

# Community action in austerity: The case of Community Asset Transfer

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## Summary

Community Asset Transfer (CAT), a practice whereby local authorities transfer the ownership of public assets to community groups, is one example of the many legacies of austerity in Britain. CAT may predominantly be understood through the lexicon of austerity localism whereby the local state - driven by fiscal pressures - offloads public-owned buildings onto community groups. However, narrowly applied this interpretation leaves little room for the possibility and/or recognition of other politics which may exist on the ground.

In response, my thesis sets out an alternative non-foundational approach to CAT practice. By combining analysis of an original national survey of CATs, scrutiny of the justifications, critique and resistance of CAT practice at local authority level, and through a series of detailed ethnographic case studies this work makes two key contributions. Firstly, it documents the geographically uneven and ongoing legacies of austerity of Community Asset Transfer in Britain, and the ways this practice intersects with deprivation, cuts to local authority service spending and national welfare. Secondly, following Gibson-Graham's (2006) call to read for difference rather than dominance, my work considers ways in which CATs constitute a physical and social infrastructure that is simultaneously shot through with logics of community co-option and austerity, but importantly, open out spaces of care and experimentation through which acts of collective endurance, a quiet politics of care, and explicit activism emerge. Through recourse to ambivalence this work holds in tension these critical perspectives as complementary frameworks to offer a nuanced understanding of CAT.

Exploring the afterlives of these assets - and their complex emotional geographies – suggests other possibilities for ethical and political responses and orientation that do not necessarily align with neoliberal policies. Indeed, in their fragile configuration of collectivism and mutualism CATs potentially can offer a different sensibility to community space and care.

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Emerging Community Asset Transfer (CAT)

Over the past decade of fiscal austerity public community buildings and land in Britain have undergone significant change. Many have been sold and/or closed resulting in considerable loss to communities (Locality 2018; Rex 2018; Hitchen and Shaw 2019; Robinson and Sheldon 2019; Jupp 2021). Others have been leased under external service agreements to large scale national social enterprises marking a shift towards the market provision of services and privatisation (Findlay-King et al. 2017). However, increasingly numerous buildings have experienced a different outcome through Community Asset Transfer (CAT). CAT transfers the management of land or buildings to community groups who then become responsible for their maintenance, staffing and from which they are required to provide services for community benefit. This raises important questions over how as geographers we might frame and understand CAT as an event in austerity. The aim of my thesis is two-fold: firstly, to explore how through this emergent practice community space is made and for what ends; and secondly, in doing so, I outline an approach to understanding community action in times of austerity.

The origins of CAT are closely allied to state encouragement of citizens to play a greater role in civil society. Formed as part of New Labour's (1997-2010) localism agenda and experiments in service provision (Kenny et al. 2017), CAT's were expanded through David Cameron's call for a 'Big Society' (Conservative Party 2010). CAT was promoted as providing an opportunity for communities to take a stake in their own future through ownership and/or management of community assets (Quirk 2007), and coalesced with localism understood as the transfer of central power towards citizens (Wills 2016).

CAT as part of localism developed concurrently with the government's implementation of fiscal constraints that in practice often undermined the overtly positive rhetoric of localist policies. As a result localism under austerity became seen as an indicator of wider structural processes designed to depoliticise the local and use it to reorganise the public sector (Featherstone et al. 2012). Viewed through a political economy lens some scholars see localism as not only a justification for spending cuts but moreover as an excuse to shrink the state (Taylor-Gooby 2012; Newman 2014). Featherstone et al. (2012) call this process 'austerity localism', which is positioned as part of a wider shift towards neoliberal governance - understood as an 'open ended and contradictory process of regulatory restructuring' (Peck 2010, p. 7) that creates a 'withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision' (Harvey 2005, p. 3). As such CAT, might be



understood as not only a product of economic necessity borne of the 2008 financial crisis, a narrative promoted in public political discourse, but as part of a wider structural political agenda to rearrange the state in the service of the free-market economy.

While some might effectively explain this CAT as part and parcel of a wider neoliberal project, I suggest that, if narrowly applied, such an approach could limit scope for critical engagement and political possibility. Through this lens the actions of those involved in CAT can be interpreted as both reactionary and a form of co-option. This simultaneously castigates local authorities and communities whilst leaving them to their own devices and risks excluding them from further academic consideration. This is particularly problematic because many of the communities involved highly value these spaces as 'thriving' community infrastructure. This suggests that there is a potential disjuncture between how scholars might frame CAT practice and how community members outside of the academy understand their lived experiences. Although framing community action through neoliberalism could offer a comprehensive vision that both describes and explains the diminishment of the state it may also be an oversimplification of the localism agenda (Hickson 2013), and risks glossing over other interpretations that would otherwise remain open to wider possibilities (Williams et al. 2014). In agreement with Janet Newman (2014), I suggest that we need to look beyond neoliberalism to engage with the contradictory trends and tendencies that might otherwise be explained through this lens, we need to critically engage in CAT, to open spaces for other politics and agency.

With this in mind, I propose a different approach. This begins with my use of language and the term 'community action'. 'Action', I suggest is a relatively open descriptive term when compared to others related to community activity. For example, and on one level, grammars of community 'activism' evoke the redemptive power of campaigning to bring about political change (Haughton and Allmendinger 2014), whereas community 'resistance' (Harvey 2012) suggests progress through conflict and opposition. On another level, terms such as community 'co-option' (Kunkel and Mayer 2012; Ahrens and Ferry 2015), or 'coercion' (Davies 2012) suggest how civil society is subsumed by the state, or where the language of a 'reactionary' community evokes conservative positions against radical political or social reform (Taylor 2011). In contrast, I propose that 'action' as a neutral term avoids introducing polarising assumptions about the work of the voluntary sector in CAT. Using a non-deterministic terminology invites us to think openly about CAT practice beyond labels that evoke an image of conservative communities colluding with state retrenchment by taking on responsibility for the maintenance of these assets and services, or positions community as otherwise engaged in resistance. In considering the actions of community in engaging in CAT we should take seriously the agency that they exercise and listen to the myriad

motives of those involved. In doing so, we might be able to register community action that in addition fosters something beyond the state agenda. Therefore, my study is centred on a desire to develop a more open understanding of Community Asset Transfer, to look beyond overpowering narratives by taking a non-foundational approach to real world practices to engage in local understandings of practices of CAT unfettered by a priori judgement.

My approach is based on three factors. Firstly, it draws on Gibson-Graham's (2006, pp. xxxi -xxxii) call to be 'reading for difference rather than dominance'. Reading for difference is an attempt to reach beyond a potentially reductive framing of community action and bears witness to other practices where, and if, they emerge (Gibson-Graham 2006). In doing so, the multiple and ambivalent possibilities of these spaces can be explored. Secondly, it engages with ambivalences of the politics of critique in geography (See Ruez and Cockayne 2021) that emerge through a grounded exploration of disparate empirical data alongside a rejection of totalising theoretical standpoints. Attending to the inherent ambivalence of CAT is '*not* resolving tensions between affirmation and negativity' (Ruez and Cockayne 2021, p. 93 [italics in original]), but acknowledges the undecidability in the worlds we research (Kern and McLean 2017). Thirdly, my inquiry attends to ambivalence in order to allow for more affirmative understandings to emerge from the 'messy middle ground' by drawing on the work of May and Cloke (2014). My analysis reveals actions that are both reactionary and give a sense of how such space can moreover be appropriated for more progressive actions, where spaces of care can challenge or offer refuge from neoliberal austerity (Cloke et al. 2017). Thus, my work is not an apology for the neoliberal dissolution of the state based on romantic or naïve interpretations of localism, nor merely a search for oppositional forms of activism, but rather it sustains a willingness to consider other grammars of interpretation that is critically aware while simultaneously avoiding theoretical reduction prior to investigation.

In the context of a world changed by COVID-19, I suggest that CAT maintains relevance. CAT still holds power as part of the broader set of earlier localist policy reforms now in force (See Tait and Inch 2015). Although the lexicon of localism may have fallen from political currency, recourse to community is making a comeback through the New Social Covenant Unit led by Conservative MP Danny Kruger who proposes a new social covenant based on a politics of strengthening the family, the community and the nation by nurturing common rule that protect the individual (Kruger 2021). CAT continues to be implemented today. In July 2021 the government announced a new £150 million community ownership fund for England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to 'harness that spirit of resilience, selflessness and neighbourliness to build back better', and explicitly to 'take ownership of assets which are at risk of being lost to the community' (HM

Government 2021). Therefore, as political, and financial support for CAT continues, so too does the need for critical engagement with its forms and outcomes.

## 1.2 What is CAT?

An operational definition of CAT practice is outlined as ‘the transfer of management and/or ownership of public land and buildings from the owner (usually a local authority) to a community organisation, for less than market value, to achieve a local social, economic or environmental benefit’ (Locality 2017b). In the context of this thesis the assets of interest are former local authority run spaces of community infrastructure with an emphasis on community centres that have been transferred to community organisations for community benefit. Furthermore, these assets are important sites of local government service provision and through CAT are being brought into the uneven third sector provision of care in Britain, already placed under strain by austerity (Kenny et al. 2017; Power and Hall 2018). Rather than being the realm of the state, care is increasingly being shifted onto the market (Kenny et al. 2017) and/or onto families and religious communities (Williams et al. 2012; Hall 2019b) with the potential to reinforce inequalities by being disproportionately gendered, classed and racialized (Fraser 2017; Hall 2020). Consequently, I argue that CAT is more than a physical asset and is part of, and integral to, the wider contemporary infrastructures of community care.

There is a relative absence of scholarship on CAT. That which exists is confined geographically to specific regions of the UK. See for example the work of Brendan Murtagh (2015) on the Northern Ireland Executive’s use of CAT, or Stella Darby’s (2016) study of a singular case of CAT in Leeds presented as a beacon of radicalism. Associated contemporary literature on community assets either focuses on the effects of austerity and emotional loss (Hitchen 2015; Robinson and Sheldon 2019; Hitchen 2021) or otherwise often overlooks the impact of contemporary fiscal constraint, and instead focuses on seeking technical fixes to community ownership (See for example Aiken et al. 2011; Archer et al. 2019). In contrast, I propose that my study of the afterlives of assets transferred under CAT is an attempt to engage broadly with this community action across different geographies and with its ambiguous nature as both a product of and mitigation of austerity.

## 1.3 Research questions

My thesis sets out to develop an understanding of CAT as it has unfolded across time and space and as defined and practiced by those engaging in the process. My research questions sought to

establish an understanding of the practice of CAT across different scales, and to recognise the political ambivalences of this form of asset disposal. Above all, my inquiry was concerned with the impact of CAT practice, aiming to broadly explore to what extent and in what ways do transferred assets engage with or transcend social inequality. This work was considered as a form of social inquiry into evolving and experimental community action from which we can learn. My study addressed three specific questions.

### **1. What can a survey of CAT reveal about the places and communities affected by this practice?**

The creation of a fine-grained national survey of the temporal and spatial emergence of CAT documents the scale and geographical distribution of CAT practice in Britain by recording each individual act of CAT. This information provides an original descriptive understanding of CAT practice detailing which local authorities are engaging in CAT and suggests what kind of communities might be experiencing it. This data furthermore allowed for exploratory statistical analysis. Testing for spatial and temporal relationships between CAT and secondary data suggests several associations. These include relationships between the spatial patterns of CAT and i) the rise and impact of austerity on local government service spending (Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Gray and Barford 2018), ii) the local effects of national austerity cuts to welfare (Beatty and Fothergill 2014; 2016b), and iii) its relationship to pre-existing levels of socio-economic inequality through the Indices of Multiple Deprivation for each nation. These explorations sought to test the relationship between the rise in CAT and implementation of austerity, to draw on different theoretical rationales as an explanation for the geographical irregularity of CAT. The partial correlation between the uneven geographies of austerity and those of CAT contributes to our understanding of the landscapes of austerity.

### **2. Why and how has the process of CAT emerged at local authority level?**

This question served to move closer towards, and complements, an understanding of the grounded experiences of the local authorities that were identified in the survey referred to above. By shifting attention to the meso-level scale of local authorities, I turned to the experience of public officials who administer CAT practice. To do this I explored CAT as a discursive institution (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]), through two specific questions. a) How do local authorities discursively frame and coordinate CAT, and address critique and resistance? b) How do the discursive institutions of CAT provide understandings of the line between acquiescence and resistance that this practice involves?

On one level, this exploration of the justification, critique and resistance to CAT reveals how this process is constructed through top-down austerity logics to incorporate civil society into service provision existing at the edge of the state. On another level, CAT is situated as mitigating the effects of market and bureaucratic norms, deployed alongside shifting civic and moral values that serve to mute wider critique. These values continue to be tested in CAT practice through the emergence of forms of post-hoc legitimisation and resistance. This work supplements a political economy approach to CAT by offering understandings of the deliberative practices involved and serves as a step towards a more intimate inquiry of on-the-ground experiences of CAT within the transferred assets themselves.

### **3. Why do community groups become involved in CAT, how do they operate these spaces and what subsequent role(s) do they take on or establish?**

This final suite of questions marks a final scalar shift in my work to focus on the experiences of the communities installed in these community spaces through the practice of CAT. These questions framed an ethnographic approach that attends to calls for a more nuanced understanding of community sector action to be developed (Newman and Clarke 2009). My ethnographic work bears witness to the real-world experiences of CAT at the ultra-local scale. I propose that this is an essential territory for understanding how we might frame CAT and other community spaces in the vicissitudes of austerity by considering how its ethical and political dimensions play out in-situ, how wider structural moves unfold on-the-ground and how communities respond.

In answering these questions, I was able to show how CAT is co-constituted through different constellations and relationships of co-option and neoliberal off-loading of public assets onto community groups, but also through the emergence of collective endurance and activism. This work reveals the establishment of new infrastructures of care that alleviate as well as being a product of austerity, sitting within and influenced by broader understandings of the impact of spending cuts on social reproduction. Through these three exploratory questions that move across scale and experiences of CAT I suggest that an open theorisation of CAT practice allows for its ambivalent political nature to be acknowledged and (re)assessed.

## **1.4 Approaching CAT**

I propose that understanding the possibilities of CAT in times of austerity requires a non-foundational epistemological approach to knowledge that moves beyond the confines of structural framing and engages in the plurality, inherent messiness, and ambivalence of this practice. This is based on an underlying desire to contribute to community action, to make a

positive intervention through understanding and engage in conversations around a social process that is continually in the making (See Gibson-Graham 2006).

To do so my work draws broadly on pragmatism as a philosophical approach to knowledge. Pragmatism provides a framework for an approach not bounded by pre-existing abstract notions of truth (Barnes 2008) but is otherwise grounded in human experience (Morgan 2014). In doing so I value the experimental work of communities through CAT practices. Yet at the same time, I acknowledge the utility of the traditional role of experts in problem solving (Geiselhart 2020) in contributing to ongoing debate around CAT practice and draw broadly on Bridge's (2021) recent framing of pragmatism as a critical force in geography (See Section 3.2 Knowing CAT for a detailed discussion).

Addressing the everyday contextual problematic situations is of personal interest as I have professional experience and longstanding engagement in community infrastructures. I worked as an architect for seven years in the design of community school buildings and worked with place-based communities to explore neighbourhood change in Santiago, Chile. On return to the UK, I continued this work, becoming involved in a joint project between a local community and Cardiff University. Initially employed by the Welsh School of Architecture, I worked on the initial client brief for a project as the local authority transferred the management of a bowling-green and pavilion to a University/Community partnership through Community Asset Transfer (See Turnbull 2017). This singular process sparked my academic interest in other experiences of communities taking on these spaces across Britain. I was able to formalise this by securing funding through open competition for an ESRC 1 + 3 PhD scholarship. This presented an opportunity to develop new insights into contemporary community action and explore how academic work can be useful in this arena.

## 1.5 Researching CAT

Given the broad scope of my research questions, I drew on a variety of strategies and methods. I used a mixed methods research approach. This is based on a pragmatist approach to knowledge as plural and engaged, where all ideas are not expected to cohere and embraces 'difference, otherness, opposition and contradiction rather than being reconciled' (Barnes 2008, p. 1547). Through this engagement with plurality pragmatism moreover becomes a practical tool to bring together diverse and contrasting perspectives and chimes with my approach to an open yet critical theorisation of CAT situated in and drawing on a diverse range of critical geographical

literature on local government restructuring, austerity (Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Gray and Barford 2018), and spaces of care (Conradson 2003; 2011; Cloke et al. 2017).

My approach to the research design sits within an inherently pragmatic approach to knowledge that comes from person-environment interaction (Dewey 2012 [1920]), but in addition draws on statistical data taking the view that these approaches are not mutually exclusive, and we can have both rich and intense description and generalizability (Woods 2012). I used forms of triangulation to broadly integrate this data. Using methodological triangulation allowed different methods to play to their strengths (Denzin 1970; Denscombe 2010), e.g., where qualitative ethnographic data revealed different understandings of CAT practice than those generated through the quantitative survey. I used theory triangulation (Denzin 1970), where reflecting on more than one theoretical position helped in the interpretation of the data, e.g., political economy, governance, austerity localism, etc. This approach attempts to hold together different understandings of CAT that vary between austerity driven accounts, and additionally makes room for recognition of the emergent spaces of care.

**Figure 1** Table of outline of methodological approach

<b>Methodological approach</b>	<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Extent</b>	<b>Justification</b>	<b>Addresses research questions</b>
Survey questionnaire through Freedom of Information requests, allows for statistical analysis of resulting data	Quantitative analysis	National (Incl. England, Scotland and Wales)	Documenting the emergence of CAT over time and space. And exploration of causal relations	1
Semi-structured interviews with selected local authorities and document analysis	Qualitative case study	Local authority (three selected cases)	Engaging with local experience, norms and values that drive CAT.	2
Ethnographic approach including participant observation and recorded conversations with community members	Qualitative multi-sited ethnography	Community level (three selected sites)	Bearing witness to the local experience of community members associated with CAT	3

Source: By author

I organised my work broadly through ‘Dialectic pragmatism’ (Johnson et al. 2007; Johnson 2009; Johnson and Gray 2010) that systematises the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, engaging in a double task of social science to make visible the contingency of perceptions and constructions of reality while simultaneously taking account of the actual processes involved on

the basis of well-established experimental methods (Morgan 2014; Geiselhart 2020). Figure 1 outlines my methodological approach as it shifts scale and strategy to answer my research questions. I engage with three methodological approaches: 1) an explorative quantitative survey, to document and engage in the distribution, scope, and scale of CAT practice in Britain through a Freedom of Information questionnaire. This allowed for subsequent statistical analysis of the data; 2) semi-structured interviews to gain insight into how CAT practice is being semantically deployed at local authority level, and 3) an ethnographic approach that allows for an inductive appreciation of practices of CAT to emerge from inside the spaces of CAT.

## 1.6 My contributions

My thesis makes a three-fold contribution to academic knowledge, empirically, conceptually, and theoretically. Firstly, empirically this thesis makes an original contribution to understanding the scale, prevalence and uneven geographies of CAT and contextualises this within neoliberal austerity. Data demonstrate a strong temporal association between the rise in the number of CAT and the decrease in the revenue spending power of local authorities and additionally, the patterns of CAT are shown to map onto austerity landscapes. In addition, at local authority level my work provides detail on the discursive institutions of CAT. This acknowledges the in-situ narratives and justifications that are employed and which we must consider as important expressions of local politics. My ethnographic work furthermore contributes empirically by giving a sense of how community groups are working within these spaces of state retrenchment and in doing so are appropriating them for other ends.

Secondly, conceptually my non-foundational approach to data encourages an open appreciation of CAT practice. As such, I did not set out to test hypotheses and in doing so potentially default to confirmatory positions. Rather, in taking an exploratory approach to the data set (Marsh and Elliott 2008), I intended to acknowledge patterns from which theoretical understandings could emerge. In relation to local authorities, rather than approaching them through overdetermining narratives of retrenchment and co-option I suggest that we should acknowledge and understand them as actors that deliberately apply local logics to drive CAT practice. I approached my ethnographic work by asking open questions and through which different ideas were brought to the fore. This locally grounded knowledge subsequently helped to calibrate otherwise potentially overbearing theoretical positions.

Thirdly, theoretically a pragmatist orientated approach to CAT is useful to explore the politics and ambivalences of CAT practice. Through embracing pluralism, we are able to appreciate these sites



differently. As a result, the national distribution then does not only document an austerity event but also records an act of mitigation whereby community groups engage to avoid the loss and closure of assets. It allows different readings of local politics at local authority level to emerge. At asset level it shifts ideas of co-option towards ideas of coexisting mutualism and collectivism.

Underpinning this work is my engagement with the ambivalence of CAT. This thesis seeks to offer a theoretical framework to bring to light, rather than conceal, the ethical and political ambivalence and possibilities of this community action. I suggest that attempting to understand CAT in this way offers valuable insight into these dynamic sites not only as spaces from which we can learn but moreover reengages the academy with communities who value these 'thriving' community infrastructures. At a national level, exploratory mapping begins to suggest the presence of an emergent civil society infrastructure that both works to mitigate austerity whilst also being co-opted and risks further adding to the uneven landscapes of local government austerity (Hastings et al. 2015; Gray and Barford 2018). At the local authority level, engaging with the experiences of locals to 'take seriously the fact that ordinary actors are equipped with critical moral and judgemental capacities' (Lemieux 2014) recognises local actions and offers space for future intervention. And at community level these physical infrastructures variously co-opt communities and are shot through with austerity, raising questions over who is doing care, and engaging in capitalist technologies for survival. And yet their afterlives demonstrate an affective politics and orientation that doesn't always appear to align with neoliberal policies, can configure into something mutual and even activist, offering a different sensibility to community space and care.

## 1.7 Thesis layout

This thesis sets out to construct a plural understanding of CAT grounded in the real-world experiences of those engaged in this practice. It does not intend to offer an exhaustive account of CAT practice, rather it is an attempt to begin to explore the multiple ways in which CAT operates across different scales where 'ideas don't add up to an ultimate, single truth, pure and simple. It is more complicated, messier, more contingent' (Barnes 2008, p. 1547).

Chapter 2 presents a review of literature placing CAT in the wider contexts of localism and austerity. It argues that while existing scholarship has been limited this offers an opportunity to approach CAT unfettered by ingrained notions, however at the same time must simultaneously recognise and contextualise CAT practice within austerity. Chapter 3 sets out my approach to how such an open inquiry can take place by drawing on a philosophical approach that goes beyond

foundationalism and draws broadly on pragmatist emphasis on human experience (Dewey 1998 [1925]; 2012 [1920]) and through engagement with CAT at different geographical scales.

The next three chapters, 4, 5 and 6, demonstrate how through diverse empirical inquiry an appreciation of CAT beyond but within austerity narratives can be created. Chapter 4 shows CAT as both austerity-led at the same time as providing a map of CAT that could be said to mitigate the closure and loss of assets through austerity. Chapter 5 attends to the meso-level of local authority CAT practice demonstrating how the local politics of CAT both employ bureaucratic and market norms associated with neoliberalism but also forms of autonomy for community groups. Chapter 6 engages ethnographically at three separate sites of CAT to show how they transcend a narrow understanding of the co-option of community.

The final chapter sets out my conclusions, drawing out themes that run across all three empirical chapters, attending to my overarching research question; to what extent and in what ways, do these spatial community actions engage with or transcend social inequality? This is followed by discussion of the limitations of the study, the setting out of future opportunities for further inquiry and reflections on the research process as a vehicle to think differently about community action in times of austerity.

I argue and demonstrate in the following chapters that understanding community action through CAT calls for engagement with what is happening on the ground. CAT involves acts of austerity localism that coalesce with quotidian forms of care and the potential for activism. Recognition of this ambivalence requires careful calibration of the stories we tell about these places, and an understanding of them as current sites of refuge and experimentation from which we can learn and reimagine the future of care.

## Chapter 2 Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction to a review of literature

I begin this chapter by setting out the broader contexts of CAT. I start by looking at the geographies of austerity originating in the 2008 financial crisis and its political and economic aftermaths that led to the implementation of economic austerity measures. This has particularly impacted local government and public service provision through severe cuts to public funding. Many scholars have positioned austerity as the wider extension of neoliberalism and where state roll-back is unevenly distributed across space.

I then look to one of the ways in which geographers have approached austerity through community infrastructures and in doing so have registered the emotional costs of austerity through loss. I suggest that this contrasts with extant CAT literatures that are otherwise caught in a schism between practitioners' work in providing technical fixes to correct the fiscal and policy instruments of CAT practice, and accounts of resistance in austerity. I argue that there are three important omissions in this work: firstly, a lack of attention to the spatial and temporal nature of CAT practice; secondly, a lack of understanding of the motivations and rationales behind the implementation of CAT at local authority level; and, thirdly, a lack of attention to the social geography of the spaces of CAT.

I propose that, as an emergent and politically ambivalent practice that elicits community action in times of austerity, a fundamental question is raised over how we might approach and frame a conceptual understanding of CAT. To do so, I explore critical geographical perspectives, including political economy, governmentality and the notion of austerity localism, suggesting that narrowly applied there is a danger that these accounts can overwhelm understandings of CAT practice. Drawing on Gibson-Graham's (2006) call to read for difference rather than domination where accounts of local community action are not overpowered by high-level theoretical narratives, I draw on the work of scholars who have sought to develop alternative grammars of analysis to acknowledge and bear witness to the often-concealed geographies that are hidden and/or eclipsed by grand narratives. These include consideration of pragmatic sociology, progressive localism and concepts of care and social infrastructures that offer to reveal the nuance and potential of actual practice on the ground. Nonetheless, this work draws together these lenses to supplement rather than dismiss one or another conceptual approach to austerity. In doing so, it seeks to understand more affirmative practices emerging from the 'messy middle ground' (May and Cloke 2014), and which are co-constituted by these understandings.

Accordingly, this chapter offers a conceptual framework through which to register and understand actual CAT practice as it continues to emerge. I ask how we might understand CAT through narratives of state retrenchment, unevenness, and notions of care and social infrastructure. I propose that through recourse to ambivalence we might hold in tension these critical perspectives as complementary frameworks to provide nuanced understandings, and to begin to acknowledge the plurality of CAT practice without closing it down through the application of a singular theoretical perspective.

This review draws on a wide body of distinct literatures. It connects to a broad range of geographical literature, considers the handful of academic peer reviewed papers that refer directly to CAT and engages with the small body of CAT practitioner and advocacy literature. I propose that 'practitioner' literature here is useful term to distinguish work produced outside the academy but nonetheless has value as 'expert' knowledge grounded in praxis.

## 2.2 Geographies of austerity

Contemporary use of the notion of austerity has emerged from policy responses to the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis. The 2007 mortgage crisis in the US led to the 2008 international banking sector crisis provoking state-intervention which in turn led to a sovereign debt crisis. Subsequently, and based on an argument to reduce significant nation state budget deficits, governments in the USA and many European countries introduced severe fiscal austerity policies (Schonig and Schipper 2016; Gray et al. 2020). For Donald et al. (2014), this has led to shrinking state budgets based on several forms of economic, social and often political restructuring. In economic terms, austerity refers to the measures implemented to reduce state debt including wide ranging spending cuts by reducing labour costs, increasing taxes, and the privatisation and reconfiguration of public services and the welfare state (Whitfield 2013; Donald et al. 2014).

For many scholars the global scale of the financial crisis and its impact on nation states has positioned economic austerity as an extension of a longstanding project of the neoliberalisation of the state. Through the lens of neoliberalism, understood as a loose 'open ended and contradictory process of regulatory restructuring' (Peck 2010, p. 7) that 'seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market... [leading to the] withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision' (Harvey 2005, p. 3), economic austerity can be seen as a broader structural move to rearrange the state. These broad propositions are grounded and given nuance in Lobao

et al.'s (2018) more recent discussion of contemporary austerity and changes to the state. Lobao et al. (ibid) set out the notion of the 'shrinking state' where the withdrawal of finance, underfunded social programmes, a reduced public sector, public asset sales and privatisation are potentially eroding customary state roles of intervention in economic regulation, redistribution and as an institution in local and regional affairs.

Austerity is not merely the diminishment of the state's role in financing welfare but is part of a change in the social contract between the government and citizens where the public sector is in retreat (Gray et al. 2020). Austere fiscal policies that see the restructuring of public services and incorporation of the public in their operation resemble Tickell and Peck's (2003) wider macro analysis of neoliberal regulatory reforms, which include the destructive roll-back of inherited Keynesian-welfare structures and the creative roll-out of adaptability in urban governance. This process provides an explanation of the forces behind the privatisation of public services that some see as ultimately engaged 'in order to restore the conditions in which profitable investment and capital accumulation can take place' (Latham 2017, p. 2). As has been discussed, this shift in public service provision is not new (Kenny et al. 2017; Lobao et al. 2018), but the scale of change demands renewed attention (Latham 2017). This meta narrative can offer a powerful explanatory overview of current changes to the state through fiscal tightening.

At the same time there are calls to engage with the situated contexts of these CAT practices. This partly acknowledges that totalising theories play out differently in practice (Harvey 2005), and that any project with globalising reach will be spatially differentiated (Davies and Blanco 2017). Neoliberalism is said to vary, and urban scholarship is highly sensitive to geo-political variety, captured in the notion of 'variegated neoliberalism' developed by Peck et al. (2013), which reflects earlier notions of the importance of 'contextual embeddedness' (Brenner and Theodore 2002a) in the study of changes to the state. This attention to actual unfolding practices of CAT is pertinent in the context of fiscal austerity where scrutiny of the nuance of its local impacts reveals a better understanding of its consequences.

Concern for a finer-grained understanding of austerity has at least two dimensions. On one level, this is linked to broader geographical understandings of the rescaling of the state, where central government pursues policies to help the private sector and reduce spending whilst offloading responsibility for services and local policies onto sub- and intra- national state institutions (Brenner 2004; Lobao et al. 2018). On another level, geographers are registering and documenting the spatial and situated variations of austerity in a shift to scrutinise the sub- and intra- national, regional and local impact of cuts in Britain.

Austerity appears to have diminished the economic power of the local state through national and local policies. For Latham (2017) this involves revealing how cuts to local government were earlier and harder than those affecting the rest of the public sector. Work by Amin Smith et al. (2016a; 2016b) has registered several differences in the scale and distribution of cuts including i) between home nations, where cuts to service spending in England has been at 22 per cent, compared to 15 per cent in Scotland and 11.5 per cent in Wales, and ii) between local authorities, where cuts to the central government funding of councils in England have most affected grant-reliant local authorities who tend to serve poorer communities (See Hastings et al. 2015; 2017), iii) between local services at local authority level, where there are variations between local service sectors where for example spending on planning and development, housing, culture and related services has been cut by more than 40 per cent on average, while spending on social services has been cut by about 10 per cent on average (Amin Smith et al. 2016a; 2016b). Thus, this work in drawing out these differences begins to reveal the unevenness of the impact of austerity and the resulting disparities and inequities reinforced and perpetuated by the deepest cuts.

Scrutiny of the variegated nature of austerity is registered through the ways in which local government has responded to fiscal tightening. Empirical studies of urban governance reveal the impacts of international and national narratives on management (Meegan et al. 2014), the ease by which austerity measures have been accepted by urban governments (Fuller and West 2017), and the behaviour of local authority agents in implementing austerity governance (Fuller 2017). This work furthermore attends to the spatial, socio-economic unevenness in the implementation and local rationales behind national austerity policies.

A central theme of the study of economic austerity has been its uneven geographical impact. This is exemplified by the work of Gray and Barford (2018), in their fine-grained analysis of changes to local authority budgets that highlight the substantial variations between local authorities in terms of funding, local tax-base, fiscal resources, assets, political control, service need and demographics that serve to exacerbate territorial injustice (See Hastings et al. 2015; Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Hastings et al. 2017). This unevenness relates to the disproportionate impact of austerity on the poor, the vulnerable, the young, the old and racialised communities (Donald et al. 2014; Lobao et al. 2018). This inequity has been empirically demonstrated in studies that show the differentiated spatial impact of state-level cuts to welfare. Beatty and Fothergill's (2013; 2014; 2016b; 2016a) ongoing work to document central-government changes to national welfare show how these austere corrections have an unequal impact on areas that have pre-existing levels of poverty, classified as areas with high levels of deprivation. In general terms welfare reforms since

2010 affect deprived areas most and in doing so are 'widening the gap in prosperity between the best and worst local economies across the UK' (Beatty and Fothergill 2014, p. 77). This work demonstrates the value of spatially locating austerity policies where their impacts are contextualised.

Additionally, the unevenness of austerity is being recognised at the micro-scale in new literature that focuses on the experience, feelings and negotiations of austerity embodied and contested across the varied spatial tapestries of everyday life (Strong 2020). Therefore, through scrutiny of the distribution of the spatial and social geographies of austerity understandings of its disproportionate impact on pre-existing vulnerable communities are being revealed.

### 2.3 Community Infrastructure and CATs

One of the recent ways that geographers have conceptualised austerity is through the study of the micro-social geographies of community infrastructures. In my study 'community infrastructures' refers to buildings and land where communal activity and a range of associated local services take place. In attending to such infrastructures scholars have focused on the emotional costs of austerity and loss. Conceptually, this emergent literature addresses the localised affective geographies of loss as part of a wider project to reveal the psychological and emotional impacts of austerity. For example, Hitchen and Shaw (2019) set out how, through the loss of community infrastructure austerity, is related to depression. They discuss how the closure of community infrastructure shrinks our worlds of togetherness and interaction where the loss of these spaces is 'suffocating the world of its public vitality – constricting its spaces, encounters, and temporalities' (Hitchen and Shaw 2019, p. 3), and damaging our mental health as 'our existence collapses into tighter and more suffocating shells' (Hitchen and Shaw 2019, p. 4). Additionally, in relation to the threat of closure of children's and youth services, Horton (2016) explores the anxieties induced through the anticipated futures of loss through austerity. This work registers how the emotional impact of the anticipation of loss of funding cuts to services has wide ranging consequences and can be more troubling than the impacts of the funding cuts themselves (Horton 2016). Consequently, these social geographies begin to reveal the different ways in which multiple impacts of austerity are embedded in everyday experience.

Loss is substantively linked to the physical closure of community infrastructure. This includes many different land-use typologies from libraries (Robinson and Sheldon 2019; Hitchen 2021), to youth centres (Horton 2016), Sure Start centres for childcare and pre-school education (Jupp 2013; 2017), museums (Rex 2018) and parks (Ernwein 2021). This community infrastructure is

lost in a physical sense as local authorities dispose of these spaces through sale, closure, and/or where they are leased to third parties and state control of their operation is relinquished. Loss can be direct through sale and/or closure. The leasing of assets to third parties can lead to indirect loss through forms of privatisation. Some scholars have claimed that leasing assets to large scale national social enterprises can be viewed as a form of privatisation where these entities tend to seek profit and can overlook local needs (Findlay-King et al. 2017). Loss for communities is also implicitly linked to savings for local authorities who no longer have to run, maintain and staff these facilities. Thus, loss comes in different forms and may have direct relationships with fiscal austerity.

Within the context of the physical loss of the spaces of community infrastructure through which the emotional impacts of austerity are being registered, I suggest that CAT presents a different austerity process. Through CAT, community buildings and land survive the withdrawal of funding by the state where they are taken on by local communities. This form of community action simultaneously mitigates and contributes to austerity by keeping the lights on and the doors open whilst taking on responsibility for their staffing, running, upkeep and provision of services for community benefit.

#### Existing CAT literatures

Although largely absent, existing CAT literatures nonetheless present different understandings of CAT practice which can be broadly understood to be caught in a schism between providing technical fixes to correct the fiscal and policy architecture of CAT and totalising accounts of resistance to austerity. The literature of the 'technical fix' refers to a positioning of the problematic of CAT as requiring appropriate architectures of economic support, funding and policy instruments to support CAT practice and brings benefits to communities. This approach is developed in perhaps the most comprehensive study of CAT to date led by urban planner Brendan Murtagh (Murtagh and Goggin 2014; Murtagh 2015; Murtagh and Boland 2019). This body of work positions CAT as linked to a wider move to promote the social economy and concern over how to create supportive legislative frameworks and skills to develop third-sector social enterprises as an alternative to public or private provision (Murtagh and Goggin 2014). For Murtagh and Boland (2019) the potential of CAT is evaluated as a way to challenge both logics of capitalism and to create alternative modes of accumulation and economic organisation. As such, it is positioned as an important tool for community work, skills development and the development of meaningful alternative economics, as an opportunity rather than merely serving to reposition the sector around neoliberal politics (Murtagh and Goggin 2014). Through empirical



work, based on CAT practice in Northern Ireland, Murtagh (2015) suggests that improvements to policy, funding incentives, subsidies and support is needed to realise the potential of CAT to support social economics and local circuits of wealth creation and retention. Although CAT entangles the participant community groups with the market, money and ethics, it is suggested that these can be addressed through a distinct set of skills, resources and relationships to negotiate state restructuring in more progressive ways (Murtagh and Boland 2019). In this way, this work therefore positions CAT as collaboration with state policies and politics suggesting that focusing on and identifying technical fixes to the fiscal and policy architectures of CAT has the potential to offer opportunities to participating community groups.

Associated to this approach is a body of largely apolitical practitioner literature. Here rather than seeking wider technical amendments to improve disposal, many reports offer motivational guidance on 'best practices' in order to inform public bodies and community groups interested in asset management (COSS 2016; Ystadau Cymru 2019a; Community 2020). Nonetheless, there is an underlying assumption that engaging in CAT is a tool through which assets might be saved from closure due to economic austerity (Locality 2018), reinforcing CAT as a collaborative approach.

This approach in turn is linked to ideas of CAT as mitigation of austerity measures. This work more explicitly engages with CAT practice as a response to state retrenchment in order to avoid the closure and loss of local assets, thereby legitimising such practice. For Jane Wills (2020) CAT is a useful tool to respond to austerity at local authority level. In their pragmatist orientated participatory social inquiry into large-scale transfer of assets to town and parish councils by Cornwall Council, Wills (2020) actively engages in CAT practice to smooth its implementation and securing of community infrastructure. Wills (2020) highlights the role of public institutions in mediating responses to austerity, where state rescaling takes place through 'institutional switching' based on a willingness of the local authority to use local councils to take on libraries and community centres, thus 'switching' assets between these existing institutions. In doing so, Wills (2020) positions CAT as a tool that can be used to mitigate the withdrawal of local government from supporting these assets by passing on responsibility for them to local councils, the bottom tier of the state.

Conceptually the work outlined above aims to address the technical challenges of practice and is distinct from the positioning of CAT as a form of resistance to austerity. Resistance sees the top-down policy of CAT as something to be exploited where an activist approach to practice is taken. Stella Darby's (2016) ethnography of CAT practice bears witness to how a community group

deploys a range of tactics to engage with but also opposing the state. This group is shown to access resources, facilities and skills, whilst reflexively negotiating the management of a community centre in an attempt to hold on to self-defined core values of equality, collectively, empowerment, sustainability, respect and care in resistance to co-option into a state-sanctioned market based economic paradigm (Darby 2016). Darby (ibid) calls this 'dynamic resistance' firmly locating these actions as politically aware and in opposition to, yet in addition engages with, coercive state demands.

