well of talent, *"I do think it is a good idea, it gives the volunteers an opportunity for development....[they are] people who have skills from outside, which charities are crying out for"* (Stephanie, project staff). However, they were also in agreement that the supervisor post was pivotal to successful advice sessions and that it was inappropriate for senior managers or trustees to decide the nature of support that supervisors received. Rather,

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they emphasised the importance of support being managed informally by the supervisors themselves. Therefore, even these peripheral egalitarians were nonetheless protective of informality as an organising principle of the duty rooms in advice centres.

More to the point, they assumed these enhanced responsibilities for volunteers were already in effect in an informal capacity in any event, *“it sounds like a good idea to me if you’ve got the volunteers who are willing....there are definitely some who are happy to have more responsibility...I would imagine that has been going on informally over the years, experienced advisors being asked to step in for a short period to deputise for the supervisor”* (Saul, project staff). Even though these support or project staff themselves worked in formalised operational roles, as egalitarians their cultural sympathies were such that they were defensive of the equitable, informal interpersonal relationships this cultural type relies upon for its coherence in duty rooms especially. They were protective of where they perceived enclaves of egalitarianism in other parts of the charity (i.e. the duty room) and were conscious of maintaining this ideal. They recognised that volunteers may be weary of an overt or formal way of assuming additional responsibilities for fear that they may be perceived by colleagues as *“higher up the chain than me”* as Steph a project staff member in Greengate Advice Centre perceptively pointed out. To guard against this she told me emphatically that supervisors would need to *“need to be clear of what the expectation is of that person and how that fits in with the rest of the duty room”*.

Operationalising this second change that the trustees announced allowed me to demonstrate the second feature of egalitarian sociability – their grid-dimension. By controlling how these new posts were or were not promoted in the advice centres the egalitarian supervisors played a decisive role in manipulating how and what information was delivered to other members of the culture to create the closed culture that is a defining feature of Douglas’s ideal-type egalitarianism (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Bale, 1997; Douglas, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1978]; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). Driving the control of information was not only a contrivance to protect their preferred mode of informal social regulation but also a determination to protect their values, their way of life, their culture. This was the first step of regulation over the behaviour of egalitarians by the supervisors in this cultural group; this ushered in a second regulatory regime: *self-regulation*. Thus even those egalitarians not affected by the newly announced volunteer posts and who were in fairly formal roles themselves expressed a preference for informality in how they associated with each other. The social lubricant of this preference for informality was high levels of trust between the various members of the egalitarian culture wherever they were located in GatCCA (Swidler, 1986; Tonkiss and Passey, 1999). The factionalism that was prevalent in confronting the return to localism was less evident in this second change but differences in the culture emerged

nonetheless between active-type and passive-type egalitarians. Underscoring egalitarian regulation was one part social control over the cultural collective, and the other part dissidence from the main structural entity of GatCCA. This was a forceful reassertion that the charity was, to egalitarians of whatever persuasion, an (informal) *practice*, and therefore rejected any understanding of the charity as a structural entity with rules and regulations that its members did not wish to recognise.

### 3.3 Egalitarian social action

At the roadshow meetings the trustees' preamble to their third and final announcement of change was to report that the advice service commissioned by the local government provided only enough funds to cover the costs of the general (i.e. free at point of delivery) service open to the public but did not financially subsidise other parts of the charity, like specialised areas of legal advice that GatCCA currently provided. In light of this financial reality the trustees proposed initiating a new fundraising 'culture' (as they referred to it) to include everyone in the organisation. Staff and volunteers were encouraged to introduce and undertake fundraising activities and to actively promote the work of the charity to the wider public, reminding them that Gates County Citizens Advice was a charity and welcoming of donations and legacies. The timbre of this announcement was to enthuse staff and volunteers of the potential of fundraising to raise unrestricted funds to spend in ways the organisation decided. Furthermore, the trustees promoted the idea that if enough funds were raised this could lead to the possibility of the charity relinquishing reliance on local government and local authority funding to enjoy full financial independence. The trustees offered no concrete suggestions or examples of what sort fundraising activities were preferable; rather Seb, the trustee chair reiterated again that he was 'giving back' the charity to volunteers and staff to set the fundraising agenda themselves.

In the weeks and months following this announcement the participants in GatCCA began to reflect upon their understanding of the charity's funding model; who it received funds from and what service delivery obligations or targets were incumbent on it on receipt of funds or contracts. In conversations I had with volunteers and staff in the egalitarian culture many of whom had worked for several years under different funding regimes, they claimed a lack of knowledge or basic understanding of how the charity was funded. Furthermore, there was widespread shock at the trustees' revelation that funds were as limited as they were and what constraints this imposed on service provision to the public. From the volunteers' perspective, they explained that historically details of the charity's funding model was something they had never needed to become acquainted with. They had been, in some senses, shielded from this information and were

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encouraged instead to concentrate on providing the best possible advice service to their clients whilst managers dealt with the nuts-and-bolts of generating income. Indeed, throughout fieldwork, many of the egalitarian participants made glib or vague comments to me that the charity was funded 'from the government' whilst others could not guess at all. When I probed to illicit more detailed answers of how, say, the various income streams from central or local government had implications for how and to whom the advice service was delivered across the county, sometimes in uneven ways, they were forthright and honest in their response: they did not know.

What follows next is a discussion of how the egalitarian cultural group acted in response to the fundraising request that the trustees announced. They did so in ways that reflected their cultural characteristics in that their actions simultaneously sought to serve their cultural bias (to prioritise clients) as well as to protect the symbolic boundaries and keep out others that threatened their cultural identity and values. Whilst Douglas spent time elucidating the aspects of the social dimensions (group and grid) of cultural types, how these combined to produce social action towards a directed purpose was something she attended to through empirical demonstration (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983) as I shall do here.

### **3.3.1 Active-type social action**

Supervisors, by virtue of their positions in overseeing volunteers and other staff in and across the advice centres, possessed a wide-ranging vision of the organisation as whole as well as the peculiarities of their own advice centres. Reflecting upon this multi-faceted view they perceived that many individuals in GatCCA, including themselves as paid employees, did not fully understand how the charity was funded and that that this was, in their view, a shortcoming. Peter the supervisor in Lowgate Advice Centre explained, *"my understanding was that we had core funding and project funding, and beyond I didn't really have the time or the information to be much more interested than that really"*. However, he went on to say that in order for everyone in the charity to meet the current service provision commitments (as highlighted by the trustees in the roadshow meetings) that the prevailing fog of misunderstanding and misinformation about the funding model would require a *"mental shift"* for everyone in GatCCA to become better informed. He referred to himself as an example when he said, *"as I have become more embedded in the business I think it is something I am more interested in because I think it is a time of change and that in itself makes it interesting because we are having to think outside the conventional box"*.

Yet, what became clearer over the course of fieldwork was that no discernible effort from staff or volunteers in the egalitarian group was made to become better informed about GatCCA's funding structure or how a fundraising would fit its funding portfolio. Where there was an opportunity to find out the specifics of this funding disparity between, say, the advice centres in the north of the county and those in the south, this descended into conflict between volunteers and senior managers. Indeed a team meeting to discuss funding and fundraising initiatives involving a heated exchange in 'northern' advice centre – Lowgate – several volunteers heckled senior managers that their advice centre had not received funding that the centres in the south of Gathshire had. This they complained was a deliberate act of unequal distribution of funding and thereby prevention of specialist legal advice provision being made available to clients in the northern parts of the county. The managers replied that occasionally borough and district councils provided limited funds for advice services in certain parts of the county to target the advice service at specific groups of the population. This funding arrangement existed for the advice centres in the south of the county; additional training for volunteers in these centres had been paid for by the district council to support them in delivering specialist advice to the targeted population. This funding precluded the 'northern' advice centres of GatCCA. In the febrile atmosphere of the meeting, this explanation by managers was lost and subsequently there remained a simmering resentment and recalcitrant misunderstanding of this not unusual income stream.

What was being demonstrated in that team meeting was a "selective deafness" (Douglas, 2011 [1986], p.3) to and rejection of what constituted *organisational* knowledge of GatCCA – the physical and legal *entity* – and its funding model. I began to understand that many egalitarians did not, in fact, want more information about the organisation. This was because they were already in possession of knowledge about clients' needs and the practice of providing advice in their advice centre locales. Furthermore, there was no follow-up questions or discussion of the ethical and legal constraints the membership organisation (CitA) obliged GatCCA to observe in terms of who the charity could, and could not, accept funds from and on what basis as regards to fundraising activities. As with the egalitarian response to the other two changes, the culture's tendency was not to act instrumentally to bring extrinsic value to the whole of Gates County Citizens Advice, but rather to act in ways that held intrinsic value to the principles of egalitarianism and to the ways they believed best prioritised clients' needs. As such, egalitarians consistently demonstrated their closed-cultural tendency that was reliant on their own knowledge and being self-referential in deciding how best to achieve certain ends. This was the case when confronting the first two change the trustees announced as it was with this third change when asked to act instrumentally to raise funds for GatCCA. Indeed, active-type egalitarians demonstrated their habit to resist information from 'outside' the culture and about the organisation at large.

Egalitarians also evidenced their resistance to the imposition of managerial or what they perceived as hierarchical dictation of what fundraising activities should be. A volunteer, Simone, who understood this resistance, explained to me that fundraising ideas should come from the like-minded volunteer workforce itself and not *“from the top”* (i.e. senior managers). If managers and trustees dictated the terms of fundraising this would *“get their [i.e. volunteers] hackles up because it is the boss saying it”* she qualified. Instead, fundraising activities that reinforced the egalitarian preference for close social bonding and maintenance of indivisible collectiveness were prioritised, *“in order for an enterprise like this to succeed you need everybody to be buying into it”* Pete explained. Stephanie, a paid staff project worker, echoed this view *“I think volunteers absolutely should be involved and they should be supported in the process...volunteers are our key workforce”*. Therefore, initiatives should be driven by volunteers and be ‘fun’ as Simone explained, *“we could all do all sorts of events...[where]... we can all be involved”*.

The first fundraising event that was conceived in this way, chiefly from volunteers and that emphasised informal social bonding, was a Bake Sale. It was agreed that this would be held in each of the eight advice centres and was intended to be a gentle introduction to fundraising. The vast majority of both staff and volunteers admitted to having no experience of fundraising with the exception of a notable few who fundraised for other national and local charities. Intriguingly, the purpose of the Bake Sale was not to bake and sell cakes to the public, but rather, to each other, to other volunteers and staff *within* the centres. The response to this initiative across the centres was mixed. Some staff and volunteers supported it whilst others were critical of the morality of requesting volunteers to give more to the charity over and above the time they already dedicated to their advice roles. The Bake Sale meant that volunteers, or rather those who chose to participate, also had to contribute their time and effort to make baked goods for their respective advice centres. However, those members of the active-type egalitarian group welcomed the idea enthusiastically. To them it was clear that it was a voluntary fundraising scheme in which those who wished to engage and provide cakes did, and those who wished to purchase these baked treats during the advice session could do so. Lowgate Advice Centre, which enjoyed a particularly pronounced active-type egalitarian culture propelled by an exemplar supervisor of this cultural type embraced the Bake Sale and used it through-out the advice session to the public as an incentive for which volunteer could advise the most clients and be given ‘the last slice’ gratis as a reward.

Because Lowgate Advice Centre possessed many participants that fitted the egalitarian ideal type they approached the Bake Sale as an opportunity to encourage the social element of volunteering

by strengthening their already close social bonds with each other. Soon after the event, the senior management team announced that the Bake Sale was a success with just over £50 being raised across all the advice centres. Egalitarians in Lowgate immediately began planning another fundraising activity at a local outdoor adventure park. Once more however, the egalitarians who were organising the event did not seek to fundraise from individuals outside of the charity (i.e. from the public) but rather looked to themselves. The premise was to encourage staff and volunteers to sponsor the invited senior managers and Seb, the chair of the trustees, to participate in the most difficult obstacle course at the park with a view to making light-hearted fun of the upper echelons of the charity. This was viewed by active-type egalitarians as a 'levelling' activity to equalize relationships between the senior managers and trustees with those in the advice centres, but it was also, more fundamentally, about controlling the types of fundraising activities they engaged in on their own terms.

### 3.3.2 Passive-type social action

The unfamiliarity with GatCCA's funding model and rules regarding fundraising did not prevent active-type egalitarians instituting fundraising activities that reinforced their preference for strong social solidarity and informality. By contrast, passive-type egalitarians were also not in possession of any particular knowledge of the organisation funding structure or how fundraising could support its limited income streams. They did not perceive any potential benefit in fundraising to strengthen their social relationships in the way active-type egalitarians did. Members of this group were closed to 'external' information about the organisation at large; they did not take action to understand GatCCA's current funding context and other exigencies that compelled the trustees to seek alternative funding streams by way of fundraising. And they were bereft of ideas of potential fundraising avenues the charity could explore; when I asked about this a representative answer was *"I must admit I haven't given it much thought...no I must admit nothing springs to mind"* Saul, an administrative staff member told me. He assumed that GatCCA's senior managers would *"presumably know the organisations that are worth applying to"*, like trusts, foundations and retail banks. Equally, other egalitarians like him thought fundraising activities would be stymied by what they believed was the charity's branding issue, that it was not a 'heart-strings' charity like *"children...animal...[and] cancer charities"* (Catriona, supervisor) and consequently not appealing to public sympathy in the way these charitable institutions were.

Apathy was an effective attitude that passive-type egalitarians adopted to resist participating in fundraising activities. For instance, whilst they tentatively claimed that including everyone in fundraising activities was a good idea in principle, they hesitated to moot ideas or schemes

themselves. One such passive-type egalitarian, Maggie, a senior manager who was well-placed to suggest and co-ordinate such events stated, *“I think that would a lovely place to be if somebody was organising it, setting the boundaries and reviewing it, there are a lot of great skills, I am amazed every time I talk to our volunteers, they’re amazing, and we should be tapping into that, but unless somebody tells them what to do and what is expected of them, how to do it, it will just dilute the whole [organisation]”*. However, there was no guarantee that if the organisation did steer fundraising initiatives that it would compel passive egalitarians to participate. Indeed, on the one hand they demurred to GatCCA to lead the fundraising drive but on the other hand would make their own decisions as to whether they would engage, as Saul explained to me *“I think it is up to GatCCA to make proposals, slightly more specific proposals, rather than a general ‘would you be willing to help?’, it’s got to be more specific before you can say whether you are happy or not to do it”*. Besides, the egalitarian cultural characteristic of being resistant to prescribed roles, formality and regulation of their social arrangement was evident in concerns some passive-type egalitarians had that fundraising activities may be formally proposed *“so that it becomes part of your job”*, Marie, support staff in Eastgate Advice Centre told me. She continued, *“it does make me nervous, because you wonder what you are going to be asked to do next”*, this raised suspicions of an implicit form of regulation or coercive effort by the charity’s senior managers and trustees to compel participation with the wider organisation in ways this cultural type had a preference against, Marie told me, *“I wouldn’t want to feel that we are forced to take part in fundraising events”* and *“I am just resistant to it”*.

What is more, as already demonstrated, all members of the egalitarian cultural group conceived of the organisation not so much as a physical entity but rather a *practice*, that GatCCA was the *practice of charity* in relationships with others in their advice centres and those external to it for client benefit. Therefore, fundraising for the benefit of the *entity* of Gates County Citizens Advice was anathema for passive-type egalitarians in particular as much as it was for active-type group. If staff and volunteers did agree to participate in fundraising they would base this on what their respective advice centres and the clients that visited these centres stood to gain. Alexis, a passive-type supervisor in Rushgate Advice Centre, explained that if fundraising activities were *“hypothecated on something like ‘we can get new equipment’ then it does give people a buzz if it is something that is going to be funded or provided for. [But] I can’t see anybody going for the idea of [fundraising for] operating costs, to find anybody to go out and shake a tin for that I think would be a fundraiser too far”*. However they chose not to actively exert control over the kinds of activities they would engage in to support their advice centres, instead their reliance on past practices inculcated a sense of complacency about the charity’s present financial circumstances. Alexis encapsulated this *“because....they [local authorities and local government] have got an*

*obligation to provide advice services, so they will always be there regardless of whether it's us they are funding or someone else". As much as she took a paternalistic approach to volunteers to 'protect' them from any further responsibilities or duties she also assumed a paternalistic protection from CitA if Gates County Citizens Advice lost its principal revenue stream from local government, she said "you've got this big umbrella organisation [i.e. CitA] which is...funded by central government so you are not going to get local government pulling out of GatCCA...well, if anything happened to us, CitA would come in and rescue us".*

### **3.4 Conclusion**

What the three changes announced at the roadshow meetings at the outset of fieldwork presented was an ongoing moment of organisational change in which the participants of the Gates County Citizens Advice were compelled to consider who they intended to engage with, and how, in response to these changes. Taken as a whole egalitarianism was a coherent (if riven) cultural group within the organisation to the extent that its members largely perceived and believed the changes should be responded to in similar ways. Furthermore, egalitarians had consistent ideological reference points based on what they believed their and the charity's purpose was; this framed their perception of the changes themselves. The egalitarians' cultural bias was an overriding commitment to prioritise clients above all else. This idea steered and justified their preferred mode of social organisation, their way of life, hence to either act upon or reject the three changes. Egalitarianism in GatCCA was a culture of high sociability of close, professional relationships; it was resisting of social stratification and outside meddling or attempts to regulate the members' behaviour or relational dynamics. As a culture it protected itself by being a self-contained, closed knowledge system against organisational influence in the form of managerial directives or information that undermined egalitarian practices.

Also discernible about the egalitarian culture was that its participants gave a sense of *re-emergence* of an older dormant culture at GatCCA as opposed to the manifestation of an entirely new organisational culture. This seeming reestablishment – and at times forceful reassertion – of itself was evidenced by egalitarians' habitual references to the past. 'The past' was an idealised time that provided an imagined but stable reference point of former practices that many of them as long-serving staff and volunteers had participated in. They still had a preference for and believed these past practices offered apposite responses to the current changes mooted by trustees and managers. Furthermore, preoccupation with the past revealed the culture's attitude to change more generally. Indeed, whilst the three changes presented egalitarians with an opportunity to reflect upon how they would socially align themselves in relation to the changes,

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they did so by reviving their preferences for past ways of doing things. This meant egalitarians *resisted* change and sought instead to institute *continuity* with the past rather than deviate from it. This resistance was itself symptomatic of how egalitarians perceived the organisation itself, not as an entity but a *practice*; what is more that it had always been about *practicing the act of charity* in the local communities around the advice centres. Their nostalgia for the past offered the 'proof' of this idealised notion that they continued to cherish in the present. In sum, egalitarians were determined to practice charity and in doing so rejected the signal of change(s) the trustees announced and instead put *continuity into practice*.

## Chapter 4 Hierarchy

As I detailed in the previous chapter, egalitarianism was a *re-emerging* culture, it gave an impression of re-asserting itself from a period of hiatus, drawing strength and coherence from being rooted in a well-established, well-remembered past. By contrast, the second cultural type I identified was hierarchy; it gave an impression of being a *newly emergent* culture; entirely new in that it had not existed in any particular embryonic form in Gates County Citizens Advice Centre before. Its members were a small but clearly discernible group; paradoxically they were simultaneously finding their voice and yet expressing their views of the new changes that had been announced with fixed determination. This culture was comprised more of paid staff and fewer volunteers, but volunteers (including trustees) were unquestionably part of this cohort. Unlike egalitarians who had already started to put their responses to the changes into practice, allowing me to both observe their behaviours and hear the views they reported in casual or more formal settings (like interviews), the opposite was true of hierarchists. There was a less of an observable culture because they had yet to enact or put into practice their responses to the three changes. I was compelled to rely more heavily on what they said than by what they did as a culture. However, what they said was important and not to be ignored, this I weighed up in their favour based on the positions the most vocal members of this culture enjoyed in the organisation and their length of service. This was a culture in preparation, planning, and co-ordinating for action; as I explain below hierarchists had well-defined ideas about how to respond to the changes and put their preferences into action.

### 4.1 Hierarchist group dimension: social solidarity

#### 4.1.1 Cultural bias: prioritising the organisation

Let us remind ourselves that members of the egalitarian cultural group defined a return to localism in person-centred terms with clients being spoken about most often, emphasising their advice needs and how these should be addressed by cultivating interpersonal relationships with local stakeholders as vital to this process. By contrast, those in the hierarchist cultural group mentioned clients very rarely when providing their definition of localism. Of course, helping and supporting clients as the *raison d'être* of the charity was well understood and implied by members of the hierarchist culture; however, it was not an immediate touchstone in their understanding of what the new change to a return-to-localism meant. Instead, participants in this cultural group articulated their definition in more abstract terms of providing a service to 'society', 'the public' and even to 'populations', as several suggested. For example, Judy, a volunteer in Greengate

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Advice Centre stated *“I think it is about trying to listen to the issues and problems that local populations have”*. She and other hierarchists like her pitched localism at a higher conceptual level of what constituted local need; what a whole population of people required from the GatCCA advice service as opposed to what an individual client may need from a particular advisor in a particular advice centre at a particular point in time. Indeed, this broader understanding of localism was encapsulated by Isabelle, a manager (and previously supervisor to volunteers), who worked peripatetically across all eight of GatCCA’s advice centres *“localism is about local communities and a sense of belonging, and a sense of being there for the general public, and for Gates County Citizens Advice it means capturing that and inviting them in”*.

The hierarchist members’ more abstract repositioning of what constituted local need had the implication that as a culture it considered that an organisational as opposed to an individualised response was necessary to begin to address the issues and needs of ‘the general public’. In the first instance, this meant that the charity was compelled to pragmatically take stock and re-evaluate its ethos in relation to society’s needs, *“[it] is really important that we look at our ethos - and charity ethos generally - is a reflection of what society is hoping and wanting?”*, Kathleen, a supervisor in Eastgate Advice Centre asked. Furthermore, Barbara, the long-time manager responsible for GatCCA’s county-wide service delivery added that the organisation would need to take an instrumental view of what the needs and *“pressure points in the immediate areas are, and target or develop services in order to support that need”*. This would mean, she continued, working collaboratively with other types of organisations, whether they be niche service providers or more generalised ones in order to prevent Gates County Citizens Advice from regressing into a signposting-only organisation – which would not attract government funding if it did.

My questioning and probing into what hierarchists meant by working collaboratively with other organisations uncovered more ambitious aims they had for the charity. Barbara explained that she hoped that GatCCA would *“be the number one provider of advice in Gates County and that is what we are working at...that we are the [advice] organisation of choice”*. This sentiment represented how members of the hierarchist culture perceived the charity itself, as an organisation being positioned *in relation to* other organisations in the county, as opposed to the egalitarian notion which positioned staff and volunteers being *in relationships with* other individuals in stakeholder organisations in the near vicinity of specific advice centres. What the hierarchist interpretation of the localism announcement expressed was an underlying preference for positioning or ranking of GatCCA relative to other organisations in the provision of welfare services across Gateshire county, and an understanding their place within that ranked cohort. This de-personalised and de-centring of clients from localism was in contrast to the egalitarian

response that put equitable interpersonal professional relationships with other external stakeholders at the heart of manifesting localism for clients' benefit. In the course of discussing localism with both staff and volunteers of the hierarchist group it was evident that the role of close, equitable, interpersonal relationships was absent in their vision of localism. So too therefore was an important corollary of these interpersonal relationships and that was a sense of what constituted local proximity to the advice centres in which relationships with external stakeholders could be maintained.

Discussion revolved around bigger picture concerns of how GatCCA could be positioned at county-level as opposed to what local town-level concerns were. Hierarchists did not attach any importance to either staff or volunteers being residentially close to their nearest advice centre. They did not stipulate a five mile radius, like egalitarians did, as being the optimal manifestation of localism, for instance. Egalitarians believed this was necessary to both understanding the nuances of local issues and to cultivate relationships with a network of services to provide clients with appropriate advice. By contrast hierarchists were bemused as to why some volunteers and paid staff wanted to live in close geographical proximity to their local advice centres, and equally, why these same individuals resisted giving advice over the national telephone advice line preferring instead to see clients in face-to-face appointments. Isabelle who had worked with volunteers like this, said *"I must admit I didn't fully understand why the volunteers thought it was a bad thing to answer the phone to other people in different locations"*. Instead, when hierarchists did discuss particular local concerns these were, again, in more abstract terms. For instance, Barbara, a senior manager, suggested that GatCCA should focus on providing specialist advice on domestic violence matters in Lowgate Advice Centre and in Rushgate Advice Centre. However, unlike egalitarians, Barbara and other hierarchists were unable to draw upon local knowledge and relationships with other external stakeholders to begin to realise this aim and were therefore frustrated by lack of progress.

Members of the hierarchist group did however possess a sense of their lack of local knowledge of other service providers and competitors in the county. In ascertaining GatCCA's position in the assumed hierarchy of the county's charity-scape, it was pointed out to me by Harry, a trustee of many years' experience working with not-for-profit organisations, that GatCCA had never before conducted *"benchmarking exercise[s] with the outside world"*. However, he stated that the challenges that presently faced the charity, not least how it would continue to fund itself now and in the future demanded that this be done. Moreover, an instrumental approach to assessment should be extended to include a cost-benefit analysis of GatCCA's own service provision to determine which services should continue and which should be suspended. He explained, *"the*

*first thing you have to do to my mind, is to identify the needs of who we need to help, and then ask can we do it viably and what are the benefits?.....how do [we] know if it is worth keeping it going? or should [we] be expanding it?"* These pragmatic, emotionally detached questions of what was 'worth keeping' Harry and other hierarchists (including volunteers) applied not only to GatCCA's service offering but also to its smaller less busy advice centres too. Some mooted suggestions as to whether it would be financially prudent to close one or more of the eight advice centres that comprised Gates County Citizens Advice in order to save overhead costs and bolster its stability and viability in implementing the localism policy in the way they envisaged.

Importantly, it was not only trustees and managers who inhabited the hierarchist culture who supported this structured, top-down approach, but other staff and volunteers in the organisation who were in this cultural group too. Moreover, willingness by others to take these hard-headed more rational decisions about the charity was also evident in the vernacular of commercial professionalism they used in their discussions. Indeed, if the new localism policy represented an opportunity to become more professional as an organisation then this was because members of the hierarchist culture considered GatCCA to be a business. Carla, a paid staff member had previously worked in commercial settings before joining the charity, explained that a new more serious, financially hard-headed approach to localism was required to protect the organisation *"because it is a business; we are a business"*. In this vein, rather than the charity 'being given back' to staff and volunteers to pursue localism in ways they saw fit, she recommended that locally-specific business plans with key performance indicators be implemented in each of the advice centres. This would assist trustees and managers measuring the financial viability of the centres and the service they offered in the context of reviving localism.

In navigating and constructing the links between the ideas of what was important to members of hierarchism, the principal concern to them in their interpretation of localism was that an organisational rather than individualised approach was necessary. This bias of the culture was revealing of how it conceptualised GatCCA – as an entity, an objective 'thing' with hard-edged boundaries positioned in relation to other entities, other organisations in Gateshire county. This was the opposite of the egalitarian culture that perceived GatCCA as a nebulous space in which to *practice* charity in relationships with other like-minded individuals. The hierarchist concept of GatCCA had consequences, however. Indeed, Isabelle, who had worked closely with volunteers in both client-facing and non-client facing roles discussed how unhappy some volunteers had become when several separate advice centres merged to create the single, unified Gates County Citizens Advice entity. The merger meant GatCCA *"got very big, very quickly"* (Isabelle) as an organisation. In doing so it promoted standardisation of the advice service across GatCCA and

compelled volunteer advisors to support clients through a telephone-service from all parts of Gates County, often necessitating referring clients to national-level services. This was the antithesis of town-level, local, face-to-face support of clients that some volunteers (i.e. those not in the hierarchist culture) valued. However, Isabelle (and others like her) did not perceive the cultural preferences of others, or importance of the role of community and interpersonal relationships within a five mile radius of the advice centres that facilitated the personalised service that was so beneficial to clients. Rather, she and hierarchists like senior manager Barbara, gave dispassionate responses to the concerns of others that the organisation had become 'too big', or of advice centres losing their unique identities by being absorbed into a larger generic organisational entity.

Instead, the hierarchist cultural bias was to prioritise what they perceived the needs of the organisation were over what individuals within the organisation wanted; the whole rather than its parts were paramount (Mamadouh, 1999). Indeed, evidence of this was the absence of people – clients, volunteers, staff or other individual stakeholders – in hierarchists' understanding of, and response to, localism in all its aspects. This initially presented me with difficulty in establishing what the hierarchist group-dimension of sociability was; with whom hierarchists preferred to cooperate when confronting the new change the trustees had announced. If people were absent in how they discussed and interpreted localism, then who did members of the hierarchist cultural group feel social solidarity with? The egalitarian cultural bias of serving clients in the manifestation and practice of localism made it clear who they wished to associate with; I was able to establish their group commitment. It was less clear who staff and volunteers in the hierarchist culture wished to associate with because of their depersonalised response to localism was also de-centred from clients' needs; instead they elevated the concept of localism to an organisational level of understanding instead.

Yet, in the analysis of the data I generated what I came into understand was that the concept of localism not only illuminated how hierarchists perceived GatCCA as part of a hierarchical arrangement within the wider, external charity-scape, but also, this revealed of how they as individuals wished to associate with others within GatCCA. Put another way, GatCCA in its external milieu was a proxy for their individual identities *within* the charity and demonstrated a preference for sociability on the basis of unsentimental, pragmatic, taking stock of where one fitted in the order of things. The absence of other people in their initial discussions of localism evidenced an emotional detachment from GatCCA. Thus, rather than inter-personal professional relationships being the explicit fulcrum from which the practice of localism would emerge (as was

the case for egalitarians); instead, for hierarchists each person would find or be designated their allotted role and begin to transact in an unambiguous and orderly way (Bale, 1997).

Finally, whilst I observed egalitarians in the process of building relationships with like-minded stakeholders both in and outside of GatCCA by capitalising on pre-existing knowledge of their local areas, hierarchists were unable to replicate this. Their admitted lack of knowledge of the local charity-scape and their weak ties with other stakeholders in communities in and around their advice centres meant hierarchists inverted their attention to within the confines of GatCCA to deal with the change to localism. This initially seemed incongruent with their stated desire to achieve an advantageous external position relative to other organisations. However, what it expressed was the desire to bring order, control and formality over what they could control – the internal operational dynamics of the organisation. Rather than being adrift and unable to order their external milieu, hence, they turned away from it.

### 4.1.2 Localism internally focussed

If through their interactions and associations egalitarians demonstrated an organic, informal manifestation or *practice* of localism, in which all members of the culture perceived themselves to be equally involved in a collective effort to prioritise clients' needs, then the opposite was the hallmark of the hierarchist culture. Indeed, hierarchists preferred to *implement* the localism policy and implementation would be no less demanding of high levels of commitment expected of each other. However, instead of informal and spontaneous co-operation, members of the hierarchists group preferred to co-operate in an unemotionally driven, formal and structured way (6, 2005); at least, this is what they *envisioned*. Isabelle, newly appointed manager and former supervisor who occupied a key position in implementing the new localism policy across the eight advice centres offered imaginative but at the same time theoretical speculations of how implementation should unfold, in the first instance concentrating on GatCCA's operational dynamics. This was on the basis of imagined actions that she (and others like her) hoped would take place such as co-ordinating a "central community, [a] controlled and managed network" (ibid, p. 99) of staff and volunteers without details of what this would mean.

But Isabelle also recognised that localism was not only about being operationally high-performing but also about "*knowledge as well*" (Isabelle, manager). She and other members of the hierarchist group acknowledged that their lack of knowledge of the wider charity-scape around the GatCCA advice centres was a barrier to external implementation of localism. However, it was believed that volunteers could help with this because they were already inspired to help their local

communities and therefore were in possession of local knowledge that had not been *“tapped into enough”* as Barbara, a senior manager, put it. The first step in ‘tapping’ this wellspring of knowledge was to establish an approach to working with volunteers that was top-down in style. This was based on an assumption held by hierarchists that GatCCA was a conventional hierarchical organisation anyway comprising of a vast cohort of volunteers at the base of the organisational pyramid and who should be co-ordinated to maximise the value they bring to the organisation. Isabelle, whose considerable experience working with volunteers and their supervisors across the organisation, summed up this notion and how it should be exercised in the context of extracting information from volunteers, *“it is down to the supervisor to see what strengths volunteers have got in centres, to identify that, and then work with it”*. Furthermore, *“they are going to have to tap into the volunteers who know the area, and again, as we said, the motivation behind that from volunteers might not be so forthcoming”*.

Not all individuals in the organisation would be compliant to these sorts of requests, Barbara pointed out because she recognised that there was a *“mixed level of engagement and commitment in the organisation, there is a mixed level of ability and skills”*. Other strategies for managing people would be required to foster compliance from volunteers *“without it coming across as a demand”* as Isabelle stated. Douglas’s theory attends to this tendency found in hierarchist cultures in that it seeks to *“persuade and reconcile”* (Douglas, 1999, p.412) others to requests from authority. Compliance of those in the lower orders must be balanced with the understanding that those giving instructions are not rulers or overseers of the organisation as such but rather that they do this as an act of service to the organisation that they encourage others to participate in serving the organisation too (Bale, 1997). Isabelle bore this out when she explained to me how volunteers should be managed by their supervisors when asking them to impart their local knowledge, *“in terms of management, it is going to be more about encouraging, supporting and explaining what we are doing”*. This revealed too that the priority of localism implementation was first and foremost co-ordinating a clearly-defined internal hierarchy in the service of the organisation; it was implicit that this would be catalytic to implementing localism externally.

Some of the other areas of work hierarchists believed everyone (especially volunteers) in the organisation was expected to apply themselves to were not necessarily client-focussed tasks but rather ancillary activities that GatCCA was involved in. There was acknowledgement that this may make volunteers *“wary in terms of how they are now being asked to interact with the community”* (Isabelle). For example, volunteers would be expected to undertake activities beyond the traditional advice role, like researching social policy failures and identifying local issues (such as

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rogue landlords and loan sharks) which would feed into CitA's national social policy campaigns. This was less about being 'given back' the charity (as the egalitarian culture had envisioned it) to prioritise work in ways that staff and volunteers believed appropriate for their individual clients. Instead, hierarchists stated that localism was about including new responsibilities and commitments in GatCCA's interests (not just in clients' interests) as determined by CitA. Far from being 'given back' the charity, on the contrary, that "*for volunteers, it is a case of be careful what you wish for*" (Isabelle, staff) because they would now be more firmly co-ordinated in ways that served GatCCA's wider interests.

Some of these activities had already started such as the renewed impetus around researching client cases that built an evidence base for social justice campaigns led by CitA. Volunteers were already being mobilised to these activities which supported wider organisational obligations. A volunteer in Greengate Advice Centre, Judy, who had already discerned this shift in priorities and who had started to work with other volunteers in identifying local policy problems mentioned to me that she expected some resistance, and possibly hostility, to this new initiative under the guise of localism. She explained, "*some advice centres are fed up with being given extra tasks because they have so much to do [already]*". Although Judy was enthusiastic about this new drive she had noticed that some of her fellow volunteers had started questioning the motivations behind the increasing responsibilities and workload of volunteers were expected to undertake. She told me that volunteers had started asking "*how do they expect us to start doing this?*" In answer to them Judy invoked the authority of the charity to establish the principle that "*actually it is one of our twin aims*"<sup>5</sup> and what is more because the change to return-to-localism was signalled by CitA a pragmatic 'get-on-with-it' approach was expected by all in GatCCA. Therefore, Judy told other volunteers who complained: "*it is your job*".

This top-down co-ordination of processes and the relationships that supported them was less of an organic flourishing of local practices (as in the egalitarian case) and more of an expression of the hierarchist social solidarity which preferred ordering of people and processes that was justified by a cultural bias that prioritised the needs of the organisation first and foremost. Keeping these principles intact also motivated members of the hierarchist culture to favour standardisation and homogenisation of the advice service over more personalised client-centred (i.e. local) approaches that egalitarians preferred. Kathleen, a supervisor based in Eastgate Advice Centre explained this clearly "*things need to become more efficient and just more generic across*

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<sup>5</sup> Citizens Advice is a twin aim organisation; 1) to provide free, impartial non-judgemental advice, and, 2) to campaign for reform of harmful social policies.

*all [advice centres]”*. However, some hierarchists paid credence to the idea that implementing localism through internal operational mechanisms may well mean some variation between the advice centres *“so the autonomy to be able to meet these needs is a good thing”* explained Marina, GatCCA’s training officer in Greengate Advice Centre. However, she nevertheless stated her preference that for *“fundamental core support services, there should be one offering for training and development, it should be mirrored everywhere”*. Echoing this sentiment one of the managers stated that it was her intention to issue business plans to each of the eight advice centres to standardise implementation and processes. This was not something the trustees had announced at the roadshow meetings, it gave less credence to the laissez-faire ‘giving back’ attitude Seb the chair of trustees, alluded to and instead was an expression of hierarchists’ desire for a centrally co-ordinated action plan to implement localism.