These first attempts and beginnings to develop scholarly understandings of CAT reveal several distinct omissions in this literature which I suggest take three forms. Firstly, there is little understanding of the spatiality of CAT; secondly, there is a lack of attention to how local authorities negotiate CAT practice; and thirdly there is a lack of understanding of the social geographies of the spaces of CAT.

Firstly, in relation to the spatiality of CAT, scholars are yet to register and document the spatially and temporally situated practices of CAT more widely. This contrasts with the detailed work to register and document the geographies and spatial impacts of austerity mentioned above. This oversight may partly be due to the emergent nature of CAT and where current understandings of its practice are reliant on highly contingent sets of individual case studies and/or due to lack of official data on the numbers and location of CATs. To date, in academic literature CAT practice is broadly represented by a set of individual case studies across Northern Ireland (Murtagh 2015), or in England by individual cases (Darby 2016) or across a local authority (Wills 2020). Collectively this work does not provide sufficient information for an exploration of the relational geographies between cases given its limited geographic extent and/or the incommensurability of the timescales under consideration. Arguably even Murtagh's (2015) comparatively extensive work on CAT in Northern Ireland offers limited possibilities for generalisation, not least because it is administered centrally by the Northern Ireland Executive but also where discussion of its unevenness centres around differences in practice between religious groups in a highly segregated society (Murtagh and Boland 2019). As a result, existing scholarship provides only piecemeal spatial coverage of CAT practice.

This scholarly work is supplemented by a range of practitioner reports and best practice advice based on handpicked CAT exemplars that focus on limited individual cases studies and/or local authorities (COSS 2016; Ystadau Cymru 2019a; Community 2020). As with the academic literature mentioned above this does not add up to a comprehensive account of CAT. Practitioner literature moreover offers a largely aspatial account of CAT. This is perhaps best exemplified in a recent

survey of CAT practice in England (Locality and Co-op 2020). Although this survey documented the scale of CAT across this home nation and identified the differences in the numbers of CAT at regional level, there was no discussion of this variation beyond an idea that higher rates of CAT were driven by higher rates of CAT guidance (Locality and Co-op 2020). The relationships between the landscapes of CAT and their wider sub-national economic, social and political contexts where practice is emerging was not addressed. Additionally, associated practitioner literature on contemporary community asset ownership that has mapped this practice does little to advance understandings of CAT. A recent report on the economic outcomes and sustainability of assets in community ownership did not separately identify CAT practice (Archer et al. 2019), combining disposal with assets that have been in community ownership for decades, thereby frustrating any temporal reading of the emergence of the specific practice of CAT.

At the same time, there is no official data on the numbers and locations of CAT, with the exception of an unrealised expectation of a new register of CAT in Scotland. In Scotland, under 'Part 5 Asset Transfer Requests' of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, relevant authorities are required to publish details of requests for asset transfer, including those that have been granted. However, a recent report for the Scottish Government has suggested that since the beginning of reporting in 2017-18, the information published by authorities is not standardised and often omits detailed information (McMillan et al. 2020). Therefore, work needs to be done to address official accounts of CAT.

These recent attempts to quantify CAT demonstrate the appetite for an understanding of the scale of CAT practice, whilst there remains a lack of knowledge around the spatialities of CAT or any temporal understanding of how it has emerged. This raises two important interrelated questions that detailed granular knowledge of practice can answer; i) How has CAT emerged over time since the implementation of fiscal austerity? and, ii) how is it distributed across space?

Secondly, there has been a lack of attention to how local government negotiates and translates CAT practice where there is an implicit assumption that councils engage in CAT simply as a cost-cutting exercise. This perpetuates an overtly economic rationale that is unlikely to play out in actual CAT practices. The work of Wills (2020) does offer some evidence of how institutional innovation is developed at local authority level in Cornwall. Yet given the contingent nature of practice, where it is recognised that understandings must be attuned to the highly contextualised outcomes of CAT practice (Murtagh 2015), more empirical exploration of the motivations and local rationales employed by local authorities is necessary. Recognition of CAT at local authority

level would serve to contribute to the extensive literatures on how local government has responded to economic austerity, to which CAT is both a product and a response.

Thirdly, there has been a lack of attention to the social geographies of the spaces that have been transferred. Although some previous work has focused on individual case studies, these are orientated towards specific goals. For example, the work of Murtagh (2015) mobilises case studies to account for local legislative and funding challenges including financial sustainability, the risks that assets might be captured for economic gain and a warning not to place unreasonable burdens through expectations around social development in Northern Ireland where communities are highly segregated. Darby's (2016) single case study account focuses on the community group management of a community centre. Similarly, practitioner literature moreover presents a number of individual case studies, but these are positioned to advise on good operational practices rather than reveal what these spaces are like (COSS 2016; Ystadau Cymru 2019a; Community 2020). As such there exists a large gap in academic understandings of the lived experiences of the people who are running and using these spaces. What are the emotional and social geographies within CAT? Who is running these spaces, who is using them, and what do they think these spaces are for?

## 2.4 Critical geographical perspectives on CAT

Both the omissions in knowledge around CAT practice and the relative absence of scholarly literature raise questions over how we might approach and frame conceptual understandings of practice. I suggest that to date CAT has an as yet unassigned nature within academia. In agreement with Murtagh (2015), I propose that as an emerging sector understandings of what CAT is for and how it is supported remain negotiable. I propose that CAT should not be solely understood through one dominant viewpoint and that framing of CAT practice remains up for wider consideration and debate. Therefore, I propose that the ambiguous nature of practice and its negotiability invites continuing open exploration of the politics and ethics of practice. This is partly based on a pragmatist approach to knowledge as plural and engaged that embraces rather than reconciles difference, otherness, opposition and contradiction (Barnes 2008), allowing the ambiguous nature of CAT to be explored. I argue that engaging through open conceptual interpretations the diversity of practice may be registered and any reduction or closing down and narrowing of understandings of CAT avoided. As such this sub-section looks across a range of several conceptual perspectives through which different understandings of CAT can emerge. This includes a brief examination of the connections of CAT practice with theories of Marxist political

economy and governmentality, followed by a longer discussion of the notion of 'austerity localism' and its links with CAT.

### Political economy

Read through the lens of Marxist political economy CAT could be interpreted as yet another mechanism through which the state offloads public assets onto the community and private sectors. Viewed in this way CAT, represents one of the 'spatial strongholds of inherited Keynesian welfare structures' (Peck 2010, p. 26) experiencing state retrenchment through neoliberalism, a process described as a shift of the state away from public collective values to private and individualist ideals (Barnett 2005). Such an interpretation offers useful explanatory insight in bringing together an understanding of CAT as the result of an ideology that prioritises the workings of the state as primarily addressing global political economic forces and providing for the market whilst turning away from providing for its citizens (Harvey 2005). CAT operating at the local level could then be positioned in this way as leading transformations in the landscape of publicly owned and managed community infrastructure. Therefore, CAT becomes a microcosm and empirical manifestation of this meta narrative. However, recourse to Marxist political economy could reduce the scope of community action through CAT to one of subjugation. As Hughes (2019) underlines by setting out the two key concepts of structural Marxism – 1) structure conditions the potential for agency and, 2) the totality of capitalism as a whole way of life – this perspective could limit CAT to these concerns. Through Marxist political economy, I propose that there is little scope for the consideration of other activities and actions beyond the dominant rationality of capitalism which could lead to reductive understandings of CAT and to which pragmatism can offer – a fuller critique and justification of which I now set out below.

For many scholars a political economy lens, which can be broadly thought of as the study of the relationship between politics and the economy, is often grounded in meta narratives. Sheppard (2009) suggests that in geography a political economy approach is often employed as some variant of Marxist thought that seeks to explain, and often predict, how structural forces direct social processes. This places an emphasis on a way of thinking about the economy that although recognises that individual 'wants' can determine what happens in the market, behind these 'wants' stands an objective structure of reproduction that dominates the individual (Caporaso and Levine 1992). This domination, as suggested by Caporaso and Levine (1992), is used to justify a Marxist orientated reading of the political economy that focuses on the objective process of reproduction rather than on the subjective process of making choices.

Such an approach can be seen in the work of David Harvey (2004; 2005; 2006 [1982]) who has helped to establish the concept of neoliberalism as the leading rationale behind contemporary political economic practice. This approach to neoliberalism, first and foremost, proposes that human well-being can be best advanced variously through individual entrepreneurial freedoms, strong property rights, free markets, and free trade where the role of the state to create and reinforce an institutional framework to guarantee such practices (Harvey 2005). Harvey's (2005) neoliberalism is the hegemonic discourse that through the creative destruction (see also Black et al. 2009) of prior institutional frameworks and powers including divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, ways of life and thought. As such, neoliberalism values market exchange above all else and the logic of the market has become 'an ethic itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs' (Harvey 2005, p. 3). Harvey (2005) is highly critical of this approach to addressing the relationship between politics and the economy that proposes that the social good will be maximised through expanding the reach and frequency of market transactions and seeks to bring all human activity into the domain of the market.

In concrete terms, the impact of a neoliberal approach to the organisation of society in relation to public services has been well documented by critical scholars of neoliberalism (Harvey 2004; 2005; Peck 2010; 2012; Peck et al. 2013). By drawing on Harvey's (2005) conceptualisation and description of the outcomes of neoliberalisation a template to consider the economic and political dimensions of CAT is offered. For Harvey (2005) the main substantive achievement, and thus critique, of neoliberalism has been its redistribution of wealth rather than the generation of wider prosperity. This, Harvey (2005) argues, has been achieved through 'accumulation by dispossession' linked to Marxist ideas of accumulation practices including the commodification and privatisation of land and displacement of people; conversion of various collective property rights into private rights; suppression of rights to the commons; commodification of labour; suppression of other forms of production and consumption; the appropriation of assets; monetization of exchange and taxation; and the use of the credit system as a means of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2005). Such process can also be linked to practice of CAT.

'Accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey 2006 [1982]) comprises of four features: privatisation and commodification; financialization; the management and manipulation of crises, and finally; state redistribution. The first and last of which are most closely pertinent to the shift in management of public assets practiced through CAT. First, CAT might be considered as a form of privatisation and commodification. The commodification and privatisation of public assets has been a key indicator of neoliberalism. As Harvey (2005) argues the aim behind this move has been

to open new fields for capital accumulation in areas previously regraded as off limits to market forces. This has led to public utilities, welfare services, including social housing, education, health care and pensions, and public institutions have been privatised to some degree for rents from private property to be extracted for class-privileged domains (Harvey 2005). The justification given for the privatisation of assets lies in an idea that sectors formerly managed by the state must be turned over to the private sector, deregulated – freed from state interference. For neoliberals, privatisation and deregulation combined with competition does away with needless bureaucracy, increases efficiency and productivity, improves quality, and reduces costs, both directly to the consumer through cheaper commodities and services and indirectly through reduction of the tax burden (Harvey 2005). This is linked to commodification of public assets that attests to a belief that the market can best determine the allocation of resources to citizens for the wellbeing of society. Commodification assumes that the market works as a guide for all human action (Peck 2010).

Second, CAT might be considered as a form of state redistribution. For Harvey (2005) the neoliberal state employs redistributive policies to the benefit of private individuals, and disproportionately the upper classes, eschewing a redistributive system based on Keynesian views of the role of the state to intervene and manage the contradictions of capitalism to the benefit of the nation and its least well-off citizens (Sheppard 2009).

To further consider CAT as an ultra-local expression of ‘accumulation by dispossession’ the work of Tickell and Peck (2003) provides useful detail on how Harvey’s (2005; 2006 [1982]) broader ideas on the mechanisms of neoliberalism might be understood to manifest on the ground. Tickell and Peck’s (2003) reflection on the changing nature of neoliberalism documents how regulatory (re)forms have impacted on spatial relations and public services. In doing so, this work offers a useful framework through which CAT can be described. Drawing on these ideas CAT could be understood as an ultra-local act of neoliberalism under at least three categories, i) the roll-back of the state, ii) the marketisation of goods, and iii) privatisation. The transfer of public assets to community groups could be seen as a manifestation of the destructive ‘roll-back’ of the state and as a place-specific attack on inherited Keynesian-welfarist structures. Essentially where CAT operationalises the withdrawal of local government from the responsibility for the management, staffing and maintenance of small-scale public community land-based assets and services, it could be seen as facilitating a reduction in state support of community infrastructure linked to broader welfare cutbacks (Tickell and Peck 2003).

CAT could also be seen as a form of marketisation of previously uncommodified goods and/or services. Community groups taking on CAT are required to present a feasible business plan that demonstrates financial sustainability to secure a successful application to take on the management of the asset (Locality 2020). This effectively brings market values into an area, at least outwardly, previously financially supported by the state, and echoes a tenant of neoliberalism that 'the social good will be maximised by maximising the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human activity into the domain of the market' (Harvey 2005, p. 3). Turning public assets over to communities to manage as financially viable concerns is a further example of the neoliberalisation of the state. Where the state is committed to the 'pervasive naturalisation of market logics' (Peck and Tickell 2002, p. 394). Of course, there are limits to the explanatory rationale of marketisation. Community groups tend to operate under charitable status with an assumption that profit is driven back into the assets and its activities for community benefit rather than directed towards private individuals. Additionally, and as I will demonstrate with my empirical data, the local logics of CAT are not solely guided and/or restricted by economic concerns (e.g., chapter 6), thus somewhat undermining the idea that CAT might be wholly described by theory that is limited to such an explanation.

Additionally, understanding CAT as a neoliberal regulatory reform could also be evidenced through its relationship with privatisation. Here the process of CAT may not represent a clear and direct shift in the management of these spaces by private individuals for private gain (as outlined above), nonetheless CAT is a form of the enclosure of public assets for smaller 'community' units. Thus, through this reflection on the links between wider neoliberal processes and the practice of Community Asset Transfer provides a suggestive explanation of the rationale behind CAT, albeit tailored to its specific and highly contextual dimensions.

This divergence between CAT practice and neoliberal theory could be explained as evidence of the adaptability of neoliberalism in practice rather than as an abstract concept. Peck's (2010) scrutiny of neoliberalism is explicitly based on an understanding that it is a constantly 'evolving web or relays, routines, and relations... [where] neoliberalisation works in a range of settings... [requiring] analysis that seeks to travel with the neoliberalisation process' (Peck 2010, p. 34). As such, neoliberalism in action is always 'impure' or 'mongrel' by nature (Peck 2010). In addition, any theory that posits the primacy of the market above all other concerns will, in practice, face limits and/or corrections (For example see Polanyi 2001 [1944]). However, the real-world limits of the application of this grand narrative may also be indicative of a conceptual weakness whereby narrow applications of neoliberalism may serve only to reinforce ideas of neoliberalism to the exclusion of other possibilities. The risk of the Marxist political economy viewpoint is that



narrowly applied it only serves to reinforce pre-existing theoretical attempts to understand the world restricting understandings of the agency of community action to predefined notions of coercion without recourse to what is actually happening on-the-ground or acknowledgement of the possibilities of agency.

Warnings of the all-encompassing nature of a political economy lens based on critiques of neoliberalism have been raised. Janet Newman (2014) has set out some of the theoretical, political, and critical deficits of neoliberalism as an explanatory concept in relation to studies of local government in the UK. Newman (2014) points out that extensive scrutiny of the neoliberalisation of local government has generated fruitful analytical frameworks for understanding their transformation in the context of global economic and political forces (For example see Brenner and Theodore 2002b). However, she posits that in a crude form these approaches merely serve to depict the market as an invisible but potent force, which in turn serves to justify attempts to appease it further legitimising the subjugation of populations to economic logics (Newman 2014). In relation to political dimensions, the positioning of local government as victims of new global political-economic forces shut down opportunities to understand the existence of multiple and contrasting local ideological projects (Newman and Clarke 2009; Newman 2014). Finally, Newman (2014) calls for critical engagement in neoliberalism that recognises the work of local government that aligns disparate projects into seemingly cohesive entities, reconciles multiple scalar projects and regimes of funding, governance and policy making while balancing often ideological contradictions. Local authorities, for Newman (2014) are sites of contradiction and diversity between the legacies of, for example, municipal socialism or compassionate conservative alongside dominant neoliberal rationalities. Newman's (2014) approach suggests and calls for greater sensitivity to more complex and dynamic processes of transformation which positions local authorities as mediating neoliberalisation, rather than simply being subjected to such processes.

These ideas begin to point towards the possibility of agency which begin to transcend narrow use of the theoretical viewpoint of Marxist political economy. I suggest that such an approach can be further supported by the use of pragmatism in understanding the possibilities of the actions of local authorities, and similarly those of community groups taking on CAT. Pragmatism is an approach to knowledge that is not guided by doctrine, but rather takes a non-foundational approach to processes as they unfold. In a Deweyan sense this implies a 'certain logic of method... [where concepts] indispensable to any systematic knowledge be shaped and tested as tools of inquiry' and 'proposal for social action be treated as hypotheses... entertained subject to constant and well-equipped observation of the consequences they entail' (Dewey and Rogers 2016, p.

220). In other words, theory is used as a tool in research, and not as a totalising doctrine or immutable fact. Therefore, understandings of CAT would not be shoehorned into narrowly mobilised economic or structural rationales but rather set out where theoretical tools would be tested in-situ and importantly as part of a process of social action. Such an approach involves making discoveries of social processes based on evidence rather than recourse to views ‘frozen into absolute standards and [that] masquerade as eternal truths’ (Dewey and Rogers 2016, p. 221), and offers room for agency. Thus, in this way pragmatism offers an approach to engaging with social processes in a way that is not predetermined and avoids default to narrow applications of grand theory, or even registers of ‘impure’ theory in practice, whereby community action is reduced to subjugation.

### Governmentality

While a Marxist political economy lens may help to establish ‘what’ CAT represents and/or embodies – albeit problematically as outlined above – a different conceptual approach might otherwise reveal ‘how’ this shift in governance has occurred. I suggest that this could involve the use of the Foucauldian theoretical perspective of governmentality that could offer a reading of how CAT is part of a wider political discourse of austerity linked to neoliberalism and has evolved through the practice of this ideology across different levels of government.

Foucault’s concept of governmentality emerged in the 1970s as a historically specific analytical guide to understand and explain changes in modern statecraft from the time of ancient Greece to modern neoliberalisation (Lemke 2002; Lemke 2019). Lemke (2002) sets out how this concept brings together ideas around governing (*gouverner*) and modes of thought (*mentalité*), indicating that political rationalities underpin how the state approaches the governance of the population, and therefore these rationalities must be considered as part and parcel of its technologies of power. In addition, governmentality also recognises the problem of ‘government’ more widely to include problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household and religious observance, as well as direct management by the state (Lemke 2002). This relates to Foucault’s term ‘biopolitics’ which draws attention to a mode of power that operates through the administration of life itself through both individual and collective bodies, in relation to health, sanitation, procreation mental and physical capacities, etc. (Foucault 2003a in McKee 2009). As Häkli and Ruez (2020) suggest governmentality reveals a power that is not implemented simply by subjecting people to obey or conform to norms, i.e., ‘technologies of security’, but more subtly relies on strategies of normalisation or ‘technologies of self’ where forms of repression and constraint are practiced by self-regulating individuals. Thus,

governmentality might be broadly understood as a concept that both pays attention to how power is exercised through political rationalities, or political discourses, and the ways in which individuals and/or groups take on and perpetuate these ideas.

Governmentality has been used as a way for understanding power across urban studies to address shifts in changes to local government and public services under neoliberalism (Newman 2001; Clarke 2007) that could also be helpful for understanding CAT practice as one such change to state welfare provision. This body of work shows how power is exercised through multiple agencies and techniques demanding a response not only from individuals but also from various other collective bodies and institutions across the state-, (e.g., universities, public institutions), private- (corporations, businesses) and third sectors (charities and non-governmental-organisations). As such, neoliberalism can be seen as a new technique of government based on the re-organisation and transfer of the state's tasks to other individuals and groups, rather than the withdrawal of the state from its typical functions per se (Häkli and Ruez 2020). Neoliberalism then is not an end of state control but rather a shift and change in how control is achieved indirectly and through self-regulating individuals.

To sketch out the potential of governmentality in specific relation to CAT, I draw on Kim McKee's (2009) discussion of the analytical insights and explanatory power of the concept. McKee (2009) sets out four different analytical strengths of a governmentality approach that can bring the study of power to light. These can be categorised loosely as i) discourse, ii) self-governance, iii) productive power, and iv) non-normative.

First, 'discourse' centres on how modes of thought around political rationalities are made both practical and technical within specific organised practices that direct human conduct (McKee 2009). In other words, this suggests how the actions of individuals and/or groups are discursively based and generated through specific strategies and programmes. In this context an understanding of the shift in management of public assets could centre on how the actions of individuals and/or community groups are based around state discourses and manifest through the specific practice of CAT. For example, CAT is presented, in part, as a fiscal solution to help reduce the financial liability of local government through recourse to community groups (Quirk 2007). This problematic was underlined by the Conservative party following the 2008 financial crash (Conservative Party 2010), with the 'Big Society' promoting the increased participation of civil society in local service provision as a means of reducing the fiscal burden of local government. Through these discourses political ideologies become transformed into action by individuals engaging in processes that have been set up to legitimise them (Lemke 2002).

This process also carries a moral dimension as it seeks to establish what people should do whilst assuming that what people do can be directed (see also Rose 1999). CAT is linked to an idea that everyone should contribute to society to help address the national debt (Conservative Party 2010) which explicitly positions reliance on community action and volunteering as part of a wider moral culture to build the 'good society' (Etzioni 2000). This discourse that promotes charity and volunteering, of which CAT is intimately bound, may be considered to be a technology of the intentional state to justify the offloading community infrastructure onto communities on the basis that this work is part of a wider civic duty.

Second, 'self-governance' emphasises an aspect of governmentality that goes beyond analysis of the institutions or political power of the state. This is related to Foucault's (Foucault 2003b in McKee 2009) 'art of governing' or 'conduct of conduct' where conduct refers to any attempt to direct human behaviour towards a particular goal (Dean 2010). This is based on a wide reading of government where the state is only one authority amongst many where individuals are subject not only to domination by external actors but also are active in their own government (McKee 2009). This can be seen in the ethical obligations that individuals are being expected to take on including self-esteem, social responsibility, empowerment and exercising sovereignty which cut across different fields of social policy. For example, Cruikshank (2019) writes of how building self-esteem is a technology of self-government for evaluating and acting upon ourselves – where we exercise power on ourselves so that the state does not have to. This notion of self-governance, also allied to ideas of empowerment and responsabilisation, is interesting in the context of CAT as it allows for the consideration of the remote manipulation of individuals by the state whose intention is to bring in community groups to manage local services. Thus, individuals and community groups act through their own subjectivities which in the case of CAT could be argued to have been moulded by the state.

Additionally, 'self-governance' can also be seen specifically in the neoliberalisation of care, where care is i) positioned as personal responsibility, ii) is a problem that is solved through the market, and iii) where the family becomes the proper locus of care, and not the state (Tronto 2017). As such, individuals become active and self-sustaining rather than passive recipients of state assistance (Clarke 2005). Additionally, McKee (2009) reports that commentaries on neoliberalism have underlined how endeavours to devolve autonomy and responsibility from the state to civil society represent a form of 'regulated freedom' where the subject's capacity for action is used as a political strategy to secure the political ends of the government. While much of the language here relates to individuals, this mobilisation of responsibility away from the state is also related to

communities which can be seen in austerity discourses surrounding cuts to welfare services (See Newman and Clarke 2009), and is highly relevant for CAT as many of the sites also provide local services. As such CAT considered in this way is understood as an intentional state form of welfare retrenchment.

Third, 'productive power' refers to a perspective on power that is not merely repressive and negative but is also exercised through the production of discourse, knowledge, pleasure and thus need to be considered as fundamentally productive (Foucault 2003c in McKee 2009). For McKee (2009) this alludes to the intimate nature of power understood as the management of possibilities and potential to structure the actions of others in contrast to negative and repressive acts of coercion and/or violence (McKee 2009). In this way governmentality is not about resistance to oppression but rather a political strategy whereby all actors exercise power. Such an approach may find support from community members who are involved in CAT and who do not position their work as resistance to the state, however this may overlook power imbalance and exposes what is perhaps a weakness of governmentality which is also present in the fourth and final analytical insight presented by McKee (2009).

Fourth, the 'non-normative' aspect of governmentality does not offer moral judgements about good and democratic government (McKee 2009). Thus, governmentality would not offer guidance on how CAT should be governed but rather focuses on describing how this particular form of governance operates. Both 'productive power' and 'non-normative' aspects of governmentality provoke particular challenges for understandings of CAT. Without offering a critical approach or simply engaging in observation to provide a descriptive account of how CAT is practiced, governmentality risks overlooking the potential of academic inquiry to experiment and advance social organisation in a productive, and more progressive, way and inadequate in demonstrating how resistance is actually possible (McKee 2009).

McKee (2009) sets out some of the limitations of the contemporary use of governmentality which have at least three implications for the study of CAT. One, there has been a disregard for empirical reality where there is an overreliance discourse sourced from documents as opposed to material evidence and focus on the more specific and concrete 'art of governing' (McKee 2009). Related to this governmentality has tended to conflate thought and practice giving priority to abstract texts rather than attending to how particular outlooks or rules play out in their local contexts (McKee 2009). This is further discussed in Barnett's (2005) critique of the strategic intentionality given to the state; plus, the ways in which governmentality has been deployed to shore up Marxist perspectives of the state, Barnett argues, have too often engaged in deterministic discourses that

are ultimately politically unproductive. In the case of CAT this would assume that austerity and neoliberalism are the sole drivers of CAT practice overlooking other politics on the ground and warns against leaning on grand narratives as totalising explanations of this process. This would be a fundamental difficulty in a study of CAT as many different approaches and discourses are mobilised at ground level – many of which are at odds with state narratives.

Two, McKee (2009) outlines the critique of inattention to social difference where the complexities of social location are ignored by assuming that power falls equally over all ignoring social inequalities linked to race, class and gender. This is a key issue in relation to CAT and is central to questions over who is participating in CAT where my thesis explores broader understandings of the characteristics of the geographical communities involved (See chapter 4 Uneven geographies of CAT in times of austerity) to understandings of the community members involved at local level (See chapter 6 Austerity, ambivalence, and care: an ethnography of CAT).

Third, governmentality offers an immersive and all-encompassing mode of power that people cannot escape and thus offers little movement for the observance of a politics of resistance. Foucault is accused of failing to provide an account of how resistance is possible offering only pessimism and lack of normative guidance (McKee 2009). Barnett (2005) has also voiced dissatisfaction with instrumental uses of governmentality that lead towards the intentionality of the state. For Barnett (2005) the apparent reconciliation of a political economy analysis of neoliberalism with a post structural analysis of governmentality has served to compound the strategic intentionality of the state by supposing that its intentions are either automatically realised or contested and resisted. Barnett (2005) argues that this has relegated agency to a residual effect which either chooses to impose or resist such actions promoting a two-dimensional understanding of political power. While they offer a consoling image of how the world works in their simplistic reiteration of the idea that liberalism privileges the market and individual self-interest, they provide little assistance in thinking about how best to balance equally compelling imperatives to respect pluralistic difference and enable effective collective action. Barnett argues that neither approach is able to acknowledge the proactive role that 'long-term rhythms of socio-cultural change can play in reshaping formal practices' (2005, p. 7). The value of a study of the technologies of power of CAT without the possibility of hope through resistance is both empirically and conceptually limited. The idea that CAT represents another facet of an overwhelming trajectory towards a market led and individualised organisation of society offers little scope for other politics to emerge (Newman 2014), and it also does disservice to those who are working on-the-ground offering care and are engaged in acts that in some cases do and could go on to challenge top-down power.

McKee (2009) stresses that while Foucault's original work does provide the conceptual apparatus to engage with these issues it has been its (re)appropriation by 'secondary commentators' that has introduced these shortcomings. This points towards dissatisfaction with the way in which these conceptual theories are being used, rather than a dissatisfaction with the theories themselves. Nonetheless, these critiques represent important drawbacks to the way in which governmentality has been used and raises questions on the suitability of the adoption of this theoretical framework.

In contrast, a pragmatic turn to CAT may offer some solutions to this approach. Pragmatism takes a non-foundational context driven approach to knowledge where understanding social processes is based on evidence (Dewey and Rogers 2016), and thus avoids disregard for empirical reality and overreliance on totalising discourses. While governmentality has been criticised for its inattentiveness to social difference, so too has pragmatism been critiqued as being a-political in the sense that it overlooks social justice and politics of hope (Denzin 2010). However, while this challenge to governmentality has been refuted by arguments based on the value of critical thought for its own ends, i.e., it does not engage in solutions, or that as an approach it is explicitly limited (McKee 2009), in contrast pragmatism is politically involved in practice, is driven by real-world problematics and is embedded in the political outlooks and belief systems that we bring to research (See section 3.2 knowing CAT for a fuller discussion of critiques of pragmatism as a-political). Finally, pragmatism can recognise the agency of individual action and thus acknowledge the possibility of resistance – or at least does not discount the possibility of agency. This can be seen in pragmatism's recognition of transactions between government rationalities and public collective identities understood as shared values which are both the raw material of politics and an essential component of the state – as set out in Dewey's idea of the function of the public and its relationship to the state (Caporaso and Levine 1992). Dewey envisions the public as in a permanent state of possibility in the sense that they cannot be defined a priori, but rather as emergent from groups and individuals that come together in the service of problem solving (Dewey and Rogers 2016). Thus, pragmatism offers an openness to dialogue and possibility.

The usefulness of pragmatism contrasts to, admittedly narrowly applied, approaches of governmentality where the technologies of governing conspire to realise the objectives of the state and where individuals are subject to 'technologies of self', or where a Marxist political economy lens offers an equally totalising account of action given its insistence on the predominance of economic forces in the organisation of society. Further discussion of the value of pragmatism is discussed below (see chapter 3 methodology below).

## Austerity localism

Attending to the context of CAT, I suggest, relates understanding of CAT practice as part and parcel of wider national policies and politics. This involves consideration of CAT under the relatively new concept of 'austerity localism', which can offer a contextual understanding of CAT based on a political economy approach. Featherstone et al.'s (2012) definition of 'austerity localism' is based on a critique of the use of localism by the state as a discursive tool through which to establish an 'anti-state' and 'anti-public' narrative to implement 'roll-back' neoliberalism. They describe how the shift in political narrative towards localism that came under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010-2015) was 'a direct challenge to state intervention, regulation and the public sector to create a right-wing restructuring of Britain' (Featherstone et al. 2012, p. 177). This understanding draws on a wider body of work that has sought to contest localism as part of a wider structural process designed to depoliticise the local and use it to reorganise the public sector.

Localism entered the political agenda through the then Prime Minister David Cameron's 'Big Society' narrative as a response to the 2008 financial crisis. For the Conservatives, Britain was facing financial ruin, a frayed social fabric and a political system that had betrayed the people (Conservative Party 2010). The Conservatives response was to encourage citizens to take an active role in civil society and to take responsibility for themselves and in doing so would help to reduce the national debt. Part of this agenda was formalised in legislation with the 2011 Localism Act. For some scholar's localism represented an opportunity, a 'shift in policy making and practice to decentralise political power towards local institutions and local people' (Wills 2016, p. 7), a way to address disillusionment with mainstream politics (Wills 2015), and a response to a genuine desire for greater participation in decision-making (Chwalisz 2015). This localist discourse links to CAT through the Conservative party manifesto which set out a vision for grant-funded voluntary sector organisations being able to earn a competitive return for providing public services to take 'over local amenities such as parks and libraries that are under threat' (Conservative Party 2010, p. 38). Therefore, CAT could be seen as a local practice through which this policy could be manifested.

As the localism agenda has become incorporated into public and political life it has attracted criticism from both academics and activists. On one level, there has been distrust in the intentions of this form of localism. Tait and Inch (2015) point out the deeply ambiguous political constructs of 'the local' and call for the need to explore how the affective and morally charged dimensions of localizing projects fit within broader ideological frameworks. There is concern that localism is



merely an articulation of longstanding traditions of conservative political thought arguing for a revived and enlarged civil society as a response to the free market and oversized state (Blond 2010). As such, it provides a vehicle for further evolution of the neoliberal project (Levitas 2012; Griggs et al. 2014).

Austerity challenges the politically 'neutral' rhetoric of policy and can be seen as an indicator of wider structural processes designed to depoliticise the local and use it to reorganise the public sector (Featherstone et al. 2012). This political economic viewpoint is supported by authors who see austerity not only as a justification for spending cuts but also as an excuse to shrink the state (Taylor-Gooby 2012; Newman 2014). Concurrently, through scrutiny of actual practices of localism taking place, scholars reveal the contradictory nature of the offer of more freedom for local communities whilst lacking institutional support from the state to realise these aims, placing doubts on the ability of localist policies to meet their democratic aims. Lowndes and Pratchett's (2012) review of the Conservative-led coalition's 2011 localism policies argues that while localism policy does incorporate a commitment to deliver a radically different form of local governance, budget cuts and the removal of local partnerships are likely to constrain efforts at furthering participatory governance. In studies of localism in action at local authority level attempts to create new participatory public service arrangements are seen to be restricted by austerity. In one case potentially coercive demands are seen to be placed on local citizens running the risk of a return to hierarchical forms of governance (Penny 2016). In another case, responsibilities for cuts to services are offloaded onto local citizens through participatory budgeting dispersing accountabilities rather than focusing on outcomes (Ahrens and Ferry 2015). This work suggests the likelihood of financial constraints frustrating the promise of devolving power in practice.

Many scholars supporting the notion of austerity localism largely focus attention on the role of the state, through national administrative bodies and sub-national state institutions such as local authorities. However, there is a long tradition of academics following a political economy path in scrutinising the role of citizens in engagement with government policies. In the context of neoliberalism this has taken a moral turn where academics have castigated communities involved in what they define as market forms of governance as 'little platoons' of neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell 2002). In this way not only the political aims of the state are put in question but also the individual acts of many citizens who are portrayed as collaborators co-opted into neoliberalism.

Although 'localism' has substantially fallen away from British political vocabulary it is still relevant. I suggest that Tait and Inch's (2015) threefold argument around the value in continuing to examine 'localism' still stands today. Firstly, Tait and Inch's (ibid) point that localism continues to

be a useful concept to help explain a process of economic reform which has been framed as a manifestation of neoliberalism remains practically relevant, as demonstrated in my discussion of the literature above. Secondly, their proposal that the local is a recurrent theme in urban theory and practice and as such is important for future policy discussion (Tait and Inch 2015) appears to be in the process of being realised. As discussed above in the introduction, very recent moves by the government to support localism can be seen in the launch of a new £150 million community ownership fund for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which additionally explicitly encourages communities to take ownership of assets that are at risk of being lost to the community (HM Government 2021), and is therefore likely to further promote CAT. Additionally, there is a resurgence of the ideal of communities and families which is held up by conservative thinkers as local units through which society should be organised (Kruger 2021). Thirdly, localism has been instrumental in the development of earlier policy reforms that are now in force (Tait and Inch 2015). Additionally, the idea of localism has not gone away. Advocates for the localism agenda, such as national development trust organisations, continue to lobby in support of localist policy, e.g., through the 'Commission on the Future of Localism'. This commission argues that the 'fundamental shift of power promised by the Localism Act 2011 has not yet been achieved' (Locality 2017a, p. 20), and continues to promote the localist project.

Similarly, although 'austerity' has also recently fallen from political parlance, it too is still relevant. In October 2018, the then Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May pledged to bring austerity to an end (Stewart 2018). However this has followed a decade of austerity policies with scholars arguing that austerity endures and continues to be endured (Denning et al. 2019), where the legacies of austerity remain and merit ongoing scrutiny (van Lanen and Hall 2021). Today we are still living with the legacies of austerity through the continued reduction in state fiscal support, not least for local governments and national welfare provision (Beatty and Fothergill 2016b) of which CAT, as a way for local authorities to reduce their fiscal commitments (Quirk 2007) stands as one example.

What role austerity might take in any future balancing of budget deficits and debt remains an unanswered/unanswerable question at this time. Given that the state response to Covid-19 has pushed government borrowing to levels not seen previously in the UK in peacetime (Young et al. 2020), and where economic crises very often engender austerity (Lobao et al. 2018), austerity may not yet be dead. While the current Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has suggested publicly that any government response that went back, at least discursively, to austerity would be a 'mistake' (Simons 2020), how this and future governments might address this new economic juncture remains unclear. At risk of speculation, I suggest at the very least there is highly unlikely

to be a reversal of the cuts already undertaken in the name of austerity and as set out above. As such, society will continue to both suffer the continued impacts of previously applied austerities and the continued implementation of some of its associated policies of which CAT is part and parcel.

In this sub-section I have discussed how political economy, governmentality and austerity localism offer the potential to frame understandings of CAT. Long established meta narratives or the newer contextual notion of 'austerity localism' offer useful understandings of CAT practice. However, I have suggested that in recent years geographers have become increasingly dissatisfied with the way in which this framing has been interpreted. Barnett's (2005) critique of the strategic intentionality given to the state; plus the ways in which governmentality has been deployed to shore up Marxist perspectives of the state, he argues, have too often engaged in deterministic discourses that are ultimately politically unproductive. McKee (2009) agrees that contemporary use of governmentality has been limited by overlooking empirical reality and prioritising abstract texts rather than attending to how practices and rules play out in their local contexts.

Calls to address these critiques of the contemporary deployment of both Marxist political economy and governmentality approaches centre on a renewed interest in the study of the detail of actual practices. There are calls for recognition of the variegated nature of the political economy (Newman 2014), where practice is recognised as always evolving (Harvey 2005).

To be clear, I want to supplement rather than dismiss the contributions that these perspectives can offer interpretations of CAT practice. Long established meta narratives, or the newer contextual notion of 'austerity localism' can offer useful understandings of the world. However, it is the often narrow and incomplete use of the political economy perspective that I seek to address. By focusing on the level of local authorities and in the spaces of community infrastructures other ideas around CAT are elicited. I suggest that dealing with different scales develops different notions around CAT. This can discourage the rehearsal of a priori takes on CAT as simply yet another mechanism that promotes retrenchment of the state for the benefit of the market, or as a site from which authoritarian power is simply enforced.

## 2.5 Grammars of analysis for CAT

One alternative approach to community action that can broaden otherwise narrow understandings is presented by the work of Gibson-Graham (2006; 2008). Gibson-Graham's call to engage in 'reading for difference rather than dominance' (2006, pp. xxxi -xxxii), where reading

for difference is an attempt to reach beyond a potentially reductive framing of community action and bears witness to other practices where, and if, they emerge. In this thesis, I understand this as a useful approach that offers a way to recognise local actions beyond those that might be defined as simply contributing to a political economy understanding of CAT. Additionally, it offers a framework that does not reject a political economy perspective, but rather one that seeks to fuse rather than dispense with this theoretical argument. In doing so, I hope to reveal some of the often-concealed geographies that are hidden and/or eclipsed by grand structural narratives.