Marina expressed her preference for centralised directives, *“I was wondering if everyone was going to go off to just do their own thing, would we lose the commonality if there is an element of local variation? I still believe that our fundamental principles need to be absolutely the same where ever you go...it needs to be the same way of doing things, and I am not sure how well that will be reflected”*. Her comment also reflected a culture that preferred non-emotive, rational interactions that prioritised these kinds of associations with others to fulfil the hierarchist cultural bias of prioritising the needs of GatCCA the organisational entity above all else. The cultural bias compelled a high level of commitment by hierarchist members to the cause and an expectation that this level of commitment would be forthcoming from others too. The commitment was also to preferences for transactional relationships that lacked emotional content and that were in contrast to the deeply, emotive interpersonal attachments that egalitarians preferred. In part, hierarchists’ preferences were based on a rejection of the past, which I explain in more detail below.

#### **4.1.3 Future orientated**

It is worth noting at this point that Douglas’s cultural theory deals with temporality as an influencer of cultural bias; in particular to how ideas of the past provide justifications for particular courses of action by the cultural groups in her typology. Douglas (2011 [1986]) posits that in the construction of culture that members of a particular type have the capacity to *“remember and forget”* (p.67-70) the past. How a culture responds to circumstances of the present are the result of the knowledge its actors hold of the (re)imagined or forgotten past (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983). Ergo, we saw this in how those staff and volunteers in the egalitarian culture ‘remembered’ the past which provided a stabilizing anchor for how to socially

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organise and behave during the period of change GatCCA was experiencing. For egalitarians, remembering and re-enacting past practices provided a sense of continuity and underwrote their preferences to *resist* the changes the trustees announced and to pursue localism in a ways they had previous knowledge of. Intriguingly however, Douglas does not attend to the role that notions of the future may play in acting as a guide to a particular culture's bias. Yet, it must logically follow that if temporality is influential in shaping cultural biases then this must include not only ideas about the past but about the present and the future too, and all the hopes and fears that these temporal positions are perceived to hold.

Indeed, what I discovered was that for hierarchists their ideas of the past were something to be rejected rather than be embraced in their perception of localism *and* of how they conceived of Gates County Citizens Advice as an organisation. The past was associated with the chaos and aftermath of GatCCA's mergers and, paradoxically, what they perceived to be a fragmenting, and un-unified period of the charity's recent history. Michaela, a trustee who joined GatCCA not long after the merger took place, discussed with me that the "*mergers have caused damage*". Barbara, a senior manager who had been a part of the merger history also brought this to my attention when she stated, "*to a certain extent they [i.e the previous board of trustees] lost the hearts and minds of the local people that volunteer for GatCCA...we didn't take people with us I don't think*". The destination where staff and volunteers were not taken to was to an idealised notion of 'the future'. Barbara had made references to the notion of the future being a destination to progress to during the roadshow meetings; at several of them she had used phrases that GatCCA was "*a bit behind*" other not-for-profit organisations and "*had to move with the times*". The future was represented as a destination to arrive at, and the announcement of changes by the trustees signalled a new conscious effort on the part of the organisation, as hierarchists perceived it, to 'take people with us' to the future. Occasionally, oblique references were made as to how this future-orientated ambition related in concrete terms to the organisation and its processes, for instance, the need for volunteers to embrace digital media, such as Skype and webchat platforms, when dealing with clients to keep pace with what CitA and what clients themselves wanted from the advice service. Unlike egalitarians whose application to the past provided them with the means, that is, knowledge and experience, of how to achieve ends like returning to localism, for hierarchists the future offered them no such referential touchstone to act in accordance with. Instead it was evident to me, and to hierarchists themselves, that they were acting in the *absence of knowledge*, this vacuum was filled with an imagined ideal of what the organisation would be once 'the future' was arrived at.

The justification for this approach was located in the hierarchists' cultural bias: securing the stability and longevity of the organisation. Because of the deficit of knowledge they had of the external environment, hierarchists could not readily enact their vision of localism in which GatCCA would "*be the number one provider of advice*" (Barbara, senior manager) in the future. Thus, in the present moment their focus was inverted to the internal dynamics of the organisation where they began to implement direction over the internal dynamics of the organisation. Here they would, as Isabelle idealised, be "*encouraging, supporting and explain[ing]*" to staff and volunteers the new dynamic and arrangements to justify cooperation of the whole of GatCCA. Kathleen the supervisor in Eastgate also explained that this would be with a view to "*sharing knowledge that we have in the advice centres*". The emphasis on process and procedure, standardisation (especially core support services) and problem-solving and coordination of the whole extracting information from volunteers, would "*enable GatCCA to move forward*" Isabelle predicted. This approach to organising GatCCA meant that they could claim, as Douglas (2011 [1986]) explains, "*structural amnesia*" (page: 69-70) to the past (its difficulties, challenges and methods) and instead focus on the future, which remained an unsullied and somewhat romanticised hierarchist vision.

Because egalitarians were informed and validated by the past in their practices and their knowledge of their external milieu was complete this resulted in members of the culture immediately practicing localism in way that felt 'natural' and consistent with their cultural bias. By contrast, no hierarchists were ready to act *per se*, they were nonetheless cognizant of new localism policy as being a definitive moment of *change*, and because this cultural type was more future orientated, also perceived it as an opportunity for *progression*. Moreover, hierarchists' determination to move swiftly in the direction of progress would be accomplished without the strategic support of CitA; Harry, a trustee, explained, "*we can't wait for CitA to get off the fence*" to offer support. Instead hierarchists took the decision to act in accordance with an imagined vision of what localism could be, not what it was, and an idealised sense of how GatCCA would shape itself as organisation as a result. Their propensity to project into the future as a way of embracing change gave the culture a characteristic of utopian optimism, not entirely rooted in actual limitations and practicalities of what might be possible to achieve when working with others in GatCCA who were not of the hierarchist culture and possessed different cultural biases and preference for how they socially organised.

## 4.2 Hierarchist grid dimension: social regulation

High levels of interpersonal trust were the informal glue of the egalitarian culture, but for members of the hierarchist cultural group this was not the case. Indeed, they put little emphasis on the role of individuals and relationships but instead placed their trust in rules and processes. These had the added benefit of being transparent, formally sanctioned and therefore, in the hierarchist view, unambiguous. The members of the hierarchist cultural group had already demonstrated in their response to the new localism policy that their group-dimension – *who* they preferred to transact with – was marked by high degrees of group solidarity bound by a common commitment to the best interests of the organisation. Individuals would subsume themselves to the greater good of GatCCA. The second announcement of change, of newly enhanced roles for volunteers, demonstrated the hierarchists' grid-dimension of sociability, that is, how much social regulation the culture was willing to accept over its activities. As a cultural type they had a preference for bureaucratic processes with prescribed roles that determined one's place in the organisation. Importantly, members of hierarchism enjoyed the prescribed roles assigned to individuals in the group who then also observed a clear chain of command, they were bound into this tight group solidarity through personal choice and preference not as consequence of being imposed upon to accept this arrangement (Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 1990; Douglas, 1999). Preference for a ranked, prescribed social structure is an important point because it also facilitated what Bale (1997) identified as acceptance by all members of the group of a "closely monitored normative agreement that someone must rule" (Bale, 1997, p.30).

### 4.2.1 Supervisors as managers

In the same way that members of the egalitarian culture emphasised the importance of the role of the supervisor in the charity, members of the hierarchist cultural group were in agreement, referring to the supervisor role as "*a critical post*" (Barbara, senior manager). Supervisors who were situated in the egalitarian culture self-defined their roles through the practice of (however illusory) equal relationships with others engaged in serving clients advice needs with high degrees of trust underpinning these relationships. Additionally, regardless of whether the egalitarian supervisor was an active supervisor (the first-amongst-equals type) or a passive one (paternalistic in approach) they required the tacit consent of others, volunteers and staff, in their particular style of supervising. Group acceptance of the supervisor was both a confirmation and validation of the supervisors' approach to supervising their volunteers. Hierarchists however deviated from egalitarians in terms of what they believed the person in a supervisory role was expected to achieve and what the most appropriate way to support the supervisor in their role was.

Indeed, participants in the hierarchist culture did not give way to the idea of the supervisor defining their own role *in relationship with volunteers*. Instead, the hierarchist preference was to define the supervisor role being *in hierarchical relationships to volunteers* in their respective advice centres. Whilst egalitarian supervisors regarded their role as being there to support the volunteers and worked to build a *mutual support system* between them and their volunteers, this led to roles and responsibilities within the duty rooms being ambiguous due to the subtle and informal division of labour that egalitarian supervisors surreptitiously achieved. The reverse was true for hierarchists. This culture preferred supervisors to have clear role differentiation from volunteers with reference to their individual job specifications and understanding of them being, ultimately, in charge of managing the advice centre they were based in. Furthermore, hierarchists regarded the supervisor post as requiring the most additional support in the organisation, and it was volunteers who would provide this support to them by instituting new roles that the trustees announced.

The starting point for hierarchists was an aspiration to establish the headship of the supervisor within the advice centres. If egalitarian supervisors considered themselves as equals, enablers or paternalistic figures to their volunteers, then hierarchists considered supervisors as managers of volunteers, as being 'in charge'. There was a notable absence in their discussions of the personal dimensions of the supervisor-volunteer relationship *per se*, and more focus on instrumental aspects such as a processes and procedures that would regulate the contract between supervisors and volunteers. Carla, who was a former volunteer and now in a paid position, was supportive of how the new roles that had been devised for volunteers would support the supervisor, she emphasised how these would be additional 'resources' for supervisors. This terminology was indicative of hierarchists' preference for unemotive language and de-personalising volunteers experience at GatCCA. Carla said of the new roles that they were available for supervisors' benefit, "*I think it means empowering the supervisors to run their advice centre in the best way*". She continued, "*the supervisors have now been empowered to do their own case checking [and] they decide who needs the feedback, they decide who needs training and they discuss it with the volunteer as to what training they should be going on, they decide their own opening hours because they know what works and what clients' needs [are], so they are empowered to run the centre*" with the support of these new roles.

Now that the supervisor role was more formally defined and clarified hierarchists believed by them being able to recruit new volunteers to the support them in their duties that this would result in them being fully supported and therefore able to direct their attention to areas other

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than the general advice service. Barbara explained to me in more detail “*primarily supervisors are internally focussed [but] with external knowledge*”. Therefore, they were expected to “*facilitate those [local] network and connections*” that would be necessary to implement the localism policy. However, Barbara suggested that this latter point may be difficult to achieve because supervisors would be ‘too busy’ focussing on the procedural and operational elements of managing volunteers, for instance engaged in performance management, recruitment and exit interviews, as she explained. Other hierarchists, like Isabelle and Carla, reiterated this point. This emphasis, of adding to supervisors’ duties and responsibilities ran contra to the development of the new volunteer posts which were devised specifically to relieve supervisors of some of these burdensome responsibilities. However, the hierarchists’ tendency was to downplay this because their preferred mode of organisation was through observing hierarchical roles in which supervisors would retain a recognised level of responsibility and authority over volunteers. However, because the hierarchist culture was future-orientated, those in this group were excited and positive about progressing towards what they believed was an appropriate model for each of the advice centres to operate on. Thus, they continued to prioritise supervisors following formal ordained organisational procedures at the cost of nurturing relationships with other external stakeholders that may have benefited clients in the advice centres.

This differed dramatically with supervisors in the egalitarian group (especially the active-type) who did not perceive their roles in the hierarchical model at all but rather considered it incumbent on them to facilitate building a network of local relationships and knowledge. Local interaction was vital to this, egalitarian supervisors believed, and would increase the quality of the advice offered to clients. Other operational duties of the advice centre were quietly distributed to other volunteers, so in a sense the egalitarian supervisor and volunteers were all ‘managing’ the advice centres. As Peter had said, “*it’s not my advice centre, it’s theirs [i.e. volunteers]*”, and he did not feel the need to “*own everything*” in his advice centre. As already discussed, it was informality and high level of trust that maintained a sense of egalitarian collectivity. Hierarchists however had a preference for formality and, in part, along with the localism policy and the new roles for volunteers, these presented opportunities to instigate formal procedures and taken-for-granted notions of what they believed constituted professionalism in doing so. A direct manifestation of this preference was that advice centres were encouraged to have highly visible manager-supervisors distributing tasks to a subordinate workforce of volunteers.

Evidence of this latter point was discussed with me by Isabelle; she mentioned that in the past there were elements of the supervisor role relating to how volunteers were managed that had not been carried out; that the “*excuse*” (as she put it) for not attending to these tasks had been

*“oh we are charity, [so] don’t worry about that”*. However, this moment of change this was an opportunity to reject these lackadaisical past practices (or non-practices) and instead professionalise by making it obligatory for supervisors to attend to their wider duties when managing volunteers. What is more, Isabelle suggested that not only were supervisors being asked to undertake these longstanding but often ignored duties, like conducting formal yearly appraisals of their volunteers, but that this was now going to be *“enforced”* by the senior managers of GatCCA. Furthermore, it was clear in discussions with Isabelle, Barbara and Carla that the technical knowledge of legal advice, which although crucial to the supervisor role, was to them, of lesser importance than the supervisory skills the supervisor was expected to have. As was said to me in bald terms, the supervisors’ full job title was *Advice Session Supervisor*. Therefore, technical and local knowledge alone did not ‘run’ the advice session, as Isabelle stated, but rather that supervisory skills were required to *supervise* not just the advice session but more importantly, in the estimation of hierarchists, of volunteers in their advice centres.

There was also an assumption on the part of hierarchists that all supervisors across the advice centres were in agreement of this model of their role and would be active in their approach to more rigorously manage volunteers, *“so they have got quite a lot, I would say, of resources to call upon, it’s up to them to utilise it and organise themselves and take what is on offer”*, Barbara explained. Therefore, as much as supervisors were a resource in the wider organisation to be harnessed to perform, so too were volunteers perceived as resources. There was recognition from Barbara (and others) however that, some volunteers will *“naturally”* struggle with the *“pressure of change”* (Barbara), of being managed with more scrutiny and having more clearly prescribed roles with new elements of work. Above all, Barbara explained that not only supervisors but also the organisation at large *“needs to be confident in managing them”*. As with the egalitarian culture, there was the assumption, indeed a blind spot, that all others within GatCCA were operating on the same assumptions and although they had a sense that volunteers may struggle with the shift in priorities and management style, they did not ascertain that it might be the supervisors who may not want to conduct their roles in the formally regulated way hierarchists proposed.

#### **4.2.2 Volunteers as resources**

Notable was that hierarchists did not make any particular differentiation between paid staff and unpaid staff, i.e. volunteers, in terms of the high expectations they had of volunteers in terms of social incorporation into the organisation. Their depersonalised approach to perceiving not only the changes that the trustees announced but also how the organisation should respond to them was again reflected in comments made by Carla who also viewed volunteers as human ‘resources’

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to be mobilised in service of these changes and formally managed in ways that paid staff were. When I asked her what her opinion of the newly mooted posts for volunteers, which have them enjoy enhanced responsibilities, she stated they were a good idea *“provided they are managed properly, why wouldn’t you? I’m all for it, it’s daft to restrict it”*. She did not mention how these roles would support the supervisor, or offer opportunities for professional or personal development of the volunteer, but rather that *“they can contribute to the overall running of the business which in turn will contribute to the service we offer”*. A qualifier Carla provided was that the volunteers must be competent enough to undertake the new roles on offer, *“well, providing they are good at it [it will have] nothing but a positive impact”*.

Another characteristic amongst members of the hierarchist group was that they did not demonstrate or articulate much emphasis on interpersonal relationship building between each other in the ways that egalitarians did, for instance. Rather they approached interactions with each other as transactional and instrumental to achieving certain deliverable ends according to a role-based division of labour (Bale, 1997; Mamadouh, 1999). This approach meant that several things could be achieved in Gates County Citizens Advice, firstly, professionalisation of the charity *“providing [volunteers] are good [enough]”* (Carla, project worker) and adaptable to taking instructions from authoritative sources in the charity, like their supervisors. Implicit in this assumption was that a heavily socially regulated and transparently observable internal hierarchy would establish greater stability of the organisational structure as a whole; volunteers could therefore be utilised to build and protect the structure of GatCCA (Thompson and Wildasky, 1986). With this cultural bias in mind, the habit of participants of the hierarchist cultural group was to recommend more regulation between its members, more internal processes, procedures and protocols.

As a case in point, Marina, GatCCA’s training officer, who had previously worked in corporate environments perceived the new posts that had been offered to volunteers as a mechanism to be utilised and to assist her own efforts to professionalise and bring centralised co-ordination of GatCCA’s training courses to volunteers. She also perceived volunteers were ‘resources’ as opposed to people or colleagues, she was motivated by the prospect of maximising these resources to benefit the organisation. Marina reported to me that the procedures she had previously put in place to evaluate and monitor volunteers’ progress and training needs had been *“trampled on”*, as she put it. She continued that she saw the volunteers who would fill the new roles as being able to assist with other volunteers’ appraisals in a more structured and formal way which ultimately would help identify the individual training needs which Marina would use to develop and write an organisational training plan. This would avoid Marina’s department’s

unnecessary involvement in operational process and instead *“just get on with training”*, she told me, to strengthen the professional and quality credibility of GatCCA. Volunteers would need to be formally co-ordinated and managed to this end, but by doing so it would help the organisation *“get back to basics”* she stated. Furthermore, Marina intended her training plan to be reactive to a larger organisational recruitment and volunteer retention strategy. What Marina was explaining to me were clearly defined areas of work in which processes and procedures, prescribed roles and formalities would primarily and directly support aspects of the organisation but that were not necessarily immediately beneficial to clients, but rather indirectly so.

Indeed, hierarchists had a preference for taking action (where they were able to) that had immediate valuable impact, as they perceived it, on supporting the operational and structural elements of GatCCA. Clients, it was implied, would benefit by proxy. For example, Carla, paid staff member in Lowgate Advice Centre, had recently completed a professional qualification in financial and debt management and was intending to train and *“upskill”* (as she referred to it) volunteers on some of the topics that her course had covered. This would complement and increase the debt management knowledge that volunteers had previously received training on. The impetus behind Carla’s desire to deliver this additional training to volunteers was chiefly to prioritise how this would benefit GatCCA, and secondly, to benefit clients. She explained, *“there is no point in me sitting here one day a week [where] I manage to help four [clients] a month. I need to be sharing this information and I need to be mentoring other debt caseworkers in all of the advice centres so that my qualification can be a benefit to the whole organisation rather than a handful of clients”*. Indeed, this qualification would provide volunteers with the technical knowledge and skills to deliver highly specialised debt management advice to clients, which was an area of increasing demand on the GatCCA advice service. However, as a participant in the hierarchist cultural group Carla demonstrated an enormous amount of personal commitment to GatCCA and assumed that volunteers would be amenable to this level of commitment to additional training too. However, the training she proposed to deliver was not, strictly speaking, a CitA requirement, it was additional to the core training volunteers received and moreover was pitched as a year 1 undergraduate degree level qualification. However, CitA had warned in their localism policy for instance, that when making requests of volunteers to undertake additional work in any capacity that the advice centres should consider very carefully what they could reasonably expect of an unpaid workforce.

Carla’s commitment to her hierarchist cultural bias of prioritising organisational needs above those of individuals was clear. It is worth qualifying however that this did not mean that she or other participants in the hierarchist cultural group did not *care* about volunteers or clients – they

did, but *prioritised* GatCCA as the overarching entity to secure the jobs of, and advice service to, others. Consequently this resulted in hierarchists assuming that volunteers would readily accept the new terrain of responsibilities, commitments and formal focus on organisational processes, as ultimately this would secure the advice service for clients. Again however, the guidance disseminated to advice centres by the membership organisation, Citizens Advice (2012), stated that “volunteering is an optional and personal decision” (p.3). This alone posed a challenge to the hierarchists’ belief that the charity’s volunteers would willingly accept and adopt hierarchism’s cultural bias. Furthermore, hierarchist preferences for high levels of social regulation of the culture’s members and the inevitable inequality this led to was justified on the basis that this is the most productive social arrangement to respond to organisational changes, was also something that all volunteers (for instance, egalitarians) would not tolerate (Thompson and Wildavsky, 1986; Thompson *et al.*, 1990).

Only a few participants in this cultural group were concerned that the intrinsic value of volunteers was not been adequately recognised and warned that they should not be taken-for-granted and assumed to unquestioningly follow new rules and modes of working. Kathleen, who was a supervisor in Eastgate Advice Centre, expressed her concerns that volunteers should not be managed too heavy-handedly, “*the thing is to be mindful, mindful of the talent we have sitting there and not to take it for granted or make assumptions, and know that they are giving up time to make this place tick*”. She continued “*we have got such a wealth of experience and knowledge and astuteness in our advisors and assessors and we must not just assume that they are ignorant or should be kept ignorant of what is happening*”. Kathleen, a member of the hierarchist cultural group, was nonetheless a lone voice in articulating that, rather than being resources of the organisation, volunteers may in fact be an obstacle to the ideals of implementing an internal process-driven hierarchical order, that they may resist this. Even when there was acknowledgement from one other participant of the culture, Carla, that some volunteers may have other priorities and not be pliable to hierarchist social arrangements and regulations, she nonetheless believed that enculturation into her preferences and biases was possible, “*volunteers will turn up every week and as far as they are concerned the client is who they are turning up for...they will keep doing it for the client, they will just let everything else happen around them, in the same way that I used to when I came in one day a week*”.

### 4.3 Hierarchist social action

#### 4.3.1 Charity as a business

As with the egalitarian cultural type members of the hierarchist group did not possess an understanding of how the GatCCA was funded, what its revenue streams were and how these determined what kind of service delivery model was available to the public. Marina offered a representative answer of hierarchists when I asked directly how the organisation was funded, she replied *“a big pot from local government”*. An attempt by Kathleen, the supervisor in Eastgate Advice Centre to give more detail to this answer was *“I was aware that funding was something to be worked at and wasn’t a given, but I don’t think it was particularly clearly explained the amount that did come from central government or local government or whatnot”*. The absence of funding knowledge perturbed the members of the hierarchist cultural type in a way it did not for those in the egalitarian group. For instance, hierarchists considered how the vacuum of understanding impacted the organisation as a whole, *“it is probably a bit destabilising really because if you have a lack of information you just make up the bits you don’t know don’t you? It’s human nature”* Carla confessed. Indeed, because hierarchists conceptualised the GatCCA as a supra individual-level entity that they found their place within, they perceived their lack of knowledge of the funding model as obstructive to their own endeavours to serve *“the business”* (Carla). Indeed, Marina, the training officer, continued to explain how her lack of knowledge of the funding model which she believed dictated the organisation’s strategy, affected her role, *“training and development should hang off the strategy of the organisation and I don’t have a strategy to work with, I’ve got some core quality criteria which is a good building block but I don’t have the overall vision of where the organisation wants to go”*.

Marina considered this general unfamiliarity with how GatCCA was funded to be widespread across the organisation, *“[we] don’t have the big picture, it is all very silo-ed”*. Carla admitted with surprise that she *“had no idea”* that the entire Citizens Advice network of charities was ‘a franchise’ (i.e. a federated charity). She also believed that others in GatCCA were also unaware of this structural (and financial) feature of the charity and wondered what the implication of this was when CitA required its charities to implement its policy. Also notable was that the trustees and managers did not provide staff and volunteers with clear information or guidance as to how, for instance, contracts from funders other than ‘the government’ fitted the organisation and scope of advice services. For instance, a small contract from a local housing association to deliver specialist housing advice in a few of the advice centres caused confusion and begrudging resentment from some volunteers as to why they were not involved in this service delivery. Even Marina reflected,

*"I have been thinking where they come from and how they fit within our overall offering within the organisation".* With an eye to operational matters she continued, *"[I wondered] what the requirements for that funding actually were, how it worked on an operational level, are there stats or a number of gateway assessments that we needed to have seen or the service that we should have been providing?"* Even in the absence of knowledge and understanding of this contract and funding stream, Marina evidenced the hierarchist tendency towards wanting to know how to plan and co-ordinate people and service activities rationally and formally. However, in the absence of knowledge she was also acknowledging that this presented a barrier to the kind of action she would prefer to take in the organisation's interests.

The announcement of a new drive to initiate fundraising activities across the advice centres presented another chance for actors in the hierarchist culture to emphasise the importance of co-ordinating the organisation as a whole, as opposed to adopting a more laissez faire approach. As Harry (a trustee) stated, *"the focus now is on planning in my view"*. Additionally, given the importance of funding in relation to securing the viability of 'the business', as hierarchists conceived of GatCCA, fundraising also served as an opportunity to adopt a more commercial approach in their practices. This would also assert the authority of trustees as leaders of Gates Count Citizens Advice. *"I keep saying that we have to run this place as a business, and that is not always palatable to volunteers who come along and give up their time and do a fantastic job, but we would be failing as a board of trustees if we don't adopt practices that make sure that next week or next year, we've got a business that is viable, and ultimately our job as trustees is to make sure that we fulfil [that]"*, as Harry explained. This was a trustee in the hierarchist cultural group articulating the cultural characteristic that Bale (1997) had identified in his cultural analysis that ultimately within the culture there is "normative agreement that someone must [rule]" (p.30), and in this case, this 'ruling' would extend to fundraising activities.

Yet, there was more of a sense of wish-fulfilment than plausibility about fundraising ideas that hierarchists mooted. At the early stage planning the cultural tendency was to operate on assumptions of the future, in the absence of a reliable knowledge to direct their actions in the present. Harry, one of the trustees, was an exemplar of this tendency; he expressed scepticism of long-term reliance on public funds and instead proposed being open to private sector funding of the charity. He explained this to me, *"look[ing] at alternative funding strategies, particularly where we can reduce the reliance [on public funding] as we don't know where it is going in the future....I have got a completely open mind as to who you can try get money off"*. However, he claimed that a challenge to fundraising was public perception of the charity in the first instance, *"we still have the perception out there that people think we are state funded...that is where [we]*

*should be saying 'we are not! we are not! we are not!'*". This was untrue; the national charity (CitA) was entirely funded by central government and as the Citizens Advice (2014) own Local Government Strategy stated "[l]ocal authorities are the single largest source of funding for the service" (p.3) across the regional advice centres (as was the case for GatCCA). In light of the objective reality of GatCCA's own financial reliance on local government for their commissioned advice service to the general public, there was nevertheless a perception amongst hierarchists that the organisation was a 'business' and that fundraising activities now incumbent on all was *"about sustainability in the long-term"* (Harry, trustee) of GatCCA 'the business'.

### **4.3.2 Responsibility for fundraising**

Historically, trustees and senior managers had not considered staff and volunteer fundraising as having the potential to raise significant funds, and if GatCCA did fundraise *"what direction do we expect it to go in"*, Barbara, a senior manager said to me. However with the announcement at the roadshow meetings that everyone in the organisation should be involved in fundraising, the hierarchist cultural type perceived this less as an open invitation to staff and volunteers participate if they so wished, and more of an obligation to formalise and co-ordinate these activities. Importantly, one manager's view was to seek the support from trustees in adopting this approach; there were plans afoot to enshrine fundraising into the formal business plans each advice centre would soon be provided with. The forecast was that twelve months subsequent to the roadshow announcements the trustees and senior managers would *"have down the policies, procedures and the fundraising established, [that is] fundraising activity planned into the work plan for each advice centre"* Barbara explained. Crucially, taking part in fundraising would be written into every person's (paid staff and volunteer) job roles, thus, everyone would *formally* be responsible for fundraising.

Isabelle mentioned to me that she believed that this proposal, although yet to be enacted, was a positive one. She was aware that not everyone in the organisation would want to be involved, that some may ask *"why is this job mine now, it's never been like that before?"* Therefore people would need to be encouraged to embrace fundraising as a new aspect of their jobs, irrespective of them being paid staff or volunteers. Ultimately, she emphasised and relied upon the importance of job responsibility and obligations to GatCCA as the justification for the mooted mandate that required all employees to participate in fundraising. Furthermore, whilst the past was generally something to be broken with in the hierarchist estimation, Isabelle was not immune to invoking its precedence to infer legitimacy of future obligations. For instance, she explained that fundraising responsibilities had always been an implicit part of working and volunteering at

GatCCA but that *“we just didn’t enforce it”*; however, this was about to change and fundraising would now be a mandatory obligation of one’s role in the organisation. Carla stated that it was all to the good to harness ‘people power’ as she referred to it, *“why not it is just using the power of the team isn’t it?”* she explained.

Whilst hierarchist members at all levels of the organisation reported supporting a formal, co-ordinated approach to fundraising activities, when it came to imposing the rule of responsibility and formality upon themselves, they invoked different reasoning of why this did not apply to them and why they should not necessarily have involvement in fundraising. Indeed the character of the hierarchist type was that they possessed a fixed sense of what their prescribed roles were therefore they also had a clear sense of what the organisation could reasonably expect of them beyond their already defined roles. Indeed, introducing extra-responsibilities post-hoc was, for one supervisor in the hierarchist group, impractical, *“to be honest with working role four days a week, I’m not sure how I would fit that in”* (Kathleen, supervisor). Judy, a volunteer who worked on social policy issues, was adamant that she had joined Gates County Citizens Advice for a particular set of personal reasons that fulfilled a role that was separate from and did not include fundraising, she told me emphatically, *“as far as fundraising goes I am not at all interested because I do that for other organisations...I give my time to Citizens Advice, so it is a personal thing”*.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

As with egalitarianism the three changes that were introduced to GatCCA allowed me to ascertain the two sociability dimensions of participants who formed the hierarchist cultural group. Equally, in the culture manifesting itself the members also expressed how they conceived of Gates County Citizens Advice, that it was a structural, legal *entity*. Prioritising the organisation first and foremost was the cultural bias of hierarchism. Unlike egalitarians who were rooted in the past and wished to continue with the *practice* of charity, hierarchists disengaged from the past and preferred to project into the future and its possibilities. This had implications for how they perceived the changes that the trustees had announced. They embraced the changes in order to progress into the future. Continuity with the past was, it appeared, outmoded and irrelevant to the challenges and opportunities that the future held for the viability of GatCCA. Some of these ideals had a utopian idealism about them largely because they were conceived in a vacuum of understanding and knowledge of the external environment GatCCA was operating in. However, to this culture’s advantage was their self-awareness of their limited knowledge in certain areas and an openness

to remedy this, which was in contrast to egalitarianism that closed itself from outside imposition of knowledge or information that challenged their cultural status quo.



## Chapter 5 Individualism

The third and final culture I represent here is individualism. When I considered the characteristics and tendencies of the members of this culture I am reticent to speak of them collectively as a re-emerging or emerging culture as I did with egalitarians and hierarchists respectively. However I do not think it unreasonable to speculate that this culture which filtered throughout GatCCA had almost certainly always existed as the disparate individuals they were. The announcements of the three changes by the trustees presented an opportunity for the members this culture to have their tendencies amplified. Additionally, whilst it was possible to postulate that relative sizes of the other two cultures, it is more difficult to consider individualism in terms of numbers. In my estimation based on observation in advice centres and analysis of field notes and interviews, there were not many individualists, but with an important qualifier that this was of little consequence because the vigour of members (some of whom were maverick-like) of this cultural group were a force to behold in GatCCA. And their actions had the potential to influence other cultures, as I shall discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

### 5.1 Individualist group dimension: social solidarity

#### 5.1.1 Egocentrism

During the course of fieldwork I identified across the eight advice centres a small but conspicuous cultural group: individualists. There was however a contradiction in analysing individualism as a culture in that there was little pattern to it precisely because the members of this cultural type were resolutely individualistic in their approach to the announced changes. Yet, this in itself was the shared similarity that coalesced these actors into a cultural group of their own. Although there appeared to be few participants who fitted this cultural group, those that did tended to present as highly visible or vocal presences in their respective advice centres. In their own estimation, they were strong, forceful characters – and indeed were responded to as such by their colleagues. From the outset of engaging with individualists across Gates County their chief identifying characteristic was ego-centrism and self-interest. Secondly, a resolute determination to act autonomously in all matters was an early indicator of the loose, disinterested even, social bonds they experienced with other staff and volunteers. If, in their perception and implementation of localism, the egalitarian cultural group prioritised clients' needs and hierarchists prioritised the charity then it was apparent that individualists prioritised themselves. Individualists perceived and responded to localism through the lens of self-interest.

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Early evident signs of individualists' outward self-confidence was their willingness to engage me in conversation unprompted, and, whilst not necessarily showing particular interest in my research, nevertheless offered their opinions openly and unfiltered on many aspects of the charity and its work. This was in contrast to my engagement with participants in other cultural groups who needed time to at least establish familiarity with me in their respective advice centres, if not a relationship of trust. With individualists, however, as I broached casual conversations and more formal dialogue in their interviews about the change to return to localism this led into a more discursive exploration of their motivations for their association with Gates County Citizens Advice. Individualists provided me with verbal autobiographies embedded in which were their reasons for joining GatCCA which was principally for themselves, for personal satisfaction, and because they believed they had valuable previously-gained professional experience to offer the charity. For example, Roy, a relatively newly qualified volunteer in Westgate Advice Centre said, *"you come in because you want to, firstly for your own personal well-being, and secondly to help others"*. This 'personal wellbeing' he described as a *"feel good factor"*. Another volunteer, Marcus, also based in Westgate but who made himself available to volunteer in other advice centres echoed this view, *"my motivation was primarily selfish to be honest, [but] it's good that what I am doing will benefit people at large"*. Whilst participants in other cultures framed their understandings of localism by stating motivations such as 'wanting to give back' and prioritising the longevity of the charity for social good, this was absent in individualism. Instead, participants in this culture foregrounded the need to extract something for themselves from their volunteering or paid work at the charity.

In both observing and probing individualists as to how they defined localism and would seek to 'return to it', they provided simplistic, generic answers with no specific detail of why they perceived localism in this way. These understandings ranged from stating that localism was about helping clients in the locale of the advice centre and interaction with the local community: *"localism is really about being available at point of, in this case, the advice centre....to deal with issues that affect people locally"* as David, a volunteer based in Eastgate Advice Centre, told me. However, unlike egalitarians who held a similar definition of localism in these terms, they substantiated it with a client-centred benefit. Clients would receive more personalised advice based on advisors being in possession of nuanced knowledge of local problems and issues and being able to harness the network of services that were established through close professional working relationships. By comparison individualists believed that the new drive to localism offered opportunities for them personally to moot, promote and involve themselves in local projects, as Roy the Westgate volunteer reported, but were unable to elucidate what these projects might be. The self-interested impetus to revitalise localism was recognised by another member of the individualist group, Frankie, a paid staff member in the Human Resources

department. He mentioned that a return to localism was what the volunteers wanted in order to do things in their own way, it *“gives them what they want”* as he put it.

When probed to more explicitly define what a return to localism meant and how it should manifest, a second distinguishing characteristic of individualist culture came into focus. This was a lack of emotional or sentimental attachment to both the concept and practice of localism. There was a loose, nebulous definition of localism and was indicative of the loose social bonds they shared with others in the organisation. Julian, a supervisor in the Hillgate Advice Centre who worked with a small handful of volunteers said, *“as far as everybody concerned here, we have been local, I don’t think too many people feel joined to the hip with everyone else... most people volunteer here because they live locally and they want to help local people”*. He did not consider that localism may mean anything more than what he believed it to be in these simplistic terms, as was the case with other participants in this cultural group. Whilst members of the egalitarian culture demonstrated serious, personal commitment to working in ways that honoured localism as they understood it and that continued historical precedence, individualists were indifferent to such an approach. Thus, when the announcement was made at the roadshow meetings that the advice centres were encouraged to reinstate their town name into their title, e.g. Hillgate Advice Centre, and were no longer obligated to use the generic organisational title, that is Gates County Citizens Advice, this was not interpreted as a significant signalling of a recommitment to localism. Renaming an advice centre only had practical utility of being clear which community it served but beyond this, unlike egalitarians for instance, individualists were unsympathetic to tradition having emotive or intrinsic value (Douglas, 1999). Julian continued, *“calling ourselves Hillgate Advice Centre, [just] because it was like that before....I don’t know how it affects us”*.