This move to wrestle back the opportunity for social action that is wary of overpowering narratives is a longstanding theme in academic literatures that explore the opportunity for, and legitimacy of, local actions in the face of global power and struggles against capitalism (DeFilippis 2004; Larner and Craig 2005; Gibson-Graham 2006; 2008). Indeed, when considering the open ended and inconsistent processes of neoliberalism (Peck 2010), there is a case to be made for an approach that recognises space within the system to effect change (Milligan et al. 2008). Navigating a study of CAT in this way allows for an alternative politics to emerge, where it exists, or be sought; however, care should be taken not to simply rehearse the progressive debate.

At the same time, emphasis on social action rather than structure in localism could attract criticism that such a project is at best romantic and naive or more bluntly serves as an apology for neoliberalism that furthers the dissolution of public ownership (Harvey 2012; Peck 2013). There are two counters to this argument.

Firstly, there is a risk that adherence to the grand narrative risks abandoning communities as services collapse. Determining these spaces as reactionary where community groups are judged and castigated for their participation in this top-down practice (see discussion of the 'little platoons' of neoliberalism in section 2.4 above) writes off community action and discourages any further inquiry based on the belief that it only serves to further structural adjustments. This results in the abandonment of communities to their own devices and misses opportunities to academically engage in CAT as a site of experimentation which could provide the state lessons in how public services might be run. This raises questions around CAT. Rather than lamenting CAT as an end to the welfare state, what opportunities does this community, voluntary and third sector practice offer? On one level, this relates again to the work of Gibson-Graham (2006; 2008) who have pioneered ways of thinking about how more hopeful geographies might take a new look at reactionary agendas for more progressive ends. Gibson-Graham (2006) ask how we can be more empirically sensitive to what these spaces are doing, what people are doing and what opportunities arise.

Secondly, communities are countering the different challenges of neoliberalism and CAT may be one way, albeit paradoxically, for communities to take control and devise their own ways to provide community services and welfare. This might be considered as a type of conscious social resourcefulness and could allow for a new way of thinking about community action. Here community action, which may not be considered to be radical by the community itself, could embody progressive outcomes. For example, by changing the ways that assets are used and transforming them from places of restricted use and under investment CAT practices might offer otherwise open, more pluralistic realms of emergent publics that provide for a more diverse set of people. I suggest there is potential in the exploration and recognition of action in the middle ground rather than looking at polarised extremes.

With this in mind, I turn to consider different conceptual tools that have the potential to give voice to different grammars of CAT. Here I consider theories of pragmatic sociology as an approach that takes seriously the local motives and agency of those involved allowing for the (re)consideration of CAT practice beyond 'universal' structural concerns. I acknowledge the notion of 'progressive localism' that aims to reclaim community action in times of austerity. Finally, through a focused discussion of spaces of care I look at how understanding the actions of the community groups in these spaces can lead to important understandings of the new roles of these spaces which might otherwise be overlooked. In the following sub-sections I show why each of these perspectives is important in the context of CAT. This work does not go against the dominant neoliberal story but supplements it and holds it in tension with other more hopeful narratives.

### Pragmatic sociology

Pragmatic sociology provides a theoretical framework that allows scholars to appreciate the openness and ambivalences within CAT that are precluded by narrow and all-encompassing interpretations. French pragmatic sociology offers a theoretical approach of openness that aims to establish understandings of the local logics that guide action (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]). This could be usefully applied to the deliberative work of local authorities in their implementation of CAT where it avoids foreclosing interpretations of what is going on and seeks to understand the motives of key actors.

I propose that this framework, mobilised here as a 'research programme' rather than a theory (Wagner 2014), can offer a more than explanatory account of CAT practice by conceptualising the argumentative rationales used by local actors in their deployment of CAT. Centred on a form of

pragmatist critical theory (Boltanski 2011 [2009]; Susen 2014a) this approach underlines the importance of the judgement of ordinary actors in establishing and ordering the social world. In doing so the potential within local deliberations that constitute everyday constructions of social values and norms are highlighted. For Boltanski (2011 [2009]) this opens the possibility for emancipation where the role of critique increases the strength of those who engage with it and in its capacity to engage with reality in order to alter its form.

The deliberative actions implicit in CAT have a spatial dimension considering Doreen Massey's invitation to imagine space as always in process as a realm of political possibility chiming with contemporary interest in the local and positioning these spaces as social sites under construction:

[space]...is a product of relations-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out, it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far. (Massey 2005, p. 9)

In geography, the use of Boltanski's (2011 [2009]) 'pragmatic sociology of critique' has been used to reveal the localised values at play behind austerity governance (Fuller 2017). This work seeks to conceptualise how the performative actions of local authorities are based on explicable orders of justifications constituted by localised values, norms and spatial relations (Fuller 2019). Inspired by this work, an approach to CAT through pragmatic sociology would permit the register of the deliberative processes at play in local authority practice of CAT and uncover other forms of action that do not simply reinforce social control.

For Fuller (2017) the use of pragmatic sociology centres on the 'discursive institutions' that are formed from the logical, socially constructed arguments that people use to frame their actions. People base these arguments on their ideas and understandings of 'common good' which direct action through deliberative episodes. Examining these discursive institutions focuses on how understandings of austerity are deployed within local authorities to critique or justify an argumentative logic, with actors drawing on various values in different situations (Fuller 2017; 2019). Fuller (2017) develops an understanding of how discursive austerity institutions based on market and bureaucratic values are constantly reconfigured to underpin fiscal austerity, where critique of the wider system may have been marginalised, e.g., resistance to central government withdrawal of financial support for local authorities, everyday critique and circumvention is present. While Fuller's (2017; 2019) work identifies how local authorities have come to construct and rationalise their actions more broadly through deliberative institutions of austerity, I focus on

the local rationales specifically behind the practice of CAT. This brings together ideas of how both civil society and new ideas for the role of community assets are incorporated into these understandings as forms of austerity mitigation. In bearing witness to the existing local 'logics' behind CAT my work contributes towards the ambiguous ways in which local governance is evolving through claims to both mitigate while simultaneously being part of austerity cuts to services.

The utility of discursive institutions can, in part, be found in contrast to other work, arguably more commonplace within geography, that seeks to understand organizational practices, namely Foucauldian analysis of modern governmentality (See Lemke 2019). While Foucault's approach could profitably establish the rationalities and praxis of governing embedded in CAT, pragmatic sociology of critique offers a different perspective situated in the experiences of the actors. Sociologist Magnus Hansen (2016) contrasts the historical and archival Foucauldian perspective that examines existing governmental practices with Boltanski's more situational, ethnographic method that examines the everyday tests, tension and conflicts that people negotiate. For Hansen (2016) pragmatic sociology offers a living perspective on the development of social reality where the plurality of the world results in uncertainty, unease and ongoing tensions within which actors deliberate, drawing on Boltanski's (Boltanski 2011 [2009], p. 44) call to see the 'social world in the process of being made' rather than viewing it as a 'product of the past'. In this way, in recognition of the adaptable nature of space, it allows the potential for emancipation (Susen 2014b) through an open of social phenomenon rather than relying on an approach that seeks to document subjugation.

Pragmatic sociology furthermore offers, in part, a response to criticism of the way in which Foucault has been (mis)used in geographical debate as a tool to reconcile structuralist accounts with the activities of everyday life. Barnett (2005) is critical of the way in which Marxist accounts have made use of Foucault's account of governmentality to address the social, suggesting that it has been instrumentalised to offer a binary counterpoint of hegemonic projects through processes of contestation or resistance, which serve to confirm the primacy of the structural approach. In doing so they overlook the 'proactive role that long-term rhythms of socio-cultural change can play in reshaping formal practices of politics, policy and administration' (Barnett 2005, p. 7). At risk is the depth of processes of valuation and their associated deliberations which a more pragmatic approach offers. Therefore, rather than mobilising governmentality, I look to the opportunities of 'pragmatist sociology' to register with how rationality is constructed.

My use of pragmatic sociology here is not a rejection of a governmentality approach per se, indeed Susen (Susen 2014b) underlines Boltanski's antecedents in Foucauldian post-structuralist theory particularly in relation to analysis of the multidimensional nature of power. There is rich potential for comparative analysis between both approaches where there has been sparse dialogue and cross referencing (Hansen 2016) and synergies are being explored with scholars drawing on Foucault's understanding of neoliberal markets through analysis underpinned by 'pragmatic sociology' (Davies 2014; Davies and Dunne 2016). Given the otherwise extensive nature of this thesis, analysis at local authority level will, for now, be restricted to the pragmatic sociology of critique. However, comparative work based on detailed examination of explanatory concepts, causality, social relations and understandings of political power amongst other parameters does offer rich scope for future academic examination.

Critique of pragmatist sociology in this context is three-fold. Firstly, claims that Boltanski's approach successfully draws together macro and micro processes (Susen 2014a) may be contested given that its focus on meso-level local deliberations could be misconstrued as apolitical where it offers insufficient attention to macro structures. Yet this approach centres on critique from the perspective of the actors rather than imposing external values. Davies (2016, p. 161) argues that for Boltanski it is this grounded 'critique (that) renders reality unacceptable', offering an understanding of how local conditions impact on social processes. This focus is distinct in its approach from other calls to incorporate the local into understandings of wider processes which may simply be mobilised to give regional detail to broader structural issues (See also Peck 2013).

Secondly, there may be concern that discursive institutions do not go far enough in their consideration of agency. Susen (2014b) outlines some of the sociological drawbacks inherent in Boltanski's institutions, relating to the lack of criteria through which to prove the actual existence of institutional realities. In other words, there is little clarity in what factors, and their order of importance, drive an institutional realm. These factors include objective (e.g. structural conditions), intersubjective (e.g. relational settings) or, and most importantly in relation to agency, subjective factors (e.g. cognitive estimates) or a combination of all (Susen 2014b). The issue of where agency sits within discursive institutions, is one that detailed empirical observation may help to point towards the potential of emancipation, or transformation of social life that these deliberative processes propose (Susen 2014b).

Finally, discursive institutions should be viewed as highly performative, acknowledging the fragility of social life (Gadiner 2016). For Boltanski the problem of institutions is the fact that



they are performed by psychological and biological human disposition which being highly flawed, will never create the perfect institutions in the way that they were planned. There needs to be a recognition that reality is complex and that the uncertainties of the world will always infringe on these institutions, and where the contingency of place can allow for more emancipatory actions to take place.

### Progressive localism

The notion of progressive localism also offers a way to engage with CAT that eschews dominating structural narratives. Featherstone et al. (2012) have coined the term 'progressive localism' to define a project to construct political alternatives to previously discussed 'austerity localism'. Many scholars see the 'austerity localism' discourse as an oversimplification of the localism agenda (Hickson 2013), and challenge it as 'glossing over' other interpretations that would otherwise remain open to wider possibilities (Williams et al. 2014, p. 2803). In contrast 'progressive localism' (Featherstone et al. 2012) challenges the totalising account of 'austerity localism' and this perspective is supported by a growing body of work which argues for and seeks to explore the possibilities present within current practices of localism (Williams et al. 2012; Williams et al. 2014). The 'progressive localism' debate seeks to engage with and acknowledge emerging practices of localism to identify and analyse their potential for the development of new ethical and political spaces which rewrite the 'Big Society' agenda or offer different actions (Williams et al. 2014).

Featherstone et al. (2012) offer a definition of progressive localism based on Mackinnon et al.'s (2011, p. 1) proposal for the political potential of 'outward-looking community strategies for negotiating global processes, to create positive links between places and social groups'. These community strategies are progressive in that their 'struggles are not merely defensive, but expansive in geographical reach and productive of new relations between places and social groups' (Featherstone et al. 2012, p. 179). Furthermore progressive localism, explicitly political and radical, has the potential to transform communities around agendas for 'social justice, participation and tolerance' (Featherstone et al. 2012, p. 179). While the definition of 'progressive localism' as outward looking does directly lend itself to the inherently local actions of CAT, nonetheless as a perspective that asks us to revisit the sites of CAT in the vicissitudes of austerity to interrogate if there exist interstitial spaces of hope it is very useful.

This understanding of progressive localism is presented as a call to geographers to reclaim the concept of localism from policy makers and politicians, to 'engage with struggles over the terms of

the debate around localism and to contribute to strategies of collective resistance' (Featherstone et al. 2012, p. 177). This implies that in the spaces of localism a more radical agenda can be produced and that academics must be open to the possibilities of such actions and be ready to acknowledge and analyse its phenomena.

This reframing of localism is based on a critique of the overbearing role of structural theory in defining interpretations which cast the process in an all-embracing neoliberal light. Williams et al. (2014) argue that hegemonic grammars of localism can underestimate or ignore possibilities for creating new, more progressive practices. Newman (2014) argues that while defining localism through the concept of neoliberalism demonstrates its regressive nature is open to the critique that application of the neoliberal 'label' offers little scope for critical engagement, suggesting that the neoliberal debate can paralyse and shut down further analysis.

These positions might be indirectly supported by an understanding of neoliberalism as an open ended, inconsistent process of state reforms reached through 'botched efforts' and adaptive mutation to achieve a politically assisted market rule (Peck 2010, p. xiii). While an adaptive interpretation of neoliberalism allows for an understanding of its manifestation, translation and application to different times and places, it furthermore presents an understanding of an imperfect process which in turn might provide unintended moments of opportunity in the way that it plays out. Neoliberalism might then potentially represent not only a move towards free-market reform but also indirectly provide during its implementation opportunities for oppositional politics to emerge. In this way, and drawing on the work of Williams et al. (2014), the intention to develop a more nuanced 'local' understanding of the process which takes into consideration 'on the ground' manifestations does not imply a rejection of a structural critique of localism but rather its overbearing dominance, and where 'cracks and fissures that create spaces in which various agents can prefigure alternative political and ethical worlds within the dominant' (Williams et al. 2014, p. 2803). As such, might CAT then offer landscapes for political opportunities to emerge where local action takes up the opportunities of localism, creating spaces of hope?

### Concepts of care and social infrastructures

In reading CAT sites as spaces that foster community benefit, I suggest that geographical literatures of care may offer useful insight to conceptualise practice. Geographies of care have recently moved on beyond focusing on spaces of care and fear (For a history of care in geography see Conradson 2011), to attend instead to relational geographies that draw on feminist ideas.

Through these ideas new understandings of care in austerity are emerging that focus on the activities in spaces and between people in their everyday lives.

Conradson (2003; 2011) sets out the significance of care in social geographies for its transformative ethic and relational dynamic that has the potential to transcend self-interest. For Conradson (2011), care as an ideal invites attention to recognise the lived experiences of others and where they are vulnerable, marginalised or in need, care elicits a response to provide assistance and perhaps facilitates positive change. Tronto and Fischer (Fisher and Tronto 1990; Tronto 2017) set out a feminist approach to care, albeit self-proclaimed as an extremely broad holistic five-point account that does not necessarily proceed in order. Here care is conceptualised as a caring process of noticing unmet caring needs (caring about) taking responsibility to meet them (caring for), providing care (caregiving) and, observing the response from the recipient (care receiving) (Fisher and Tronto 1990; Tronto 2017). This is supplemented by a fifth form of care, caring with, which takes place when a group, from a family to a state, can rely on ongoing provision of care to continue to meet their caring needs and when this becomes established, trust and solidarity are produced (Tronto 2017). Understood through these concepts of care, social infrastructures offer, as Tronto (2017) posits, an understanding of human endeavour beyond the rational individual of liberal thought.

Care practices are of course contingent to their situated contexts. Austerity is understood to be (re)shaping welfare provision and support, and in doing so is changing the norms and expectations of who does and should 'do' care (DCLG 2008). Care is embroiled in austerity and its wider conceptualisation as a form of neoliberalism. Tronto (2017) provides a three-fold guide to how neoliberalism attempts to account for care: i) care is positioned as personal responsibility with uneasy moral undertones that encourage people to ignore the needs of others, ii) care is a market problem, where if needs exist then a market solution will emerge and reinforce the idea of individual responsibility above which people must look after themselves through recourse to the market (Cox 2013), iii) the family becomes the proper locus of care under neoliberalism. Where individuals cannot look after themselves through the market then they become otherwise reliant on the family or faith-motivated communities (Tronto 2017; Chatzidakis et al. 2020; Cloke et al. 2020). Thus, neoliberal care is conceived as individualised, market-led and/or where individuals cannot provide for themselves, they must rely on small social units of family and/or community, repositioning the role of the state as care-less.

Considered as a variation of the model of care in neoliberalism, CAT does broadly connect with these ideas, albeit in distinct ways. In response to Tronto's (2017) triptych, i) the practice of CAT

does not responsabilize individuals, at least not directly, but rather relies on community groups to take on assets which may offer respite to individuals where other forms of care are being taken away. As a result, this burden is collectively shared rather than being individualised. ii) Although CAT is a move by the state away from these assets, it is not a swing towards the market. Community groups are required to hold charitable status which serves as a check to the pursuit of financial gain for private profit. iii) Community groups responsible for CAT are then involved in expanding the locus of care of the family as they step in to provide the services associated with these assets that had once been delivered by the state.

At the same time, care scholars recognise the limits of neoliberal ideas. For example, Tronto (2017) is clear about the inadequacy of the neoliberal lens. Firstly, because it misunderstands how human society organises itself, where human nature is construed as rational and objective, and overlooks the complexity and embedded nature of care across subjective human practices (Tronto 2017). Secondly, it incorrectly assumes adherence to, and the dominance of, a market-economy driven society (Tronto 2017).

Tronto (2017) in relation to care, along with Warner and Clifton (2014) in relation to the marketisation of urban service delivery, bring in the ideas of Polanyi (2001 [1944]) who contested the expectation that society functions solely to achieve maximum financial gains. For Polanyi (2001 [1944]) the market-economy could only exist in a market-society which acted as an accessory to the economic system, thereby reducing, labour, land, people, the environment and society to commodities. The idea that everything would be turned into a commodity could not be fully realised. In response to moves to create a market-society Polanyi argues that this engenders a 'double movement' by those who would limit the free market and protect against total commodification (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). As Tronto (2017) points out this means that market fundamentalism will create its own opponents who will support social protection. Thus, care can never be wholly neoliberal, albeit Donald et al. (2014) point out this may be overly optimistic, and risks overlooking the strength of market fundamentalism (Burawoy 2010). Additionally, this does not mean that political narratives do not still seek to change how care is thought about and who is responsible.

Political narratives around individuals, families and communities taking on responsibility for their own care are often tied to the concept of 'resilience'. This is a widely discussed notion in policy and human geography although fragmented between ecological natural-science and social-science research and is stretched to describe different things (Wilson 2018) including 'social resilience' (Adger 2000) and 'community resilience' (Wilson 2012). However, in agreement with

Mackinnon and Derickson's (2013) discussion around 'resilience', we should be wary of any top-down imposition of this concept that serves to maintain the status quo. Mackinnon and Derickson (2013) warn of the danger of this concept in promoting an ideal to secure the stability of an (unequal) existing system and how this places the onus for this capacity on individuals, communities and places, and expects them to use their own resources to get back up after they have been knocked down. This discourse is part of the alteration of care and the work that care is expected to do, raising questions around the distribution of care at the individual, family and community levels.

Feminist approaches to care, through recourse to the notion of social reproduction, offer important insight into the ways in which care is being reconfigured beyond the state. Social reproduction here is considered as 'complex networks of social processes and human relations that produce the conditions of existence' (Bhattacharya 2017, p. 2), within which the giving and receiving of care is an essential component to 'maintain, continue and repair our worlds as well as possible' (Fisher and Tronto 1990, p. 36). In austerity, this work is particularly important. In common with Nancy Fraser (2017) I argue that in a context where the capacities of individuals, households and communities to sustain themselves, and more broadly society, are being 'squeezed' by capitalism contributing to the general economic, ecological and political crises that all intersect and exacerbate each other. Importantly, feminist approaches that involve the collection of empirical data through close contact with research participants attempt to recognise and address power relations and social locations giving voice to the marginalised (Hall 2019b). This approach underlines the work of social reproduction as gendered, racialised, and classed, and so inherently unequal (Fraser 2017; Hall 2020). This is particularly important where the state has retreated and policy makers have then looked to community members to fill the gaps in care for the elderly, children, community services, etc. (Hall 2020), work that has historically fallen to women and is a greater burden where it coincides with low wages and fewer resources. In common with Sarah Marie Hall's (2020) argument that focusing on how the vulnerable are often brought into and expected to provide labour to maintain social infrastructure, the potential of CAT to reinforce inequality is raised.

This approach is exemplified in Sarah Marie Hall's (2019a ; 2019b ; 2020) recent approach to care in austerity. This work takes a relational approach where research participants situate their experiences alongside those of other people they know in their everyday lives, and consequently makes a departure from the lived, felt and personal impacts of austerity contained within previous writing on austerity (Hall 2019b). Hall's (2019b) approach sees austerity as personal and social which brings lived experiences and social inequalities to the fore. This does not exclude

economic and political concerns but makes spaces for austerity a personal condition, rather than simply an ideology or inevitability (Hall 2019b). This work situates feminist theories of personal relationships in conversation with geographical writings about austerity, which also means that economic, social and cultural theories are brought together (Denning et al. 2019). Crucially, Hall (2019b) posits austerity as more than a contextual backdrop to people's lives, suggesting that it is intertwined within everyday lives and the relationships in which everyday lives are grounded. Hall's (2019b) thesis focuses on austere intimacies and attends to how relationships and support networks are shaped by austerity. As such, I suggest that it is useful as a guide to the study of what happens between people in the spaces of CAT.

The empirical work contained within Hall's 'austere intimacies and intimate austerities' (2019b, p. 101) provides a useful framework for approaching grounded understandings of austerity. Whilst my own ethnographic empirical work is contingent upon the exact circumstances of CAT and is therefore distinct from this study, nonetheless drawing on Hall's (2019b) discussion of two of their four emergent themes provides insight into some of the scope of the relational experience of austerity and the conceptualisations at play. The first theme relates to intimate monetary arrangements that show how intimate practices of favours, labour and leisure are shaped by austerity (Hall 2019b). This could be significant for CAT where different economies might be emerging as communities engage in caring practices. Registering such practices relates to a wider exploration of economies of exchange, of time, of labour and economies that do not rely on wage labour and capitalism contributing to understanding of a proliferation of diverse economies that emerge from an experimental, performative and ethical orientation to the world (Gibson-Graham 2008). The second theme, momentary encounters, relates to the personal and wider social impacts of austerity and the reshaping of relational space (Hall 2019b). Momentary encounters that provide care may also be significant in CAT as these spaces allow for relationships and support networks to develop (Klinenberg 2018), are associated with social connection (Putnam 2000), and act as gathering places that foster an informal public life (Oldenburg 1989). Additionally, and importantly in relation to care, as Popke (2007; 2009) highlights encounters can engender collective responsibility suggesting the possibility for meaningful encounters between strangers, albeit where there is a need to attend to sociospatial inequalities and power (Valentine 2008). These themes offer a form of sensitizing concepts (Charmaz 2014) for more inductive ethnographic work.

Hall's (2019b) two other themes of more-than-human intimacies explored through what can be gained or lost from physically and emotionally cross-species close encounters, and material proximities which attend to how material things provide a conduit for social proximities which

become particularly significant in times of austerity, are not considered in this thesis, yet contribute indirectly by reinforcing the micro nature of these social geographies that are highly significant to experiences of austerity. Therefore, in this way looking closely at the relational intimacies within CAT can allow for new care practices to be acknowledged.

A further consideration of the role of care relates to the work that care is expected to do from a scholarly perspective. In their discussion of the work of contemporary mutual aid Spade (2020) highlights the need to organise to help people survive the devastating conditions unfolding every day, whilst in addition arguing for a political mobilisation of resistance to tackle the underlying cause of these crises. Thus, care is not only considered as palliative assistance but as a call to political activism. Within this context the inherently participatory move of community action in CAT appears as something less than politically caring. The work of community groups here is not outwardly opposed to the state but rather engages with government mechanisms for survival. Resistance then would not be loud and spectacular (For example see Harvey 1972; 2012), but is perhaps aligned with quieter and/or more everyday actions.

Within geography there exists a growing body of work that seeks to bring nuance to resistance. Various scholars are repositioning resistance and its associated activism through qualifying it as 'everyday' (Larner and Craig 2005; Chatterton and Pickerill 2010), 'dormant and embedded' (Maynard 2018), 'implicit' (Horton and Kraftl 2009), and 'quiet' (Pottinger 2016). These muted actions offer a different form of politics. For Askins (2014) acknowledging the 'quiet politics' of encounters between refugees, asylum seeker and local residents can engender care around local belonging and communities interconnected to wider mobilities. To this work, Sarah Hughes' (2019) recent call to reconsider the often narrowly framed and defined form of resistance raises important questions around what constitutes resistance and what do we risk ignoring if we only focus on predetermined, recognisable forms? Hughes (2019) asks for engagement with 'resistance in emergence' which goes beyond the fundamental assumptions held in geography that determine in advance what comes to be determined as resistance (such as intention, linearity and opposition). As Hughes (2019) suggests this notion can open our understanding of 'resistance' as ambiguous and unremarkable, positing that it should not be foreclosed into predetermined forms and we should not prescribe what resistance should look or feel like for anyone else.

Nonetheless, within this work that draws out new grammars of activism there are still underlying political intentions. These, I suggest, are present in the notion of care which itself is often used within geography to suggest political and ethical work beyond endurance and towards more progressive action, if not activism (See Conradson 2011; Williams et al. 2012). Furthermore I

suggest that in the context of CAT that such political endeavour can be understood as a form of mutual aid as a 'collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them based on a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust' (Spade 2020, p. 7).

## Volunteer labour

Before I conclude this chapter and turn to consider methodological issues, one further dimension of CAT merits some discussion. This is the issue of volunteer labour, a key concept around which CAT develops and unfolds. As I will show later in the empirical chapters' volunteerism is essential to the running of assets, their services, and the associated provision of care that they provide. Here I provide a three-fold consideration of the concept which includes, the role of volunteering in austerity, motivations behind volunteering, and finally a question around who volunteers?

First, the role of volunteering in austerity could be seen as one of the mechanisms through which the 'Big Society' might be enacted. At the beginning of the 2010s, Conservative ex-Prime Minister David Cameron promised more autonomy and control for local charities and volunteer groups, in effect setting up these organisations as alternative service providers to picking up where the state was being withdrawn through cuts to local service spending (Fisher and Dimberg 2016). This move has been described as a neoliberal turn to community with community programmes, and here we can read CAT, being seen as a low-cost alternative to welfare state programmes (Ashbee 2015). As such, there were increasing calls for people to volunteer, which in turn was represented as needing to expand considerably and into areas not previously seen as the domain of volunteers, not least so the shortfalls in services because of financial cuts could be ameliorated (Harris and White 2018). While Gamble (2015) points out the contradiction in the reality of a squeeze on public spending at local government level which has undermined the 'Big Society' programme as so much civic engagement and voluntary effort depends on subsidises paid through the local state, CAT appears nonetheless to have been successfully rolled out raising questions over the nature of people's motivations behind volunteering.

A definition of volunteer work, given by Wilson and Musick (1997), positions it as time given freely for the benefit of others, a productive activity that usually involves collective action and an ethical relationship between volunteer and recipient. In the context of CAT, volunteering can be considered as willingly giving unpaid labour for community benefit through sustaining an activity and/or social setting – considered to be the building and/or land that the group has taken on from the local authority. Kenny et al. (2017) set out three forms of volunteering that can be useful to



consider actions in CAT. These are i) emphasis on the service aspect of volunteering based on altruism and charity, ii) civil society paradigm based on mutual support, self-help, and activism, iii) unpaid pursuit of collective interests, such as sport, arts, music, learning etc. While this framework suggests multiple benefits, Kenny et al. indicate that on an individual level volunteering can also have a 'shadow underbelly' (Kenny et al. 2017, p. 91). This relates to where volunteering brings strong benefits to those who volunteer, which can provide the main motivation for volunteering and where personal motivations dominate the volunteer relationship and corrupt notions of public good and virtue (Kenny et al. 2017). The potentially negative impact of power dynamics between individuals through volunteering is only one aspect of concern in relation to volunteering participants as wider questions over who volunteers reveal.

A further dimension of volunteering of note here relates to who is volunteering. Kenny et al. (2017) outline out how in the past trade unions and feminists have both approached volunteering with deep suspicion seeing it as the exploitation of labour to provide services cheaply. For example, these groups have argued that it is no coincidence that most of the caring volunteering is done by women who are already marginalised and where their work is devalued within the market and the home (Kenny et al. 2017). This is especially important where policy makers are expecting community groups to fill in the gaps for care for the elderly, children, community services, etc., (Hall 2020) which the spaces of CAT often typify. The risk is that volunteer work is gendered, racialised, classed, and thus an unequal one (Fraser 2017; Hall 2020). As with other conceptual tools and in keeping with my anti-foundational approach, any such narrow application of understanding of CAT as an inevitable form of neoliberal, gendered, classed, racialized volunteering is avoided in favour of empirical scrutiny, however acknowledgement of the potentially negative aspects of volunteering are essential to furnishing a critical appraisal of CAT practice.

## 2.6 Discussion and chapter conclusion

In setting out how we might understand CAT through new grammars of analysis I do not intend to replace the inevitability of one set of ideas with another. In exploring the often-concealed geographies that can otherwise be overlooked my intention is to hold in tension narratives of political economy, governmentality, austerity localism, pragmatic sociology, progressive localism and notions of care and social infrastructure. To do so, I argue that the idea of 'ambivalence' offers a useful way to account for this plurality.

Ambivalence allows for the range of empirical and theoretical contradictions of community group engagement that I have tried to acknowledge over this chapter to coincide. I turn to ambivalence to reflect on how my aim to consider CAT practice more openly, rather than situating this community action on a positive-negative axis, offers opportunities for other actions to be acknowledged. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the debate around community action in austerity by recognising what practice through ambivalence can offer. This work touches, in part, on Ruez and Cockayne's (2021) recent call to engage with ambivalent affects and the politics of critique in geography. My focus in this thesis is mainly based on the cognitive and conscious experience of CAT rather than engagement with the embodied practices and performances of the politics of affect per se (See also Anderson and Harrison 2010), although this is present in the local logics of local authorities and relational experiences and activities underway in the spaces of CAT. The usefulness of ambivalence here helps to acknowledge some of the divergent ethical and political implications of CAT practice and joins wider questions around how academics approach the politics of critique in geography.

In acknowledging the different individual approaches to CAT, in addition I recognise the role of ambivalence in my own approach to this practice. On one level, staying with the data and engaging with often opposing ideas around CAT has generated unease. In part, this was due to a personal hesitation to turn completely towards a more affirmative or reparative critique that an approach to reading for difference (Gibson-Graham 2006) might invoke, albeit conscious that reflective and critically aware use of these approaches could offer nuance. While searching for hope in CAT might orientate my own feelings towards positivity and provide me with a clear ethical remit, I worried that taking this approach could direct attention away from the possibilities of injustice and suffering (Ruez and Cockayne 2021), that this austerity driven practice might encompass. This was a concern given that many accounts of community ownership of assets, I suggest, too readily overlook the wider political economic drivers behind CAT (See for example Aiken et al. 2011; Murtagh 2015; Ystadau Cymru 2019b), and are engaged in uncritical and contextual forms of legitimisation of this practice. Yet, neither did my experiences of CAT suit an oppositional, and equally secure, 'negative' approach to frame practice.

My work is about situating CAT as part of austerity, but which does not simply fall into narratives of loss and/or is overwhelmed by totalising narratives. Such approaches would undermine my experience of the genuine attempts by community groups to sustain these spaces through CAT, whilst recognising some bias on my part due to growing close to the communities' struggles (Crang and Cook 2007) based on knowledge gained having spent many hours in-situ. I agree that ambivalence is about 'not resolving tensions between affirmation and negativity' (Ruez and

Cockayne 2021), where can acknowledge the undecidability in the worlds we research (Kern and McLean 2017), my approach nonetheless allows, tentatively, for more affirmative practices to emerge beyond such messiness as acts that could be fostered and encouraged to grow.

Assessing the ambivalence of practice, tacit in my discussion of empirical data in the later chapters of this thesis, is an attempt to better understand practice. CAT is certainly implicated in the neoliberal project where community groups are co-opted into taking on responsibility for community buildings and services and an explicit re-orientation towards processes of marketisation, professionalisation and new forms of surveillance and control. Seen in this way community groups are mobilised in the service of neoliberal goals (Peck and Tickell 2002). And yet, CAT is also a site of different forms of care, community action, and more speculatively we might see CAT as a site of resistance when considering a broader definition of this concept. Viewed separately, these opposing interpretations of community action would prioritise a binary position as either a reactionary move by community groups and their co-option by the state or as oppositional and an act of resistance. Openly theorising CAT, while reflecting a call to maintain ambivalent attitudes of ‘staying uncomfortable – in the queasy sweaty space of undecidability’ (Kern 2021, p. 122), even if not following it to a undecided conclusion, but rather using it as a tool through which different processes can be acknowledged. Such an application of ambivalence allows for a more progressive understandings to emerge from my analysis of the operation of CAT space. Rather than settling on the totalising ideas of co-opting neoliberal policies an idea of collective endurance is constructed where reliance on unpaid labour and volunteerism in addition can be driven by solidarity and reciprocity, the neoliberal technologies of performance management are distinct, and perhaps less onerous, than previous forms of state control.

An open approach, or acceptance of ambivalence, additionally permits recognition of the different forms of care that offer essential repair work through the sharing of resources or monetary acts of respite through affective bonds, small acts of reciprocity. This care work may not simply be the antithesis of political action but might be a form of passive dissent akin to Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar’s (2019) question over the right to be weary as people endure and are exhausted by and in austere times. Therefore, actions that are not merely neoliberal nor progressive are registered, and ambivalence has allowed space for the prospect of relational transformation (Linz and Secor 2021) to emerge.

I suggest that engaging with ambivalence goes some way to address my question around how we are to understand CAT. In many ways my approach is firmly and intimately embedded in the ambivalences of CAT. Yet, ambivalence is also important more widely as academics tend to

totalise the contemporary actions of community groups as the state has developed a localist agenda whilst withdrawing direct support for community infrastructure. My work is not necessarily about resolving the tension between the critically negative neoliberal frame, nor developing an overly romantic appreciation of communitarian action that may offer a more progressive lens, it acknowledges both, but is not beholden to either. Nonetheless, in constructing a wider open understanding of CAT the nuance of other valuable and hopeful practices emerge. Around this work stories of CAT can be constructed on which future analysis may be based. Acknowledging often contradictory ethical and political dimensions requires careful calibration of the stories we tell about these places and calls for an understanding of them as current sites of refuge and experimentation in future community infrastructure. Assessing the inherent ambivalence in CAT practice constructs a critical view of its politics and opportunities for hope.

Finally, this approach coincides and contributes to understandings of more affirmative CAT practices emerging from the 'messy middle ground' (May and Cloke 2014). Geographers have sought out conceptual approaches to where there are possibilities for ethical and political responses to welfare "in the meantime", introducing values other than those of neoliberal capitalism as a response to the austere conditions of the here and now' (Cloke et al. 2017, p. 704, *italics in original*). Particularly where spaces of care can challenge or offer refuge from neoliberal austerity (Cloke et al. 2017). Thus, in a similar way my work does not reduce CAT to narrow forms of neoliberalism or resistance considers community action as both reactionary and gives a sense of how such space can moreover be appropriated for more progressive actions.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out my approach to research for this thesis. The first section 'Knowing CAT' outlines my philosophical approach to knowledge. This is based primarily on a non-foundational exploration of CAT practice drawing across pragmatist and post structuralist approaches where they are useful to encourage action and debate on the impact of CAT as a real-world problem. I approached CAT both as an exercise in exploring the position of community action within scholarship and as a form of inquiry to critically problematise CAT practice. In the following section, 'Approaching CAT', I set out my mixed methods research design, research typology and approach to analysis. This section includes discussion of the methods and their relationship to my detailed research questions and aims, my approach to data and explains the extent and boundaries of my inquiry. I then discuss research ethics before ending this chapter with the section 'Introducing the field(s)' which provides a descriptive introduction to each field of inquiry - national data, local authority case studies and individual community centre research sites. This introduction orientates readers before analysis and engagement with my empirical data in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

### 3.2 Knowing CAT

In taking an open theoretical approach to CAT that resisted a priori framing of practice I aimed to engage with emergent CAT practices in the field. To do so, I drew broadly on non-foundational understandings of knowledge based around ideas of post structuralism as developed by geographers Gibson-Graham and wider ideas of pragmatism in geography and the social sciences.

This comes from my intention to engage in 'reading for difference rather than dominance' (Gibson-Graham 2006, pp. xxxi -xxxii) as an approach to recognise and acknowledge the variety of overlooked practices 'that languish on the margins of economic representation'. For Gibson-Graham (2006) this approach is recuperative and uncovers not only what is possible but what is also obscured from view, where reading adopts a stance of curiosity rather than recognition toward claims of truth. This simultaneously brings new ideas to work with whilst not denying the forces that may work to undermine, constrain, or destroy actions (Gibson-Graham 2006; 2008). While closely linked to feminist (re)interpretations of the world that seek to acknowledge alternative economic practices, here in the context of CAT reading for difference presents an opportunity to recognise practices that reach beyond the co-option of civil society to allow for

consideration of co-existing actions. Gibson-Graham's (2006) call is used here as linked to non-foundational post structural approach to knowledge, with a scepticism of grand narratives (Lyotard 1984), and rejection of grand structures (Harrison 2006). As such, this approach shares parallels with pragmatism in 'turning away from meta-narratives, objective truths, and unifying theories, preferring instead to develop modes of thinking, which they believed had greater utility for helping people to cope with the messiness of everyday life' (Wood and Smith 2008, p. 1527).

Pragmatism offers a philosophy of knowledge that is not bounded by pre-existing abstract notions of 'truth' or universal laws taking a non-foundational approach to understandings of the world. Barnes (2008) defines the notion of non-foundationalism in pragmatism as based on a belief that ideas do not exist as timeless and pre-existing perfect forms governed by fixed rules, but instead are formed contingently and experimentally in response to particular needs as people live out their lives in a given time and place. This in turn comes from a world view that humans constantly face unpredictable circumstances against which knowledge and ideas need to adapt in order to offer practical advantage (Barnes 2008). In adopting a pragmatist approach to knowledge I aimed to transcend what might be considered mechanical hypothesis testing, to avoid the danger of rehearsing political economy concepts that would otherwise restrict CAT to narrow economic and structural definitions (See also Newman 2014). As such, my work is oriented towards an emphasis on human experience and away from abstract concerns and metaphysical discussions about the nature of reality or truth (Morgan 2014). Accordingly, such an approach implied engagement with CAT as it unfolds on the ground.