Deborah, another individualist volunteer of many years standing in the small but busy Ashgate Advice Centre, discussed with me not knowing how a return to localism would affect clients when I asked her, or how it might impact the ways in which the general advice service was delivered to the public. She said, *“that I don’t know. What we used to have was local knowledge, it’s gone, it went when we first merged...so when people ring on the telephone service they’re coming from all over [the county] so local knowledge isn’t needed”*. She went on to describe that she did not have any sentimental attachment to or ‘miss’ the local knowledge she used to be in possession of and felt no need to restore it. Rather, the advice service had developed into what it currently was and she had no plans to revive traditional approaches to or practices of localism. Moreover, she was blunt in telling me that her personal life was her priority and that she was satisfied to volunteer on the basis of how the advice service operated now. This was not resignation to the status quo through apathy, as was evident in the egalitarian passive-type group, but rather characteristic of

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the decided emotional detachment from the activities of Gates County Citizens Advice and a cultural bias that did not prioritise clients, but rather themselves.

Furthermore, whereas egalitarians and hierarchists had preferred means of actualising their vision of localism through, for instance, relationships with like-minded stakeholders committed to serving clients' needs (as egalitarians preferred) or through instituting processes and procedures to stabilise the organisation (as hierarchists preferred), for individualists, their means for actualising a return to localism was *self*-actualisation. Participants of this cultural group believed that they were personally equipped and best placed to solve the problems that localism (however they defined it) presented. David, a relatively newly qualified volunteer inexperienced in the range of problems that clients present with in advice centres, boldly stated that as an advisor he was trained to "*deal with any problem that comes through the door*". This was a typical example of the self-confidence in their abilities that they were individually not only capable but also suitable to addressing problems of localism. They did not need relationships with others *per se* and processes were bothersome. Sensitive understanding to clients and their complex needs was absent; rather, localism as far as it was defined by individualists was based on what their role within it had the potential to be. The client as a person was decentred from these speculations and instead their issues and problems focussed upon as an opportunity for the individualist to promote and distinguish themselves in 'solving' these problems. Furthermore, there was the view held by individualists that 'dealing with any problem' was on a *quid pro quo* basis, indeed "*the more you get involved the more you are actually going to get out of it*" Roy in Westgate explained. This unabashed desire to seek personal gain from the context of 'returning to localism' was in marked contrast to both the egalitarian and hierarchist cultures.

For individualists because the value of the whole was perceived as less important than what the individual stood to gain from their exploits in a particular set of circumstances these social actors only incorporated into the social group of the charity and their respective advice centres on a self-serving basis. Beyond what they could extract from others and the situation at hand they felt no commitment, solidarity or emotional ties to others and enjoyed the spontaneity to associate with whomever it suited them in the moment (6, 2005). This weak group commitment and preference relationships based on competitive transactions was their wont and not for the betterment of the clients, the advice service or Gates County Citizens Advice as a whole (Bale, 1997).

### 5.1.2 Localism as personal autonomy

Participants in the individualist group were enthusiastic at the prospect of acting with a degree of autonomy in the name of localism in their advice centres; Marcus an archetypal individualist volunteer reported that, *“localism is in fact a degree of autonomy in the way in which the local advice centre offers its service to the local population”*. However, these participants felt stymied in acting autonomously *as individuals* because they were perpetually confronted with the realisation that they, and their advice centre, were bound to the wider Gates County Citizens Advice organisation. This meant that there were established operational rules, processes and procedures in place that compelled adherence to as part of being GatCCA and a member of CitA. When Seb, the chair of trustees, who was a member of individualist culture, announced a return to localism, he stated that volunteers and staff were free to achieve localism in ways they wished but with the qualifier that these efforts should *“stay within the rules”* of the wider Citizens Advice network. Later I observed a debacle of a volunteer in the individualist group acting autonomously, without the authority to do so and outside of agreed protocols, to arrange a client appointment with a local, ‘unauthorised’ pro-bono solicitor the matter was halted and assigned to the supervisor; this was a source of annoyance and exasperation to the volunteer.

In the theoretical sense this was a diminishing of the autonomy and creative, opportunistic impulse of the individualist cultural type, a disruption of the spontaneity and impulsiveness that individualists (6, 2005) sought in pursuing localism and other aspects of their work in the charity. Indeed, there was cynicism amongst those in this cultural group that the trustees’ announcement of a return to localism was merely rhetoric which would ultimately not empower volunteers and staff to act more independently in its pursuit. Moreover, the contrary traits of the individualist cultural type were such that participants in this group perceived the Gates County Citizens Advice as being both a space of potential opportunity to fulfil their own aims and interests, and also, as a constraining structural entity characterised by rules and regulations frustrating their efforts. Marcus’s experiences were typical of this internal tension, he lamented that in his view volunteers who had ideas and initiatives and *“who are interested in more than just the assessing and advising [clients]”* should be encouraged and supported to assume more responsibility and take the lead of projects that promoted localism. Instead, he complained *“I find that [new] ideas are smacked down very quickly or there is a knee-jerk reaction”*.

What is more, whereas the egalitarian and hierarchist cultural biases were affected by their members’ sense of being temporally located in the past or the future, by contrast, individualists were located firmly in exploiting the opportunities of the present. Indeed, they did not have the

tendency of either reminiscing for the past or projecting into the future as an anchoring point of how to orientate and act in response to the announced changes. Rather, their self-belief in getting the measure of any situation quickly meant that they were driven by a pronounced sense of immediacy, of urgency, of what could and should be achieved now and what opportunities were available to promote self. An example of this individualist tendency was found in the chair of trustees, Seb, who combined decisiveness, swiftness of action and opportunity for himself in directly initiating the abrupt management restructure that had recently occurred. This included the removal of the chief executive and instalment of himself as executive chair of the trustee board. Seb explained to me that he felt a personal sense of urgency to instigate these changes because *“the organisation was calcifying, it wasn’t moving, it wasn’t working, people all over the place were very unhappy, there were a whole lot of individual things leading up to it, a lot of feedback from volunteers and feedback from staff, that they didn’t like what we were doing and that they were very unhappy”*. He explained the need to take decisive action, to ‘free’ people (as he described it) was his immediate concern and the consequences of his actions would be dealt with thereafter. He began the restructure and was instrumental in removing the former chief executive of GatCCA and subsequently capitalised on the vacuum of leadership by creating himself as the executive chair of the charity. He provided a justification for this unorthodox arrangement in third sector organisations, *“we had to do something about it and in a way we had to do something big, because a tweak wasn’t going to work, and we had to do something dramatic almost to say ‘hey we are changing, this is going to be different’, pay attention”*.

However, for individualists occupying positions that were not as organisationally prominent as Seb’s their efforts to assert themselves to achieve influence were more limited. Although, one tactic volunteers in the individualist group used to assert their independence and autonomy was to remind others in the organisation of their volunteer status. For instance, David the volunteer in Eastgate Advice Centre explained this habit by stating that if a volunteer was asked to work on a day they did not normally volunteer that they would simply refuse. He said, if a manager asked a volunteer *“can you work on Wednesday?... the volunteer will say ‘no’”*. The reason being, he elaborated, was because volunteers did not identify with the needs of the charity or others in it; *“[it’s] not an issue, I’ll tell you what they identify with, they identify with how volunteering fits in with everything else they do in life”*. This attitude amongst individualist volunteers was a commonplace and furthermore they believed senior managers of the charity had lost *“sight of the fact that we are volunteers and that we can turn around and walk out the door at any time”* as long-serving volunteer, Ted, in Greengate Advice Centre reported. As a cultural group individualists were sceptical of the extent to which localism could be pursued because in their

experience the workforce could not be relied upon; in their view, volunteers in particular rejected cooperation preferring instead to emphasise independence in their activities (Bale, 1997).

This uncompromising determination to assert their autonomy and rely on their own judgement in their actions created a blind-spot in the culture's ability to perceive local issues that would have required a collective response to solving. More pertinently, since individualists prioritised their own self-interest problem-solving that served GatCCA more generally or requiring collective action were not, as 6 (2005) has identified, "recognised as problems worth solving" (p.99). This detached sense of integration into the social group of their advice centres and non-identification with others in GatCCA (including clients) resulted in participants of this cultural group displaying low levels of sociability and co-operation. This also was displayed in their indifference to some of the traditions of the charity. For example, renaming advice centres back to their original 'town' names was perceived as having only practical significance to local people but held no intrinsic or sentimental value beyond this and certainly was not a device to encourage integration into the advice centres.

## 5.2 Individualist grid dimension: social regulation

### 5.2.1 Self-enhancement

The second announcement of new roles with enhanced responsibilities for volunteers which Seb later explained were devised because he "*want[ed] to get them to feel ownership; I think they had been disempowered*". This was a siren call to volunteers in the individualist culture who wished to enjoy higher levels of responsibility beyond their traditional advisor roles. However, the contrarian character of these volunteers was such that they responded by claiming that there were insufficient skills in the volunteer cohort to exploit the opportunities the new posts presented. An outspoken proponent of this view, David, in Eastgate Advice Centre, told me emphatically that utilizing volunteer skills "*doesn't happen because the skills don't exist*" and therefore the new posts would be difficult to fill. This view was in contrast to the egalitarian cultural group who were generous in their perception of their colleagues' abilities and skills, and, as I observed, were adept in harnessing these abilities in different ways and to varying degrees in the advice centres. Contradictorily, David also stated that there were in-fact talents and skills in the volunteer body and this well of capability "*was largely untapped*". When I inquired to elicit more details of who these 'untapped' individuals in advice centres were, it transpired he was referring to himself, "*I do much more than anybody else because I enjoy it*". This was typically

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characteristic of other individualists like him who felt able but under-utilised and were eager to exploit the opportunities the new posts offered.

Indeed, these individualists believed they were in possession of the necessary abilities to fulfil the new posts. Roy, also newly qualified as a volunteer advisor, told me that he would “*be very happy to move roles into [the new posts]*”. Others like him reported the same based on their interpretation that the new roles were, as Roy explained, an “*excellent opportunity*” and an “*opportunity to enhance*” and further develop their skills and training. They chiefly prioritised how they would benefit personally from the new posts; a secondary consideration was how the others around them would benefit too. This was not a widespread benefit to both clients and the advice service at large, but rather a specific benefit to the paid supervisors of advice centres to which these volunteers believed they were equal to “*taking on more responsibility*”. Their perception of parity with the paid supervisors differed from the egalitarian notion of collective parity. The egalitarian notion was based on an ethical stance of valuing each member of the collective equally in the endeavour of practising charity, that is: serving clients’ needs whilst tacitly accepting the supervisor’s authority over the volunteers during the advice sessions. The individualist volunteers’ notion of equality with the supervisor was more based on a self-confidence of being in possession of comparable professional expertise and authority. Marcus exemplified this attitude when told me that by him taking up one of the newly devised posts he would “*reinforce relationships*” between him and his supervisor and between paid staff and volunteers in a more general sense.

Unlike the egalitarian culture where supervisors informally and discretely distributed responsibilities and volunteers tacitly consented to this arrangement; and unlike hierarchist culture where the preference was to formally delegate responsibilities through formal procedures, by contrast, individualist volunteers were unaware of these informal subtleties or disregarded the formal directives and instead nominated themselves for additional responsibilities to their respective supervisors – not always successfully as I observed. Where the new roles were concerned David in Eastgate had already considered “*should I do that?*” and suggested himself to his supervisor as a potential candidate for one of the new posts. As an aside he confessed to me much later that he was still waiting to hear whether his offer had been accepted. This “*personal entrepreneurial initiative*” (6, 2005, p.99) was also evident in Westgate and Greengate Advice Centres where similar forward approaches were taken by individualist volunteers. I had observed Marcus undertaking tasks that did not necessarily require action; frequently in casual conversation during the advice session he revealed to me feeling personally gratified by being allowed to take on these additional duties. He was one of a handful of mentors to newly recruited volunteers joining GatCCA, of this experience he said “*mentors themselves are flattered by being*

*assigned to a trainee*". Moreover, his view was that his supervisor was grateful to volunteers like him who actively put themselves forward for additional responsibilities; he explained these extra responsibilities provided him with "*a bit of kudos*" chiefly because he was "*taking pressure off the supervisor, [who] appreciates it*". The conviction felt by individualist volunteers that they were ready to take on one of the new posts at the competence and expertise level of a paid supervisor was such that they identified it as posing a potential risk; they believed they might undermine the authority of the paid supervisors in the eyes of their fellow volunteer advisors.

However, not all individualists were ready to apply for the new posts Seb had announced at the roadshow meetings. Instead, these individualists asserted their steadfast individualism, independence and dislike of formal role definition by stating that they had no intention of applying for the new roles. They actively and formally discounted themselves from consideration. In discussions with these individualists they explained to me that as long as *someone* fulfilled the roles to a satisfactory standard this would enable them to continue with their volunteering activities uninterrupted and unfettered. Here was the nub of individualism; self-consideration was the greater concern than for other stakeholders or the advice service as whole. Ted, in Greengate Advice Centre said, "*it doesn't matter who the supervisor is, provided there is someone who has been appointed to the role and is capable of doing that role, then it wouldn't affect me*"; Deborah in Ashgate Advice Centre confirmed the same to me. Thus, whether the person acting as supervisor during the advice session was a paid member of staff or a volunteer was immaterial to them; the only expectations these individualists had of the supervisor was to support *them* during the advice session and not limit their activities. Deborah also confirmed that she would not be applying for one of the new posts because she believed any further duties or responsibilities would interfere with her private life and require more of her time than she was willing to give to GatCCA. Like Ted she was forthright in her view of her independent status and prioritised her needs over that of the organisation; Ted encapsulated this by telling me unapologetically "*we are volunteers and that they can't push us around, I think sometimes they lose sight of that fact*".

Indeed, a refusal to be 'pushed around' was indicative of the individualist culture's preference for informal, low levels of social control and of resistance to rules and regulations over their actions. Moreover, they only recognised authority when it suited them. For instance, for those who were already in the process of lobbying their supervisors to consider them for one of the two new posts, they made the qualification to me that these roles should be managed *informally* in spite of the elevated level of responsibility volunteers appointed to the new positions would take-on. Marcus made this point, "*overall I think by putting in the informal layers I think can only improve the service*". Indeed, the informality and unrestraint he wished for was a requirement of individualist

culture because, as he confirmed, *“you can’t tell a volunteer what to do”*. Pushing ahead with ‘telling a volunteer what to do’ would be met by Marcus and others like him replying *“nah, I’m not doing that”* as he summed up. Informality of the new roles would on the one hand guarantee an avenue for the individualists to compete and exalt in their respective advice centres, whilst on the other hand being relatively free from the managerial and organisational constraint that paid staff experience. Again, David in Eastgate Advice Centre justified this by explaining that attempts to formally manage and co-ordinate volunteers fulfilling the new posts would be met with practical and logical problems because *“the issue with volunteers is that manpower and planning is a nightmare, it is the impossibility factor and trying to manage them and appraise them is like trying to herd cats”*.

Indeed, the group dimension of individualist sociability that demonstrated preferences for autonomy and a desire for spontaneity also found its expression in their preferences for weak social controls over their behaviour and actions too. Individualists either did not recognise or eschewed the rules and regulations imposed on them; they also assumed this level of individualism in others too. Instead, any regulatory controls or boundaries were optional and in their own minds and open to compromise and negotiation *if* that suited their self-interests (Thompson *et al.*, 1990). Failing that, they simply did not recognise or acknowledge the rules and regulations or claimed that they did not pertain to them. Resultant of their weak levels of social solidarity and social regulation was that individualists were “vulnerable to lack of co-operation” (Mamadouh, 1999, p.400). This was not a concern to this cultural group however, because collective co-operation simply was not a part of their cultural bias or cultural consciousness.

### **5.3 Individualist social action**

#### **5.3.1 Fundraising as laissez-faire opportunity**

It was soon apparent during the course of fieldwork that what many individualists shared with the other cultures was little or no understanding of how Gates County Citizens Advice received its funds and why, in light of the trustees’ announcements at the roadshow meetings, the organisation required additional income. When attempting to explain to me how the charity was funded one member of staff who regularly worked with the charity’s senior managers and trustees and took minutes at the trustee board meetings, made a vague statement that funds came *“from the council”* (Frankie, full-time staff) but was unable to elaborate details of what this meant. Volunteers in the individualist culture also reported similar indistinct notions as to how the charity financially sustained itself. Other volunteers in the cultures who had been at the

charity for many years, and, in some cases, had previously been volunteer representatives for their advice centres to the trustee board meetings and therefore privy to discussions about the charity's finances, were unable to articulate its funding arrangements either. *"Oh it is very hazy"* (David, Eastgate Advice Centre) stated one such volunteer; this was a typical response of volunteers in the individualist culture across all the advice centres. However, a crucial difference between individualists and members of the other two cultures was that they were unperturbed by this lack of knowledge. They did not seek to remedy this or show interest in how funding structures of the charity determined the kind of advice service it delivered to the public and what that meant for clients using the service or for staff and volunteers involved.

Individualist self-interest provided both the explanation and reason for what was widespread indifference amongst the members of this group to being informed about the charity's funding streams and what effect this would have on service levels and their role within this. Outspoken David in Eastgate stated, *"I don't think the level of funding worries most people because as long as they can get their expenses [paid] and free carpark one day a week or whatever it is, then it is not going to worry them"*. Such sentiments rested on an assumption that others in the organisation not only shared their views but also had the same self-interested motivations they did. Deborah in Ashgate also made herself clear in bald terms that efforts to communicate such information would be largely futile because managing volunteers was a difficult task, *"it is like herding cats...that is the nature of it"* and furthermore *"most volunteers don't really care about funding"*. This comment captured the essence of the individualism: that they followed their own path irrespective of organisational concerns. This was the case in how they responded to the first change (the localism policy shift) and the second change (new roles for volunteers) and so it was with this third change to initiating a fundraising drive.

When Seb, chair of trustees, signalled at the roadshow meeting the sort of fundraising culture he hoped to inculcate at GatCCA, this was signifying of his own competitive, individualist cultural preferences. He set the terms of fundraising as an opportunity for the eight advice centres to fundraise for what they needed and wanted, in this sense he implicitly condoned a competitive environment which was historically not something GatCCA had encouraged amongst the advice centres. Seb told all staff and volunteers that *"if you find something that [your] advice centre particularly needs you can do it, it is your call...if there is a particular service that you think it would work and the supervisor and you as a group agree, then go for it guys, and if it is going to cost money then you're going to have to raise the money for it because you're not getting it from the centre [i.e. central charity funds]"*. If the advice centres were not directly pitted against each other then they were certainly given a directive to 'perform' to accrue the resources they needed; that

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is, to pursue activities in their self-interest. What Seb's announcement also alluded to was that advice centres' failure to secure funds would be as a result of their own inaction. The competitive tenor of the new fundraising regime was qualified by him confirming only minimum regulation over fundraising activities. "*You've got to stay within the rules*" of the Citizens Advice brand Seb said, but without explaining what the rules were as regards to who the organisation could and could not accept funds from.

In an interview with Seb sometime after his announcements he explained to me that he did not wish to put any sort of qualifiers or dampeners on fundraising initiatives. Hence he chose not to mention that if an advice centre managed to raise over five thousand pounds that that money would be recouped by GatCCA to be repurposed elsewhere in the organisation – not necessarily in the advice centre that raised the funds. He explained his reasoning "*what I don't want to do is put restrictions on staff and volunteers in advance, I'd rather let go and deal with it as it happens, because I want to get them back feeling that GatCCA belongs to them*". Seb's approach to initiating a fundraising regime within Gates County Citizens Advice was imbued with the preferences and values of individualism. Advice centres were presented as proxies for the individual who were encouraged to put self-interest first; act independently in a competitive environment with the opportunity to excel and achieve success based on merit. Too many rules and regulations would only stifle competition, problems – if they arose – could be dealt with later. Seb also mentioned several times to me and in the roadshow meetings that other Citizens Advice charities in the Midlands and North of the country had been successful in achieving fully independently-funded status and consequently did not require local authority funding to survive. These charities were inspirational to him and Seb cited them exemplars of autonomy and independence – the very values individualists hold most dear.

However, there was a tone of cynicism amongst individualists who found themselves hampered in their advice centres when attempting to take action in the liberated, unbound way Seb had suggested was possible. Volunteers in particular felt frustrated that their fundraising ideas and suggestions had been "*thropped on*" as Marcus in Westgate Advice Centre claimed. They had assumed that the trustees' announcement had in effect ordained independence on them as individuals (and on their advice centres too) to act without restraint and to proceed with fundraising activities that they deemed imaginative and appropriate. They were hampered in this however, because of their persistent cultural characteristic not perceiving themselves as part of other stakeholders or of the organisation itself. Therefore, its attendant rules and regulations to prevent their fundraising ideas from being realised was a source of unending annoyance. Indeed,

Marcus expressed to me his dismay at needing to have his many fundraising ideas go through the process of requiring management approval.

### 5.3.2 Self-preservation

Other members of the individualist culture were less interested in participating in fundraising because they believed that they were already providing informal profile raising of Gates County Citizens Advice simply by working or volunteering for the charity. David claimed that this was the case for him, *“we are all individual PR champions”*. Furthermore, he claimed that this was unlikely to change, that fundraising was an expectation too far of volunteers, *“what I see is that people’s commitment is so much, so far, and over and above that is beyond them, and that is beyond what they want to do”*. Deborah in Ashgate Advice Centre held a similar opinion, she believed that the charity ‘had a right to ask’ (as she put it) if staff and volunteers were *amenable* to fundraising activities but that there should not be an outright expectation of obligation to fundraise. Once again, Deborah prioritised her needs first, she told me *“honestly I have other things that I do that I am not sure that I have the time to do that”*.

Paid staff member Frankie was also doubtful as to whether he would participate in fundraising activities. In a casual conversation with him he mentioned that GatCCA would struggle to co-opt volunteers into fundraising activities if it did not ‘suit’ them and he thought this would be the same for paid staff. He explained that if he was asked to participate in fundraising activities that he would make his decision based on the type of fundraising event it was, if it was located conveniently for him to attend, and if it was outside of his normal working hours whether he was available to participate. He would only support fundraising activities that ‘fitted in with him’ and his personal life. He suggested that volunteers would also reject requests to initiate and partake in fundraising because as he put it, *“they are only here to give advice”*. Julian, a supervisor in Hillgate Advice Centre, echoed Frankie’s views by stating that volunteers were unlikely to want to involve themselves in fundraising, that they would say *“well I do my volunteering day, that’s it and all I have time for’...and that is fair enough, they are a volunteer”*. Paid staff members in the individualist cultural group shared views that were consistent with their volunteer counterparts and always placed self-interest first.

## 5.4 Cultural contestation

Individualism was the final cultural group of GatCCA; its inclusion here has enabled me to present the first of this thesis’s two arguments, that the organisation was constituted by three separate cultures. As already described in previous chapters, Douglas’s Cultural Theory suggests up to four

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possible cultures in any organisation at any point in time; by my analysis I suggest only three cultures are active in Gates County Citizens Advice; the Fatalism cultural type was absent. I use this next section to address an important aspect of this theoretical understanding of the organisation's ontology. I will address the criticism levelled at Douglas's cultural typology that it is too rigid and prescriptive (Selle, 1991). I do this by describing how dynamism between cultures operates through their various interactions and contestations. The reason for addressing this particular criticism of the typology here is because of the potential role that the individualism could play in the transactions between cultures. Indeed, I posit that they will be a "slack resource" (Bale, 1997, p.25) that is vulnerable to its members being co-opted into other cultural groups. This is a speculation based on the data analysis and my interpretation of it; I speculate on the power dynamics between hierarchist and egalitarian cultures and how individualists may ultimately tip the balance of power in favour of hierarchism. This in effect would determine which cultural vision (and version) of the localism policy has the greater chance of manifesting in GatCCA.

Indeed, this latter point is where my second argument is located and has more practical implications for how researchers and organisations themselves understand how policy is implemented in-situ, not rationally, instrumentally or linearly but in entirely culturally idiosyncratic and discursive ways. I should say that due to the evident time-constraints of the cross-sectional study I conducted this precluded the opportunity to longitudinally track how the policy unfolded and what the participants' perception of this was. However, the interpretation of the data I have presented thus far and the full-extent of Douglas's Cultural Theory is such that it allowed me to make empirically informed speculations as to what the cultures would contest over and which would achieve cultural hegemony and be a deciding influence on the implementation of the localism policy.

However, firstly let me revisit one of the points just made, due to the time constraints of cross-sectional fieldwork the full possibilities of Douglas's Cultural Theory precluded applying it to the organisation longitudinally to analyse the outcomes of the localism policy over its intended lifecycle (2014-2017). Reapplying the theory and cultural analysis at regular intervals over the policy period would have potential to glean several insights, not least ascertaining if the aims and outcomes of policy were met. This would be a complex conclusion depending on whose, i.e. which culture's, perspective the researcher considered in the analysis of outcomes. Moreover, the aims may have been met but in ways not foreseen, and there may have been other unintended consequences that could be ascertained from obtaining new data from participants over the policy period. Longitudinal research would also have yielded examples of what was successful, and what was not, in each culture's approach to policy implementation. More importantly

however, the researcher would know *why* this was the case because s/he would have the opportunity of revisiting and reanalysing the initial cultural biases, that is the ideas, that supported the preferred social behaviours of the three cultures at the launch of the policy, and if, and how, these biases altered or remained constant over the policy period.

In essence, plotting continuity and perhaps even discontinuity of one or more of the cultures and their respective responses to 'returning to localism' would be both the practical and theoretical means of assessing the trajectory of the localism policy itself. And I consider that this general principle of plotting the waxing and waning of GatCCA's cultures as still having utility to the cross-sectional study presented here. Indeed, the data analysis post-fieldwork was sufficient to make speculations on the potential interaction and power dynamics between the cultures. These empirically grounded speculations relate to which culture would achieve hegemonic dominance relative to the others and thus be in an influential position to realise its version of localism according to its cultural preferences. Firstly however, to establish the principle that the cultural types wax and wane through members' interactions and migration from one cultural group to another, we must first accept that the cultures in Douglas's typology are not static, though this is an oft cited criticism of the theoretical model. Indeed, it is worth being reminded of Douglas's definition of culture which is: 'a way of life'. Therefore, an assumption of her theory is that conflict is the basis of cultural interaction as social actors attempt to persuade others to their vision of the ideal social order, that is a better 'way of life'. By being convinced of the way of life of another culture, social actors are subject to shifts in their own biases and preferences, and ultimately, some will transition from their own cultural group to that which they believe offers a superior way of life in a particular social context.

A further criticism of Cultural Theory that has more traction is that it does not adequately deal with power relations. This is fair; there is no explicit elucidation of power and power relations *per se* and other researchers who have applied Douglas's theory tend to neglect or side-step this matter too. However, what I propose here is that the data analysis presented in this thesis is such that some inferences can be made from it to make cautious speculations as to how power relations between the three cultures in GatCCA may work. But first this will require a working definition of what is meant by power relations. If we consider the theoretical assumption that cultures are oppositional in character and conflict arises from contestation over their alternative world views based on what an ideal society (or social setting) is. Thus, with this in mind it is possible to take an oblique approach to understanding power relations in Cultural Theory's terms as: the contest between cultures vying to recruit and retain members to accumulate influence, achieve hegemony and establish their 'way of life' as the legitimised norm in their particular social

milieu (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Douglas, 1999; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). This, therefore, could be construed as power relations, in the broadest sense; to convince and enculturate a social actor into a new cultural group. The practical and explanatory utility of Douglas's economical typology is that it allows the researcher to make comparisons between the cultures as they contest to be the cultural hegemon within the organisational setting, for instance (Gross and Rayner, 1985; Douglas, 1999). This comparison is possible even speculatively, as I shall do here, because I have at my disposal the elements of the cultures which may be the grounds on which contestation and conflicts are fought to establish cultural dominance within GatCCA. These elements are their high or low sociability dimensions, the extent of their members' emotional or non-emotional commitment to the charity and the cultural preferences for continuity or change. Examining these more closely is where the social actors within GatCCA may be susceptible to change their preferences and migrate between the cultural groups.

#### **5.4.1 Ideological versus material values**

Douglas theorises that in any organisation the cultures that are present hold each other in tension but that the struggle for dominance arises out of cultural conflict over which way of life is preferential, especially with regard to problem solving the issues that face the organisation. I contend that in the months and years post-fieldwork, during the period that the localism policy was due to be implemented (2014-2017), that the area for contestation between the three cultures of GatCCA would centre on conflict between ideological and material concerns; between, on the one hand, egalitarianism and its traditional values of client-centred priorities, and on the other hand hierarchism which held more material concerns for the charity's financial viability. What follows here are speculations and judgements I have made based on the empirical data as to what might have happened in the intervening months and years in terms of which culture was more persuasive in their approach to CitA's localism policy. That is, how the cultures may have interacted with specific focus on increasing their membership base and influence in the organisation by co-opting and inculcating members from the other cultural groups into their own.

Firstly, let us step back to revisit egalitarianism as a cultural group. It was a re-emerging culture drawing on a long tradition of 'the past' whose members were fervent ideological defenders of the spirit and ethos of putting clients first as the *raison d'être* of their charity work. As I have already stated in the methodology section, I was unable to arrive at an exact figure for how many members each culture had, my field notes left me with an impression that this was a large group, the largest in fact, filling its ranks with many volunteers but also paid staff including managers. It was a confident culture, enjoying high levels of social incorporation but low levels of social

regulation of their members, having instead a preference for informality in their social relations. There were also pronounced aspects of egalitarianism that exposed its vulnerabilities. Firstly, the members' *emotional commitment* to the parity principle; indeed, seeking equality in all their social relationships was at once inclusive and exclusive. This rendered egalitarianism prone to its second vulnerability, *factionalism* between a "core and periphery" (Bale, 1997, p.40). Core members were those who were client-facing and enjoyed parity with advice centre supervisors; periphery members were those who were non-client facing members, they struggled for both recognition and legitimacy in the egalitarian group. Douglas has theorised that egalitarian cultures are easier to sustain in small social settings and that when the membership is distributed over larger social spaces it becomes difficult for the egalitarian cultural consciousness to sustain itself, its principles are challenged or eroded. This was the weakness for egalitarianism in GatCCA, its relative scale in membership was undermined by being spread across eight advice centres throughout a large county, with some members quite geographically isolated and atomised from other parts of the organisation. What this 'spread' was conducive to was toleration of a weak periphery of unrecognised and inadequately inculcated members into the strong core of the culture, leaving peripheral members exposed, dissatisfied and vulnerable to inculcation by another culture.

This led to a third weakness that egalitarianism was a *closed culture*, not only to some of its own members who subscribed to the cultural bias and preferred modes of social organisation, but also to knowledge acquisition about the organisation as whole and their place in it. This closed approach was a guard against managerial or trustee imposition of social control over their preferred informal arrangements for communing with one another. As I previously argued, egalitarians conceptualised the charity not as a *place* or *entity* but as a *practice*. Of course they were aware of GatCCA as the physical, structural entity, but they chose not to engage with it in these terms, their *cultural preference* was to *practice charity* in an outward facing way to clients in the communities surrounding the advice centres, not with the operational and structural features of the organisation. All these aspects taken together made egalitarianism *resistant to change* and resolved to defend the continuity of its practices and ideals. Also, somewhat perversely, in spite of the egalitarian commitment to maintaining parity amongst its members, the culture as a whole was affected by an air of clout, a sense of being the authoritative highly visible culture in GatCCA, the rightful upholders of traditional values of charity, not least in how localism should be practiced.

As I explained earlier, at the moment of fieldwork the culture seemed to be manifesting its *re-emergence* after the hiatus of post-merger trauma and subsequent organisational restructuring.

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During this re-emerging phase, those egalitarians on the periphery were a quiet faction and possessed a certain resignation rather than acceptance of their illegitimate status. I suggest that this resignation could transmute to dissatisfaction that would leave these members vulnerable to being seduced into another culture whose members could detect and capitalise on the dissatisfaction of peripheral egalitarians. Indeed, I suggest that the hierarchist culture would have been best placed to monopolise the position of sympathiser to peripheral egalitarians. However, for disaffected egalitarians to transition to the hierarchist culture would require a Gestalt shift in their cultural bias. Indeed, instead of prioritising clients they would need to shift to prioritising the needs of GatCCA the structural entity. This shift may not be difficult to achieve as peripheral egalitarians tended to be those members of the culture who worked in operational, back-office roles supporting the client-facing advice functions. Their work was already focussed on organisational processes and operational matters and therefore making the leap to this as their priority may not have been as great had they been at the coalface of providing advice to clients face-to-face, for instance.

To its advantage of co-opting peripheral egalitarians into its culture, hierarchism enjoyed high group incorporation as much as egalitarianism; this would offer disaffected egalitarians the *close relationships with others* they had a preference for. The sacrifice egalitarians would have to make however, is to be incorporated into a strong regulatory regime too. This means they would need to accept formal role definition that hierarchists have a preference for over the informality of association they experienced in their egalitarian culture. This would be tolerable to peripheral egalitarians given that the hierarchist culture *validates* its members through recognition of each person's position within the organisation thereby bestowing cultural acceptance and legitimacy on that person, something peripheral egalitarians were deprived of in their own culture. Indeed, peripheral egalitarians may have found that in fact the recognition and legitimacy they would have received by transitioning to the hierarchist culture may have superseded the emotional commitment they felt to egalitarian cause. In the hierarchist culture they could reach an acceptable compromise of serving the organisation as the proxy for serving clients. This shift in their cultural consciousness would in effect challenge and erode of the ideology of the egalitarian culture from within its own ranks. Consequently, defectors to hierarchism would result in the diminishment of egalitarian cultural membership and disrupt and expose the precarity of its chief organising principle: unequivocal acceptance and parity amongst its members.

This would put hierarchism in a position to expand both its membership and influence by subtly convincing and converting others to its cultural bias and behavioural preferences. This would have the effect of creating movement in the power balance between the cultures. The cultural

configuration at the time of fieldwork was in a state of holding each other in tension. Indeed, in the first flush of the trustees' announcement there was little indication of power imbalance and more the initial steps to reestablishment or in the case of hierarchists, new emergence, of the cultures. There was no indication – yet – of conflict between cultural types but more the process of fully expressing and manifesting themselves; as the cultures mature however, imbalance was likely as they clashed over which social arrangement was more conducive to what they believed the needs of the organisation were and how best to respond to the three changes the trustees announced. This is where hierarchism, although appearing to be smaller in membership numbers than egalitarianism, may have had the upper hand. Indeed, as a culture in the context of GatCCA it had significant strengths in its characteristics that placed it advantageously to persuade and inculcate members of other cultures into its biases and preferences. Firstly, hierarchists were characterised by low levels of emotional commitment to Gates County Citizens Advice. This did not mean that if one had emotional commitment to the organisation that it would exclude that individual from acceptance in the culture, rather it meant that emotional commitment was not a precondition for participation in and acceptance by the cultural consciousness of hierarchism. Thus, if disaffected egalitarians retained some of their emotional commitment that was a legacy of their original egalitarian identity, this would not preclude them from incorporation into the hierarchist group.

A second related point was that hierarchist culture was an open culture, not only to members of other cultures but also open to conscious awareness of their knowledge deficit in matters pertaining to external services and stakeholders that supported a 'local' advice service to the public. In short, hierarchists were open to what they did not know. Related to their openness was the members' motivation to organise themselves to achieve this knowledge. This group were already in the process of writing plans and processes to build the internal structure of the organisation in preparation to fulfil CitA's localism policy. Equally, they discussed managing people in ways that would not only professionalise GatCCA but also elicit the "*knowledge as well*" (Isabelle, manager) that was required to address localism in order to achieve being "*the number one provider of advice in Gates County*" (Barbara, senior manager). Thus it would be entirely within the culture's advantage to convince peripheral egalitarians i.e. those who were already in possession of knowledge of the wider external charity scape to their way of life to bolster and support their efforts to implement the localism policy successfully.

Lastly, hierarchists emotionally detached and pragmatic approach to GatCCA meant they were future-orientated and embracing of change because they did not need to attend to the deeply emotive pull the traditional past had on egalitarians, for example. Hierarchists were therefore

reconcilable to *change*, they were amenable and adaptable to it without it shaking and threatening their core impetuses and values because they are driven by what they believed the vicissitudes of the context demanded rather than by emotive, personal drives. Whilst a weakness of the culture was its rigidity in its group and grid dimensions, this was mitigated by explanations that this was what the operating context, the changes, demanded. Therefore, if or when the social system around the culture fails, blame is not attributed to individual members but rather a pragmatic approach adopted that the culture as a whole must adapt its rules and processes to survive new circumstances. Whilst I posit that hierarchism would absorb some of the peripheral egalitarians, the more susceptible group to hierarchist enculturation were individualists. From the hierarchists point of view, their vision of the localism policy was not entirely complete and secure, rather it was in the planning phase to gain knowledge of the external charity-scape so as to position GatCCA advantageously in it. I suggest that individualists may be vital to accomplishing this due to them offering hierarchists an external vision of the charity that hierarchists currently lack due to their inverted tendencies.