Jane Wills (Wills and Lake 2020; 2021) has underlined the importance of engaging with in situ real-world 'problematic situations' (Dewey 1938) in pragmatist knowledge production. Chairing a session exploring the power of pragmatism at the recent Royal Geographical Society and Institute of British Geographers (RGS-IBG) Annual International Conference 2021, Wills (2021) emphasised that pragmatism starts with a provocation or problem that requires resolution through inquiry leading to the development of new ideas intrinsically connected to the tools we need to solve social problems. She explained that in Rorty's (1999) later work this becomes about (re)describing our world and its problems with new ideas so that new action, outcomes, and consequences are possible (Wills 2021). I propose that my thesis is part of such a process in drawing closer to CAT practice, to understand and reveal problems and to observe the facts with a long-term aim, although admittedly not explicitly part of this project, to consider and discuss possibilities for experimentation and to address the issues that arise. A pragmatic approach to knowledge then begins with asking what the problem is and how as academics we might help? In this context, I propose that the process of CAT itself is a form of inquiry to answer 'problematic situations' as the

state withdraws from assets and communities' step in to take responsibility for their upkeep, operation, and provision of community benefit. This process forms the focus of my empirical engagement with communities to understand how they have begun to address this actual situation, how they understand it, and how CAT practices interact with wider questions of social justice.

At the same time and in parallel, I proposed that my inquiry must also extend to consider how scholarly understandings of CAT are formed. This does not dilute the importance of working on problems beyond the academy or turn these issues into an excuse for disengaged intellectual 'dead work' (Dewey 1938), irrelevant to society (See also Wills 2021). Rather, I argue that reflecting on how CAT is conceptualised within academia helps to position practice within the scholarly community which can in turn contribute further to discussing, experimenting in and addressing problems. This in turn opens the possibility for academic knowledge to be drawn into the praxis of CAT as a valuable tool to identify potential issues. For example, the identification of CAT as concentrated in areas of high deprivation and/or where this community infrastructure is supported by volunteerism highlights specific issues that require detailed consideration. I suggest that this work can include the use of various paradigms where theoretical ideas -considered here as fallible incomplete and subject to change - can be used as tools to forward thinking about CAT. Such recourse to longstanding academic ideas and notions should not be misunderstood as a scramble for the safety of a 'lifeboat of apparent foundations' (Wills and Lake 2020) but rather, I argue, is acknowledgement of the value of the traditional role that experts, and expert knowledge can contribute to any such problem-solving project (See also Geiselhart 2020).

My inquiry acknowledges Bridge's (2021) recent call to approach pragmatism as a philosophy of doing, rather than of objects, subjects, and immovable facts. In a paper given at the session on the power of pragmatism at the RGS-IBG Annual International conference 2021, Bridge (2021) set out pragmatism as a philosophy described through verbs rather than nouns. I draw broadly on this work that is grounded in the classical pragmatism of John Dewey and which Bridge (2021) arranges around three themes of *situating*, *problematizing* and *experimenting*.

Bridge (2021) outlines *situating* as a non-foundational, fallible and uncertain approach to knowledge. Bridge (2021) frames *situating* partly in relation to Dewey's notion of 'togetherness' or association of how things come together in certain ways. In this sense situating appears to encourage scholars to analysis of how situations are construed and understood in context rather than making abstract theoretical assumptions. Situations based on such an understanding suggests attending closely to the contexts of CAT practice to provide understandings of the

associations through which it is co-constituted. Furthermore for Bridge (2021) *situating* relates to the emergence of problematic situations when certain aspects of togetherness are emphasised, and the situation becomes uncertain. In this scenario Bridge (2021) calls for greater investigation into processes that can include spatial and temporal aspects. In the context of CAT, the togetherness of austerity and community action leads to uncertainty. This uncertainty could manifest through a priori application of notions of 'co-option' applied through a narrow political economy lens and whereby CAT is then assigned a distinct political role. Here pragmatist calls for greater sensitivity to understanding 'togetherness' encourages acknowledgement of nuance and places experiences before theory. In this way, we could understand *situating* CAT as an exploration of ideas around this practice are not pre-existing, transcendent, fixed or subject to overarching narratives but are the outcomes of embodied experiences, formed contingently and experimentally in response to needs (Barnes 2008; Wood and Smith 2008).

Moreover, I suggest that this approach echoes ideas of post structuralism where all 'truths' and knowledge is fully contextual (Radford and Radford 2005). It turns away from meta-narratives towards developing modes of thinking that are useful in helping people cope with the messiness of everyday life (Wood and Smith 2008). Therefore, this approach resonates with my wish to read for difference (Gibson-Graham 2006).

*Problematizing* under pragmatism is contextual, ordinary and everyday (Bridge 2021) relating to the nature of pragmatist research as motivated by issues arising in everyday human experience, the 'real-world' problems (Wills and Lake 2020). This poses a challenge to those scholars who assume a critical distance that they reinforce through critique (Bridge 2021). This is a theme that runs throughout my thesis and is particularly evident in Chapter 6 which begins by taking seriously the local assertions that assets under community control through CAT are locally considered to be valuable 'thriving' community infrastructures therefore challenging political economy ideas of coercion at the same time as introducing political ambivalence and uncertainty. Therefore, social inquiry is positioned as an act of communal activity, where my research is not an abstracted approach to knowledge but grounded in experiences of CAT in the real-world and its needs (Wills and Lake 2020). It therefore seeks to engage beyond the academy but acknowledges the utility of scholarly notions and concepts that help to frame our understandings of the world and informs action.

Finally, *Experimenting* for Bridge (2021) should be considered through three factors. Firstly, it should consider how social life can through experimentation create innovation which additionally evokes ideas and possibilities for transaction where the world is not static, but in process and



incomplete (Bridge 2021). Secondly, *experimenting* is a holistic pursuit rather than reductive activity that acknowledges the partial nature of humans in any situation, and that in doing so promotes a humility and/or modesty. Thirdly, and linked to the previous aspect through the changing of the situation through *experimenting* people may transform themselves. This helpfully offers an approach to CAT as a form of experimentation and, I suggest, includes attending to the possibilities of transaction where pragmatism recognises the ability of community members to engage in deliberation (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]; Fuller 2017). Bridge (2021) indicates that the dimensions of *problematizing* and *experimenting* are especially grounded in Dewey's process of inquiry (1998 [1925]; 2012 [1920]), which can be thought of as a complete process of problem identification and solution (Morgan 2014). Through this experimentation a sense of unpredictability may also offer hope (Rorty 1999), and through which progress can be made (Bridge 2020).

To be clear, I caveat my use of pragmatism in this thesis as operating at an exploratory and preliminary stage in engaging with CAT practice rather than making any wider claim to resolve emergent issues. Taking such a position, I propose, relates to wider questions around the temporality of pragmatism recently posed by Robert Lake (2021) who asked: what is our timeframe for pragmatic inquiry and what expectations do we have in terms of making a difference, of engaging with community to experiment, to fail and try again? In response, I propose that my orientation to knowledge production leans towards gaining academic insight into CAT practice through which informed conversations about the process can take place. As my work reflects on assets transferred, I am not involved in addressing live transfer projects as Wills (2020) has done in their study in Cornwall. Rather, my work is not directly involved in action but rather seeks to begin to develop an understanding of CAT practice. My approach seeks to acknowledge the work already undertaken by communities in addressing CAT. The processes, actions and experimentation already undertaken are to be acknowledged but moreover can be positioned as resources from which we can learn. The ideas that emerge from any such project are not fixed, are highly contextual and are to be understood as part of a program for future work (James 2000 [1907]) rather than offering a definitive understanding of CAT practice or complete process of problem solving.

I take seriously scholarly critiques of pragmatism as apolitical. Denzin (2010, p. 420) critiques pragmatist research that defaults to merely attending to processes and which in turn leaves little space for issues connected to empowerment, social justice and a politics of hope. However, there are at least three dimensions of pragmatist inquiry that attest to its engagement in politics; 1) from the beginning of pragmatism Dewey was closely involved in the progressive politics of Jane

Addams' work at Hull House (Bridge 2005; 2021); 2) research is driven by context, where any attempt to understand the world involves discussions around what issues people have, how to resolve them and reflection on any potential outcomes and ethical concerns (Wills and Lake 2020), 3) inquiry is embedded in the experiences, political outlooks and belief systems that we bring to research, but which in a pragmatist process are also subject to change (Bridge 2021). In the case of CAT, the inauspicious political environment of economic swingering at local government level and people's own experiences of its impacts are firmly part of the contexts and local politics of CAT that should not be overlooked. Similarly, neither should grand narratives be allowed to dominate debate and eclipse the emergence of other actions.

Lastly, my approach extends to engage with the political ambivalence of CAT, and as outlined earlier in the introduction and literature review. Attending to the inherent ambivalence of CAT is about holding in tension different understandings links to working in the political and ethical 'messy middle ground' (May and Cloke 2014) that gives a sense of both the reactionary and progressive potential where these spaces offer refuge from neoliberal austerity (Cloke et al. 2017). As a result, my work is not apolitical, nor should it be seen as supportive of the neoliberal dissolution of the state based on romantic or naïve interpretations of localism. Rather my work sustains a critically aware willingness to consider other grammars of interpretation.

### 3.3 Approaching CAT

#### 3.3.1 Mixed methods research

To carry out this work I employed a mixed methods research design to provide a multi-layered, multidimensional and holistic understanding (Hesse-Biber 2007; Teddlie 2009) of CAT practice. Hesse-Biber (2010) outlines the long tradition of the use of multiple methods in the study of the urban realm. These include the use of demographic analysis, social mapping techniques and observations in the nineteenth century by Le Play and Booth (ibid). For Hesse-Biber (2010) these studies went on to influence the work of the Chicago School of Sociology in the early twentieth century noted for urban ethnography and qualitative case study approaches (See Park 1921). Variations of this mix of methods can be seen in contemporary approaches to the city (See Sampson 2012) and are furthermore linked to early pragmatism, notably through the Hull House settlement (Bridge 2005). Pragmatism commonly used in mixed methods today (Morgan 2007; Tashakkori 2009; Creswell 2017) offers a flexible and rigorous framework allowing the simultaneous incorporation of different ways of knowing (Denscombe 2010; Creswell 2011; Bryman 2016). Framing the multi-method approach of my project through pragmatism allowed

me to draw on data from across national quantitative mapping of CAT and local qualitative ethnography.

My project is guided by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner's (2007) definition of mixed methods as 'combining elements of qualitative and quantities research approaches or viewpoints, data collection, analysis and inference techniques for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration' (ibid, p. 123). Bringing together both quantitative and qualitative research through an integrated approach can yield a whole greater than the sum of its parts (Fetters 2018) and recognise the strengths of both (Greene and Caracelli 1997). In doing so, I approach quantitative and qualitative research not as exclusionary paradigms that offer distinct and irreconcilable views about social reality (Bryman 2016). Rather, I approach the complexity of life as consisting of both 'interpretivist' and 'positivist' aspects (Sale et al. 2002) whilst at the same time acknowledging the blurry boundaries that exist between them (Morgan 2018). My study prioritised the use of qualitative methods as the principal data gathering tools preceded using quantitative methods to contextualise, locate and identified CAT practice.

### 3.3.3 Analytical approach

Combining different approaches required a clear strategy to bring them together through combined analysis. The aim of mixing methods says Denscombe (2017) is to get a better 'fix' on the thing that is being investigated by using more than one method to see it from more than one angle, linked to a pragmatist desire to show the most complete picture (Hesse-Biber 2007), and concern to create the most multi-faceted and complex layering of data analysis possible (Reinharz 1992). This was attempted through 'triangulation'. Triangulation in this context (See Denzin 1978; Mathison 1988; Denzin 2012) is founded on a premise that a research topic can be better understood from more than one perspective (Denscombe 2017).

A core idea of triangulation is that all methods have inherent biases and limitations so the use of only one method to assess a given phenomenon will not correct for such distortion (Greene et al. 1989). Denscombe (2010) sets out an approach to triangulation for mixed methods research based on Denzin's (1970) early work, of which the following are pertinent for my study:

1. *Methodological triangulation* (between methods) or the use of alternative methods to allow the findings from one method to be contrasted with another which here refers to the use of quantitative survey data and subjective qualitative interview and ethnographic data to bring broadly different understandings of CAT practice together.

2. *Theory triangulation* where more than one theoretical position is used to interpret data. Where here the potential to reflect on the pertinence, value and usefulness of structural political economy and post-structural positions at different scales of inquiry.

Further integration is also suggested by Mason (2002) at the level of explanation. For Mason (2002), integration at the level of explanation focuses on the how data suggests and supports different forms of general claims. While this study explores the emergence of CAT using different strategies it points towards the pragmatist turn away from non-transcendent, fixed truths, otherwise understanding knowledge as outcomes of embodied experiences and actions that are dynamic, contingent and continually evolving (Wood and Smith 2008). Additionally, I propose that through triangulation of these different approaches I was able to generate different stories around specific practice in the classical pragmatic tradition of 'warranted assertions' (Dewey 1938) with a situationist view of the world rather than recourse to hypothesis testing or 'truths'. Nonetheless this triangulation relies on the validity of the methods used. In mixed methods research validity permeates all aspects of the project, not only its design, including the literature review, design and evaluation of a study, inferences drawn, the use and consequences of the findings (Leech et al. 2010). While some authors have set out the use of new terms, combining terminology from both quantitative and qualitative approaches to reflect the distinct nature of combined inquiry (Johnson et al. 2007), I drew on longstanding approaches to methods in each strategy to promote transparency of inquiry, demonstrate integrity and value.

Finally, in relation to my use of triangulation I acknowledge that although the combined use of methods is aggregated in the final integration of elements its use varies across the different stages of my project. For example, the CAT survey, local authority case studies and ethnographies of transferred assets draw on different methods where analysis and reflection across the data permits methodological triangulation, whereas each individually engages in theory triangulation.

### 3.4 Methods

I organise my work through 'Dialectic pragmatism' (Johnson et al. 2007; Johnson 2009; Johnson and Gray 2010) to systematise the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. This involves engaging in a double task of social science to uncover the potential existence of pre-existing perceptions and constructions of reality while simultaneously taking account of the actual processes involved based on well-established experimental methods (Morgan 2014; Geiselhart 2020).

**Figure 2** Table outline of methodological approach

Stage	Research questions	Aim	Approach to data	Methods	Extents / boundaries
One (part 1)  (part 2)	1	Documenting the emergence of CAT over time and space (descriptive)  Exploring patterns in emergent CAT practice	Quantitative analysis	Survey questionnaire Freedom of Information requests (FOI)  Statistical analysis of FOI dataset	National (Incl. England, Scotland and Wales)
Two	2	Recognising local norms and values that drive CAT practice	Qualitative analysis	Semi-structured interviews with selected local authorities and document analysis	Local authority (Case study x 3)
Three	3	Engaging in the local experience of CAT with community members	Qualitative analysis	Ethnographic participant observation and recorded conversations with community members	Community / neighbourhood (multi-sited x 3)

Source: by author

Figure 2 outlines my methodological approach as it shifts to answer my research questions. This empirical work took place over three stages across different scales and utilised different strategies and methods. Collectively this work addresses the overall research question; To what extent and in what ways does CAT reinforce or transcend inequality? In doing so, it offers an approach to understand the ambivalence and opportunities of CAT practice. Given that mixed methods should explicitly attend to the particular strengths and limitations of each method of data collection (Creswell 2010; Molina-Azorin and Feters 2018), each stage is discussed in terms of its relationship to each detailed research question, its aims, approach to data, methods used and its extents and boundaries.

#### 3.4.1 Stage One: The geographies of CAT

This first stage responded to my first detailed research question: What can a survey of CAT practices reveal about the places and communities affected by this strategy? The aim was to take an extensive view of CAT across Britain with granular spatial and temporal detail to document both its emergence and explore patterns in the resulting data. I addressed this in two parts through quantitative approaches to knowledge.

##### *Part 1 Documenting the emergence and distribution of CAT*

In Stage One Part 1, I created a register of the emergence of CAT over its first decade between 2007-08 to 2017-18 and across Britain. CAT is characterised by the transfer of assets from local

authorities to community groups (Locality 2018), where each local authority is responsible for initiating and implementing transfer. Therefore, I looked to these bodies to document the emergence of CAT practice. To do so, I carried out a survey questionnaire to collect a large amount of data over a fairly short period of time (Denscombe 2010) thereby creating a wide angled although ultimately fuzzy picture of the distribution of CAT across Britain. Local authorities, including all Metropolitan districts, London boroughs, Unitary authorities, County councils, and District councils ( $n=407$ ) (See Appendix 1) across Britain were contacted to take part in the survey. This was initially intended to be a comprehensive account of CAT to avoid sampling bias through prior theoretical selection. This drew on Robinson's (2006) call to move beyond constantly focusing on the same centres of knowledge, and a desire to uncover stories of otherwise forgotten places (Cloe 1991). Local authorities in Wales ( $n=22$ ), Scotland ( $n=32$ ), and England ( $n=353$ ) were contacted. Northern Ireland was not included as some mapping work of CAT had already been undertaken (Murtagh 2015; Murtagh and Boland 2019). Additionally, the Development Trust Association Northern Ireland indicated in a telephone call on the 15th August 2018 that CAT in Northern Ireland represents a different process from that common in Britain as disposal of assets here has been centrally managed by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The survey was conducted through formal Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to local authority officers under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. Although FOI requests have reportedly been overlooked in social and political science research (Walby and Larsen 2011) this legislation offers clear benefits. On one level, FOI processes democratise access to information by 'any person' (Savage and Hyde 2014, p. 305) thereby holding public bodies accountable for their decisions. On another level, this method of data retrieval is well suited to deliver land-based information since it legislates a 'Right of Access' to public authority information including registration records relating to rights over land held by local authorities and HM Land Registry (Sharpe et al. 2005) making a survey questionnaire of the individual transfer and characteristics of publicly owned land-based assets feasible. Additionally, I propose that FOI requests have procedural advantages over traditional surveys as they ameliorate some of the difficulties of surveys in contacting 'hard-to-reach' populations and achieving good response rates (Denscombe 2010). In this case local authorities were easily identifiable, and responses, in theory, are assured through legislation - although with some caveats which in practice did limit responses and which I discuss below.

**Figure 3** *Scope of data requested from local authorities*

<b>Data solicited</b>	<b>Contribution to knowledge</b>
Name of asset	General description
Function/land use categorisation of asset (at time of transfer)	Identified the function/use of the community asset
Address and postcode	Located assets geographically
Name of organisation taking on the asset	Identified groups taking on public assets
Type of transfer (i.e., freehold, leasehold, licence/agreement to use)	Identified the type of land transaction
Date of transfer (month/year)	Documented the temporal dimension of CAT
Transfer through CAT policy	Identified the use of CAT
Identification of retracted transfers	Identified the turn-over or churn of community ownership through CAT

*Source:* by author

Local authorities were asked for broad details on the transfer of management and/or ownership of public buildings and land with community, cultural and leisure amenity from local authority to other organisations, groups, or individuals between the financial years 2007/08 to 2017-18. This included the transfer of all assets (e.g., buildings or land), irrespective of the use of CAT to contextualise asset disposal. Detailed quantitative information was solicited. Respondents were encouraged to answer questions, set out in an excel spreadsheet covering a variety of aspects that collectively offered a broad description of the nature of CAT (See figure 3 scope of data requested from local authorities). This process was based on the premise that clear and short questions improve validity and reliability (Ritter and Sue 2007), and to encourage the return of standardised data that can facilitate comparison (Savage and Hyde 2014). Following a successful pilot survey to test questions during July-August 2018 (Including 6 local authorities of differing size), all requests were sent out in late August 2018.

### *Part 2 Exploring patterns in emergent CAT practice*

From the Freedom of Information requests data was gathered to create a detailed survey of CAT practice based on the transfer of individual assets in Britain. This data served as the basis for the second part of the first stage. This involved statistical analysis of the data following an exploratory approach to data analysis as set out by Catherine Marsh (Marsh 1988; Marsh and Elliott 2008). Marsh's (1988) approach to statistics positions analysis not as mechanical testing of preconceived hypothesis drawn from theory but rather as detective work to piece together numerical evidence about the social world. Correspondingly I approached CAT openly, employing a range of exploratory data analysis to understand patterns of CAT practice as found within the dataset. As Marsh and Elliot (2008, p. 2) outline this work is about asking 'what do these data say' and 'might that result be spurious' in a balancing act between understanding the stories within the data and checking whether the patterns that they contain are generalisable to the wider population.

The aim of part 2 was to analyse this original dataset focusing on patterns of CAT across time and space at local authority level based on returned FOI requests with complete information (n=298), a relatively small number for statistical analysis. Using this data, I carried out exploratory work in four main areas using computer software (IBM SPSS Statistics 25).

Firstly, I explored the association between the national expansion of CAT and the impact of austerity (See Appendix 2 Association between CAT and austerity, for descriptive analysis of dataset and variables). Secondly, I mapped the emergence of CAT practice across time and space through cluster analysis based on location, political control of the local authority (at time of transfer), urban/rural classification and asset use (See Appendix 4 Cluster analysis of CAT across time and space, for my rationale and descriptive analysis of data set and variables). Thirdly, through analysis of the geographical distribution of CAT across regions and local authorities I reflected on associations with related theories of austerity (Beatty and Fothergill 2014; Hastings et al. 2015; Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Latham 2017; Gray and Barford 2018; Strong 2020). (See Appendix 5 Three CAT landscapes, for cross tabulation of characteristics of local authorities with high prevalence of CAT).

**Figure 4** Table of associations tested

Link to theory	Independent variables
To explore the relationship between the depth of austerity cuts to local authority service spending (as percentage change in local government service spending) and the prevalence of CAT.	Austerity - Percentage change in local government spending (Amin Smith et al. 2016a)
To consider the relationship between the depth of impact of austerity through the cuts to national welfare, expressed as financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) by Local authority, and the prevalence of CAT.	National cuts to welfare by local authority - 'Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) by local authority (Beatty and Fothergill 2016a)
To consider the relationship between places of pre-existing inequality through Index of Multiple deprivation and the prevalence of CAT.	Deprivation - '% of LSOAs / DZs* <sup>1</sup> in most deprived 20%' – based on Index of Multiple Deprivation for England (Gov.UK 2015), Scotland (Gov.scot 2016a), Wales (Gov.wales 2014)* <sup>2</sup>

Source: by author.

Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> LSOA refers to Lower Layer Super Output Areas, a small unit of territorial area in England and Wales populated by approximately 1,500 people. DZ refers to Data zones, a similar small territorial unit although with an approximate standard population of between 500 and 1,000 residents.

\*<sup>2</sup> Indices of Multiple deprivation data correspond to categorisation at time of transfer. This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities, and is set at 20 per cent as a proxy for areas below the official UK poverty threshold as studies have shown that in rural Wales 18 per cent of households were living below the official UK poverty threshold of 60% of the national median income for Wales (Milbourne 2014).



Fourthly, through bivariate analysis I tested associations between the prevalence of Community Service CATs per 100k at local authority level and the geographies of austerity and deprivation including: 1) the depth of austerity cuts to local authority service spending (Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Gray and Barford 2018); 2) the depth of the impact of austerity through the cuts to national welfare, expressed as financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) by local authority, and the prevalence of CAT (Beatty and Fothergill 2016b); 3) the places of pre-existing inequality identified through Index of Multiple deprivation by nation. This work draws on theory that also guides analysis of all statistical analysis and is outlined in the literature review above. Figure 4 sets out the associations tested – outlining the links to theory and identifies the independent variables with which they were tested (See Appendix 6 Bivariate analysis of CAT for descriptive analysis of variables, for calculation of bivariate associations between the prevalence of CAT per 100k residents at local authority level). This was carried out in the spirit of detective work rather than search for immutable laws and helped to frame my further inquiry at increasingly smaller scales through qualitative inquiry.

#### 3.4.2 Stage Two: local government CAT practice

This stage moved closer to the process of the implementation of CAT practice at local authority level. This attended to my second research question; Why and how has the process of CAT emerged at local authority level? The aim of this stage was to recognise the local discursive norms and values that drive CAT practices.

The purpose of this stage was to examine and understand the processes of CAT at local authority level and how they are enacted. This draws on recent work on the impact of austerity on local government institutions (Fuller 2017; 2019), allied to French ‘pragmatic sociology of critique’ that aims to establish local understandings of reality that guide action (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]). This framework, mobilised here as a ‘research programme’ rather than a theory (Wagner 2014), offers a more than explanatory account of CAT by conceptualising the argumentative rationales used by local actors in their deployment of CAT. Centred on a form of pragmatist critical theory (Boltanski 2011 [2009]; Susen 2014a) this approach underlines the importance of the judgement of ordinary actors in establishing and ordering the social world. Wills and Lake (2020) draw parallels in this approach to Dewey’s publics which seeks to understand the grammars of public disagreement and its role in shaping the common good, but suggest that it presents less of a commitment to intervention in debate that is otherwise implicit in classical pragmatism. Nonetheless, I propose that recognition of the potential within local deliberations that constitute everyday constructions of social values and norms is an important

step in inquiry that seeks to change the world, even if it only moves provisionally and tentatively forward at the same time as simultaneously acknowledging its ambivalent context. For Boltanski (2011 [2009], p. 150) understanding these debates opens the possibility for emancipation where the role of critique increases the strength of those who engage with it and in its capacity to engage with reality in order to alter its form.

My work involved three local authority case studies which through qualitative semi-structured interviews with a range of actors allowed for new and plural understandings of the rationales behind CAT practice to emerge. In relation to taking a non-foundational approach to knowledge, Flyvbjerg (2006) highlights the importance of context driven inquiry as an advanced form of learning over and above repressive rule-based knowledge. For Flyvbjerg (2006) case study research is valuable due to its closeness to real-life situations offering a wealth of detail that brings nuance to understandings of reality, including the view that human experience cannot be meaningfully understood as simply rule-governed acts. It is also important for researchers own learning processes, offering proximity and the opportunity for feedback from research participants in the absence of predictive theory in social science (Flyvbjerg 2006). On this basis case study research of local authorities can help in the pragmatist situating (Bridge 2021) work of contextualisation. This work, I suggest, involves what Diane Vaughan (1992) termed ‘casing’ where each case requires full empirical exploration before an understanding of exactly what kind of case it is can emerge. Thus, through these case studies I sought to ground knowledge of CAT through local experiences.

**Figure 5** *Table of general characteristics of local authority case studies*

Case study location	Case study pseudonym	Real-terms change in local government service spending by local authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 expressed in quintiles (1 = top quintile of cuts, 5 = bottom quintile of cuts)* <sup>1</sup>	Reduction in total service spending Figures in £s, thousands, 2016-17 prices	% of population that live within 20% of the most deprived neighbourhoods (LSOAs) within respective home nation (i.e. England or Wales)
North East (England)	Northwick	1	103,768	31%
South East (England)	Nerton	2	51,603	12%
Wales	Llandinas* <sup>1</sup>	5* <sup>1</sup>	33,574	28%

Sources: Institute of Fiscal Studies (Amin Smith et al. 2016b); Data from FOI requests by author; Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation, Local Authority Analysis 2019 and English Indices of Deprivation 2019.

Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> These data are indicative only. Welsh figures are not directly comparable with English given the different services included in their calculations.

The case studies were chosen from analysis of my CAT dataset and follows Flyvbjerg's (2006) two-fold strategy for the selection of samples and cases. Firstly, I took an 'information orientated selection', that maximises the utility of information from small samples where cases are selected on the basis of expectation about their information content (Flyvbjerg 2006). Here I drew from a relatively small number of local authorities with the highest prevalence of Community service CATs, over 0.4 per 100k people (See Figure 26, Chapter 4). Here the local authorities are given pseudonyms to protect the identities of research participants (See section 3.5 ethics below). General characteristics are outlines in Figure 5 above.

Using Flyvbjerg's (2006) second selection criteria, I used 'maximum variation cases' to obtain information about the significance of the specific context of cuts to service spending at local authority level which might inform CAT practice. As Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests this involves the selection of cases that are very different in one dimension which helps to reveal the effect of that difference. That is to say, closely framed cases allow for the critical elements of the processes of CAT to emerge enhancing the verification and/or falsification of claims which improves the possibility for generalisation. Accordingly, from the range of possible local authorities with high prevalence of Community Services CATs I chose three cases that represented different circumstances in relation to the change to local government service spending. I selected one local authority in the top quintile of cuts to service spending, one near the middle, and one in the bottom quintile. Therefore, three different experiences of cuts to service spending are presented.

Furthermore, Flyvbjerg's (2006) selection criteria implies that attempts should be made to choose cases that are similar in other aspects. That is to say, closely framed cases allow for the critical elements of processes to emerge enhancing the verification and/or falsification of claims which improves the possibility for generalisation. While I did attempt to choose cases that were largely similar in terms of being urban in nature, I also broadened the difference in choosing cases located in the North East, and South East of England, and Wales. In doing so, my case studies not only represented different experiences of austerity but also distinct geographies and potentially varying politics of CAT. This brought further complexity to analysis but fostered a less deterministic approach to the role of economic austerity in CAT. This enabled exploration of some of the different geographic landscapes identified in my discussion of local authorities (See Chapter 4, section 4.5 and Appendix 5). Additionally, given the exploratory nature of my study where I was not seeking to establish universal facts, I wanted to explore CAT practice more widely. In my analysis of my data this variety presented quite similar yet nonetheless nuanced facets of justification, critique and resistance in relation to CAT (See Chapter 5).

At this stage, I focussed specifically on the disposal of community services through CAT to narrow the scope of inquiry to an important CAT typology. Community service CATs involve assets such as community centres, youth centres (see Appendix 8 for a table of land use typologies of assets transferred under CAT) and are the most prevalent use typology (See figure 14 below). These assets are more likely to be taken on by local community groups and not large-scale social enterprises who tend to seek profitable businesses (Findlay-King et al. 2017). As such, these are small scale operations likely to rely on alternative economies of volunteerism whilst often being associated with former local services. As such they represent some of the most demanding 'assets' for communities in terms of taking on operation and financial management responsibilities which are furthermore potentially the most vulnerable as they do not have clear sources of income. Looking more specifically at these assets omits the noise of other different use typologies such as land, amenity space, transport infrastructures and sports facilities which suggest different roles and challenges for community groups.

Over the three cases studies, I carried out fourteen in-depth semi-structured interviews with local authority officers, councillors, third sector workers and government officials across the three cases where research participants were identified as having specific roles in the development of CAT practice and/or were closely involved in its implementation. This work set out to understand the local logics employed in the practice of CAT. The semi-structured interviews were understood as conversations around the process within a formal piece of research (Silverman 2013), and involved asking questions to elicit the experiences, perceptions and feelings of research participants (Edwards and Holland 2013). Interview schedules were prepared using informal language are structured around different types of question such as description, verification and contrast (Spradley 1979) to collect data.

There were some challenges to using data from these interviews. Hitchings (2012) warns of the difficulties in using interviews to study everyday life. Where interviews happen after the fact they will provide only an approximation of what took place, or more problematically routine practices are outside narrow discourse and have difficulty in accessing 'unspeakable' but important acts (Hitchings 2012, p. 61). However, I approached these interviews as a communicative process whereby people revealed the nature of CAT through reflecting on their own experiences. Dewey (1998 [1925]) talks about the role of communication through which:

all natural events are subject to reconsideration and revision; they are re-adapted to meet the requirements of conversation' [going on to explain that events] 'are subject to

ideal experimentation: their meanings may be infinitely combined and re-arranged in imagination, and the outcome of this inner experimentation – which is thought – may issue forth in interaction with crude or raw events’ (Dewey 1998 [1925], p. 166).

Based on this understanding, might we then consider these interviews be considered as micro acts of inquiry into CAT whereby reflection creates understandings and interaction?

This leads to reflections on my own ‘actions and observations in the field, [my] impressions, irritations, feelings and so on, become data in their own right, forming part of the interpretation and [were] documented in research diaries’ (Flick 2014, p. 126). Situating myself within the process was key to framing my understandings and arguments around CAT. This work formed part of my analysis and is referred to throughout my thesis and in the following empirical chapters. Additionally, I drew on local authority documents, including statement of accounts, corporate land and management property plans and strategies, committee and cabinet meeting notes, and CAT guidelines to provide further detail. These documents were not intended to be (mis)used to ‘read-off’ practices of power which a governmentality approach might suggest (McKee 2009), but took a practical role in complementing and grounding the information from interviews with council workers within a wider knowledge base where time and resource constraints of the project limited time in this field.

### 3.4.3 Stage Three: An ethnography of CAT

In this final stage of inquiry, I refocused my investigative lens onto three individual asset transfers through a multi-sited ethnographic inquiry. This addressed the third set of research questions; Why do community groups become involved in CAT, how do groups frame and experience this and what subsequent role(s) do they take on or establish? The aim of this stage was to engage in the local experience of CAT with community members to gain an understanding of how CAT practice unfolds on the ground.

Over twelve months of weekly observations (totalling over 250 hours) and recorded conversations with 64 community members, volunteers, and paid staff across all three sites, I witnessed how community groups work through austerity to secure and protect community infrastructure. Analysis of my data was undertaken thematically, drawing across all information gathered, and in relation to specific situated contexts with reference to the origins of responses, i.e., role (Community member, Volunteer, Staff, Trustee) or location (Cymorth, Cychfan and Cymdaithasol Community Centres). Although I use quotes from individuals, by bringing them together my

argument is informed by the collective research participant community. Using this data and drawing on critical geography and feminist literatures of care to address my final research questions; Why do community groups become involved in CAT? How do they operate these spaces? What subsequent role(s) do they take on? This work reveals the establishment of new infrastructures of care - alleviating as well as being a product of austerity - that sit within and are influenced by broader understandings of the impact of spending cuts through recourse to social reproduction.

The selection of individual sites of CAT was drawn from the previous stages of survey data which identified Local authorities and subsequent selection of three as case studies, one of which I chose as the context for my ethnographic work. I selected Llandinas as it offered a three-fold advantage. Firstly, Llandinas presented a wide range of different experiences of community groups taking on assets through CAT from which individual cases could be selected. Secondly, it contained a wide range of communities involved in CAT representing different socio-economic circumstances. Thirdly, it offered proximity that allowed for sustained and frequent access. Llandinas offered the advantage of representing a different location outside the often-reported Local authorities in England, is subject to a different government (Senedd Cymru, Welsh Parliament), and is located in the nation with the highest number of all CATs per capita (0.8 CATs per 100k), compared to Scotland (0.12 CATs per 100K), and England (0.09 CATs per 100k).

From within this local authority a selection of three individual sites was made. Again these were chosen on the assertion that closely framed cases allow for critical elements of a process to emerge (Flyvbjerg 2006). Here, cases were under the same local authority, of a similar size and function as 'community centres' and were transferred under conditions of CAT. However, they did differ in neighbourhood location, with one in the city centre, and the other two in suburban areas. They were located in communities with varying scores on the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (See Boxes 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 below). I approached these approximations of the nature of the cases as preliminary assumptions (Walton 1992), wary that they could reinforce prior spatial notions based on where CATs were. For example, CAT practice in affluent areas may be self-interested and disproportionately supported by the usual suspects who have the skills and capacity to volunteer (See also Wills 2016), or where alternatively less affluent areas lack the support of charitable organisations and are left to struggle on their own (Mohan 2012). Verification of hypothesis is a strong impulse (Campbell 1988), yet I was open to understandings shifting dramatically during inquiry and analysis (Flyvbjerg 2001; 2006). In practice further exploration suggested other significant factors, which I go on to outline in Chapter 6, that transcended these preliminary notions.

Defined as an in-depth and holistic research approach, ethnography attempts to understand the subjective meanings of events for people in particular situations (Burgess 1991; Crang and Cook 2007). As such, it is well suited to explore the in-situ ultra-local geographies of CAT and how they are co-constituted through different local political, social, and economic factors. My ethnographic approach was based on open inquiry with theoretical and investigative direction emerging from being in the field. During my inquiry I began to focus on how CAT was shaped by the diverse practices, legacies and experiences of the community groups and members who either took an active role in the management of these spaces or experienced these spaces as users. This touched on the inherent tensions in CAT whereby communities take on assets to mitigate state withdrawal, simultaneously offering important sites of care and even resistance.

Through ethnography I engaged with data that was primarily 'soft, subjective and speculative' (Burgess 1984, p. 3) and required reflexive engagement in the production of knowledge (Crang and Cook 2007). My ethnographic work involved over twelve months of weekly observations (totalling over 250 hours), participating overtly in people's lives, watching, listening, questioning and gathering data from a range of sources (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). However, this process of 'deep hanging out' was not unstructured where I drew on Wogan's (2004) threefold strategy that involved, 1) gaining access, 2) spending time with people to grasp their world views and ways of life, and finally, 3) travelling back to the academy to make sense of this through writing up an account of that culture. Undertaking my multi-sited ethnography, I followed the mundane day-to-day routine and experiences of community life in CAT.

Gaining access to assets has methodological, ethical and practical dimensions. On one level, gaining consent from community groups was relatively unproblematic and community members were keen to share their stories about the community centres. Yet, negotiating access was an ongoing process where at busy sites the churn of community members in some of the spaces was constant and reflected Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) assertion that each new encounter requires the academic to (re)present themselves to ensure participant awareness of their role.

### *Participant observation*

Spending time at the sites involved participant observation to broaden my understandings of the spaces and actions CAT had created and the role that these centres had in people's lives. Participant observation encourages useful thick description (Geertz 1973) that helps to understand actions and context. From a geographical perspective Cloke et al. (2004) outlined an extensive checklist which formed the basis of my approach to participant observation as it moves

from description, to observation through participation to self-reflection (See Appendix 9, for ethnographic description summaries for each site). Based on this guide I spent time in the spaces of CAT to take in what was going on. This included sitting in the receptions and public spaces, taking part in activities and classes such as well as being around for birthdays, holding a raffle, days out, helping and volunteering. These instances allowed for informal conversations to take place, instilled a sense of what the spaces were used for, who was using them and why.

### *Recording conversations*

Alongside participant observation I undertook recorded conversations (n=64) with staff, volunteers, and community members across the three sites as a formal way to check understanding of events and to gain a different insight into how they discursively framed and understood CAT. These conversations, organised in the same way as the semi-structured interviews at local authority level (See 3.4.2 Stage Two: local government CAT practice above), took on a more intimate atmosphere as I talked with people who I had previously spent some time with. These conversations proved very important in analysis of the data, not least because they provide a direct conduit for readers of my research to the ways in which people talk and understand CAT.

### *Volunteering*

The suggestion to work as a volunteer was first made by one of the community groups who proposed that it would be a good way through which to 'speak with the other volunteers on their books... to find out what they do' (Field notes 29.03.2019). While this may be an attempt by participants to 'seek to convert the researcher to their beliefs' (Adler 1987, p. 15), or perhaps more likely in this case as a way for the centre to showcase the work that they do, volunteering potentially offers access to a group involved in the day-to-day activities of the centre. Further immersion in the setting by taking on a formalised role in activities can be viewed as part of an ethnographic process that entails layers of description that move from observation, through participation to self-reflection (Cloe 2004). Additionally, my motivation to take on volunteering has an epistemological foundation as it seeks to explore the 'subjectively meaningful world of members rather than objective analytic accounts of their worlds (Rochford 1985 in Adler 1987, p. 52). However, the dual role of researcher and ethnographer brings with it concerns which may be addressed through reference to the growing literature on 'volunteering ethnography' and classic texts of sociology.