However, individualists were diametrically opposed (see Figure 1) to hierarchists in terms of their group and grid dimensions, they demonstrated weak desire for both group incorporation and regulation whereas hierarchists demonstrated a strong desire for this form of social organisation. The incompatibility of these opposing social preferences seems at first impossible to overcome. Individualists preferred loose social bonds with other stakeholders in GatCCA, wishing instead to act autonomously, and were resistant to activities directed towards goals that required collective effort. Individualists appeared to tolerate only the very informal, low-levels of authority or limited control over their behaviour within their advice centres. Accepting this limited social regulation was provisional on individualists conceiving Gates County Citizens Advice as *an opportunity* to reap from it what gratified and satisfied the individualist member. This was to pursue their own endeavours, act independently without restraint, and to distinguish themselves; hence weak social solidarity and regulation was necessary to fulfil these personal ambitions. This therefore shaped how they believed the localism policy should be pursued, unfettered and looking to the external environment as a stage on which to compete and excel. Significantly, they were also emotionally detached from the charity and from the three changes more generally. Yet, perceiving GatCCA as an *opportunity* was a strong and seductive pull-factor keeping them at the organisation. This combined with their personal drive for success and determined independence meant they may have been perceived by other cultures as “non-aligned” (Bale, 1997, p.25) to a culture and as a “slack resource” (Bale, 1997, p.25) to be co-opted to the ends of other cultural groups. I postulate that some individualist members may have been vulnerable to transitioning to other cultures *if* they stood to gain from the move.

Individualists were unlikely to be co-opted by egalitarianism because there was little room for self-aggrandisement and to stand apart in this cultural group. It would take a herculean effort to shift cultural identity from individualism to egalitarianism. Chiefly, this would mean having to prioritise others, i.e. the client, in their cultural bias; the 'self' must be largely absent from this bias, the emphasis instead is on submerging oneself to the collective identity. More likely however, because individualists perceived GatCCA as an *opportunity* for their advancement, they were vulnerable to being co-opted by hierarchists to achieve opportunity, rank and distinction through specially designed work relating to localism projects. I suggest that some (certainly not all) individualists may be seduced by the offer of rank and personal enhancement through attaining material gain for the charity and attaching their name to this success. Equally, it is worth considering, that a move to hierarchism was likely because a characteristic of individualism was to blame failure on themselves (i.e. not being 'good enough') or on lack of competition. However, self-blame would be a last resort, a more likely outcome would be for them to blame lack of competition in GatCCA as the reason for their inability to organise themselves towards any particular project or goal. Thus, what individualists stood by transitioning to hierarchism was the avoidance of accepting personal failure and instead embracing opportunity and recognition that hierarchism offers. However, the price of being limited by prescribed social rules and regulations is a heavy one, but distinguished service and self-gain is, I suggest, a prize in the individualist estimation worth making this sacrifice for.

What impact would enculturation of other cultural types – individualists and peripheral egalitarians – into the hierarchist group have? In the first instance, hierarchism would grow in membership and establish itself more firmly to potentially challenge the mature cultural authority of egalitarianism. Furthermore, the expansiveness of hierarchists' vision of the localism policy – to be 'the best in the county' – would be complemented by the expansiveness of individualists' self-belief in being able to deliver such a vision. Indeed, individualists had the potential to become influential allies of the hierarchist culture because both were amenable to activities that were extrinsically motivated rather than purely intrinsically motivated. Secondly, if hierarchists could harness the exuberance of defecting individualists to expand the field of vision of the external operating environment with a view of gaining value knowledge to successfully navigate this charity-scape and enact localism in the way hierarchists believe best, this would be all to hierarchists' benefit. It would mean that as a culture it would have influence over the external strategy of how localism was implemented *and* over GatCCA's internal operational aspects of the localism policy too. Indeed, although egalitarians were principally externally facing they did not orientate strategically to it but rather in idiosyncratic, interpersonal ways that did not necessarily

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align with wider organisational interests. This is where, in my judgement, hierarchism could capitalise on the vacuum created by egalitarians to monopolise and influence both the internal *and* external interests of GatCCA. This does not mean that egalitarianism would have no power, it would I believe continue to be a formidable voice of objection and challenge to any practices that undermined the quality of the advice service clients currently enjoyed at Gates County and in doing so would hold hierarchism to account.

This brings me to what other practical implications this cultural approach to understanding policy implementation may have for Gates County Citizens Advice itself, for its trustees and managers, and indeed staff and volunteers. Often practitioners think researchers are there to provide them with answers to things that either they or the researcher thinks are wrong with the organisation (Dobbin, 1994; Silverman, 2011). However, it is truer to say that researchers provide “good-quality data and rich descriptions which can offer practitioners new resources with which to assess their own practice[s]” (Silverman, 2011, p.435). In the first instance, if GatCCA was in possession of knowledge and understanding of itself as being constituted by different cultural groups then it puts it in position to predict variation and difference in any policies it attempts to initiate. Crucially however, this variation will not be infinite but rather limited to the three types of culture groups that make-up the organisation. And these cultures can be understood by the way GatCCA’s participants’ sociability dimensions and associated cultural biases play-out. As a result, cultural analysis demonstrates that organisational practices that GatCCA may regard as self-evident are actually more nuanced and driven by cultural rather than rational or irrational motivations. Again, cultural analysis provides the tools for understanding why this is the case (Dobbin, 1994). This level of understanding can be applied to analysing policy implementation and to ascertain how and why successes happened and to attempt replicate these and equally how and why failures in policy occurred and to try avoid these in the future.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

This thesis makes two connected arguments, the first is theoretical, that the third sector organisation in this case study (GatCCA) is constituted by three separate cultures that were realised by the participants responding to period of change during ethnographic fieldwork between October 2014 and March 2015. The members of the three cultures had preferred modes of social organisation based on who and how they wished to associate with others in the charity in response to three organisational changes. Their preferences for particular kinds of social solidarity and regulation were sustained and justified by a supporting ideology i.e. a cultural bias; the cultures' preferred modes of sociability and their cultural biases were mutually reinforcing. The characteristics of the three cultures described in detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide the answer to the primary research question: *what cultures exist in this organisation?* This answer also served as an intentional counterpoint to the prevailing politics-and-policy centric conceptualisation of TSOs found in third sector literature: that the TSO of this case study is a *cultural* rather than a policy construct (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1983; Douglas, 1999; Demers, 2007; Corry, 2010; Douglas, 2011 [1978]; Douglas, 2011 [1986]).

The second argument is reliant upon the first and is a more practical in character; it has significance for researchers and practitioners who have interests in how policy is implemented in a TSO setting. In this argument I used my interpretation of the data to make empirically and theoretically informed speculations as to how GatCCA's culturally heterogeneous ontology may affect its long term implementation of the CitA localism policy. These were speculations because time constraints of a cross-sectional study would not allow real world longitudinal application of the cultural model to the ethnographic site. Of course, it is not possible to say with absolute certainty how the localism policy would have unfolded over time; however, it was possible to draw plausible inferences from the data to argue which of the three cultures would ultimately play a dominant, and therefore decisive, role in implementing its vision of localism. I argued that hierarchists would achieve cultural hegemony by inculcating members of other cultures into its cultural bias thereby increasing its membership and influence within GatCCA. However, the hierarchist vision of implementing the localism policy would be tempered and held to account by egalitarians who acted as guardians of the moral fibre of the charity.

Taken together the two arguments offer a cultural analysis and understanding of a third sector organisation's ontology, contra the politics-and-policy centric conceptualisation I suggest is a commonplace in third sector literature. Indeed, this latter conceptualisation is reliant upon the

assumption that the third sector in general, and TSOs in particular, are ontologically objective and therefore can be described in prescriptive terms. For example, habitually attributing 'distinctiveness' to how TSOs are believed (and hoped) to deliver welfare services. However, the case study presented here provides empirical demonstration of the limits of assuming a fixed ontological reality of a TSO; rather, that is own stakeholders construct its reality through their cultural practices rendering the organisation an unstable, nebulous entity. Moreover, that policy implementation it is not top-down and is also without the authority to change organisational practices in its image. Indeed, for members of the egalitarian culture, the localism policy was an opportunity not to *change* practices but rather to act in ways that *resisted* changes to past practices. Thus, policy is not so much implemented as *interpreted* and *practiced* in ways that are consistent with, and constitutive of, the cultures of the organisation. Policy is therefore not 'rational' once it enters the organisation, instead it becomes part of its cultures as much as anything else; policy is not destiny for a TSO, at least, not in this case.

Two intentional methodological decisions were crucial to making the arguments presented here. Firstly, a commitment to an endogenous perspective of GatCCA, and secondly, deductive application of Mary Douglas's Cultural Theory to the organisational setting during fieldwork; this provided a novel conceptual, analytical and theoretical vernacular not only to generate and analyse the data, but also, to represent my interpretations of that data. The decisions pertaining to research design rested upon the assumption of culture being *constitutive* of participant (and therefore organisational) identity and practices. This assumption is unremarkable in organisational sociology but is less evident, explored and understood in third sector studies, which this case study was intended to address, as I outlined in my critique of third sector literature in Chapter 1.

### **6.1 Culture mobilises critique**

To return to third sector literature, the first critique I made is of the notion of holism; indeed, discernment between the third sector as a whole and individual TSOs therein is collapsed, the implication being that the concepts used to define and describe the third sector are adequate to conceptualising individual TSOs too. In contrast to this, this case study took the essence of the argument propounded by researchers who reject this conceptualisation and claim instead that the sector is a discursive construction of policymakers and academics (G and Leat, 1997; Corry, 2010), and to apply this to GatCCA to explore how it becomes a discursive construction of its own social actors. This approach offers an alternative understanding of a third sector organisation that breaks with the notion of it being objectively ontologically whole and coherent. Instead, what

is illustrated is that in GatCCA's social actors' discursive and cultural practices they begin to construct ideas of the charity that were in alignment with their separate cultural preferences and biases. Consequently, GatCCA's ontology meant something qualitatively different to the members of the three cultures that constituted the organisation (Douglas, 1982; Douglas, 2011 [1986]). For some, like egalitarians the charity was not a structural, bound, objective entity as such, but rather *a practice*; indeed it was perceived as being about the *practice of charity*. By contrast, for members of the hierarchist cultural group GatCCA was a structural, literal entity, *a thing*; for others still, like individualists, it was an *opportunity* for their self-interested exploits. An important qualifier to these conceptualisations was that they were not necessarily fixed or stable, but rather subject to change as tensions and conflicts between the cultures arose over the 'rightness' of their preferred modes of social organisation in the course of conducting the charity's work. A consequence of GatCCA's ontology realised in separate and incompatible ways was its discordance with how the CitA localism policy conceived of the organisation: as being stable, 'whole' and capable of acting singularly and instrumentally in its adoption of the localism policy. It was cultural analysis and employing Cultural Theory specifically that revealed this discordance and enabled exploration of it.

Cultural analysis also played another role in this study (which one can also expect to find in organisational sociology), that it was concerned with ascertaining the *meaning* behind participants' perceptions, biases and practices in response to the three changes announced by the trustees. Indeed as an approach to data generation, analysis and interpretation, cultural analysis enabled me, the ethnographer, to focus not only *how* individuals thought in the organisational setting but also *why* they thought the things they did, and finally, to attempt to access the *meaning* they gave to the *how* and *why* of their context. To do this however required, in the first instance, a Gestalt shift in my own perception of the organisational context. If a researcher takes a too rationalistic approach to studying an organisation it is possible to unconsciously assume that its practices are self-evident (Dobbin, 1994) and that they do not require additional explanation or, more saliently, *interpretation*. An important aspect of the argument I promote is that 'rational' practices and behaviours are, in the final analysis, cultural practices that have multiple meanings known to the social actors involved and must be interpreted by the ethnographer (Crane, 1994; Dobbin, 1994). Taking a moment to step outside of the specifics of this case study, what this latter point also means more generally is that 'culture' is not inherently chaotic or arbitrary but has its own internal meanings that make sense (indeed, are 'rational') to the social actors producing these meanings – and this can be accessed and interpreted by the researcher too.

## Chapter 6

In the substantive chapters I explained the meaning of the three cultures' biases and the implications of these meanings in their responses to the organisational changes; in doing so the second supporting research question – *what informs these cultures?* – was answered. Constructing meaning was a process of “intersubjective agreement” (Dobbin, 1994, p.124; Douglas, 2010) by participants who were part of the same cultural consciousness. Douglas theorised that conflict is not atypical in this process but rather that tension and dissensus are an integral part by actively constructing meaning between participants. Furthermore, as incompatible meanings and differing cultural preferences jar and clash (Swidler, 1986; Crane, 1994; Swidler, 1996; Demers, 2007) this creates a plurality of meanings and realities between social actors; the ‘plural rationalities’ Douglas referred to. Secondly, tracking the continual contestation over ideas and meanings lays bare why some organisational practices persist over time resulting in their continuity and others change resulting in their discontinuity (Demers, 2007). The time-limits of cross-sectional research meant it was not possible to fully apply and explore this aspect of the theory but I nonetheless made theoretically informed speculations as to how the contestation over meaning would unfold and what the implications of this were for the localism policy (Spillman, 2002).

Using Cultural Theory as an analytical and theoretical tool to access meaning addressed another critique I made of third sector literature which is that conceptualisations of TSOs have a tendency to be atheoretical in their descriptions. To counter this, this case study is a *theoretical* understanding of a TSO's ontology but fully evidenced by empirical data. The importance of employing theory deductively was to pay credence to the emic perspectives of the participants in the organisation and to simultaneously translate their views and practices into sociologically apposite concepts at a higher level of abstraction. Employing theory means not having to accept at face value the folk-concepts of social actors but rather to expose them to analytical rigour and complement them with theoretical concepts rooted in our accumulated knowledge of the subject area (Wilson and Chaddha, 2010). The ‘art’ of this is to tread a careful line between understanding that sociological concepts or heuristics (such as Douglas's cultural typology) are “not truth-claims...[but] are relative rather than absolute” (Bale, 1997, p.29). Therefore, the most successful concepts and theories of culture should “expose their normalness without reducing their particularity” (Geertz, 1993 [1973], p.14); furthermore, to do so in ways that helpfully advances other researchers' understanding of how to operationalise the same concepts or theories in different empirical settings. Cultural Theory's operationalisation in this particular case study demonstrates how this can be achieved in other similar TSO settings.

The cultural analysis presented here addresses my final critique of third sector literature which is the notable absence of the role of the researcher in defining TSOs. This absence implies that definitions are value-neutral, objective, self-evident and therefore separate to the researcher(s) who generated them. However, as my argument is based upon evidencing how a TSO's ontology is constructed through discursive and social practices then this, taken to its logical conclusion, must include my own role in this endeavour too. Indeed, self-reflexive positionality in ethnography is unavoidable and should be regarded as a resource, not a burden to be jettisoned from the process (Collins, 2010). In cultural analysis this compels the researcher to be self-reflexive of their own role in, as Jenks (2005) puts it, "the context of ongoing, interpretative social action" (p.60). This in itself relies upon the researcher understanding that ethnography is not so much a collection of methods but rather "a relation or attitude" (ibid p.61) to the field and its participants. Furthermore, this orientation to the field and social actors in it should instil in the researcher a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to analysing culture as an incomplete constantly evolving process. Hence, this must be explicit in the interpretation of the culture(s) of that social context, i.e. that the interpretative process is also incomplete and subjective to revision over time. This point brings us to the epistemological possibilities and limits of this case study.

## 6.2 Epistemological possibilities

In making these arguments, it is reasonable to ask if the epistemological conclusions reached are plausible ones. Whilst concepts like reliability and validity may be appropriate to measure the quality of quantitative research, these are philosophically and methodologically incompatible, and hence inappropriate, to judge the merits and value of qualitative research. What can be assessed however, is whether the study design was appropriate to i) answering the research questions, and, ii) suitable to producing rigorous, trustworthy data to analyse and interpret. In the case of the former point, the research questions were derived directly from personal experience working in TSOs and dissonance with third sector literature that marginalised cultural explanations for TSOs' ontologies. The research questions drove the methodological approach which was a multi-sited ethnography which, as addressed in Chapter 2, had both strengths and weaknesses in the study design. In the case of the latter, the minutiae of detail one expects to find in ethnographic data (such as the sights and smells of the field) are absent. Rather, this is forfeited to navigate the *breadth* and *meanings* of experiences and relationships across a large site, which was, in the final reckoning, a logistically sensible decision and more appropriate to answering the research questions. Indeed, trustworthy qualitative research is about self-reflexive good practice as it pertains to the research questions, as opposed to die-hard commitments to a particular set of

## Chapter 6

methodological positions (Seale, 2005). Importantly, in this case study, the methodological trade-off between *breadth* over *depth* of detail did not undermine the *substantive* argument made precisely because of the quality and quantity of data generated.

Additionally, the ongoing internal conversation I had with myself throughout the course of the ethnography both during and post-fieldwork was not only about the practical elements of the project but also a deeper more personal reflection as to how to analyse and interpret data, and, to realise the distinction between the two (Seale, 2005). This personal process was iterative and influenced by underlying philosophical, methodological and theoretical preferences as well as existing bodies of literature I had familiarity with. What I was certain about were the theoretical assumptions I based my data generation on and the subsequent analysis of that data – and where the criticisms and shortcomings of these were and where I was prepared to withstand these as acceptable without undermining representation of the GatCCA and the argument I have made. I also paid attention to the methods of data generation, in particular the combined field notes and research diary. These were copious and detailed, time-consuming and intellectually and emotionally exhausting to produce, but worth the high level of commitment in order to provide a solid foundation of rich data to revisit and interrogate. If qualitative research “possesses a unique practical logic of its own” (ibid, p.418), then this does not stop with difficulties in navigating the field but invariably includes the challenge of analysing and interpreting a large volume of qualitative data.

Interpretivism as an analytical approach produces what I shall refer to *representational epistemologies*. My role was not to deny or disassociate from this eventual product but to accept and embrace my role as an instrument of the research process and as author *representing* the process (Golafshani, 2003). Crucial to this was employing Cultural Theory as a tool to facilitate representation of the field and its participants’ folk knowledge through a filter of tried and tested sociological concepts (Schwandt, 2003). Of course, the only first order interpretations of the site were those of the participants themselves (Geertz, 1993 [1973]); my interpretations were of their interpretations. Nevertheless, I have attempted to represent as much of the authenticity of the participants’ experiences as possible. As an example of middle range theory, Cultural Theory provided a suitable lexicon to express this representation of the participants’ interpretation of their social milieu. Moreover, utilising Cultural Theory in this way did not decontextualize the field but allowed me to keep close familiarly with it in the process of data analysis (Hine, 2007; Merton, 2007 [1949]). Throughout the process of writing I have used, and as Bale (1997) recommends, “[my] ethnographic judgement” (p.33) in knowingly, but unavoidably, representing a partial view of the organisational setting but as self-reflexively as possible.