Recent ethnographies where researchers also act as volunteers highlight the need to negotiate the boundaries between these different roles to maintain academic rigour. Sociologist Jean



Tinney's (2008) paper on being a voluntary nursing home ethnographer sets out her negotiation of the borders between research and voluntary work. Tinney (2008) describes her actions to limit her role as a volunteer by maintaining a physical and emotional distance in order to meet responsibilities entailed in ethical and rigorous research. Negotiations are present in Garthwaite's (2016, p. 69) work as a Foodbank volunteer ethnographer highlighting the uncomfortable emotions, anxiety and attachments at play when 'applying a "critical lens" to people I have formed relationships with throughout the research'. These works speak to a longstanding concern that taking on a more involved role with participant groups can lead to the researcher 'going native' (Bulmer 1980), or being drawn into the world of the research participants where critical and analytical perspective is lost (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Consequently, a careful path must be taken when engaging in more immersive roles whilst recognising their potential to gain greater insight and knowledge. Further ethical considerations implicated in taking on this role in ethnographic research are discussed below.

### *Documenting and analysing*

Ethnographic work largely entailed the recording of observations and conversations through fieldnotes (Hammersley and Atkinson 2019). Essentially a technique to record data, the writing of fieldnotes can inform analytic ideas that arise or help in forming questions and hypotheses. Crang and Cook's (2007) advice on keeping a field diary was taken and involved: keeping a daily record whilst on site; giving detailed descriptions that evoked place, and; attempting to make sense of how (mis)understandings develop and research takes shape. This reflexivity was an important aspect of the method and helped me to acknowledge and problematize my own position within the context (Denscombe 2010). My diary, like the transcripts and reflexive accounts of the interviews undertaken at local authority level and recorded conversations from the CAT research sites, I began to incorporate all my data into software (NVivo) for categorisation, coding and thematic analysis, and triangulation, to facilitate interpretation and explanation. However, I consciously chose to carry out analysis differently in this instance turning instead to printing out copies of my data so that I could physically sort through and analyse information. This older technique, I found, offered a welcome break from otherwise near constant screen use during lockdown. Nonetheless, I do recognise the value of this software and its future potential especially where data might be shared between academics working on the same project. The coding, thematic analysis and triangulation undertaken provided the data for the subsequent empirical chapters.

### 3.5 Ethics

Ethical concerns ran throughout this thesis and were not restricted solely to methodological considerations. Scholars of the community ownership of assets have written of the need to address the political purpose and ethical base of asset transfer when framed as asset-let generation (Murtagh 2015), a stance that reflects an overall ethical commitment to explore of acts localism as part of a project to recognise beneficial practices (Featherstone et al. 2012; Williams et al. 2014), to listen to silenced voices (Hesse-Biber 2007) and to engage in CAT as part of an inquiry orientated towards action.

My consideration of ethical issues began with those that apply to social research generally and were addressed in the first instance through engaging with and securing ethical approval from the Cardiff University School of Geography and Planning Ethical Approval process. Additionally, I adhered to the core principles of my funders the Economic and Social Research Council set out in their ethical framework that guided my research conduct (ESRC 2017; 2021).

#### *Possible harm to participants*

The social world of CAT could be considered as a non-threatening everyday context with no evident risks to participants. Since these actions take place in, and are primarily concerned with, the public realm, concerns that research questions may harm emotional and psychological well-being (Boddy 2016), or intrude into peoples' lives (Punch 2005) could be understood as limited. However, over the course of the fieldwork it became clear that participants were emotionally invested in these spaces, 'coming here helps me with anxiety, it gets me out the house and to be honest I don't know what I would be doing without it' (Research diary, Cymorth Community centre, 2019), or worried about the potential negative effects of what I might find in my research and how this might impact negatively on their relationship with the local council, i.e., 'what happens if you find out something that makes us look bad?' (Research diary, Cymorth Community centre, 2019). Considering this, care was taken in the field to address these situations as they arose and reflect on how my reporting might directly impact individuals at the same time as considering wider ethical and political implications of my work.

Additionally, research can be said to place a 'burden' on participants in terms of the time they take to be interviewed or engagement during ethnographic fieldwork (Bryman 2016). This was partly mitigated as community members often had an interest in my inquiry, allowed them to talk about their concerns that otherwise might not have had an audience.

### *Informed consent and recruitment procedures*

The integrity of the research was maintained through clear planning to secure informed consent and to ensure that all participants understood the independence, ownership of the data and rights to publication (Boddy 2016). Obtaining informed consent of participants was secured in various ways.

Firstly, through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that explicitly gathered information that was in the public interest. Secondly, using consent forms accompanied by a project information sheet for interviews at local authority level and recorded conversations with community members was preceded with the signing of consent forms accompanied by a project information sheet. Thirdly with the use of consent forms and conversations with different participants in the ethnographic including the community group responsible for the assets, the volunteers/workers who organised activities in the space and final with community members who used the space. In practice, consent with community members was gained through conversations at the beginning of activities and in contrast to Bell who argues that researchers want to avoid continually reiterating their investigatory presence like some 'sociological equivalent of the familiar police caution, like "anything you say or do will be taken down and used as data"' (Bell and Newby 1977, p. 59), I was keen to ensure that consent was given. In the few cases where events took place faster than consent could be secured, I either sought permission after, or did not use the data. I was acutely aware of the care I needed to take with respect to the community members, as Hammersley and Atkinson point out 'all that can be required from ethnographer's is that they take note of ethical aspects of their work and make the best judgements they can in the circumstances. They will have to live with the consequences of their actions; and inevitably, so too will others. But this is true of all of us in all aspects of our lives; it is the human condition' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p. 228) Thus, during the analysis of my data I took decisions on what to report, and what not to report, based on the circumstances of each individual event.

### *Confidentiality of the data*

My attempts to secure confidentiality of the data revolved around protecting individual participants by maintaining their anonymity throughout pseudonymisation (Boddy 2016), which I used to protect the identity of the three local authority case studies and the three individual assets. It was more important to safeguard the identity of my research participants and not indirectly stigmatise them or their practices. As such the local authorities and individual community centre research sites were given new names. In the case of the interviewees with local authorities these individuals were anonymised by removing names and assigning them generic roles and codes to limit their subsequent identification (Boddy 2016). Moreover, it is important in

the dissemination of research that individuals cannot be recognised since their reputation can be unintentionally damaged as well as their feelings hurt (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007).

My project, whilst maintaining an independent and critical analysis of CAT, avoids unnecessarily attributing actions to specific people or organisations so as not to harm the individual research participants. This included the identity of the local authorities, so that their officers may be afforded some protection. To be clear, the actions of local authorities' as public bodies do merit scrutiny. Additionally, through the identification of place, the validity of the research can be asserted as others may find resonance in the data through their own experiences or are given an opportunity to verify findings. However, in the current climate where at national level Conservative politicians seek to shame local authorities for closing libraries, and therefore ignoring the role of their own national fiscal austerity policies in cutting local government spending (Nicholson 2021; Sheldrick 2021), the identities of the individuals at local authority level who are involved should be given some protection. The local authority case studies were given generic names in relation to their general location. The community centres were given Welsh pseudonyms to protect their identity. To non-Welsh speakers these labels may appear interchangeable and plays on the idea that knowledge is mutable and in flux, but also recognises the similarities between cases. Finally, all data was managed securely within a Cardiff University secure environment in accordance with the University data management plan (Cardiff University 2021) and the ESRCs Research Data Policy (ESRC 2021).

### *Volunteering*

The work of Adler and Adler (1987), signposted by Tinney (2008), provides a useful framework to address my role as a volunteer and ethnographer at the different sites and helps to reveal some of the techniques which can be employed to establish boundaries in this type of research. Adler and Adler's (1987) active membership role category has close parallels to volunteering as a researcher. The active membership role is defined as a researcher's participation in core activities in much the same way as members but holding back from committing themselves to the goals and values of members. Three ways of establishing boundaries are identified to 'maintain several escape routes that safeguard their [researchers] greater commitment to their academic goal' (Adler 1987, p. 50). One, periodic withdrawal from the setting to nourish outside interests and limit involvement. This is something achieved indirectly as simultaneous fieldwork over three sites means that physical contact is not concentrated with one group. Two, periodic realignment of the researcher's perspective is necessary through engagement with outsiders to maintain criticality. The location of my sites in Llandinas in Wales means that close contact with the research community of the University can be maintained encouraging academic objectivity. Three, the

need to maintain perspective that my participation is temporal and that my personal and career commitments lie elsewhere (Adler 1987). These strategies helped to prioritise academic rigour, even if in practice they were less clear cut as Adler (1987) might suggest.

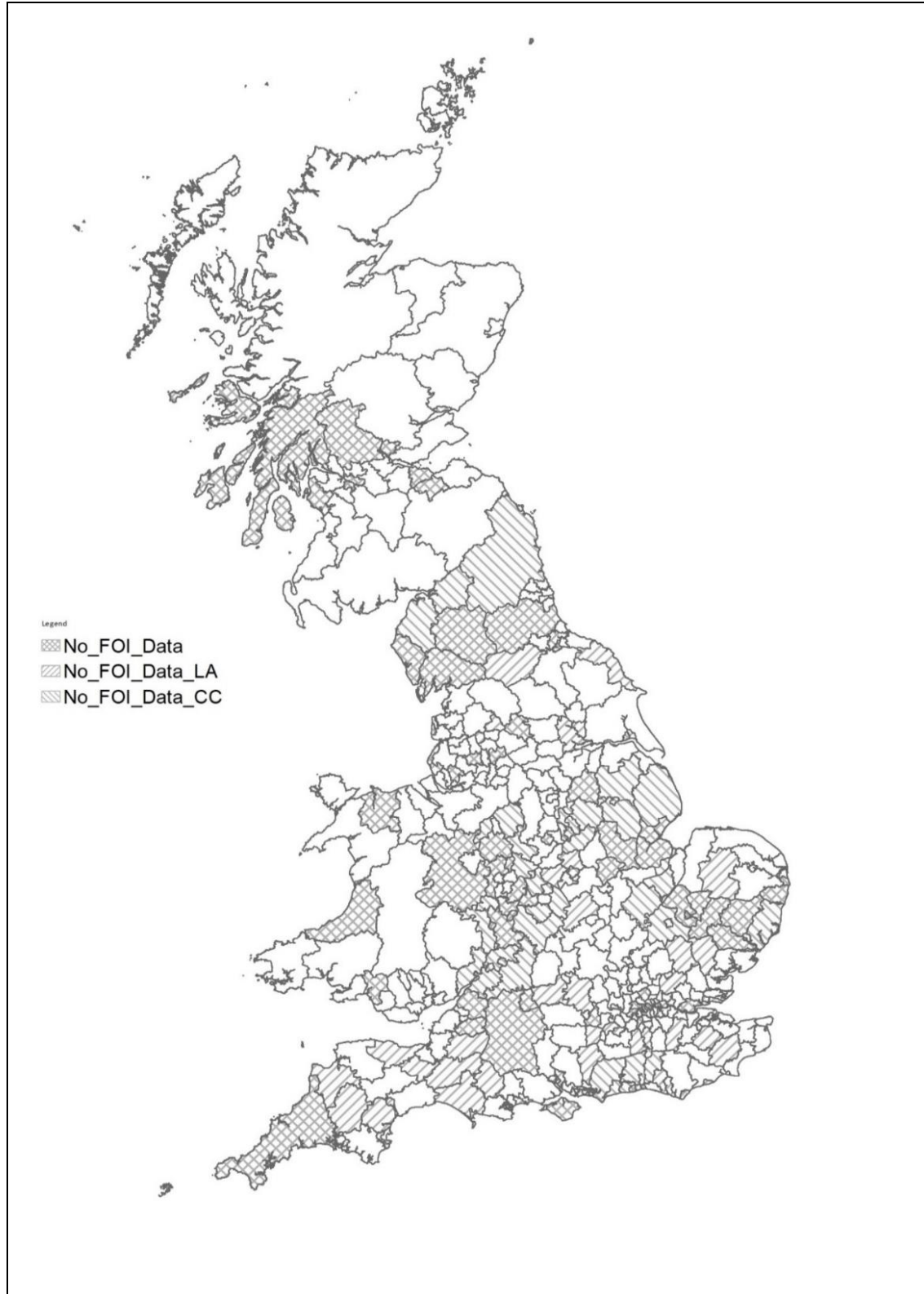
The role of volunteer was suggested by two of the community groups as a way to understand the activities at the site better. The definition of what this work entailed, its duration and what responsibilities I assumed provided the opportunity for reciprocity through mundane actions as a way of 'giving back' (Hill O'Connor and Baker 2017) and bringing benefits to community groups and members as they helped me with my project. Additionally, I acknowledge that from a methodological perspective my presence will have altered, albeit subtly, the course of events, as I 'become at the same time a constituent of place (one of those things brought together through or entangled in a place-event) and an agent in its production' (Pink 2015, p. 97).

### 3.6 Introducing the field(s)

#### 3.6.1 Survey of CAT in Britain

##### *Part 1 Documenting CAT*

**Figure 6** Map of the distribution of FOI data from local authorities across Britain



Source: By author with information from Freedom of Information returns

Figure 6 shows a Map of the distribution of FOI data from local authorities across Britain. This represents an incomplete layer of knowledge where data creates an understanding of CAT practice as an antimacassar of coverage that is full of holes where FOI requests did not return full information. The reasons for this were three-fold. Firstly, it was due to no response to FOI requests ( $n=65$ ). Secondly, some local authorities cited 'Section 12(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which allows an exception to comply with the request if the Council estimates that the cost of complying would exceed the appropriate limit which for local authorities is set at four hundred- and fifty-pounds equating to eighteen hours ( $n=21$ ), therefore demonstrating that some councils do not have this information readily to hand. Thirdly, some local authorities supplied partial information and/or data in an unusable format ( $n=23$ ). As a result, the anticipated full data from FOI returns was not achieved.

**Figure 7** Table of returned Freedom of Information requests by region

	Region	Cases					
		Valid		Missing		Total	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
FOI Full information (1), Incomplete / no info (0)	London	19	57.6%	14	42.4%	33	100.0%
	West Mid.	21	63.6%	12	36.4%	33	100.0%
	South West	27	65.9%	14	34.1%	41	100.0%
	North West	29	70.7%	12	29.3%	41	100.0%
	East	37	71.2%	15	28.8%	52	100.0%
	East Mid.	33	73.3%	12	26.7%	45	100.0%
	South East	59	79.7%	15	20.3%	74	100.0%
	Yorks & H.	18	81.8%	4	18.2%	22	100.0%
	Scotland	26	81.3%	6	18.8%	32	100.0%
	North East	10	83.3%	2	16.7%	12	100.0%
	Wales	19	86.4%	3	13.6%	22	100.0%
	Total	298	73.2%	109	26.8%	407	100.0%

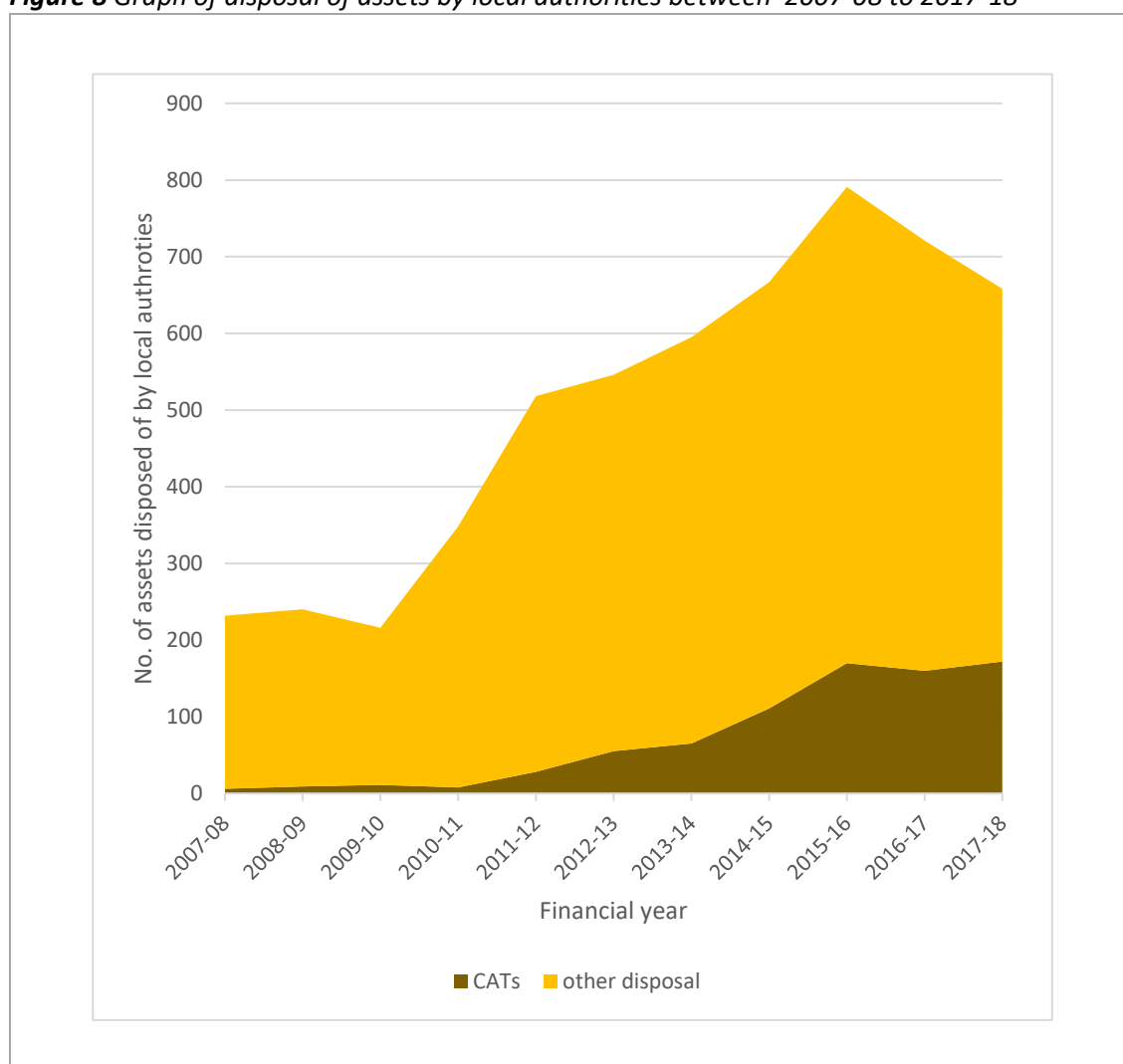
Source: By author

Figure 7 sets out a table of returned Freedom of Information requests by region illustrating geographical unevenness which could introduce bias into the data. for example, returns for London are the lowest (57.6 per cent of total) creating greater uncertainty whereas returns in Wales are 86.4 per cent complete. There are also hidden, but theoretically important, omissions in the data where some large cities and county councils were unable to provide the data as requested. Where relevant, these omissions are considered in the analysis of the data in Chapter 4. Nonetheless, while this presents a limitation of the survey the dataset represents the best available data and accounts overall for a total of 73.2 per cent of all local authorities ( $n=298$ ).

Evaluating the effectiveness of my FOI survey to return data compared to similar FOI surveys is tricky, not least as detail of the content requested is specific to my study. However, the Locality and Co-op's (2020) recent survey based on Freedom of Information requests does allow for a broad comparison. This survey which involved requests to 353 local authorities across England achieved a high 80 per cent response rate (Locality and Co-op 2020), compared to my response rate of 66.6 per cent for English local authorities. Although my results for Scotland at 81.3 per cent, and Wales at 86.4 per cent are higher. The Locality and Co-op (2020) survey requested very general information, which may have assisted a higher return. In my case, asking for less data would have resulted in a reduced scope for study and note permitted the breadth of exploration undertaken (See Chapter 4).

### *CAT and other disposals*

**Figure 8** Graph of disposal of assets by local authorities between 2007-08 to 2017-18



Source: CAT data from FOI returns collated by author



Figure 8 shows a graph of disposal of assets by local authorities between 2007-08 to 2017-18. This shows the year-on-year data for the number of transfers undertaken through CAT (brown area), a total of 795 cases (where there are 25 missing cases without a date of disposal). It also shows the year-on-year number of disposals taken by other means (yellow area), which relates variously to outright sale, or the lease of assets to a range of third parties based on long-standing forms of asset disposal in England and Wales under Circular 06/03: General Disposal Consent (2003) Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973. These acts, and subsequent revisions, gave local authorities autonomy to dispose of land and which are critically different from CAT in that they do not require the preparation of the recipient bodies supplying business cases, nor indication of the community benefit that they will offer in return for transfer – as under CAT. These cases of ‘other disposal’ constitute a total of 4737 cases (where there are an additional 379 missing cases that did not provide a date of disposal).

The total number of cases, including CATs and ‘other disposal’ is 5,936 over the ten-year period. The percentage of assets disposed of through CAT is 13.8 per cent of the total demonstrating that CAT is less prevalent than ‘other disposal’. The graph shows that CAT continues to rise over the period, discussion of which forms part of Chapter 4.

It is very difficult to verify this data as no official records exist to account for the disposal of public buildings and land at local authority level. A recent 2020 study of CAT practice in England registered a total of 1,390 cases of CAT over a five-year period between 2014-15 and 2018-19 (Locality and Co-op 2020). These figures are not directly comparable since: i) they are weighted to account for non-responses whereas my data represents only returned data; ii) they refer to a different time period, where my data covers CAT from 2007-08 to 2017-18; iii) they do not all refer to CAT, where 28 per cent of those identified were completed by local authorities without CAT policy (Locality and Co-op 2020), and thus bringing into question what the data actually represents. Locality and Co-op’s (2020) survey numbers propose a rough approximation of 1,000 CATs in England over the last five-year period. In contrast my data of 820 CATs over a ten-year period across England, Scotland and Wales is less. However, my numbers are not conflated by weighting to account for non-responses, and each of my cases carries highly detailed information such as, function or land/use, address, postcode, name of organisation taking on the asset, type of transfer, date of transfer, which allow for fine grained spatial analysis, where Locality’s data does not. On one level, this work shows the potential for divergent estimates of practice to emerge making scrutiny of CAT without more stringent official requirements to register CAT practice difficult. On another level, I suggest that we should be wary of conflating numbers through weighting data to account for non-responses. Given that CAT is highly contingent, I argue

that rather than altering data to create supposed estimates of the national scale of CAT practice, we should work with the data we have. This avoids introducing bias and potentially skewing actually existing variations between areas. Additionally, my data does not claim to be ‘real’ in the sense of providing a complete picture given my pragmatist sensibility to data I see this knowledge as fallible and influx.

## *Part 2 Emergent patterns in CAT distribution*

**Figure 9** *Distribution of all CATs by region between 2007-08 to 2017-18*

Distribution of all CATs by region					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Wales	250	30.5	30.5	82.0
	North East	105	12.8	12.8	19.1
	North West	96	11.7	11.7	30.8
	Yorks. & Hum.	83	10.1	10.1	100.0
	South East	68	8.3	8.3	46.8
	West Midlands	65	7.9	7.9	89.9
	Scotland	63	7.7	7.7	38.5
	South West	39	4.8	4.8	51.5
	East (Eng.)	37	4.5	4.5	4.5
	London	14	1.7	1.7	6.3
	East Midlands	1	.1	.1	4.6
	Total	821	100.0	100.0	

Source: CAT data from FOI returns collated by author

From my dataset the distribution of all CATs by region between 2007-08 to 2017-18 is revealed (See figure 9). Here the absolute number of cases points towards a high number of cases in Wales ( $n=250$ ) with least in the East Midland ( $n=1$ ) and London ( $n=14$ ). While in Wales the numbers may be high partly due to a higher response rate (84.6 per cent), in the East Midland's there too was a relatively high response (73.3 per cent), although the response rate for London was low (57.9 per cent). Nonetheless, this data begins to offer a picture of the distribution of CAT and points towards potential links to theory, where for example a strong presence of CAT in the north of England may be associated with the depth of cuts to local government through economic austerity (Amin Smith et al. 2016b), and where high numbers in Wales and Scotland may present a check to this hypothesis as devolved governments in these home nations have largely protected local government spending, at least up until 2015-16 (Amin Smith et al. 2016a). A full discussion and exploration of these points takes place in Chapter 4.

**Figure 10 Comparison of surveys showing the distribution of CATs by region**

<b>Comparison surveys showing data of the distribution of CATs by region (England only)</b>					
		<b>New survey data*<sup>1</sup> (2007-08 to 2017-18)</b>		<b>Locality and Co-op survey (2015-16 to 2018-19)</b>	
		<b>Frequency*<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Percent of all CATs</b>	<b>Frequency*<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Percent of all CATs</b>
Valid	North East	105	20.7	162	11.7
	North West	96	18.9	190	13.7
	Yorks. & Hum.	83	16.3	141	10.1
	South East	68	13.4	155	11.2
	West Midlands	65	12.8	57	4.1
	South West	39	7.7	385	27.7
	East (Eng.)	37	7.3	147	10.6
	London	14	2.8	45	3.2
	East Midlands	1	0.2	108	7.8
	Total	508	100.0	1,390	100.0

Source: New Survey data from FOI returns collated by author. Locality and Co-op survey (2020).

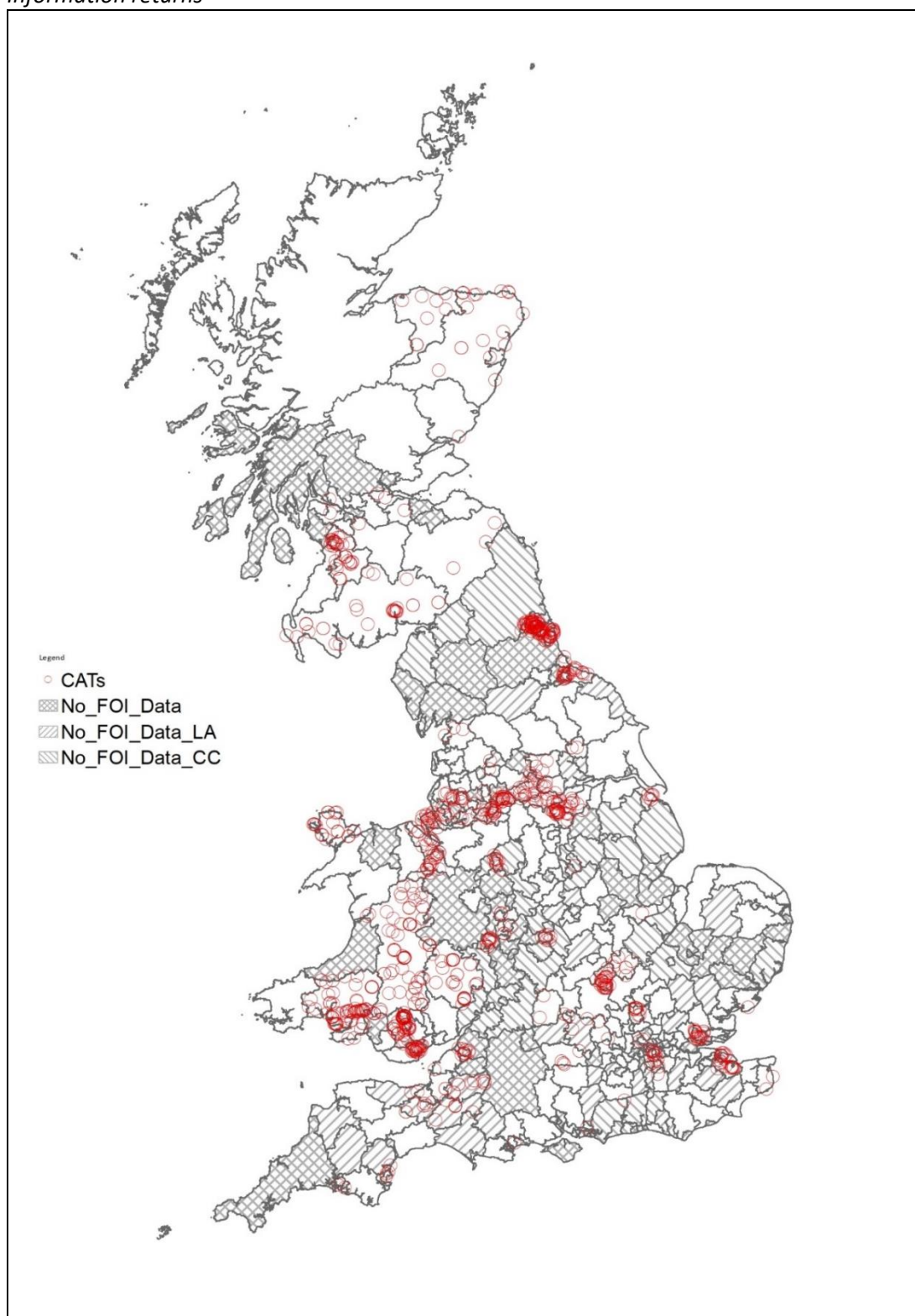
Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> survey data by author. \*<sup>2</sup> Frequency of absolute no. of CATs as per FOI returns. \*<sup>3</sup> Frequency of Locality and Co-op survey of CATs region estimated frequencies weighted for non-responses.

As with comparing the results of the FOI returns (see Part 1 Documenting CAT above), comparing the numbers of CATs identified in my survey with other data is difficult. Murtagh and Boland's (2019) work in Northern Ireland registers a total number of 320 asset transfers by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The numbers registered in this survey, based on a smaller geographic area and where asset transfers are implemented by a single state institution may reflect a more accurate picture of all transfers in this area. However, in England, Scotland and Wales asset transfer is within the remit of local authorities which necessitates wider consultation and consequently introduces greater opportunity for data to be missed. Locality and the Co-op's (2020) survey of CAT across local authorities in England does offer closer data for comparison (See figure 10 above), although as mentioned above these numbers are weighted estimates rather than verifiable cases and cover a different timescale representing a later period of CAT practice. Comparing the percentages of the distribution of CAT across England in both these surveys reveals a similarity in the strong presence of CAT in the north of England, albeit with the exception that the Locality and Co-op (2020) survey registers a very high number of CATs the South West. This disparity may partly be explained in a lack of FOI returns for this region in my survey which were only 65.9 per cent complete. Although this percentage is relatively high data may have missed from local authorities with high rates of CAT thus accounting for this discrepancy. At the same time, broadly speaking the lowest figures for CAT in my survey were in London and the East Midlands which was mirrored by the Locality and Co-op (2020) survey that

registered low figures in these areas. While there are differences in total numbers, and with expectations, e.g., the South West, both surveys in terms of the distribution of CAT by percentage in England show the strength of CAT practice outside London.

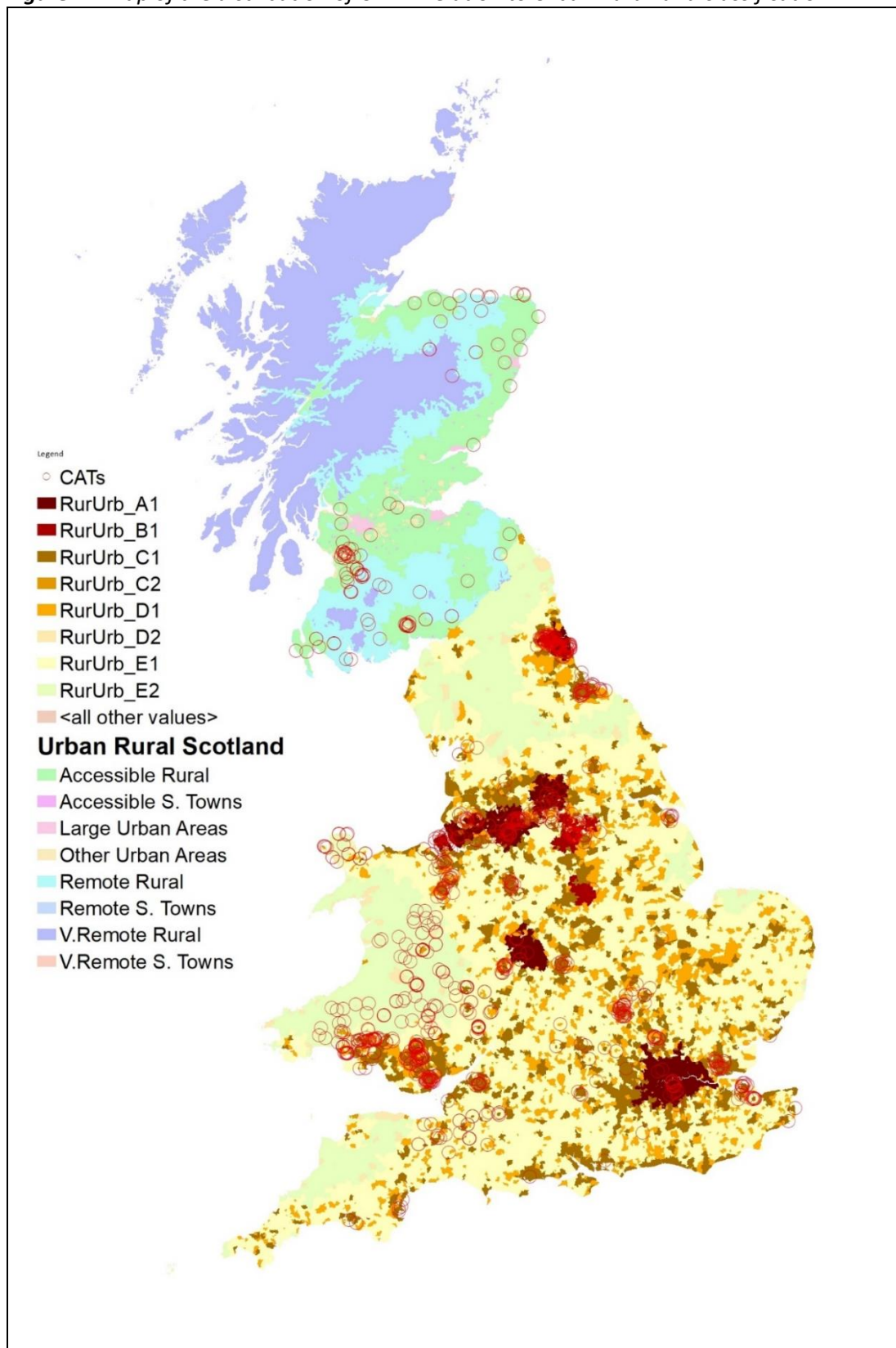
The visual representation of this data that follows below suggest preliminary and tentative spatial patterns which are explored in detail in Chapter 4. Here the three maps show the i) distribution of all CATs across Britain in relation to the extent of Freedom of Information returns (figure 11), ii) distribution of CAT in relation to Urban Rural land classification (figure 12), iii) distribution of CAT in relation to Indices of Multiple Deprivation (figure 13). These maps are illustrative only of the broad distribution of CAT. In terms of the emergence of CAT across Britain there appear to be clusters in England around the South East, and northern cities in the North East and across the Liverpool to Leeds corridor. There are also clusters in South Wales and East Ayrshire. Additionally, there is a thinner but more evenly spread blanket coverage of CATs across Aberdeenshire, Moray, Herefordshire, Mid Wales and Anglesey. The map of urban rural classification appears to show the distribution of CAT in urban areas. Finally, the map of deprivation (which are discrete values for each home nation and show here together as indicative only) suggests that CAT may be in less affluent areas. These ideas are of course preliminary and should be considered with caution as misinterpretation of visual data is highly possible. Detailed analysis of distribution is developed in Chapter 4.

**Figure 11** Map of distribution of all CATs across Britain in relation to the extent of Freedom of Information returns



Source: By author with information from Freedom of Information returns

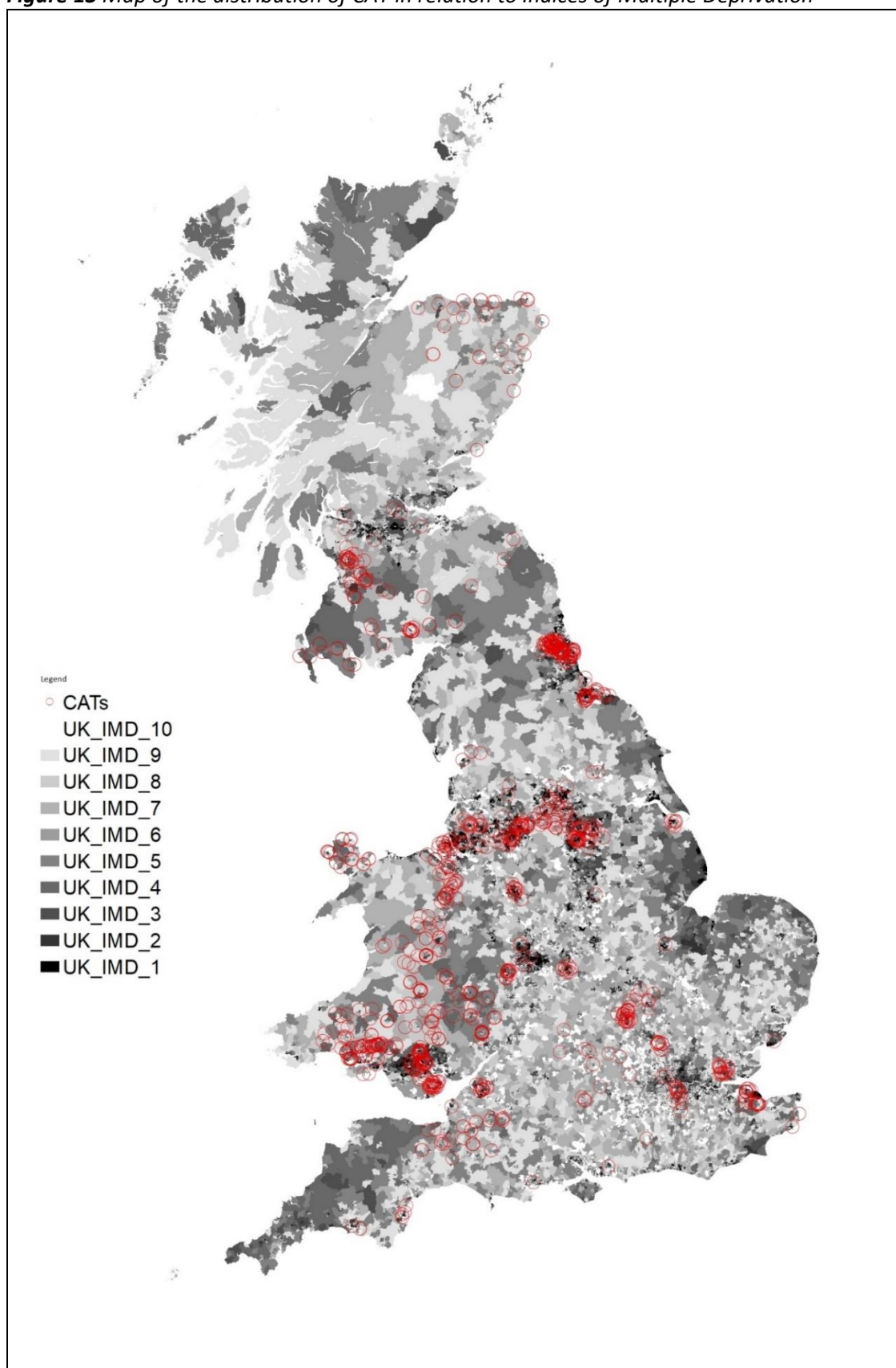
**Figure 12** Map of the distribution of CAT in relation to Urban Rural land classification



Source: By author with information from Freedom of Information returns and Rural Urban Classification



**Figure 13** Map of the distribution of CAT in relation to Indices of Multiple Deprivation



Source: By author with information from Freedom of Information returns including information from

**Figure 14** *Typologies and quantities of assets disposed through CAT*

All CAT Land use typology					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Outdoor amenity	131	16.0	16.0	16.0
	Outdoor sports facility	55	7.0	23.0	23.0
	Indoor sports facility	76	9.2	32.2	32.2
	Other rec. and amenity	21	2.5	34.7	34.7
	Community services	365	44.5	79.2	79.2
	Public sanitation	79	9.6	88.8	88.8
	Business and retail	20	2.4	91.2	91.2
	Land and infrastructure	34	4.1	95.3	95.3
	unspecified	39	4.7	100.0	100.0
	Total	820	100.0		

Source: CAT data from FoI returns collated by author

**Figure 15** *Sub-categories of 'Community services CATs' typology and quantities*

Sub-categories of Community services CATs					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Libraries	30	8.2	8.2	8.2
	Museums and galleries	21	5.8	5.8	14.0
	Medical and health care	12	3.3	3.3	17.2
	Places of worship	7	1.9	1.9	19.2
	Education * <sup>1</sup>	28	7.7	7.7	26.8
	Community services A* <sup>2</sup>	261	71.5	71.5	98.3
	Community services B* <sup>3</sup>	6	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	365	100.0	100.0	

Source: CAT data from FoI returns collated by author. Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> Education includes outdoor education buildings, land, nature reserves. \*<sup>2</sup> Community services A includes community meeting places, public hall, church hall, youth clubs. \*<sup>3</sup> Community services B includes Community protection and justice administration, e.g., police stations, fire stations, coastguard and lifeboat stations, and law courts - Community protection and justice administration, e.g., police stations, fire stations, coastguard and life boat stations, and law courts - Community protection and detention centres - Animal welfare facilities.