Thus, with this thesis, my contribution to third sector studies is to provide a new theoretical understanding of how a TSO's ontology is shaped by its ideational, that is, its cultural foundations. This means not treating 'culture' as epiphenomenal to the organisation but rather as central and defining of it. This notion is normative in organisational sociology but has not cross-fertilised to third sector literature; this study initiates this ideational cross-fertilisation. Importantly, Douglas's Cultural Theory is quintessential to the results achieved here. The deliberate economy of her typology of four possible cultures is its *explanatory* utility; this enabled me to make comparisons between participants and cultural groups. Secondly, Cultural Theory is effective in analytically integrating three aspects of the organisation simultaneously, i) individuals' preferences for either high or low degrees of social solidarity and social regulation, ii) the ideational reference points that support these preferences, and, iii) how the socio-cultural practices of the participants influences their response to and manifestation of policy (Thompson *et al.*, 1990). Thus, using Cultural Theory as an analytical tool means not disassociating the socio-culture aspects of GatCCA from its policy context, but rather yields both these factors to concurrent analysis, and ultimately, theorisation of how they influence each other. This resulted in providing an answer to the third and final research question of this study: *how do the cultures affect organisational policy?*

It should be stated however that there are limitations to Cultural Theory; it does not address issues of power relations or how power may be exercised by the actors or cultural groups in a particular context. For instance, how actors persuade others to their cultural bias and inculcate outsiders into their group. The role of resources (human, material or financial) may be a part of this process, of exercising power and asserting cultural hegemony, but this is left unattended to in Douglas's theory. Although these are unambiguous weaknesses of Cultural Theory, they do not significantly detract from nor undermine this case study and arguments presented here, that is because this study is intended as starting point to cultural analysis of a TSO, not the final word of this approach (Thompson, 1990). What this leaves available however, is opportunity for future applications to TSO settings in order to develop the theory to the specifics of a not-for-profit context. In particular to investigate how power works in overt and covert ways between, for instance, paid and voluntary staff, and if the absence of a profit-making motive changes how power is perceived and exercised. Moreover, there is scope to develop the generic heuristics of Cultural Theory into third sector specific heuristics with a complementary theoretical lexicon that potentially could be widely applied to TSOs contexts to enable appropriate cultural analysis of those contexts with a view to understanding their engagement with policy too.



## Appendix A Research Study Information

**Gates County Citizens Advice has generously agreed to be a case study in research conducted by a PhD researcher from the University of Southampton funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.**

### **About the researcher**

I am Taryn Collins, a doctoral researcher in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Southampton. My previous employment at Gates County Citizens Advice sparked an interest in how third sector organisations (TSOs) respond to change; this is now the basis of my PhD and my research is supervised by Professors Leonard and Halford.

### **What is the research about?**

Some argue that TSOs have survived a 'period of unsettlement' (Macmillan, 2013) and uncertainty following the recession, policy change and significant cuts in public funding. Set against this contextual backdrop this study seeks to investigate how a large voluntary organisation perceives and responds to change. The findings of the research will be written-up as a doctoral thesis.

### **Your participation**

Although Gates County Citizens Advice has agreed to be case study in this research this does not obligate you personally to participate. Rather I kindly request your participation and to sign the consent form which you will find with your supervisor. Before doing so however, please read what the research will involve and how your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected.

### **What the research will involve**

The first phase of the study will involve me observing the everyday activities of the organisation. This will entail me attending various bureaus, being present in duty rooms and offices observing service delivery; I will observe interaction and communication between all members of the organisation. During my observations I may ask questions to seek clarification on certain aspects of service delivery and organisational procedure.

The second phase of the study will involve me requesting interviews with staff and volunteers to discuss how the organisation perceives and responds to change. Once again you are under no obligation to participate in an interview, but if you do consent I will kindly ask you to sign a separate form.

### **Your confidentiality and anonymity**

The purpose and design of this study has been approved by the University of Southampton's *Ethics and Research Governance Committee* (ethics no.11906). This requires me to maintain strict ethical protocols throughout the research process. As such all data collected from participants will be treated confidentially, will not be discussed or shared with other participants, and, will be held securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act and the University's Research Data Management Policy. The data will be inaccessible to anyone other than me and my academic supervisors. Subsequent analysis and writing up of the research will include anonymisation of data to avoid identification of participants. Hence all participants will be given pseudonyms and where necessary other minor descriptive details may be altered to preserve anonymity. This means ***you will not be personally identifiable*** in the final written thesis.

The organisation's anonymity will be maintained by me not alluding to its precise location in the UK so as not to be identifiable within the wider Citizens Advice network. This means that its name

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– Gates County Citizens Advice – will be absent in the thesis in order to preserve the organisation's anonymity.

### **Your consent**

I hope you agree to participate in the study, if you do I would be grateful if you would sign the consent form that you will find with your supervisor. If you decide not to participate I would appreciate it if you would either notify your supervisor/manager who will in turn notify me; if you prefer you can email me directly (details below). For anyone who chooses to decline participation this will mean that when I am present in a bureau that you work in, I will ensure that I do not observe your interaction and communication with others. I will not disclose to anyone that you have declined participation.

### **And finally...**

If you require any more information about the study please contact me at the email address below, I am happy to answer your questions. Of course I will feedback a précis of my findings to Gates County Citizens Advice's trustees, and indeed to all who participate in the study, in due course.

I very much look forward to meeting you all in .....[*insert fieldwork commencement date here*]

Thank you

**Taryn Collins**

**ESRC Doctoral Researcher**

**Email: [tec1g12@soton.ac.uk](mailto:tec1g12@soton.ac.uk)**

## Appendix B Consent Form (Observation)

**Study title:** An ethnographic exploration of how a charitable organisation perceives and responds to change.

**Researcher name:** Taryn Collins

**Ethics reference:** 11906

*Please tick the boxes if you agree with the statements:*

I have read and understood the research study information sheet on the intranet/noticeboard (v.1. 17/08/2014).

I agree to take part in this research and for the data collected to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study.

I understand that my responses will be treated confidentially and will also be appropriately anonymised.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected.

**Data Protection:**

*I understand that information collected during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer owned by the University of Southampton and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this research.*

Name of participant (print name): .....

Signature of participant: .....

Date: .....

Please tick this box if you would like to receive a summary of the study findings.



## Appendix C Participant Information Sheet (Interviews)

**Study title:** An ethnographic exploration of how a charitable organisation perceives and responds to change.

**Researcher name:** Taryn Collins

**Ethics number:** 11906

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study investigating how Gates County Citizens Advice perceives and responds to change. This information sheet explains what is involved. Please read this carefully before deciding to take part in the study. If you are happy to participate you will be asked to sign a consent form.

### **About the researcher**

I am a doctoral researcher in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Southampton. My previous employment at Gates County Citizens Advice sparked an interest in how third sector organisations function and respond to their operating contexts; this is now the basis of my PhD. My research is supervised by Professors Leonard and Halford and is funded by the Economic & Social Research Council for which I gratefully acknowledge its support.

### **What is the research about?**

Some argue that third sector organisations (TSOs) have survived a ‘period of unsettlement’ (Macmillan, 2013) and uncertainty following the recession, policy change under the Coalition government, and, significant cuts in public funding. Against this backdrop the study seeks to investigate specifically how a large voluntary organisation such as Gates County Citizens Advice defines and responds to change. The findings of the research will be written-up as a doctoral thesis.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

You are a stakeholder of the charity and are involved in one capacity or another in the charity’s work and continued existence. Your opinions and views based on your experience, whether in a paid or unpaid capacity, are pertinent to the study.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

Your participation will involve discussing with me your experiences and opinions of how you perceive change and how the organisation responds to change. The interview may take up to an hour (but need not take this long) and can be at a time and at a bureau that is convenient to you.

### **Are there any risks involved?**

No personal risk or ethical issues are envisaged by this study. The purpose of the research is to ascertain your opinion and experience of Gates County Citizens Advice and how it perceives and responds to change.

### **Will my participation be confidential?**

With your permission I will audio-record the interview and the data will be stored securely on a password protected computer (owned by the University) in compliance with the Data Protection Act and the University of Southampton’s Research Data Management Policy. This data will only be available to me and my immediate academic supervisors.

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Because the interviews will be audio-recorded all comments will be 'on the record'. However, should you indicate that a remark is 'off the record', I will honour this, stop the audio recorder if desired and these comments will not appear in any documentation.

If you prefer not to be audio-recorded in the interview, I will take hand-written notes instead. Again, if you indicate that a particular remark is 'off the record' I will honour this, not write down the comment and it will not appear in any documentation.

I will not discuss your participation with other participants in the study. When writing-up the findings I will take all necessary steps to ensure the anonymity of all participants through the use of pseudonyms and where appropriate may make minor descriptive changes as well.

### **What happens if I change my mind?**

I will ask you to sign a consent form before I interview you which states that I can use the material from your interview. However, you can withdraw from the project at any stage – and if desired I will not use your interview data.

### **Where can I get more information?**

If you have any questions about the study and your participation please contact me at the email address below, I will be happy to answer your questions.

### **What happens if something goes wrong?**

In the unlikely event that you have any concerns or complaints about this study please contact the Head of Research Governance, either via email at: [rginfo@soton.ac.uk](mailto:rginfo@soton.ac.uk) or by telephone on 02380 595058.

Thank you.

**Taryn Collins**  
**ESRC Doctoral Researcher**  
**University of Southampton**  
**[tec1g12@soton.ac.uk](mailto:tec1g12@soton.ac.uk)**

## Appendix D Consent Form (Interviews)

**Study title:** An ethnographic exploration of how a charitable organisation perceives and responds to change.

**Researcher name:** Taryn Collins

**Ethics reference:** 11906

*Please tick the boxes if you agree with the statements:*

I have read and understood the information sheet (v.2. 14/08/2014) and have had an opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I agree to take part in this research and for my data to be recorded and used for the purpose of this study.

I agree that my interview will be audio-recorded and that all my responses will be 'on-the-record' unless I state otherwise.

I understand that my responses will be treated confidentially and will also be appropriately anonymised.

I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without my legal rights being affected.

**Data Protection:**

*I understand that information collected about me during my participation in this study will be stored on a password protected computer owned by the University of Southampton and that this information will only be used for the purpose of this research.*

Name of participant (print name): .....

Signature of participant: .....

Date: .....

Please tick this box if you would like to receive a summary of the study findings.



## Appendix E Overview of Interview Participants

	Pseudonym	Gender	Employment status	Role	Advice centre	Primary or secondary field site	Cultural type
1.	Ed	M	Paid staff	Advisor	Eastgate	P	Egalitarian (active)
2.	Simone	F	Volunteer	Advisor	Lowgate	P	Egalitarian (active)
3.	Lizzie	F	Volunteer	Advisor	Lowgate	P	Egalitarian (active)
4.	Anne	F	Volunteer	Advisor	Greengate	P	Egalitarian (active)
5.	Sue	F	Paid staff	Staff	Greengate	P	Egalitarian (active)
6.	Sian	F	Paid staff	Staff	Lowgate	P	Egalitarian (active)
7.	Pete	M	Paid staff	Supervisor	Lowgate	P	Egalitarian (active)
8.	Maggie	F	Paid staff	Senior manager	Peripatetic (Eastgate base)	P	Egalitarian (passive)
9.	Tom	M	Paid staff	Staff	Eastgate	P	Egalitarian (passive)
10.	Saul	M	Paid staff	Staff	Greengate	P	Egalitarian (passive)
11.	Alistair	M	Volunteer	Advisor	Littlegate	S	Egalitarian (passive)
12.	Alexis	F	Paid staff	Supervisor	Rushgate	P	Egalitarian (passive)
13.	Marie	F	Paid staff	Staff	Eastgate	P	Egalitarian (passive)
14.	Catriona	F	Paid staff	Supervisor	Peripatetic (Westgate base)	P	Egalitarian (passive)
15.	Harry	M	Trustee (i.e. volunteer)	Trustee	Ashgate	S	Hierarchist
16.	Isabelle	F	Paid staff	Senior manager	Peripatetic (Westgate base)	P	Hierarchist
17.	Barbara	F	Paid staff	Senior manager	Peripatetic (Westgate base)	P	Hierarchist
18.	Anette	F	Paid staff	Staff	Lowgate	P	Hierarchist
19.	Kathleen	F	Paid staff	Supervisor	Eastgate	P	Hierarchist
20.	Marina	F	Paid staff	Staff	Greengate	P	Hierarchist
21.	Michaela	F	Trustee (i.e. volunteer)	Trustee	Eastgate	P	Hierarchist
22.	Judy	F	Volunteer	Social policy volunteer	Greengate	P	Hierarchist
23.	Marcus	M	Volunteer	Advisor	Westgate	P	Individualist
24.	Gordon	M	Trustee (i.e. volunteer)	Trustee	Hillgate	S	Individualist

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25.	Jack	M	Volunteer	Advisor	Westgate	P	Individualist
26.	Deborah	F	Volunteer	Advisor	Ashgate	S	Individualist
27.	George	M	Paid staff	Staff	Greengate	P	Individualist
28.	Julian	M	Paid staff	Supervisor	Hillgate	S	Individualist
29.	Seb	M	Trustee (i.e. volunteer)	Trustee	Eastgate and Lowgate	P	Individualist
30.	Will	M	Volunteer	Advisor	Greengate	P	Individualist
31.	David	M	Volunteer	Advisor	Eastgate	P	Individualist
32.	Ian	M	Trustee (i.e. volunteer)	Trustee	Littlegate	S	Individualist
33.	Ash	F	Paid staff	Staff	Westgate	P	No allocation - null response to interview invitation
34.	Sasha	F	Volunteer	Trainee Advisor	Westgate	P	No allocation - null response to interview invitation

Gender	
Female	17
Male	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

Employment status	
Paid staff	17
Volunteers (including Trustees)	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

Field site location	
Primary	22
Secondary	6
Peripatetic (interviewees based at both primary and secondary sites)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

Cultural groupings	
Egalitarians	14
Hierarchists	8
Individualists	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

## Appendix F Allocation to Cultural Type

Pete, a supervisor in Lowgate, was an exemplar of the (active) egalitarian cultural group. This is a sample of some of Pete's data generated through observation (O) recorded in field notes and during a semi-structured interview (I), which was coded then arranged under the thematic categories listed below. Pete was an archetype of egalitarianism because his data corresponded with many (but not all) of the themes that came to characterise this cultural group across all three organisational changes the trustees announced. The sample data below relates principally to Pete's responses to the first change: the (return to) localism policy.

### Basic themes of egalitarianism

#### *Inter-personal relationships*

- Proactive relationship building. Participant allocated me desk space next to him in his advice centre. Already well-briefed about me and the study prior to my arrival. Introduced me (and the study) to all volunteers and staff. Friendly and engaged (O)
- Observed the participant's daily morning briefing to the volunteers, prior to this he asked volunteers 'did you get my email?' and they replied 'yes', he then asked if they wanted reminding of what was in the email and they all said 'yes', he good humouredly repeated the information (O)
- Participant makes frequent use of 'we' and 'community' (I)
- 'Community' and 'we' used interchangeably, can mean either GatCCA and/or the wider local third sector community (I & O)

#### *Prioritising clients*

- Productive, professional ties with local organisations perceived positively because "it makes the wheels go around and it is better for clients" (I)
- A volunteer stated that he would like the advice centre to be integrated into the services which the council offers the local community, Pete agreed, he believed this would benefit clients more than the separate service GatCCA currently offers (O)
- Stated that localism is the best way to ensure the longevity of GatCCA and to revive it from an "ailing cumbersome charity" and to achieve best outcomes for clients [therefore 'community' has intrinsic and extrinsic value] (O)

#### *Geographical proximity to advice centres*

- Capitalised on volunteers' local knowledge and personal connections to initiate contact with local organisations and the Council to build relationships and gain a "a greater sense of what is 'out there'" (I & O)
- Participant stated that his advice centre would be better placed if it was located in the town centre so as to attract more footfall and be more accessible to clients (O)
- Observed the participant meeting with a representative from a local charity working with young people to explain the advice service that GatCCA offers (O)

Basic themes abstracted further into organising themes (below)

### Organising themes of egalitarianism

#### *Flexible collectivity*

- Stated that in order to implement localism “I could see that it was going to make my life easier if I had allies [i.e. other TSOs] in Lowgate town to rely on” (I)
- Frequent references to encouraging ‘buy-in’ from volunteers towards the collective endeavour of serving local clients (I & O)
- Professional relationships with external TSOs creates positive atmosphere for volunteers “because they can see that you have some gravitas in Lowgate town, you can ring people up and make things happen [for the client]” (I)

#### *Factionalism*

- Stated that the difference between volunteers and staff was one of motivation (I & O)
- Showed preference for delegating additional responsibilities to experienced *client-facing* volunteers (O)
- Stressed importance of ‘buy-in’ of volunteers to maintain solidarity; implicit that this refers to client-facing volunteers; not inclusive of all volunteers who work in non-client facing areas, for instance (O and I).

#### *Role of supervisor*

- Did not seek permission from management before establishing working relationships with external stakeholders. Explained this as acting in the interest of GatCCA and ‘the community’ (O & I).
- Valued outward-facing activities to engage local stakeholders (O & I)
- Participant was presented an award at GatCCA’s staff conference in recognition of his excellence and innovative approach to conducting supervisory role (O)
- Respected by other staff and volunteers (O)
- Frequently mentioned by others as an example of ‘new generation’ supervisor (O)

A final abstraction of organising themes into global themes (below)

### Global themes of egalitarianism

#### *Active type*

- Active and assertive in taking initiative in Lowgate Advice Centre (I & O)
- Participant stated his belief that “we are really pushing boundaries here” and expressed desire to practice localism with renewed vigour (I)
- Discussed making contact with commercial organisations to raise unrestricted funds for GatCCA, he stated “we need to be bold, at least establish contact with these people” (O)
- Easy, jovial relationship with volunteers in his advice centre, participant told me “we told you we are the best advice centre” (O)

#### *Passive type*

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