In relation to typologies and quantities of assets being disposed of through CAT, the FOI data suggests that 'Community services' are most prevalent (See figure 14). The sub-categories of the 'Community services' CATs typology and quantities show that the most frequent type is 'community services' which include community meeting places, public hall, church hall, youth clubs (see figure 15). The identification of libraries allows for consideration of the scale of CAT where it has been reported that since 2010 almost 800 libraries have closed in Britain (Flood 2019). This suggests that the 30 libraries subject to CAT plays a small role in resisting this process of closure and loss.



### 3.6.2 Cases for a study of local authorities

**Figure 16** Local authority case studies of CAT practice 2007-08 to 2017-18

	Community group	Asset	Transfer
Northwick	Social enterprise (n=28)	Community centre x 23  Agriculture x 1 Education x 5  Outdoor amenity x 1 Amusement x 1 Indoor sports facility x 1 Education x 1 Education x 1	Leasehold (25yrs) Leasehold (35yrs) Leasehold (99yrs) Leasehold (30yrs) Leasehold (30yrs) Leasehold (99yrs) Leasehold (35yrs)  Leasehold (999yrs)
Nerton	Social enterprise (n=3) Private sector (PLC) (n=1) Parish or town council (n=13)	Community centre x 3 Community centre x 1 Community centre x 8 Library x 1 Place of worship x 1 Indoor sports facility x 1 Outdoor sport facility x 9 Allotments x 1	Freeholds
Llandinas	Social enterprise (n=17)      Private sector (PLC) (n=2)  No information* (n=3)	Community centres x 12   Education x 1 Health x 1 Indoor sports facilities x 4  Indoor sports facilities x 2  Community centre x 1 Indoor sports facilities x 2	Leasehold (1yr) Leasehold (25yrs) Leasehold (99yrs) Leasehold (125yrs) Leasehold (50yrs)  Leasehold (25yrs) Leasehold (30yrs) Leasehold (99yrs) Leasehold (10yrs) Leasehold (25yrs) Leasehold (1yr) Leasehold (20yrs)

Source: FOI data by author

Notes \*No information refers to organisations not registered with Companies House of the Charity Commission or other mutual or co-operative associations (See also Chapter 3 Methodology)

Figure 16 sets out the local authority case studies of CAT practice 2007-08 to 2017-18 with data collected from the Freedom of Information requests setting out the types of community groups involved, the types of assets and the types of transfer that define CAT practice across the three local authorities. Analysis and discussion of these variations are developed in Chapter 5.

### 3.6.3 Sites for an ethnography

Local government in this region is synonymous with the Labour party (Boland 2006), and as home to the Labour dominated Senedd Cymru, Welsh Parliament represents a different centre of power. While it is beyond the scope of this project to carry out a full comparative analysis of

policy between England, Scotland, and Wales, it is useful to note that the Welsh Assembly Government's 'Making the connections' (Welsh Assembly Government 2004) agenda for public services required citizen involvement as co-producers, before the coalition governments' localism agenda and legislation for England and Wales in 2011. Economically, Post-industrial South Wales has experienced large-scale public investment in large scale economic development projects (Morgan 1996). However, regionally there are questions over attempts at regeneration in relation to who has, or more pertinently, who has not benefited from regeneration (Boland 2006). This is particularly pertinent in this area where a third of all households live in poverty (Llandinas Council 2018b). As such, Llandinas demonstrates how historically grounded left-leaning cultures, can translate and implement central governments' localism austerity agenda in relation to community assets. Brief preliminary outlines and descriptive vignettes of each community centre are set out in figures 17, 18 and 19 below (See also Appendix 8 Layers of ethnographic description for each site).

**Figure 17** *Preliminary outline of Cyrchfan Community centre*

This community centre is in a suburban area that is relatively close to the city centre. Based on the postcode, this centre is in a less deprived neighbourhood (9<sup>th</sup> decile of WIMD). Local councillors are Conservative, Independent and Labour. The community group are a couple of years into a twenty-five-year repair and maintenance lease from the Council. It is a relatively new building. It is run mainly by volunteers with a couple of paid staff. The building has one large indoor hall, one meeting room and a café. It has toilets, changing rooms and a reception. Externally it has a fenced sport pitch, car park, garden, and external grassed area.

**Figure 18** *Preliminary outline of Cymorth Community centre*

This community centre is in a suburban area that is some distance from the city centre. Its postcode locates it in the most deprived decile of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (1<sup>st</sup> Decile of WIMD). This group have a repair and maintenance lease of the building for 99 years. It is run by paid staff and there are some volunteers. The building is the smallest of the three. It has a reception area, several smaller meeting and teaching rooms, a hall, offices, community shop, art room, a workshop, toilets, and a kitchen. Externally it has a small garden and yard with parking.

**Figure 19** *Preliminary outline of Cyndaithasol Community centre*

This community centre is in the city centre. Its postcode locates it in an area that is less deprived (8<sup>th</sup> decile of WIMD). The group has a maintenance and repair lease from the Council for 35 years. It has been described as a 'historic CAT' (Llandinas Council officer 2019) being leased before implementation of this policy but based on what became its standard terms and conditions. The building has two large indoor halls, several meeting rooms and music suites, a café, reception, kitchens, and toilets. It has a garden.

### 3.7 Discussion and chapter conclusion

In summary, this chapter set out my philosophical approach to knowledge starting with but not confined to a non-foundational exploration of CAT. Allied to post structuralism and drawing on the resources of pragmatism my work engages with human experience on the ground. This is a starting point for fully developed pragmatist inquiry that has an end goal of providing solutions to real-world problems and taking action which, I recognise as being beyond the scope of my work at this stage. Instead, my work here is more modestly concerned with approaching CAT and gaining an understanding of this new process, linking academic inquiry and exploration of how we are to frame CAT.

The use of mixed methods research provides a variety of data, and through a pragmatist sensibility this evidence is valued for its usefulness, rather than engaging in debate over distinctions between realism and antirealism, positivism versus interpretivism. I draw on data across a wide sweep of scales and approaches to inquiry in a two-fold pragmatist tradition to promote transaction and dialogue around CAT practice, and more prosaically as a practical tool to reconcile engagement my different methodological approaches (Morgan 2014). In engaging across these different scales and methods, and through multi-faceted and complex layering of data analysis (Reinharz 1992) and the use of triangulation (Denzin 1970), I illuminate CAT practice whilst acknowledging that this knowledge is fallible, situated and in flux. In the next three empirical chapters this work is set out in detail along with detailed discussions of analysis including the nature and limitations of my approach.

Finally, one overarching challenge in carrying out my thesis over the past four years requires acknowledgement. In March 2020 when the first lockdown came due to COVID-19, I had not completed my data collection. Fortunately, only a small part of the third stage of my inquiry remained outstanding. This included participant observation and a few missing conversations with some community members. Considering this new situation, I altered my research design. What I had previously intended to be face-to-face recorded conversations became online and telephone semi-structured interviews with some community members. This was a relatively straightforward change to make and was able to complete my work largely as originally planned, although delayed. Following this correction analysis and reflection continued, albeit slowed by the uncertainty of the world outside.

## Chapter 4 Uneven geographies of CAT in times of austerity

### 4.1 Introduction

The practice of Community Asset Transfer (CAT) has emerged throughout Britain over the last decade. I propose that mapping the distribution of this practice not only bears witness to the changing nature of local service provision and the incorporation of community into its delivery, but documents and offers insight into wider political and economic shifts that drives practice and is altering the relationship between the state and local communities.

In this chapter I will examine the rise of CAT in the context of fiscal policies brought in by the Coalition and then Conservative governments from 2010 onwards. I will demonstrate that there is a clear relationship between the rise of CAT and fall in public spending at local government level. Yet while this direct relationship has grown over time, CAT practice has otherwise established itself unevenly across space calling for comparisons with the geographies of the unequal distribution and impact of austerity. This leads to questions around what an exploration of the landscapes of CAT can tell us about which local authorities are engaging in this form of asset disposal, what kind of communities might be experiencing it and what wider associations with austerity may already exist. This responds to my overall research question, to what extent does CAT transcend and/or reinforce inequality and my first detailed research question, what can a collective register of practices of CAT reveal about the places and communities affected by this strategy?

Through critical exploration of my dataset of individual cases of CAT constructed from my survey conducted through Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across England, Scotland, and Wales, I present a series of exploratory statistical tests to sketch out an understanding of CAT practice. I begin by setting out the overall relationship between the rise in CAT and the implementation of fiscal austerity. Then I explore patterns or clusters of CAT across space and time in relation to the regional location, urban rural categorisation, political control of the local authorities, organisational structure, and asset type of each individual case. This is followed by detailed examination of the relationships between austerity and CAT practice at local authority level suggesting further links between CAT and the spatial dimensions of austerity and localism.

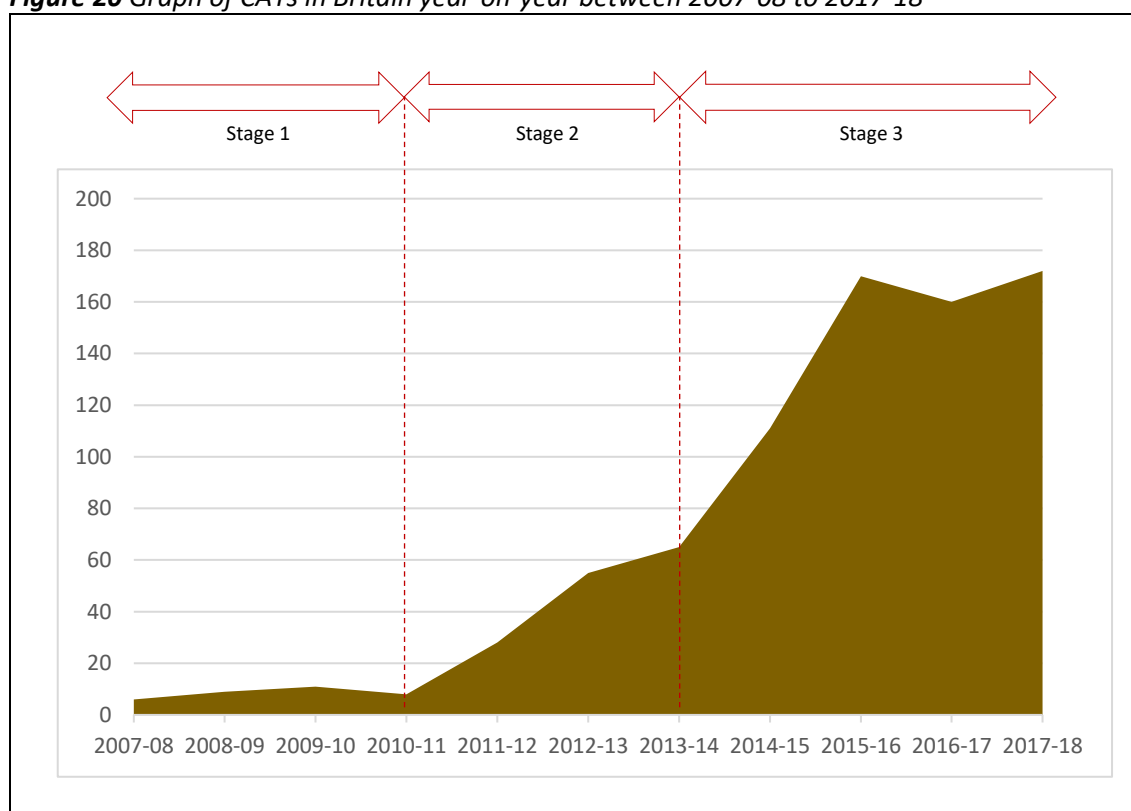
This chapter contributes to knowledge by providing and reflecting on new empirical documentation and quantification of CAT, where reading the territories of CAT through theories of austerity and localism brings new, nuanced understandings to the uneven geographies of state

withdrawal. I argue that although CAT is austerity driven representing community loss and co-option this is only part of the story of CAT where assets survive through community action. Therefore, exploring the distribution of CAT practice also bears witness to community action, and in beginning to map CAT across Britain, serves as the basis to begin to engage with its ambiguities and possibilities.

## 4.2 The national expansion of CAT

The emergence of CAT practice over the decade between 2007-08 and 2017-18 is illustrated by the empirical data collected from the Freedom of Information request returns undertaken specifically for this research. This unique dataset records for the first time the overall number and their specific postcode location of CATs across Britain during the first decade of CAT. Figure 20 plots the year-on-year emergence of CAT in Britain year-on-year between 2007-08 to 2017-18.

**Figure 20** Graph of CATs in Britain year-on-year between 2007-08 to 2017-18

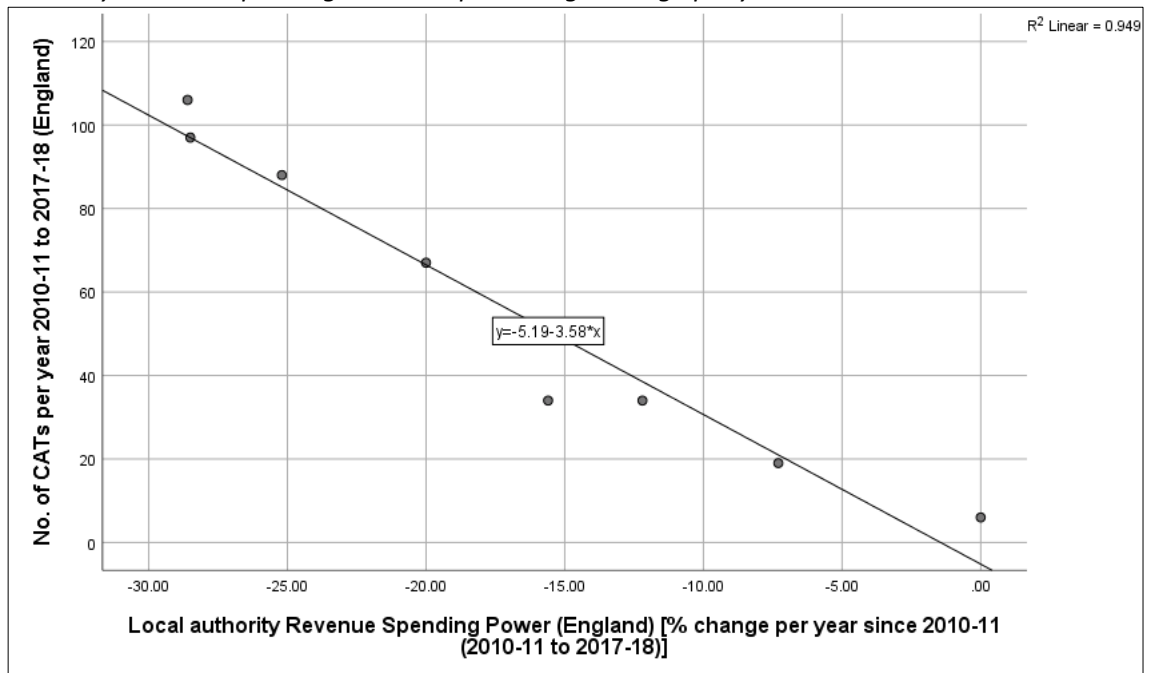


Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information (Fol) returns collated by author

This data, I suggest, indicates a prima facie relationship between the rise in the cases of CAT since the implementation of economic austerity from 2010-11 onwards. Between 2010-11 and 2017-18 there is a clear year-on-year increase in CAT practice, broken only in 2016-17, suggesting a close association between CAT and annual increases in austerity at local government level over this

period. My dataset allows for this probable association to be tested statistically (See Appendix 2: Association between CAT and austerity for descriptive analysis of dataset and variables).

**Figure 21** Scatterplot of association between the rise in CATs per year in England and local authority Revenue Spending Power as percentage change per year since 2010-11



Source: CAT data from FoI returns collated by author; and National Audit Office, Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018 (National Audit Office 2018a).

Using government data of the changes to Revenue Spending Power (England) at local authority level 2010-11 to 2017-18 as a proxy for the increasing cuts to local authority spending the statistical relationship between the year-on-year rise of CAT and the increase in fiscal austerity can be calculated. This is undertaken with some caveats. 1) I acknowledge that the use of Revenue Spending Power is not an ideal variable as it does not consider the increasing demands placed on local authorities by central government and therefore may not present the true extent of cuts. However, it does usefully provide a year-on-year measure through which to compare the rise in CATs with the rise in austerity. 2) The data relates to England only, as there is no similar data for Scotland or Wales, although if data existed it would be difficult to aggregate without adjustment to account for differences in budgets due to the variance in local authority responsibilities in each nation (Hastings et al. 2015). Nonetheless, using available data for England an understanding of the correlation between CAT and austerity is outlined.

The scatterplot of association between the rise in CATs per year in England and local authority Revenue Spending Power as percentage change per year since 2010-11 (figure 21) suggests a strong linear correlation between the rise in the number of CATs and the percentage change in local authority Revenue Spending Power (England) as a percentage change per year since 2010-

11. Calculation of the correlation coefficient of this relationship demonstrates a statistically 'very strong' negative correlation between the variables ( $r = -0.949$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Given that the percentage change in local authority Revenue Spending Power (England) is measured as a negative value, this relationship indicates that as the change in percentage of local authority Revenue Spending Power increases the number of CATs tends to increase. In other words, as the Revenue Spending Power of local authorities decreases the number of CATs tends to increase.

This near 'perfect' statistical association does not prove causation, nonetheless it demonstrates the strength of the relationship between the increase in austerity and rise in CAT practice. I argue that interpreting the rise in CAT as a function of economic austerity fits with understandings of the impact of increasing cuts to local service spending at local government level (See also Amin Smith et al. 2016b) and suggests that CAT, long recognised as a cheap form of service provision for local authorities (Quirk 2007), has increasingly been used to reduce running and staffing costs in a bid to mitigate the waning of central government financial support for local governments and their services.

Further understanding of the rise of CAT as part of the austerity project can be read through the different stages of the emergence of CAT practice suggested by the data. These include Stage 1: The first CATs (2007-08 to 2010-11) that represents a pre-austerity age where CAT is set out as an experiment in service provision by New Labour; Stage 2: Significant increase in CAT (2011-12 to 2013-14) when the rate and magnitude of CAT practice begins to gather pace during the initial stages of austerity; Stage 3: Fire sale (2013-14 to 2017-18) which sees a large-scale fire sale disposal of assets through CAT as fiscal austerity increases.

#### 4.3 Shifting patterns of CAT over space and time

While the growth in the rate and magnitude of CAT grows over time it is highly fractured across space. Taking the three temporal stages presented by the dataset and outlined above, I now turn to explore the statistical clustering of CAT to identify groups of practice. Using computer software (IBM SPSS Statistics 25) to classify data through two step cluster analysis a measure of similarity between cases can be established based on an approximate cluster quality measure. This tool is exploratory in nature and offers a broad categorisation of patterns in the cases of CAT. This reveals changes over time between the distinctive clusters suggesting an evolving CAT practice and helps to build a picture of the landscapes of CAT across Britain (See Appendix 4 Cluster analysis of CAT across time and space, for an outline of the rationale, descriptive analysis of variables and SPSS outputs for the cluster analysis).

Beyond geographically locating CAT and suggesting the rural/urban character of the nature of CAT practice, themes to which I will return in detail later in this chapter (sections 4.4 onwards), the cluster analysis suggests that the type of party-political control of the local authority is a key component in distinguishing different types of practice. Given the nature of the survey any understanding of the local politics involved are by their nature approximations, however the evident changes in the political leaning of the Local authorities who are carrying out the majority of CATs overtime does present a shift in the nature of CAT and invites speculative reflection on potential shifts in the ideological rationale behind CAT. This raises important questions around how we interpret the narrative of the political affiliation of local authorities and CAT.

#### 4.2.1 Stage 1: The first CATs (2007-08 to 2009-10)

**Figure 22** Cluster analysis of CAT between 2007-08 to 2009-10

Cluster	Region	Political control of local authority	Urban Rural classification*	Asset use
'Town and country Conservative' (62.1%)	East (33.3%) Wales (33.3%) Southwest (27.8%)	Conservative (50.0%) Independent (27.8%)	City and town (55.6%) Rural town fringe (11.1%) Rural town + sparse (16.7%) Rural village disperse (16.7%)	Community services (50.0%) Sports (11.1%) Business (11.1%) Land (11.1%)
'Urban Labour' (37.9%)	Northeast (45.5%) West Mid (18.2%)	Labour (54.5%) NOC (45.5%)	Urban major conurb. (63.6%) Urban city and town (18.2%)	Community services (90.9%)

Notes: Percentages show proportion of total. \* Urban Rural classification at LSOA for England and Wales, Data Zones for Scotland. Clusters are ordered according to strength of association between cases, not size. Thus, the strength of association between cases in the 'Town and country Conservative cluster' are stronger than those in the 'Urban Labour' cluster. *Source:* By author

Figure 22 shows a cluster analysis of CAT between 2007-08 to 2017-18 suggesting that during this first pre-austerity stage at the end of the New Labour governments (1997 – 2010) and as the 2008 financial crisis unfolded CAT was limited to a handful of sites. CAT during this three-year interval was relatively stable, at an average of 9.7 CATs per year, taking place over a range of diverse territories. Although based on only a handful of cases ( $n=29$ ), nonetheless two clusters are identified at this stage that define two distinct patterns that run through all subsequent stages (See figure 22 above). One, a 'Town and Country Conservative' cluster. This has the strongest statistical association between cases in the group and is the largest representing 62.1 per cent of total cases. The other is a 'Urban Labour' group that represents 37.9 per cent of the total number



of cases (See Appendix 4 Cluster analysis of CAT across time and space, for an outline of the rationale, descriptive analysis of variables and SPSS outputs for the cluster analysis).

The 'Urban Labour' cluster (37.9 per cent of total cases) is characterised by a higher prevalence of cases under Labour controlled local authorities within this cluster (54.5 per cent). This could be understood as representative of the then New Labour government's approach to governance through communitarianism. The bringing in of community groups to run local services fits notions of communitarianism that promoted mutual responsibility for the functioning of society (Etzioni 1996; 2000) and where New Labour aimed to establish forms of co-governance through partnerships between civil society and government (Taylor 2011). This New Labour communitarianism represented a different ethos from the traditional socialist ideology of top-down state organised and delivered cradle to grave welfare provision which was otherwise grounded in a social democratic viewpoint of experimental, pragmatic and decentralised decision-making processes (Temple 2000). CAT might be seen as embodying these political changes on the ground and operationalising a shift in the provision of services away from the state where local authorities through CAT were providing the opportunity and space for communities to become empowered through the management and ownership of local services (Quirk 2007). Cases in this cluster as located primarily in urban areas (Urban major conurbation 63.6 per cent and urban city and town 18.2 per cent). Additionally, 'Urban Labour' involves mostly community services (90.9 per cent) and takes place in urban areas in the north and midlands, tentatively suggesting relationships between CAT and local services in more deprived areas pre-austerity.

However, the larger cluster, 'Town and country Conservative' (62.1 per cent), is characterised by the highest prevalence of cases under Conservative controlled local authorities within this cluster (50.0 per cent Conservative). Conservative enthusiasm driving CAT might, in part, be explained here by longstanding conservative ideas of self-sufficiency and individualism (Wills 2016). Given that this larger cluster was Conservative and Independently driven at this stage suggests an ability for CAT to work across contrasting political ideologies, a factor which becomes even more pronounced in later stages. Although this cluster consists of community service assets (50.0 per cent), it also involves potentially more lucrative assets (See Findlay-King et al. 2017) such as sports facilities (11.1 per cent), business properties (11.1 per cent) and land (11.1 per cent) suggesting a willingness both by local authorities to part with these assets and by communities in taking them on. The town and country nature of this cluster is present in the distribution of cases across cities and towns (City and town 55.6 per cent, rural town fringe 11.1 per cent and rural town and sparse 16.7 per cent). Regional distribution across the East, (33.3 per cent), Wales (33.3 per cent) and the Southwest (27.8 per cent) locates this type of CAT across a wide range of socio-economic

landscapes which demonstrates a broad appeal of asset transfer but is tricky to associate with wider geographic notions at this scale.

#### 4.2.2 Stage 2: Significant increase in CAT (2010-11 to 2012-13)

**Figure 23** Cluster analysis of CAT between 2010-11 to 2012-13

Cluster	Political control of local authority	Urban Rural classification*	Region	Asset use
'Town and country NOC' (26.1%)	NOC* (54.2%) Conservative (41.7%)	Urban city and town (37.5%) Rural town and fringe (29.2%)	East (37.5%) Southwest (29.2%) Wales (25.0%)	Outdoor amenity (58.3%)
'Urban Conservative' (38.0%)	Conservative (48.6%) NOC (40.0%)	Urban city and town (68.6%)	Southeast (31.4%) East (20.0%)	Community services (68.6%)
Urban Labour' (35.9%)	Labour (87.9%)	Urban major conurb. (42.2%) Urban city and town (39.4%)	Northeast (30.3%) Northwest (30.3%) Yorks & H. (21.2%)	Community services (75.8%)

Notes: Percentages show proportion of total. \*NOC refers to local authorities where there is an absence of a political majority [No Overall Control] \*Urban Rural classification at LSOA for England and Wales, Data zone for Scotland. Clusters are ordered according to strength of association between cases. *Source:* by author

The next stage of asset transfer comprises of a significant rise in the total number of cases from 29 to 92 (See figure 23 Cluster analysis of CAT between 2010-11 to 2012-13). This is an average rate of 30.6 CATs per year which is approximately 3.1 times greater than the average rate of CATs per year during the first stage ( $n=9.7$ ). In this stage CAT is taking place against the backdrop of important change in national government and politics from centre-left to the right.

In this stage the two clusters that have the strongest associations (the first two cases in figure 23 above) have the largest percentage of cases within Conservative controlled councils, i.e., 'Urban Conservative' (48.6 per cent of cases in cluster are in Conservative areas) or where Conservative run councils constitute a large percentage of all cases, i.e., 'Town and Country NOC' (41.7 per cent of cases in cluster are in Conservative areas). Combined these clusters represent the largest proportion of all CAT practice during the period (64.1 per cent of total) which suggests that CAT was assimilated into the agenda of the new Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition governments evoking their political grammars of 'localism', the 'Big Society' and fiscal austerity. CAT then might be understood as adaptable to and benefitting from this altered political context. CAT might then be thought of as taking on and represent a microcosm of these policies.

On one level, CAT could be seen as a way by which the state, through local authorities, could mobilise communities to take on and run local services dovetailing with the ideals of the 'Big Society'. The 'Big Society' called on individuals, professionals, civic and corporate bodies to take greater responsibility 'to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control' (Conservative Party 2010, p. 37). CAT can then be seen as a ready-made tool through which this policy could be implemented.

On another level, CAT could be seen to further the aims of localism, to decentralise power to the local level (Lowndes and Pratchett 2012; Lowndes and Gardner 2016). These ideas of local action appear to share similarities with the New Labour desire for devolution and community engagement (Wills 2016), which were widely hoped to foster political engagement and further democracy (Danson et al. 2012). Yet whereas CAT under New Labour evoked ideas of partnership and mutual responsibility, under 'localism' and the 'Big Society' I would argue that CAT becomes discursively more coercive as it is linked closely to the imperative of addressing 'the debt-ridden economy of recent years' (Conservative Party 2010, p. 5). Additionally, the idea that the 'Big Society' and 'localism' were oriented towards tackling the national debt following the 2008 financial crisis (Mohan 2011; 2012), has been widely critiqued. Not least through the notion of 'austerity localism' (Featherstone et al. 2012), where localism becomes part and parcel of economic austerity and state restructuring. This raises the possibility that Conservative local authorities might have been appropriating CAT practice simply to reduce costs and offload assets onto the third sector. As a result, CAT practice embedded in the new politics of the Coalition government both converges and contrasts with those of New Labour.

The regional distribution of the 'Urban Conservative' cluster, located in the South East (31.4 per cent of all cases in cluster) and East (20.0 per cent of all cases in cluster), may reinforce a critique of localism that it is more likely in more affluent areas where communities may benefit from pre-existing skills, capacity and time to engage in participatory action (Wills 2016). However, the 'Town and Country NOC' (26.1 per cent of total cases) cluster at this level of analysis remains ambiguous in terms of identifiable socio-economic patterns given that it crosses a range of different conditions, East (37.5 per cent), Southwest (29.9 per cent), and Wales (25.0 per cent). The 'Urban Conservative' cluster consists mainly of community services (68.8 per cent) which may be an indicator of the new political economic context whereby local authorities begin to deal with the impact of financial cuts to central government funding (Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Gray and Barford

2018) adjust their own budgets and make decisions on what services to provide impacting their traditional role as service providers.

As in the first stage, the 'Urban Labour' (35.9 per cent of total cases) cluster remains smaller than the two combined Conservative leaning clusters yet is three times larger than the 'Urban Labour' cluster in the previous period. As before, this cluster comprises mostly of 'Community Services' (75.8 per cent) is mainly urban (81.6 per cent) and northern (North East 30.3 per cent, North West 30.3 per cent and Yorkshire & Humber 21.1 per cent). This could point towards the emergence of CAT as a form of cheap service provision within austerity landscapes as local government service spending is cut, albeit existing as a smaller overall percentage of total CAT practice at this stage.

#### 4.2.3 Stage 3: Fire sale (2013-14 to 2017-18)

**Figure 24** Cluster analysis of CAT between 2013-14 to 2017-18

	Political control of local authority	Urban Rural classification*	Region	Asset use
Urban Labour (42.4%)	Labour (85.7%)	Urban major conurb. (50.5%) Urban city and town (31.0%)	North East (31.4%) Yorks & H. (23.0%)	n/a
Welsh CAT (25.1%)	NOC (56.5%) Independent (42.4%)	Urban city and town (22.4%) Rural town and sparse (21.2%) Rural village disperse (20.0%)	Wales (99.4%)	n/a
Urban Conservative (20.2%)	Conservative (53.3%) NOC (43.8%)	Urban city and town (73.7%)	South East (37.2%) West Mid (30.7%)	n/a
Scottish CAT (12.3%)	NOC (95.2%)	Other urban (33.7%) Accessible rural (25.3%) Remote rural (25.3%)	Scotland (100%)	n/a

Notes: Percentages show proportion of total. \* Urban Rural classification at LSOA for England and Wales, Datazone for Scotland. Clusters are ordered according to strength of association between cases *Source:* by author

This stage represents the largest amount of CAT transfers ( $n=677$ ) (See figure 24 above) During this period there was an average rate of 135.4 CATs per year which is approximately 4.4 times greater than the average number of CATs per year during Stage 2 ( $n=30.6$ ), and 13.9 times greater than the average number per year for Stage 1 ( $n=9.7$ ). This large and sustained number of CATs, in part, suggests a lag in the implementation of austerity at ground level as CATs begin to emerge more strongly in the areas where austerity has hit hardest and may also be the product of the new context of 'super-austerity' that followed the election of a new Conservative government in

2015. Lowndes and Gardener (2016) coined the term 'super-austerity' to account for the greater impact of austerity under the Conservatives as cuts fell on already weakened local authorities where the scope for additional efficiencies was greatly reduced bringing concerns that local authorities would not be able to sustain further cuts. This stage 3 also suggests a political shift in local CAT practice away from Conservative controlled local authorities to Labour, and notably to areas where there is no overall political control in Wales and Scotland. Four clusters are identified (figure 24).

The largest cluster and where cases have the strongest association is 'Urban Labour' (42.4 per cent of total cases). This cluster is characterised as Labour (85.7 per cent of all cases in cluster), urban (81.5 per cent of all cases in cluster) and where cases tend to be more located in the north of England (North East 31.4 per cent, Yorkshire & Humber 23.0 per cent). This cluster is larger than the 'Urban Conservative' cluster (20.2 per cent of total cases), which is also urban (73.7 per cent of all cases in cluster), located in the south and midlands (South East 37.2 per cent, West Midlands 30.7 per cent). This appears to attest to a change in the political profile of CAT from being characterised as having more cases in Conservative local authorities in stages 1 and 2, to having more cases in Labour controlled Councils at this later stage. There are at least two dimensions which may help to explain these clusters. Firstly, there has been a disproportionate impact of austerity on Labour councils. Where Labour held areas of England have seen greater cuts to funding under austerity than more affluent, largely Conservative areas (Lawrence et al. 2020; SIGOMA 2020). Secondly, there has been a disproportionate impact of austerity on northern England compared to southern England. Beatty and Fothergill (2016b) outline the greater protection of South and East England outside London to austerity cuts compared with other areas. This also raises questions over the shift in the political allegiance of CAT. On one level, where the higher prevalence of CAT shifts towards Labour controlled councils, this is likely to have less to do with political ideology, than economy necessity. Nonetheless, New Labour narratives of community empowerment could still be used to justify CAT as Labour councils look for ways to mitigate the impact of austerity.

The emergence of clusters in Wales and Scotland adds a new political dimension to this narrative as these areas have been largely protected from the worst of the cuts to local government spending (Amin Smith et al. 2016b) suggesting other local factors are at work in the spread of CAT, and to which I will return to discuss later in this chapter in section 4.4.

Nonetheless these apparent changes in the political profile of CAT have only taken place at the local level. Overall austerity is still driven by the central Conservative government in Westminster,

even in Scotland and Wales. Donald et al. (2014) have noted the peculiarly local nature of austerity that positions local authorities as both victim and instigator of new forms of austerity where CAT may be a new practice in its implementation in real time. There is a further possible political impact of CAT practice at this stage given that on-the-ground Labour Councils were left to implement Conservative central government cuts some commentators have argued that this has resulted in political fall-out for Labour and exposure to voter rejection of austerity (See Mattinson 2020).

All clusters underline the dominance of the urban condition on practice, coalescing with the idea that this is where ‘austerity bites’ (Peck 2018). Yet, CAT is not exclusively urban. This largely descriptive discussion of emergent patterns in CAT practice is a useful introductory outline to which greater statistical rigor can be applied through analysis of practice disaggregated across different territorial scales.

Following on from this cluster analysis of all CATs over space and time, I now turn to explore the more tightly framed cases of community service CATs that have emerged since 2007-08. I seek to carry out detective work on these cases (Marsh and Elliott 2008) to explore what the patterns from these cases might tell us about the geographies and distribution of CAT practice in times of austerity.

#### 4.4 CAT practice by region

**Figure 25** *Distribution of Community service CAT by region per capita*

		Community service CATs per 100k by region	Absolute no. of Community service CATs
<i>Region by most prevalence</i>			
1	North East	0.263	70
2	Wales	0.173	43
3	North West	0.075	55
4	Scotland	0.074	40
5	Yorkshire & the Humber	0.073	40
6	West Midlands	0.053	31
7	South East	0.037	34
8	East	0.037	23
9	South West	0.034	19
10	London	0.010	9
11	East Midlands	0.002	1
	Totals	[0.57 per 100k across UK]	365

Source: CAT data from FoI returns collated by author; and, Office For National Statistics (2017).

While the rate and magnitude of CAT grows over time under austerity and seems to have adapted to a different political agenda it additionally appears to be unevenly distributed across space. This

unevenness raises questions around potential common associations with recent examinations of the unequal geographies of austerity and its disproportionate impact on low-income communities (See Beatty and Fothergill 2014; Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Hastings et al. 2017; Gray and Barford 2018). My analysis here turns specifically towards scrutiny of Community service CATs. Prevalence of CAT is measured on a per capita basis, expressed as number of community services CATs per one hundred thousand people for each region. This attempts to gauge the level of the incidence of CAT in relation to the communities who are both affected by and participant in practice. By examining the data for Community service CATs between 2007-08 and 2017-18, an understanding of the regional distribution of CAT practice emerges. To begin, figure 25 shows the distribution of Community services CATs by region per capita offering a broad descriptive analysis of CATs per 100K by region across eleven of the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) of Britain.

Based on my dataset, the region with the highest prevalence of CAT per capita is the North East of England (0.263 CATs per 100k). This region, together with the other English regions occupying the top half of the table (North West, Yorkshire & the Humber), suggest a northern bias in CAT practice. Northern England is home to local authorities that have been subject to the deepest of cuts to local authority spending (Meegan et al. 2014). Additionally, these regions often feature in assessments of the disproportionate way in which austerity has affected Britain (Hastings et al. 2015). CAT has emerged strongly in the north of England which suggests a geographical link between austerity and CAT. Correspondingly, the relatively lower prevalence of CAT in the South East, a region considered to have escaped the harshest impact of austerity (Gray and Barford 2018), supports such an hypothesis.

At the same time, there are some important variations that suggest that CAT does not directly correspond to the spatial and temporal roll-out of austerity. There are notable differences between CAT landscapes and the geographies of fiscal constraint. For example, Gray and Barford's (2018) examination of the local impact of the changes to English local service spending 2009-10 to 2016-17, highlights that of the ten local authorities that had experienced the largest cuts, four were London Boroughs. London is closely related to austerity with Beatty and Fothergill (2013) revealing that certain boroughs in the city have been disproportionately impacted by austerity based on their spatial analysis of national cuts to welfare. There is an absence of CAT practice in London. I propose that this may be attributed to a number of factors. One, the general consent for local authorities to dispose of land to community organisations is permitted only where the value does not exceed two million pounds thus placing a financial cap on CAT and therefore excluding areas of high land value. Two, in urban areas where there are higher land values and

development pressures local authorities may be more likely to capitalise on land assets through sale rather than transfer at lower than market value to community groups. Three, there is an important gap in the dataset for urban local authorities. The valid data for the region is 57.6 per cent meaning that 42.4 per cent of local authorities in London did not return useful data for the Freedom of Information requests. The data on London then has important omissions and the 'missing' data makes CAT in the capital difficult to ascertain.

Furthermore, in contrast to the strong emergence of CAT in austerity landscapes are two areas where CAT is prevalent but not usually associated with austerity. The ranking of Wales and Scotland towards the top of this table suggests that the relationship between austerity and CAT is not always straightforward. On one level, the depth of cuts to local government spending in these nations has not been as severe as in England. These regions are considered to have escaped the worst cuts to local government spending compared to those in England, or at least had until 2015-16 (Amin Smith et al. 2016b). The devolved governments may then to some extent be protecting local authorities from centrally set out austerity policies. This is political with Welsh Labour and the Scottish National Party opposing cuts from the Coalition and Conservative governments in England. However, cuts across all regions have taken place and often are most severe in those areas that are already some of the most disadvantaged (Gray and Barford 2018). This poses a question over whether CATs in Scotland and Wales are more likely to emerge in more deprived areas (See section 4.9.3) While there are numerous challenges to making comparisons between the home nations, not least where Scottish local authorities have been given additional responsibilities without additional funding (Hastings et al. 2015), the prevalence of CAT in these areas does suggest that the relationship between the depth of funding cuts and CAT practice may not always be linear.

CAT practice in these regions, I propose, is subject to specific local factors that have contributed to its greater prevalence. Here, I do not discount the notion that CAT is primarily driven by austerity. CAT has always been recognised as a tool to save local authorities money (Quirk 2007) and the imperative of fiscal restraint is a likely justification behind CAT practice, an issue to which I will return in the next chapter. However, in the case of Wales and Scotland the strength of CAT practice may also be locally driven by at least three factors. Firstly, these areas may have experienced greater financial support for CAT from either the third sector and/or state. In Wales a proportionately higher level of financial support for CAT may have contributed to the high levels of CAT practice. National Lottery Funding in Wales awarded £13 Million to projects in 2010 through a dedicated Community Asset Transfer programme (National Lottery Community Fund 2021). In contrast, in England the Office for Civil Society and the National Lottery Fund gave £30



Million to thirty-six projects in England between 2007 and 2010 (SQW Ltd. 2013). Although the National Lottery Funding is only one of many third sector funding bodies from which financial support can be sought, the difference between the figures for Wales and England suggests a more favourable funding landscape in Wales.

Secondly, there may be more institutional support for CAT, at least in Scotland. In Scotland the devolved government has legislated for CAT at national level as part of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 formalising the practice of Community Asset Transfer at government level. This contrasts with the local and informal nature of CAT policy in England and Wales which is not legislated for. The 2011 Localism Act of England and Wales did promote communities taking on public assets. This Act brought in mechanisms for the community right to challenge – giving community groups with an interest in taking over a local service or facilities a right to challenge local authority provision. It brought in the community right to buy – which requires local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value which groups can buy for community use when they come onto the market. However, the Act did not relate specifically to, or set out a mechanism for, the disposal of public assets through CAT (See Appendix 3 for a summary of policy and legislative instruments across Britain).

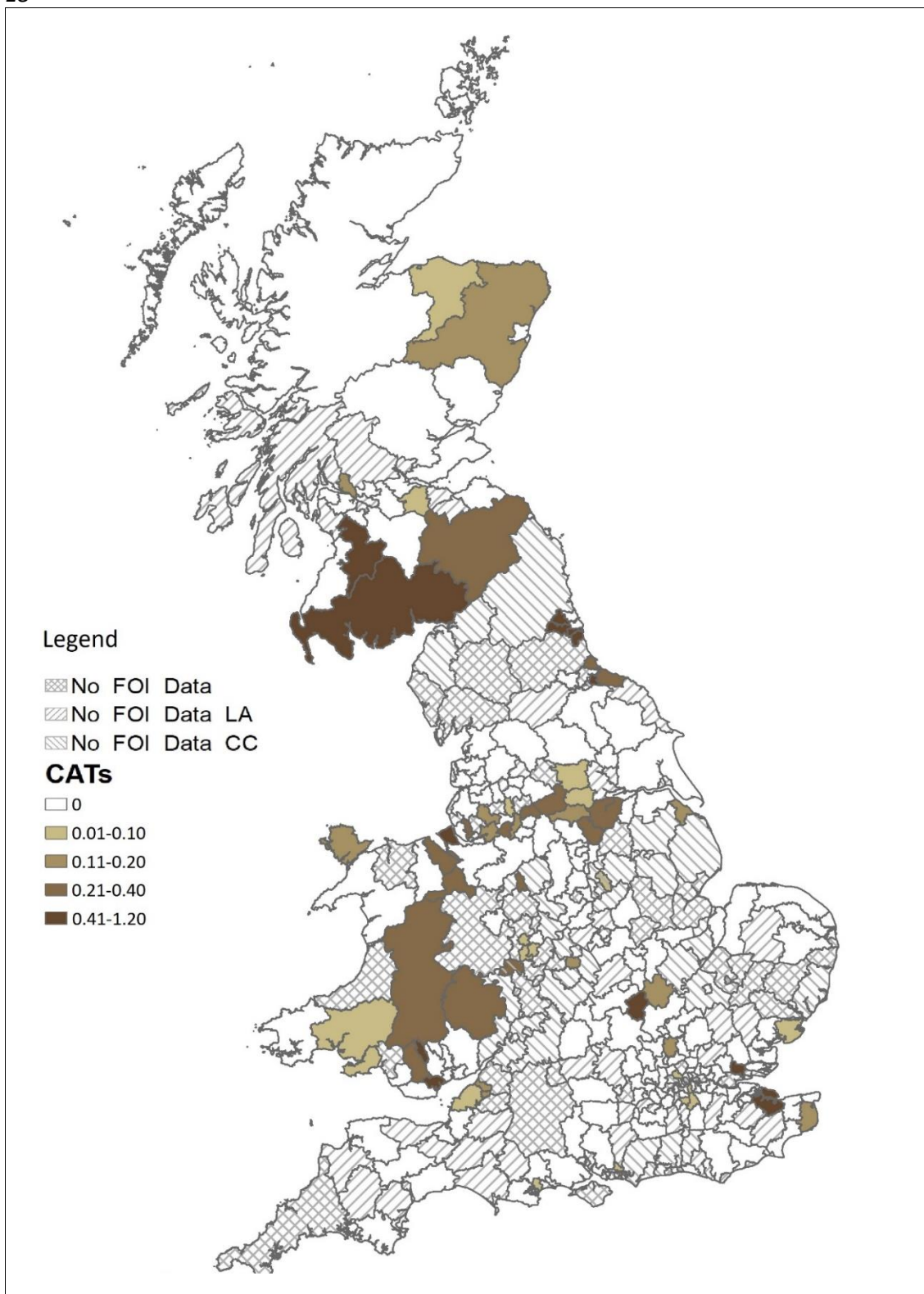
Additionally, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 builds on the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which sought to position the community ownership of assets as a tool through which to challenge landed interests by overturning a feudal system of landownership (McIntosh 2004; Mackenzie 2010; Hoffman 2013). This move was a ‘widely considered success story of community ownership in Scotland [and was] supported by substantial government funding’ (Christophers 2018, p. 238). This local appetite for community ownership is also linked to the ‘empowerment’ of communities (Gov.scot 2017). Nonetheless, I suggest that CAT is more politically ambiguous than these previous reforms in Scotland as it alters the ownership of assets that are already in the public realm, rather than challenging private enclosure. CAT is involved in redistributing state resources to smaller individual community units and away from publicly accountable collective public management.

Finally, greater support for CAT in the smaller geographic areas of Wales and Scotland means that proportionally more local authorities will have had more experience of CAT practices, and a higher likelihood of learning from the experiences of their direct neighbours. Greater closeness to devolved power may also act as a factor in the high prevalence of CAT practice in these areas. For example, Milligan and Fyfe (2004) argue that the development of the voluntary sector in Scotland

has benefited from closer access to government and its support suggesting that smaller administrative communities bring benefits in delivering policy.

#### 4.5 CAT practice by local authority

**Figure 26** Map of the distribution of Community service CATs per 100k between 2007-08 to 2017-18



Source: by author from data collected through Freedom of Information requests

Shifting focus from the regional to local authority scale allows for a detailed placed based exploration of understandings of the geographies of CAT. Figure 26 shows a map of the distribution of Community service CATs per 100k between, 2007-08 to 2017-18. This measure presents the intensity of CAT in relation to the population rather than focusing on absolute numbers that may skew understandings of CAT practice towards areas where there is more disposal but also larger populations. Although the map presents a complicated patterns of CAT by focusing on areas that have a high prevalence of CAT (0.2 or more CATs per 100k) three types of CAT landscape can be drawn out (see Appendix 5 explanation of three CAT landscape types).

The first group relates to forms of 'urban austerity'. These areas include cities and towns in England and Wales, and local authorities in Scotland where most of the population lives in urban areas. This group ( $n=19$ ) accounts for 68 per cent of authorities that have a high prevalence of CAT. These authorities are in the North East, North West, West Midlands, Yorkshire, the central belt of Scotland, North and South Wales. Most are older industrial areas and there are two seaside towns. This profile suggests that CAT can be discursively associated with the austerity landscapes reported by Beatty and Fothergill (2013; 2014). Additionally, this typology represents the largest number of local authorities. The urban nature of CAT stands in contrast with from existing understandings of the distribution of community owned assets in England which are reported to have higher numbers in less deprived, rural local authorities (Archer et al. 2019). Consequently, CAT presents a distinct form of community action from that of traditional community ownership is presented.

The second group are 'commuter towns' comprising of local authorities located close to large metropolitan cities ( $n=3$  or 11 per cent of local authorities with a high prevalence of CAT). These comprise of Trafford, part of Greater Manchester, in the North West. Basildon and Milton Keynes in the South East and East regions which are within commuting distance from London. These areas are distinct from the 'urban austerity' local authorities described above. At first glance they do not correspond to areas of austerity, conforming more to Beatty and Fothergill's (2014) notion of areas at the other end of the austerity spectrum, having escaped the worst of the cuts, and being less deprived. Here these three local authorities have a low percentage of LSOAs in the twenty percent of most deprived for each home nation.

The final group, 'rural practices', present two different situations. One a set of 'rural practices' ( $n=4$ , or 14 per cent of local authorities with high prevalence of CAT) are like 'commuter towns' in that they are not associated with the geographies of austerity having experienced less severe cuts

to local authority spending and welfare cuts and are additionally areas that are less deprived (Scottish Borders, Powys, Dumfries and Galloway, Herefordshire). The other set of 'rural practices' ( $n=2$ , or 7 per cent of local authorities with high prevalence of CAT) do take place in areas that have seen larger cuts and are areas categorised as being relatively more deprived (Swale and Wyre Forest). These rural areas are testament to a rural experience of austerity. At the same time, rural practice collectively evokes political ideas of rural self-sufficiency suggesting additional factors at play behind the prevalence of CAT in these areas.

This section has proposed a set of CAT typologies which although tentative and exploratory allow for different imaginaries of community action through CAT to be understood. It is important to acknowledge these different geographies in order to associate CAT with landscapes of austerity (Beatty and Fothergill 2014), but also with other notions of the likely prevalence of localism in areas with greater resources (Wills 2016). Through this categorisation we can begin to explore the associations between landscapes of austerity, localism and CAT.

#### 4.6 Places of most CAT practice

To explore the associations, or otherwise, of the emergence of CAT with the geographies of austerity, figure 27 lists the prevalence of Community service CATs 2007-08 to 2017-18 in England by lower tier local authority and county councils (England), and unitary authority level (Scotland and Wales). This list contains those local authorities that were able to provide complete data for this period, accounting for 73 per cent of local authorities in Britain. I argue that this data offers the most complete and best available and comparable detailed data. The list is arranged by the number of community service CATs per capita by local authority. Expressed as CAT per one hundred thousand, this per capita measure focuses on the impact of CAT practice on the local population. For Scotland and Wales, the administrative local authority units are unitary authorities, for England, a finer-grained categorisation of lower tier and county council authorities is used to identify the distinct administrative bodies and reflects the shared responsibility for these services in that nation.

As with previous analysis in this chapter, the survey level of data allows for associations with local conditions to be discursively explored. This includes cuts to local government spending, existing deprivation and political affiliation of local authorities.

**Figure 27** Prevalence of Community service CATs 2007-08 to 2017-18 in England by lower tier local authority and county councils (England), and unitary authority level (Scotland and Wales)

		Com. services CATs per 100k by local authority	Absolute no. of Com. service CATs by local authority			Com. service CATs per 100k by local authority	Absolute no. of Com. service CATs by local authority
<i>Local authority by most prevalence</i>				<i>Local authority by most prevalence</i>			
1	Gateshead	1.19	24	34	Barnsley	0.16	4
2	East Ayrshire	1.15	14	35	Somerset CtyC	0.16	9
3	Dumfries & Galloway	1.14	17	36	Warrington	0.14	3
4	Basildon	0.92	17	37	Isle of Anglesey	0.14	1
5	Merthyr Tydfil	0.83	5	38	St Albans	0.14	2
6	Sunderland	0.65	18	39	North East	0.13	2
7	Swale	0.55	8	40	Lincolnshire	0.12	4
8	Newcastle upon	0.54	16	41	Wigan	0.11	3
9	Tyne	0.52	14	42	Aberdeenshire	0.11	1
10	Milton Keynes	0.46	15	43	West	0.10	1
11	Wirral	0.43	6	44	Dunbartonshire	0.09	3
12	Middlesbrough	0.41	15	45	Moray	0.09	6
13	Cardiff	0.40	4	46	Lambeth	0.09	1
14	Wyre Forest	0.35	9	47	Oxfordshire CtyC	0.08	2
15	Stoke-on-Trent	0.34	5	48	Gedling	0.08	1
16	Knowsley	0.32	5	49	Swansea	0.08	3
17	Flintshire	0.31	6	50	Havant	0.08	2
18	Herefordshire	0.30	8	51	Croydon	0.07	1
19	Rotherham	0.30	4	52	Wolverhampton	0.07	1
20	Powys	0.30	7	53	Tendring	0.06	2
21	Oldham	0.30	13	54	Poole	0.06	2
22	Kirklees	0.29	4	55	Dudley	0.06	2
23	Redcar and	0.29	7	56	Brent	0.05	1
24	Cleveland	0.26	3	57	Wakefield	0.05	1
25	Rhondda Cynon Taff	0.23	7	58	West Lothian	0.05	1
26	Scottish Borders	0.22	3	59	Carmarthenshire	0.05	4
27	Doncaster	0.21	2	60	Bury	0.05	6
28	Wrexham	0.21	5	61	Leeds	0.05	1
29	Hartlepool	0.19	7	62	Lancashire CtyC	0.05	1
30	Trafford	0.17	3	63	Sutton	0.04	2
31	Coventry	0.17	8	64	North Somerset	0.03	1
32	Bedford	0.17	2	65	Buckinghamshire	0.01	1
33	Bristol, City of	0.16	9		CtyC		
	Dover				Sandwell		
	Manchester				Surrey CtyC		

Notes: Suffix 'CtyC' denotes County Council, 'LB' denotes London borough.

Source: CAT data from FoI returns collated by author; and, Office For National Statistics (2017) Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: Mid-2017.

The first local authority on the list, Gateshead, has a particularly high incidence of community service CATs per capita (1.19 per 100k) with the highest absolute number ( $n=24$ ). In relation to

austerity, Gateshead has experienced large cuts to local government service spending (-36.39 per cent) and is representative of a swathe of local authorities practicing CAT. These local authorities, as I have suggested above, can be characterised as mainly urban, older industrial areas which have experienced the deepest cuts to local government spending (Sunderland, Newcastle upon Tyne, Middlesbrough). These areas along with many other urban older industrial areas that have also experienced cuts, albeit not as deeply (East Ayrshire, Merthyr Tydfil and the Wirral), are often identified as more deprived. Thus, Gateshead is indicative of the austerity landscapes suggested by Amin Smith et al. (2016b) where cuts to local government spending have - disproportionately fallen on areas with high deprivation creating further inequality.

Gateshead also shares a common party-political allegiance with many of these 'urban austerity' local authorities raising questions around the local philosophies behind CAT practice. Gateshead is a Labour stronghold, having operated under a Labour majority council, at least since 1973 (Open Council Data UK. 2019). The strength of CAT here raises further questions around how the political allegiances of this practice might be framed. Why might staunchly Labour councils adopt CAT? Socialist councils may potentially be wary of the New Labour 'third way' to welfare through capitalism albeit tempered by other values such as community and compassion (Temple 2000). Socialist councils are likely to have rejected moves by New Labour to increase third sector responsibility and seen it as undermining state responsibility for looking after citizens. Thus, is CAT then more likely the result of Conservative central government-imposed austerity on local authorities? As such, are Labour councils now turning to CAT as a last resort where assets are disposed of by leftist councils who can no longer afford to pay for them due to austerity? In such a scenario does the community become a tool through which Councils can mitigate their withdrawal by bringing in others to plug the gaps left behind?

The next local authority by CAT prevalence on the list is in many ways part and parcel of the same 'urban austerity' practice, albeit within a less dense urban location. The population of East Ayrshire is distributed over Scottish urban rural categories as 'other urban' areas (42 per cent), 'accessible and other small towns' (29.4 per cent) and 'accessible and remote rural' (28.6 per cent), suggesting that CAT is also present outside major urban centres. At the same time, East Ayrshire shares many characteristics with urban Gateshead as an older industrial area. The decline of manufacturing industries, located in the larger East Ayrshire towns, and the end of coal mining that had sustained rural communities contribute to many areas being classified as amongst the most deprived in Scotland. While the local authority has experienced relatively smaller cuts to local government spending, -8.2 per cent between 2009-10 and 2015-16 (Amin

Smith et al. 2016a), nonetheless these cuts fall on these already deprived communities, further suggesting a link between CAT, austerity and pre-existing inequality.

Once again, the precise local political ideology of CAT remains elusive at this scale, but the emergence of CAT in this locale presents several factors that merit further exploration. Politically the East Ayrshire Council has been under no overall control of one political party since 2007, when the previous Labour majority was lost with the rise in the number of Scottish National Party (SNP) councillors (Open Council Data UK. 2019). The SNP claims to be ideologically opposed to UK government welfare cuts claiming that its 'Scottish government has done what it can by mitigating the Bedroom Tax, boosting Carer's Allowance and establishing a new social security system' (SNP 2021), suggesting ideological opposition to the reduction of local services. However, the Scottish government in framing CAT as part of a programme to empower communities (as discussed above in section 4.4 CAT practice by region), this still raises questions over the prevalence of CAT in times of austerity and the way in which CAT can be turned to satisfy different political objectives which here include those of a nationalist home nation government.

The third local authority on the list, also in Scotland, presents a different morphological and political landscape that may contribute to the popularity of CAT whilst still being subject to austerity. Dumfries and Galloway is indicative of the smaller, yet theoretically important group of 'rural practices'. The district is largely rural: 'accessible and remote rural' 45.1 per cent; 'accessible and other small towns' 25.1 per cent; and 'other urban' areas 29.7 per cent (Gov.scot 2018). Politically the Dumfries and Galloway Council had long been under no overall political control by one party until 2017 when the Conservatives increased their total number of councillors but remain without a majority (Open Council Data UK. 2019).

I propose that this combination of the rural and conservative evokes political notions of individualism and self-sufficiency that have often been used to reduce the role of the state in the provision of welfare. May et al. (2020) have outlined, that the rural 'idyll' is often synonymous with a political project to reduce the state. From Conservative governments in the 1980s drawing on the supposed strength of the nuclear family in rural areas to argue for cuts to welfare payments to people under the age of eighteen (Clope 1995), to more recent ideas of the rural as an ideal laboratory of small state 'Big Society' (Leach 2011), May et al. (2020) argue that the rural has been used to justify the withdrawal of the state from supporting individuals. In making these connections I suggest that the rural condition here is significant not because it reveals an inherent 'natural' capacity of rural populations to look after themselves, but rather may explain a willingness of rural conservative local authorities to draw upon such narratives to encourage CAT,

therefore providing a rationale behind the high levels of activity in these areas. Yet, at the same time, this rural practice has emerged in an area that has sustained large cuts to local government spending, -20.0 per cent between 2009-10 and 2015-16 (Amin Smith et al. 2016a), a relatively high percentage for Scotland where the total change to local government service spending across the nation was only -14.9 per cent (Amin Smith et al. 2016a). Therefore, in this case rurality and austerity seem to have come together.

The fourth local authority is Basildon, which serves to illustrate the 'commuter towns' group of CAT practice. Basildon, close to London in southern Britain, in many ways presents the other end of the spectrum of the geographies of austerity as having escaped relatively lightly from welfare reforms (Beatty and Fothergill 2014) and represents a different political context. Since the turn of this century Basildon Council has been dominated by Conservative councillors who ran the council from the beginning of the sample period in 2007-08 until 2014 when they remained the single largest party but without a majority (Open Council Data UK. 2019), evoking ideas of CAT as associated with Conservative values.

The fifth local authority on the list is Merthyr Tydfil in south Wales. Merthyr is in some ways an outlier. It has a relatively low absolute number of community service CATs but combined with one of the smallest local authority populations at only 59,953 (Office for National Statistics 2017) measuring the prevalence of CAT per capita lifts Merthyr in the ranking. Merthyr has similar characteristics to many local authorities in the urban austerity group as a long-standing Labour controlled council in an older industrial area with many deprived areas. Although it has experienced a less severe -9.8 per cent change in local government service spending between 2009-10 and 2015-16 (Amin Smith et al. 2016a), any reduction will have been keenly felt. However, it is the way in which this local authority appears to have approached CAT that merits further exploration.

Merthyr has delivered CAT in a way that does not follow the usual pattern of assets going to charitable groups taking on a single asset, which from the dataset is estimated as accounting for the largest percentage of CAT across Britain at forty-five per cent. Instead, here CAT has largely involved the disposal of multiple assets to a single not-for-profit charitable company with responsibility for delivering leisure and cultural services. The use of CAT to dispose of assets to a large-scale social enterprise raises questions over how local authorities define community and to which communities they turn. In a related way, the use of parish, town and community councils also diverges from the predominance of CATs going to charitable groups who take on a single asset. From my dataset I have estimated that around 27 per cent of all CATs across Britain have



been disposed of to this most local tier of government. Jane Wills (2020, p. 1) calls this ‘institutional switching’ and presents it as a solution for cash strapped local authorities to ameliorate the impact of their disposal of local services. However, given the incomplete coverage of local councils throughout Britain this may only serve to reinforce inequality where some areas do not have the necessary infrastructure because of uneven social capital across local areas (See Kenny et al. 2017). This again raises questions over who the local communities are that are being expected to take on responsibility for these services. It also presents a re-scaling of the state whereby local authority responsibility for local services is delegated to local councils.

#### 4.7 Largest numbers

**Figure 28** Local authorities by absolute no. of Community service CATs between 2007-08 to 2017-18

		Absolute no. of CATs by local authority	CAT per 100k by local authority			Absolute no. of CATs by local authority	CAT per 100k by local authority
<i>Local authority by largest no. of CATs</i>				<i>Local authority by largest no. of CATs</i>			
1	Gateshead	24	1.19	14	Swale	8	0.55
2	Sunderland	18	0.65	15	Rotherham	8	0.30
3	Dumfries & Galloway	17	1.14	16	Bristol, City of	8	0.17
4	Basildon	17	0.92	17	Oldham	7	0.30
5	Newcastle upon Tyne	16	0.54	18	Rhondda Cynon	7	0.29
6	Wirral	15	0.46	19	Taff	7	0.23
7	Cardiff	15	0.41	20	Doncaster	7	0.19
8	East Ayrshire	14	1.15	21	Coventry	6	0.43
9	Milton Keynes	14	0.52	22	Middlesbrough	6	0.31
10	Kirklees	13	0.30	23	Herefordshire	6	0.09
11	Stoke-on-Trent	9	0.35	24	Oxfordshire CtyC	6	0.05
12	Manchester	9	0.16	25	Lancashire CtyC	5	0.83
13	Somerset CtyC	9	0.16		Merthyr Tydfil		

Notes: Suffix CtyC denotes County Council. *Source:* CAT data from FoI returns collated by author; and, Office For National Statistics (2017) Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: Mid-2017.

Figure 28 shows the local authorities by absolute no. of Community service CATs between 2007-08 to 2017-18. This ranks local authorities this time by absolute number of Community services CATs. It shows the twenty-five districts with the largest number of CATs. The list contains many cities, which, given the likely concentration of assets in urban locations, is not surprising. Cities such as Manchester and Bristol rise in the rankings compare to the per capita measure of Figure 27. Again, London boroughs are absent perhaps due to reasons as previously discussed (See section 4.4 CAT practice by region). This analysis of overall numbers suggests that although present in urban areas CAT is nonetheless not being widely practiced in the larger cities. Once

again this should be caveated due to the missing data from some large cities (e.g., Birmingham, Bradford, Glasgow, and Edinburgh).

The higher ranking of Somerset, Oxfordshire and Lancashire County Councils reveal the strength of CAT practice in upper tier administrations in England that cover wide territorial areas, and which are otherwise lost in per capita assessment. Although county councils have seen only a twenty-two percent reduction in their revenue spending power between 2010-11 and 2017-18 (based on real terms in 2016-17 prices), compared to nearly twenty-eight for unitary authorities, thirty-two for London boroughs and nearly thirty four for metropolitan district (National Audit Office 2018b), they have not escaped financial struggles that have led to cuts to local services (Butler 2018a). This has led to bankruptcy in the case of Northamptonshire County Council (Butler 2018b; 2018c) and service reductions for the most vulnerable in Somerset (Harris 2018). Identification of CAT in these areas in part suggests the wide reach of austerity where different local authorities beyond the urban seek to reduce service spending costs by turning to communities to take on responsibility for these assets.

#### 4.8 Relationships with austerity

The following sub-sections of this chapter employ several descriptive statistical tests at local authority level to explore spatial associations between the emergence of Community service CATs and austerity. Here, I argue, that although there are examples of a high prevalence of CAT in local authorities that span across many different territories in Britain, there is some evidence to suggest that CAT practice is more likely in some areas than others. Three hypotheses are tested:

1). Where cuts to local government service spending have been greatest there is a higher prevalence of CAT. In other words, fiscal austerity has driven CAT. This subsection uses a secondary dataset from Amin Smith et al. (2016a) that sets out the percentage change in local government spending between 2009-10 and 2016-17 at upper tier district level in England and at unitary authority level in Scotland and Wales. This allows for the association between changes to local government spending and the prevalence of CAT to be tested. The financial benefit of CAT for local authorities has long been recognised (Quirk 2007) and exploring this relationship helps to consider the position of CAT as a product of economic austerity whereby cash-strapped local authorities offload local services onto community groups.

2). Where cuts to national welfare benefits have been deepest there is a higher prevalence of CAT. This subsection looks at the association between the uneven spatial impact of national cuts

to welfare (Beatty and Fothergill 2016b) and the prevalence of CAT. This allows for an understanding of if the emergent landscapes of CAT are also located in areas and coalesce disproportionately with other impacts of austerity.

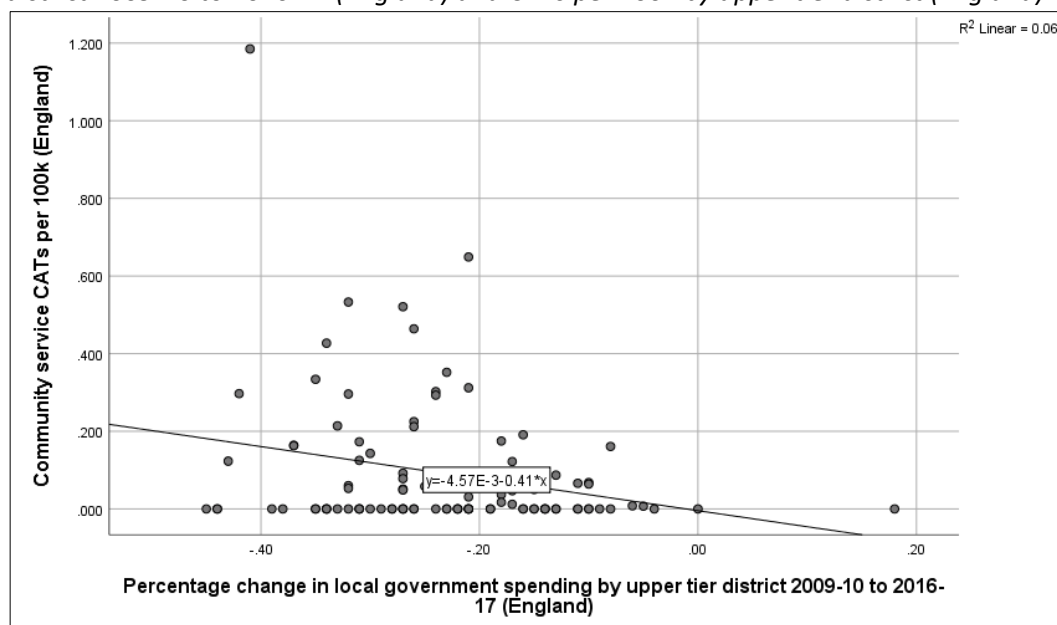
3). In more deprived areas there is a higher prevalence of CAT. This subsection follows on from the last in exploring associations between the impact of austerity and the prevalence of CAT practice. The disproportionate effect of austerity on areas that are likely to be more deprived is well documented (See Hastings et al. 2015). Testing for this relationship helps to establish if CAT is more likely to be located within these already unequal landscapes.

Scrutiny of these associations both reinforces and unsettles notions of where we might expect CAT to emerge in times of austerity. Analysis is undertaken separately for each home nation in recognition of the disparities in data between the three territories, i.e., differences in operational responsibilities at local government level and where categorisation of indices of multiple deprivation are distinct (See Appendix 6 Bivariate analysis of CAT, for descriptive analysis of variables for calculation of bivariate associations between the prevalence of CAT per 100k residents at local authority level and i) Percentage change in local government spending, ii) National cuts to welfare by local authority, iii) Deprivation.

#### 4.8.1 Percentage change in local government spending and CAT prevalence

##### ENGLAND

**Figure 29** Relationship between percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England) and CATs per 100k by upper tier district (England)



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and percentage change in local government spending at upper tier district for England from Amin Smith et al. (2016a).

**Figure 30** Correlation coefficient between percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district (England) and Community service CATs per 100k by upper tier district

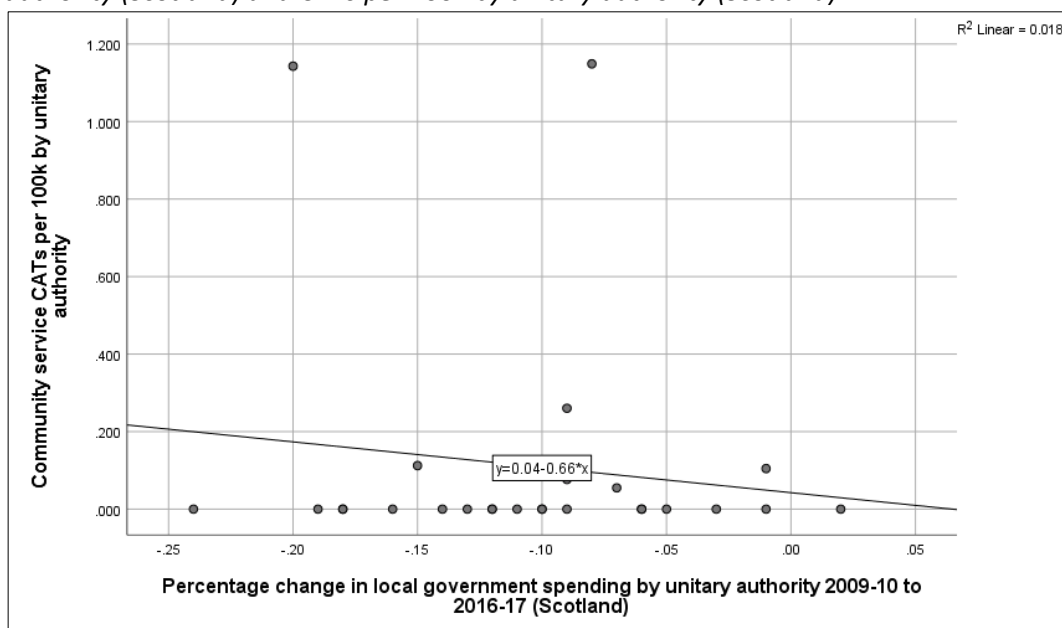
Correlations		Community Service CATs per 100k (England)	Change in local government spending (%) by upper tier (England)
Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.255*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010
	N	101	101
Change in local government spending (%) by upper tier (England)	Pearson Correlation	-.255*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	
	N	101	152
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Source: IPM SPSS Statistics 25

The scatterplot (figure 29) suggests a relationship where the greater the change in local government service spending the higher the prevalence of CATs in England. Figure 30 sets out a weak negative correlation ( $r = -0.255$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between these two variables. Figure 29 shows an outlier, Gateshead (1.19 CATs per 100k, -41 per cent change in spending) at the top left-hand side. This represents an extreme case where the high percentage change in local government service spending coincides with high prevalence of CAT. Removing this case gave a weaker but statistically significant correlation ( $r = -0.197$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). This data indicates that, as a general rule the greater the cuts to local government spending at upper tier district level in England the greater the prevalence of CAT.

## SCOTLAND

**Figure 31** Relationship between percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority (Scotland) and CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Scotland)



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and percentage change in local government spending at upper tier district for England from Amin Smith et al. (2016a).

**Figure 32** Correlation coefficient between percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority (Scotland) and Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority

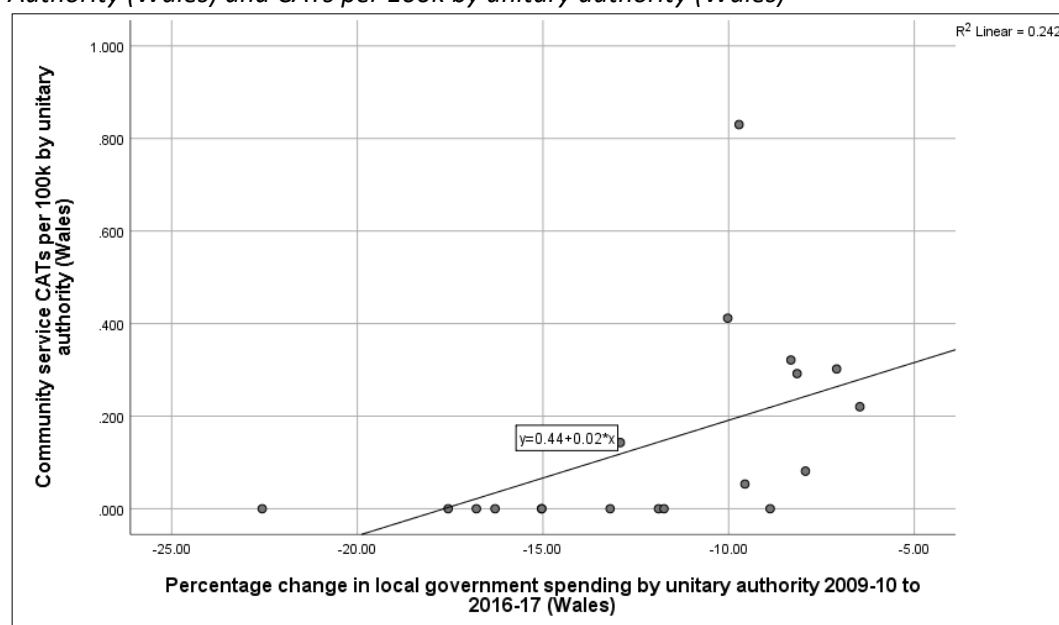
Correlations		Community service CATs per 100k by UA	Change in local government spending (%) by UA (Scotland)
Community service CATs per 100k by UA (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.135
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.511
	N	26	26
Change in local government spending (%) by UA (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	-.135	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.511	
	N	26	32

Source: IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 31 suggests a relationship in where the greater the change in local government service spending the higher the prevalence of CATs in Scotland. Figure 32 sets out a negative correlation between these two variables that is not statistically significant ( $r = -0.135$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The graph (Figure 31) shows two outliers: at the top left-hand side Dumfries and Galloway (1.14 CATs per 100k, -20 per cent change in spending), and at the top right-hand side East Ayrshire (1.15 CATs per 100k, -8 per cent change in spending). Removing these outliers transforms the relationship into a positive correlation (See Appendix 7) suggesting that as the cuts to service spending increases CAT becomes less prevalent. However, neither is this relationship statistically significant ( $r = -0.117$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). As such, the data is inconclusive.

## WALES

**Figure 33** Relationship between percentage change in local government spending by Unitarity Authority (Wales) and CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and percentage change in local government spending at upper tier district for England from Amin Smith et al. (2016a).

**Figure 34** Correlation coefficient between percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority (Wales) and Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)

Correlations		Community service CATs per 100k by UA	Change in local government spending (%) by UA 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)
Community service CATs per 100k by UA (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	1	.491*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.033
	N	19	19
Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	.491*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.033	
	N	19	22
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

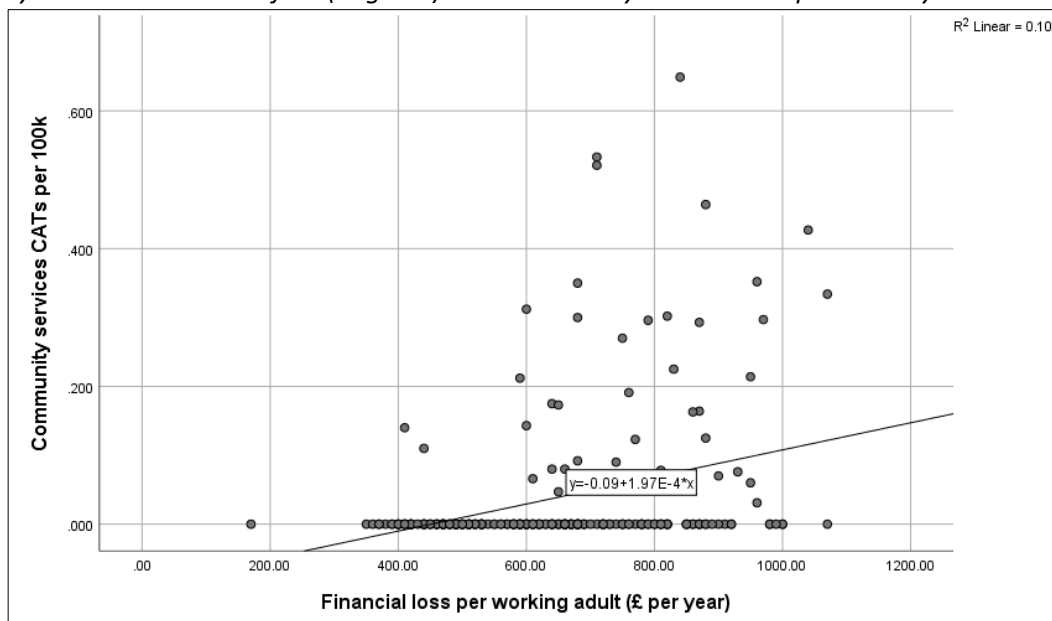
Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 33 suggests a relationship where the lower the change in local government spending the higher the prevalence of CATs in Wales. Figure 34 sets out a modest positive correlation ( $r = 0.491$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between these two variables. The graph (Figure 33) indicates one outlier at the top right-hand side, Merthyr Tydfil (0.83 CATs per 100k, -9.7 per cent change in local spending). Removing Merthyr Tydfil from the analysis increases the strength of this relationship ( $r = 0.617$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (see Appendix 7). As a general rule, the data indicates that the smaller the cuts to local government spending by unitary authorities in Wales the greater the prevalence of CAT (the opposite of that found in England).

#### 4.8.2 National cuts to welfare by local authority and CAT prevalence

##### ENGLAND

**Figure 35** Relationship between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority by national cuts to welfare (England) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (England) based on total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reforms since 2010-11 from Beatty and Fothergill (2016a).

**Figure 36** Correlation coefficient between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority by national cuts to welfare (England) and Community service CATs per 100k

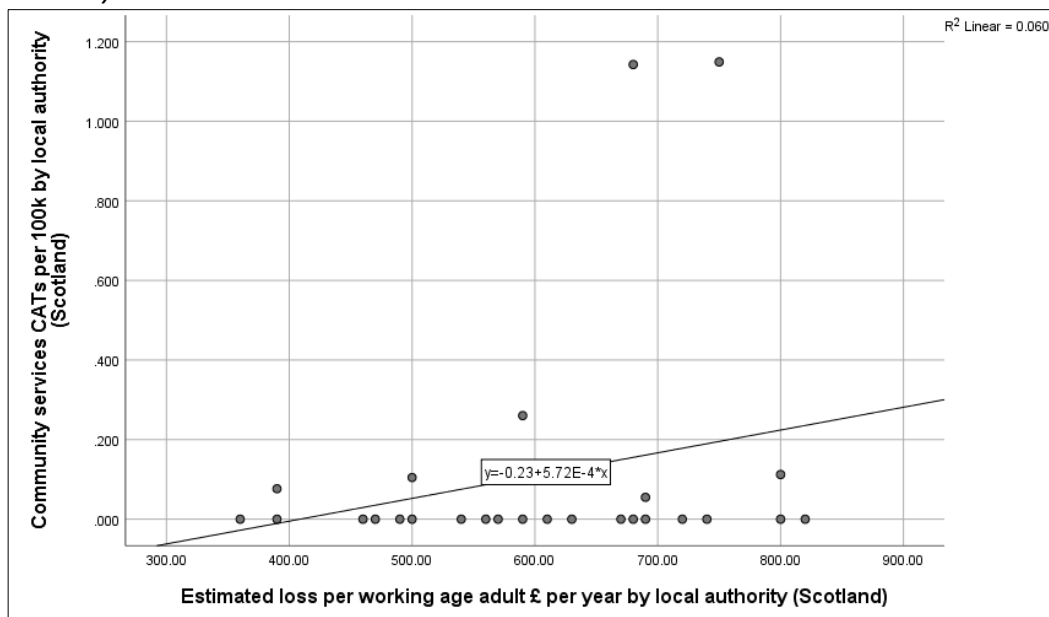
Correlations		Community services CATs per 100k	Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)
Community services CATs per 100k	Pearson Correlation	1	.276**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	254	234
Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (England)	Pearson Correlation	.276**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	234	325
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 35 suggests a general trend where the financial loss per working age adult in £ per year per local authority increases so does the prevalence of CAT. Figure 36 sets out a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.276$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between these variables. Removing two outliers at the top centre of the graph, Gateshead (1.19 CATs per 100k, £770.00 loss per working adult per year) and below that Basildon (0.92 CATs per 100k, £690.00 loss per working adult per year), increases the strength of this relationship ( $r = 0.324$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). The data indicates that the higher the financial loss per working age adult due to national welfare cuts at local authority level the higher the prevalence of CAT practice in England.

## SCOTLAND

**Figure 37** Relationship between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Scotland) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (England) based on total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reforms since 2010-11 from Beatty and Fothergill (2016a).

**Figure 38** Correlation coefficient between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Scotland) and Community service CATs per 100k

Correlations		Community services CATs per 100k	Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year)
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	1	.245
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.228
	N	26	26
Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	.245	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.228	
	N	26	32

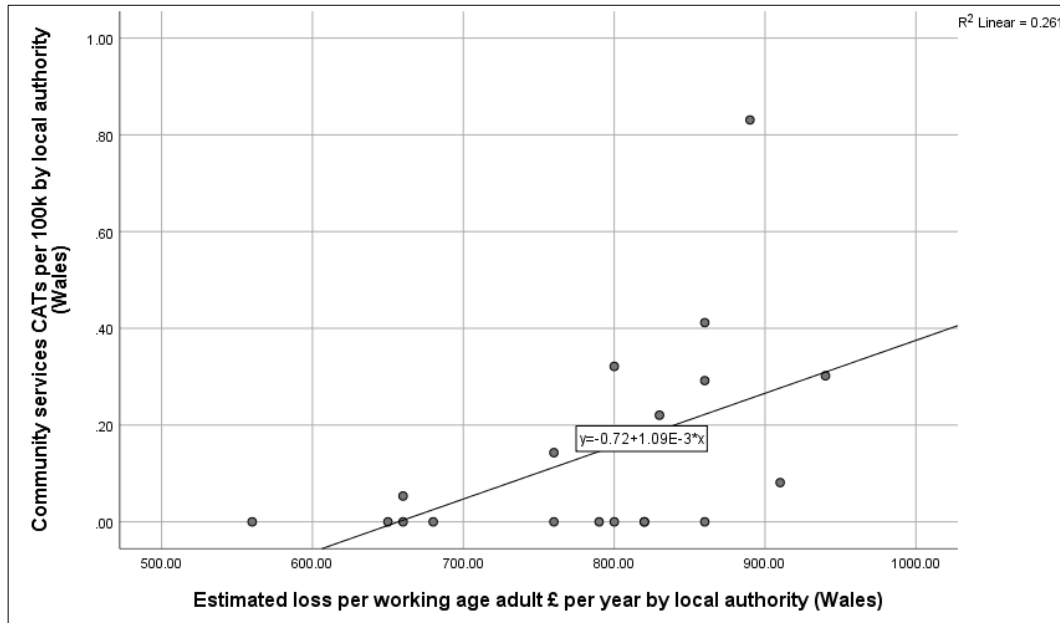
Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 37 suggests a relationship where the greater financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority the higher the prevalence of CAT in Scotland. Figure 38 sets out a positive correlation between these two variables that is not statistically significant ( $r = 0.245$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Removing two outliers at the top of the graph, towards the right Dumfries and Galloway (1.14 CATs per 100k, £680.00 loss per working adult per year), and towards the left East Ayrshire (1.15 CATs per 100k, £750.00 loss per working adult per year), does not increase the strength of this relationship ( $r = 0.10$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). Data suggests that the higher the financial loss due to welfare cuts the higher the prevalence of CAT in Scotland, but with the caveat that this relationship is not statistically significant.



## WALES

**Figure 39** Relationship between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Wales) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: Community service CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain, and Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (Wales) based on total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reforms since 2010-11 (Beatty and Fothergill 2016a)

**Figure 40** Calculation of the correlation coefficient between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Wales) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority

Correlations		Community services CATs	Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year)
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	1	.511*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025
	N	19	19
Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	.511*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025	
	N	19	22
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

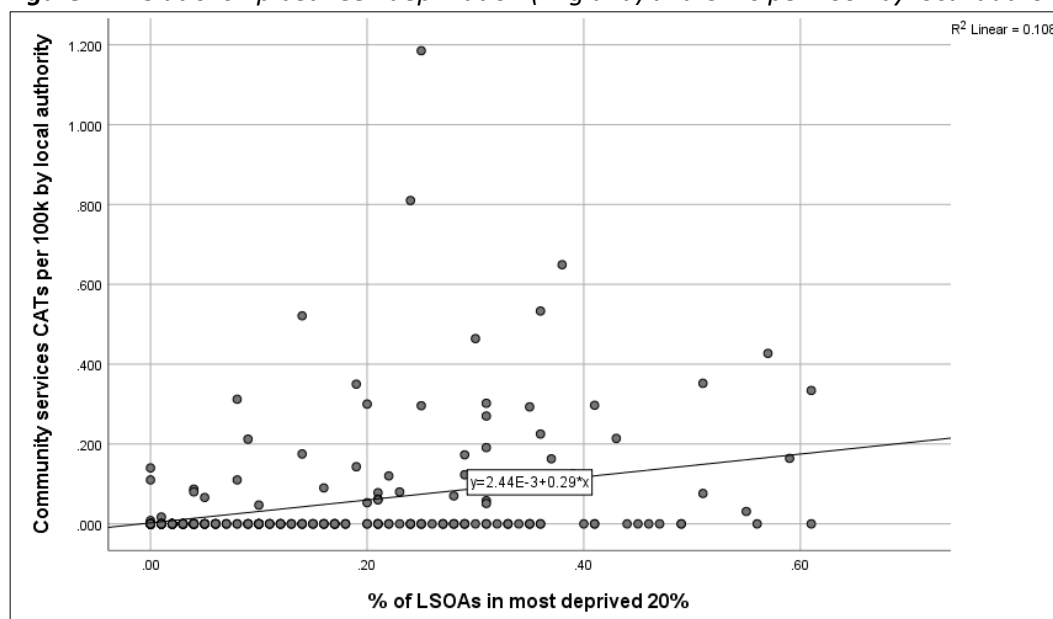
Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 39 suggests a relationship where the greater the financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority the higher the prevalence of CAT in Wales. Figure 40 sets out a modest positive correlation ( $r = 0.511$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between these two variables. Removing an outlier at the top-right-hand corner of the graph, Merthyr Tydfil, (0.83 CATs per 100k, £890.00 loss per working adult per year) only slightly strengthens this association ( $r = 0.515$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). As a result, in Wales the higher the loss per working age adult due to national cuts to welfare tend also to take place in areas with higher prevalence of CAT.

#### 4.8.3 Deprivation and CAT prevalence at local authority level

##### ENGLAND

**Figure 41** Relationship between deprivation (England) and CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain. Deprivation expressed as percentage of LSOAs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation (Gov.UK 2015). This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities (See Milbourne 2014).

**Figure 42** Correlation coefficient between deprivation (England) and CATs per 100k by local authority

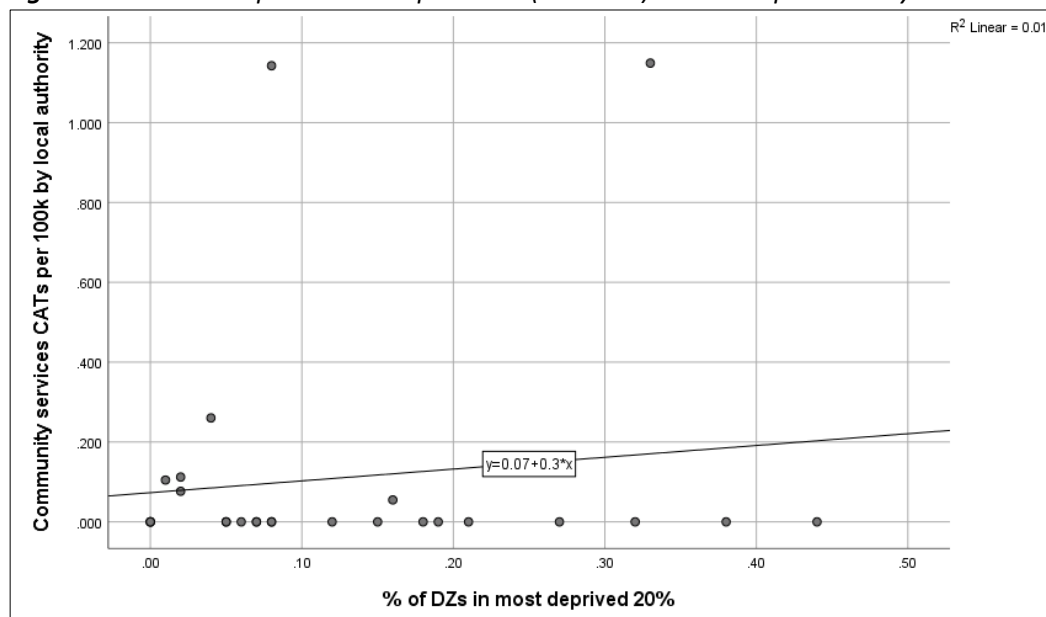
Correlations		% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%	Community services CATs per 100k by local authority
% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%	Pearson Correlation	1	.328**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	353	254
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority	Pearson Correlation	.328**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	254	254
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

The scatterplot (Figure 41) suggests a relationship in England where the greater the percentage of LSOAs in a local authority in the most deprived 20 per cent nationally the higher the prevalence of CAT. Figure 42 sets out a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.328$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between these two variables. Removing two outliers at the top centre of the graph, Gateshead (1.19 CATs per 100k, 25 per cent in most deprived 20 per cent) and below that Basildon (0.92 CATs per 100k, 24 per cent in most deprived 20 per cent), increases the strength of this relationship ( $r = 0.385$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). Thus, as a general rule the more deprived an area the greater the prevalence of CAT in England.

## SCOTLAND

**Figure 43** Relationship between deprivation (Scotland) and CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain. Deprivation expressed as percentage of DZs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation (Gov.scot 2016a). This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities (See Milbourne 2014).

**Figure 44** Correlation coefficient between deprivation (Scotland) and CATs per 100k by local authority

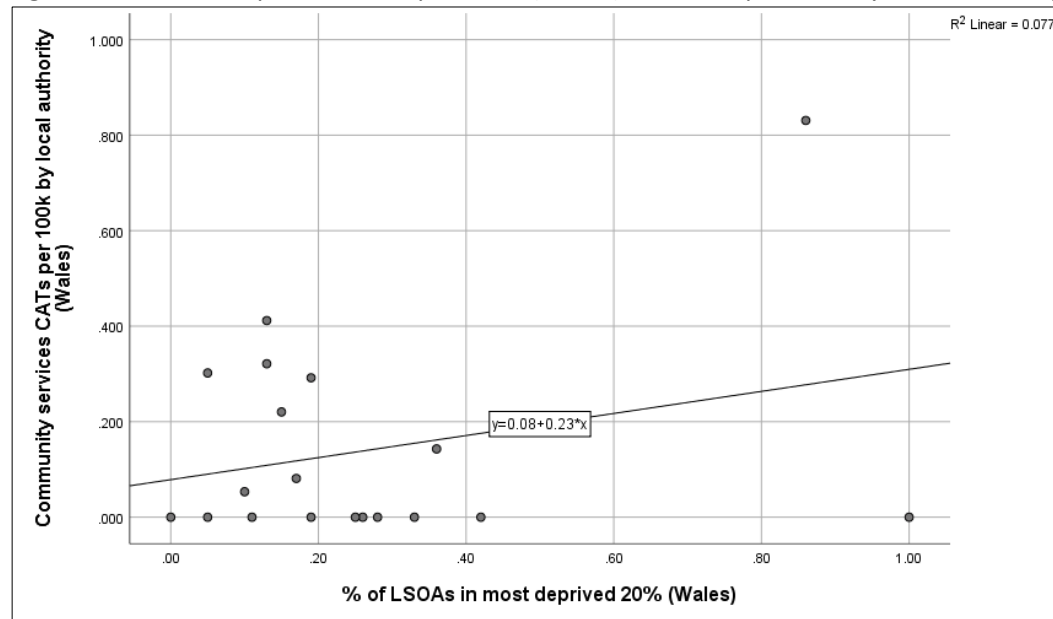
Correlations		% of DZs in most deprived 20%	Community services CATs per 100k by local authority
% of DZs in most deprived 20%	Pearson Correlation	1	.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.558
	N	32	26
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority	Pearson Correlation	.120	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.558	
	N	26	26

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 43 suggests a relationship in Scotland where the greater the percentage of DZs in a local authority in the most deprived 20 per cent nationally the higher the prevalence of CAT. Figure 44 sets out a positive correlation between these two variables that is not statistically significant ( $r = 0.120$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Removing two outliers, at the top right-hand side Dumfries and Galloway (1.14 CATs per 100k, 8 per cent of all DZs in most deprived 20 per cent nationally), and top left-hand side, East Ayrshire (1.15 CATs per 100k and 33 per cent of all DZs in the most deprived 20 per cent nationally), switches the association from positive to negative, but this too is not statistically significant ( $r = -0.296$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). Thus, there is lack of clarity over the association between deprivation and CAT prevalence in Scotland.

## WALES

**Figure 45** Relationship between deprivation (Wales) and CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain. Deprivation expressed as percentage of LSOAs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation (Gov.wales 2014). This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities (See Milbourne 2014).

**Figure 46** Correlation coefficient between deprivation (Wales) and CATs per 100k

Correlations		% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% (Wales)	Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)
% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	1	.277
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.251
	N	22	19
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	.277	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.251	
	N	19	19

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

Figure 45 suggests a relationship in Wales where the greater the percentage of LSOAs in a local authority in the most deprived 20 per cent nationally the higher the prevalence of CAT. Figure 46 sets out a positive correlation between these two variables but is not statistically significant ( $r = 0.277$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Removing an outlier to the top right-hand corner of the graph, Merthyr Tydfil (0.83 CATs per 100k, 86 per cent of all LSOAs in most deprived 20 per cent nationally) switches the positive association to negative, but this too is not statistically significant ( $r = -0.285$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) (See Appendix 7). In Wales there is a lack of certainty over the association between deprivation and CAT. However, excluding the outlier of Merthyr Tydfil suggests that the less deprived an area the greater the prevalence of CAT, with the caveat that this is not a statistically significant relationship.

**Figure 47** Summary of bivariate analysis of associations between the prevalence of CAT per 100k at local authority level (as the dependent variable)

Independent variables (IV)	Level of analysis	Pearson Correlation (r)	Relationship with IV (p)	Magnitude (descriptive)
Austerity - 'Change in local authority service spending 2009-10 to 2016-17'	England	-0.255	p<0.05	weak
	Scotland	-0.135	p>0.05*	n/a
	Wales	0.491	p<0.05	modest
Welfare cuts - 'Financial loss per working age adult per year by local authority'	England	0.276	p<0.05	weak
	Scotland	0.245	p>0.05*	n/a
	Wales	0.511	p<0.05	modest
Deprivation - '% of LSOAs / DZs in most deprived 20%'	England	0.328	p<0.05	weak
	Scotland	0.120	p>0.05*	n/a
	Wales	0.277	p>0.05	n/a

\* p>0.05 = relationship with DV is not statistically significant

Figure 47 shows a summary of the bivariate analysis of associations between the prevalence of CAT per 100k at local authority level, including austerity as cuts to local service spending, welfare cuts, and pre-existing deprivation with the prevalence of CAT. The data for England shows weak but statistically significant relationships between CAT and all variables which are sustained even with the elimination of outliers. CAT is associated with austerity as the greater the cuts to local government spending the greater the prevalence of CAT. This supports the idea that austerity is a function of CAT. Additionally, the greater the national cuts to welfare experienced at local authority level, the higher the prevalence of CAT demonstrating that CAT is more likely to be experienced alongside other austerity cuts affecting some of the most vulnerable in society. These relationships are important for at least two reasons. One, communities who disproportionately suffer national cuts to welfare are also those who are having to take on additional responsibilities to manage and provide their own local services through CAT. Two, as CAT is more prevalent in areas where national cuts to welfare have been hardest then the work that community groups do through CAT could help to ameliorate rather than compound an otherwise combined withdrawal of the state from both local services and a national safety net for the most vulnerable.

The final relationship shows that, in England, the more deprived an area the more prevalent CAT. Then CAT, like austerity, disproportionately impacts more deprived areas. This relationship raises

questions around how communities are taking on responsibility for these assets. For example, the emergence of community services CATs in more deprived areas is unexpected. The uneven nature of the charitable and voluntary sector, within which CAT is implicitly embedded, has been well documented. In wider discussions of localism, local action is often considered to be beyond the reach of some communities where they lack skills, capacity and an existing civic infrastructure (Wills 2016; Findlay-King et al. 2017), where charities are more often located in affluent areas instead of where they are needed (Butler 2020). Furthermore there are fewer organisations focusing on local activities in areas that are more deprived (Mohan 2012), where their absence compounds existing economic hardship with a lack of social capital (Corry 2020). I acknowledge that place-based definitions of community at this level are problematic. We do not know with any certainty which communities are taking on responsibility for these assets, or who is using them. However, I argue, that given that the impact of welfare cuts is concentrated in particular areas (Beatty and Fothergill 2014) and that inequality has a geographical dimension (Sampson 2012), identifying a stronger emergence of CAT in more deprived areas is important as these may be the very communities that arguably need and benefit most from these local services. A further dimension to these relationships is suggested by the data for England. The greater strength of association between deprivation and prevalence of CAT ( $r = 0.328$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to that between change in local government spending and prevalence of CAT ( $r = -0.255$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) suggests that, statistically, a rival explanation for the prevalence of CAT exists. To test for this possibility a controlled bivariate relationship is tested for below.

In Scotland, scatterplots suggest that similar associations as those observed in England between the dependent variables of austerity and deprivation with the prevalence of CAT. However, these are not statistically significant and are subject to change where outliers are removed.

Consequently, relationships cannot be established with certainty with this data. Testing for relationships in Scotland is problematic given the small case numbers ( $n=32$  Unitary authorities), low participation in CAT across different Unitary authorities (only 22 per cent of all Unitary authorities) and the high level of CAT practice in two outliers (Dumfries and Galloway, and East Ayrshire) that have a large influence on associations. Additionally, although the number and percentage of missing cases is low ( $n=6$ , 18.8 per cent of total Unitary authorities), important data was not included for unitary authorities that have seen some of the largest changes in service spending, such as Glasgow City at -29 per cent, Edinburgh at -20.3 per cent and Clackmannanshire at -20 per cent (Amin Smith et al. 2016a). This may also impact on the strength associations.

The data for Wales, in contrast, establishes a different set of statistically significant associations offering a different narrative of CAT not as closely tied to austerity. In relation to local fiscal

austerity, expressed as change in local government spending, the lighter the cuts the higher the prevalence of CAT. This might suggest that the prevalence of CAT in Wales is not directly driven by austerity. In relation to welfare cuts, as in England, the deepest cuts come in areas that also experience a higher prevalence of CAT, consequently linking CAT in Wales to nationally imposed cuts from Westminster. Finally, the association between deprivation and CAT remains ambiguous. The scatterplot (Figure 45) suggests that the more deprived a local authority the higher the prevalence of CAT. However, association is dependent on an outlier (Merthyr Tydfil) that when removed inverts the relationship so that the less deprived a local authority the higher the prevalence of CAT. In both cases this association is not statistically significant. The case of Merthyr is important as it has been shown to be one of the most deprived unitary authorities in Wales but has not experienced the greatest changes in service spending (Gray and Barford 2018). This outlier is an exception to the general rule found in England where those areas that have seen the greatest cuts tend to also be more deprived (Amin Smith et al. 2016a). This difference combined with low case numbers has a large influence over the possibility of establishing robust associations.

#### 4.8.4 Controlling for rival explanations

Given the associations outlined above, there is a possibility that these variables interact with one another to influence understandings of CAT practice. This is important in the case of the relationship between the change in local government service spending, i.e., austerity cuts, and prevalence of CAT where the other factors may offer rival explanations for CAT. The strength of associations between CAT and deprivation (England) and between CAT and welfare cuts (England and Wales) offer the possibility to explore alternative explanations for the prevalence of CAT that can be tested statistically.

For example, the prevalence of CAT in England may be more strongly associated with deprivation than with austerity. It could be that CAT is more prevalent in areas that are classed as deprived, where there may already be a higher proportion of assets to that of austerity cuts, rather than CAT simply being driven by the depth of local government spending cuts. This raises a question. Is there a statistically significant relationship between the change in local government spending, i.e., austerity, and the prevalence of CATs whilst controlling for deprivation?

**Figure 48** Partial correlation test between ‘community service CATs per 100k’ and ‘Percentage change in local government spending’ controlling for ‘% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%’

Correlations			Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% by upper tier district (England)
Control Variables					
-none- <sup>a</sup>	Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Correlation	1.000	-.255	.250
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.010	.012
		df	0	99	99
	Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	Correlation	-.255	1.000	-.478
		Significance (2-tailed)	.010	.	.000
		df	99	0	99
	% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% by upper tier district (England)	Correlation	.250	-.478	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.012	.000	.
		df	99	99	0
% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% by upper tier district (England)	Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Correlation	1.000	-.159	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.114	
		df	0	98	
	Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	Correlation	-.159	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.114	.	
		df	98	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Source: Fol returns by author, (Amin Smith et al. 2016a) and (Beatty and Fothergill 2016a)

Figure 48 shows the partial correlation test between ‘community service CATs per 100k’ and ‘Percentage change in local government spending’ controlling for ‘% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%’. This sets out a partial correlation used to evaluate the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship in England between the prevalence of CATs and change to local government spending while controlling for the effects of deprivation. There was a very weak negative correlation between CATs per 100k and change to local government spending controlling for deprivation ( $r = -0.159$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Results of the correlation not controlling for deprivation yielded a weak negative correlation between CATs per 100k and change in local government spending ( $r = -0.255$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the partial correlation null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant relationship between CATs per 100k and change in local government



spending while controlling for deprivation, cannot be rejected because the significance levels for both analyses are not less than 0.05, i.e., they are not statistically significant. In other words, statistically we do not know the effect of deprivation on the association between change in local government spending and CATs per 100k.

Further rival understandings of the rationales behind CAT can be tested. In the case of the relationship between change to local government spending and prevalence of CATs the influence of another variable related to inequality was tested to eliminate it as a rival factor to austerity as driving CAT. Welfare cuts, expressed as 'financial loss per working age adult per year by local authority', I suggest offers a measure through which the local impact of austerity can be understood. Councils are likely to be aware that these cuts will be disproportionately felt in certain areas and may be looking to support these communities through alternative service provision, i.e., through CAT. This raises a question if there is a statistically significant relationship between the change in local government spending and the prevalence of CAT whilst controlling for welfare cuts? This can be tested in both England and Wales.

**Figure 49** Partial correlation test between 'community service CATs per 100k' and 'Percentage change in local government spending' controlling for welfare cuts (England)

Correlations			Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)
Control Variables					
-none <sup>a</sup>	Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Correlation	1.000	-.245	.212
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.022	.049
		df	0	85	85
	Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	Correlation	-.245	1.000	-.414
		Significance (2-tailed)	.022	.	.000
		df	85	0	85
	Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)	Correlation	.212	-.414	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.049	.000	.
		df	85	85	0
Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)	Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Correlation	1.000	-.177	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.103	
		df	0	84	
	Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	Correlation	-.177	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.103	.	
		df	84	0	
a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.					

Source: Fol returns by author, (Amin Smith et al. 2016a) and (Beatty and Fothergill 2016a)

Figure 49 shows the partial correlation test between ‘community service CATs per 100k’ and ‘Percentage change in local government spending’ controlling for welfare cuts (England). This sets out a partial correlation used to evaluate the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship in England between the prevalence of CATs and change to local government spending while controlling for the effects of welfare cuts. There was a very weak negative correlation between CATs per 100k and change to local government spending controlling for welfare cuts ( $r = -0.177$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Results of the correlation not controlling for welfare cuts yielded a weak negative correlation between CATs per 100k and change in local government spending ( $r = -0.245$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Thus, the partial correlation null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant relationship between CATs per 100k and change in local government spending while controlling for welfare cuts, cannot be rejected because the significance levels for both analyses are not less than 0.05, i.e., they are not statistically significant. In other words, we do not know the statistical effect of welfare cuts on the association between change in local government spending and CATs per 100k in England.

**Figure 50** Partial correlation test between ‘community service CATs per 100k’ and ‘Percentage change in local government spending’ controlling for welfare cuts (Wales)

Correlations			Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)	Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)	Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)
Control Variables					
none <sup>a</sup>	Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)	Correlation	1.000	.617	.264
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.006	.289
		df	0	16	16
	Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)	Correlation	.617	1.000	.172
		Significance (2-tailed)	.006	.	.494
		df	16	0	16
	Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)	Correlation	.264	.172	1.000
		Significance (2-tailed)	.289	.494	.
		df	16	16	0
Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)	Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)	Correlation	1.000	.602	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.	.011	
		df	0	15	
	Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)	Correlation	.602	1.000	
		Significance (2-tailed)	.011	.	
		df	15	0	

a. Cells contain zero-order (Pearson) correlations.

Source: Fol returns by author, (Amin Smith et al. 2016a) and (Beatty and Fothergill 2016a)

Figure 50 shows partial correlation test between 'community service CATs per 100k' and 'Percentage change in local government spending' controlling for welfare cuts (Wales). This sets out a partial correlation used to evaluate the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship in Wales between the change to local government spending and CAT while controlling for the effects of welfare cuts. There was a modest positive correlation between change to local government spending and CAT, controlling for welfare cuts ( $r = 0.602$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Results of the correlation not controlling for welfare cuts yielded a modest positive correlation between change in local government spending and CATs ( $r = 0.617$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that controlling for welfare cuts had a very small effect on the strength of the relationship between the two variables. Therefore, the partial correlation null hypothesis, that there is no statistically significant relationship between CATs per 100k and change in local government spending while controlling for welfare cuts, can be rejected because the significance levels for both analyses are less than 0.05, i.e., they are statistically significant. In other words, statistically we know that welfare cuts had only a very small effect on the association between change in local government spending and CATs per 100k in Wales. While this does not robustly challenge a predominance of change in local government spending as a rationale behind the prevalence of CAT it does suggest that other relationships with austerity are important. As local authorities see welfare benefits being reduced, statistically they may be as likely to engage in CAT to protect services as a way to otherwise support their vulnerable communities who face greater reductions in welfare support. Statistically this is as likely as local authorities turning to CAT to address the spending cuts to local government that they are having to implement.

In summary, these exploratory tests to determine whether rival statistical explanations for the prevalence of CAT practice beyond knowledge of bivariate associations offer little further insight into the relationships, except in this final case. In Wales the influence of welfare cuts on the relationship between changes to local government spending and CAT prevalence can be said to have an effect which raises important questions around what is driving CAT.

#### 4.9 CAT at neighbourhood level

Analysis of community services CAT by prevalence at local authority level undertaken above usefully allows for the statistical testing of relationships using secondary data and suggests that CAT tends to be located in areas of deprivation. At the same time, reading the CAT data based on the characteristics of the neighbourhood (LSOAs / DZs) locations of each individual CAT offers a different perspective further contributing to an understanding CAT practice located within more deprived areas.

**Figure 51** Frequencies of CAT by deprivation ranking at neighbourhood level (England)

Deprivation ranking by postcode (England)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	55	21.5	21.5	21.5
	2	40	15.6	15.6	37.1
	3	28	10.9	10.9	48.0
	4	28	10.9	10.9	58.9
	5	25	9.8	9.8	68.7
	6	14	5.5	5.5	74.2
	7	19	7.4	7.4	81.6
	8	20	7.8	7.8	89.4
	9	19	7.4	7.4	96.8
	10	8	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	256	100.0	100.0	

Source: Community service CAT data by author from FoI requests to local authorities, deprivation ranking based on ranking of each CAT based on data at LSOA level (Gov.UK 2015).

Figure 51 shows the frequencies of CAT by deprivation ranking at neighbourhood level (England). These descriptive data show that in England there are higher numbers of CATs in the lower decile ranks of multiple deprivation (1 = 21.5 per cent, 2 = 15.6 per cent, 3 = 10.9 per cent), whereas there are lower numbers of CATs in the higher decile ranks of multiple deprivation (8 = 7.8 per cent, 9 = 7.4 per cent, 10 = 3.1 per cent). Thus, CAT in England tends to be located in neighbourhoods that are more deprived.

**Figure 52** Frequencies of CAT by deprivation ranking at neighbourhood level (Scotland)

Deprivation ranking by Data Zone (Scotland)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	4.9	4.9	4.9
	2	4	9.8	9.8	14.7
	3	12	29.3	29.3	44.0
	4	5	12.2	12.2	56.2
	5	4	9.8	9.8	66.0
	6	6	14.6	14.6	80.6
	7	4	9.8	9.8	90.4
	8	3	7.3	7.3	97.7
	9	0	0	0	97.7
	10	1	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	41	100.0	100.0	

Source: Community service CAT data by author from FoI requests to local authorities, deprivation ranking based on ranking of each CAT based on data at DZ level (Gov.scot 2016a).

Figure 52 shows the frequencies of CAT by deprivation ranking at neighbourhood level (Scotland). This shows that a similar relationship to that in England is present, although the highest numbers are not in the lowest decile ranks but in the third and fourth lowest (3 = 29.3 per cent, 4 = 12.2 per cent), while there are likewise lower numbers of CATs in the higher decile ranks of multiple

deprivation (8 = 7.3 per cent, 9 = 0 per cent, 10 = 2.4 per cent). Thus, CAT in Scotland tends to be located in neighbourhoods that are relatively more deprived.

**Figure 53** Frequencies of CAT by deprivation ranking at neighbourhood level (Wales)

Deprivation ranking by LSOA (Wales)					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	11	22.9	22.9	22.9
	2	6	12.5	12.5	35.4
	3	4	8.3	8.3	43.7
	4	5	10.4	10.4	54.1
	5	1	2.1	2.1	56.2
	6	1	2.1	2.1	58.3
	7	6	12.5	12.5	70.8
	8	3	6.3	6.3	77.1
	9	6	12.5	12.5	89.6
	10	5	10.4	10.4	100.0
	Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Source: Community service CAT data by author from Fol requests to local authorities, deprivation ranking based on ranking of each CAT based on data at LSOA level

Figure 53 shows frequencies of CAT by deprivation ranking at neighbourhood level (Wales). This data show that there are higher numbers of CATs in the lower decile ranks of multiple deprivation (1 = 22.9 per cent, 2 = 12.5 per cent, 3 = 8.3 per cent), whereas there are lower numbers of CATs in the higher decile ranks of multiple deprivation (8 = 6.3 per cent, 9 = 12.5 per cent, 10 = 10.4 per cent). Thus, CAT in Wales tends to be located in neighbourhoods that are more deprived, although here there is also a large percent that are located in the least deprived areas. This contributes to the idea that CAT is located in more deprived areas, although of course not exclusively.

#### 4.10 Discussion and chapter conclusion

I began this chapter by setting out an undeniable statistical association between CAT and austerity. Using my dataset, I demonstrated that the rise in CAT practice is closely correlated with the fall in local authority Revenue Spending Power, at least in England where secondary data exists allowing for this calculation. However, although there is a clear relationship over time it has developed in a more complex way over space. In exploring the shifting patterns of CAT over time and space the party-political agility of CAT is revealed. Cluster analysis, although statistically fuzzy, showed that although originally starting as an experiment under New Labour, CAT was then taken up by Conservative councils. However, it was in the last period (2013-14 to 2017-18) when CAT became predominantly practiced by Labour councils towards the end of the 2010s. This raises questions over the local ideological motivations of local authorities as they turn to CAT. Do they

consider CAT as a New Labour tool to foster local empowerment, a form of Conservative localism, or simply a tool through which to reduce costs and mitigate the impact of austerity?

In looking at the distribution of cases of CAT across Britain a more statistically precise picture of CAT practice is developed and reveals its uneven emergence across space. This suggests commonalities with recent examinations of the unequal geographies of austerity and its impact on low-income communities (See Beatty and Fothergill 2014; Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Gray and Barford 2018). CAT also appears strongly in the devolved nations where there appears to be more external support for asset transfer and where it might be considered as part of more sustained government strategies for the empowerment of communities.

Considering CAT at local authority level reveals associations largely with older industrial urban local authorities that have been disproportionately hit by austerity. CAT as an example of the withdrawal of the state both reflects and compounds the impact of austerity. In these areas the burden of CAT falls on communities who may be least able to manage and provide their own assets and associated local services. To a lesser extent, CAT is also present in areas that are thought to sit at the other end of the spectrum from austerity. These are less deprived areas and include: i) rural areas that are often used to evoke a myth of self-sufficiency; and ii) commuter towns that may be more susceptible to the ideology of localist calls for individual autonomy from the state and have more capacity to take on these local services. CAT coerces communities into taking on the role of the state in all areas, but distinction should be made between those areas that may be more able to cope.

Nonetheless overall, and despite these important variations, CAT is most closely associated with the geographies of austerity. CAT is more likely to be in areas that have seen greater cuts to local government spending, national welfare cuts and deprivation. This relationship with the disproportionate impact of austerity is strongest in England with statistically significant correlations between local authorities that have higher prevalence of community services CATs per capita and greater percentage cuts to local government spending, national cuts to welfare and deprivation. Although the relationships are statistically 'weak' they nonetheless suggest an important tendency, and attest to variations in CAT practice that are likely due to the local nature of its organisation and administration. The relationships in Scotland and Wales are problematic, being frustrated by small numbers of cases and are not statistically significant. Yet, neither do they allow us to rule out the possibility suggest that CAT is here again associated with austerity landscapes.

The limitations of the dataset are evident. Non-response to the survey by some local authorities means that it is not strictly possible to infer generalizations for the wider population in Britain, but rather that the data, as the best available, allows for the best approximations to be made. In retrospect, the extent of information requested in my freedom of information requests could have been more concise. However, these were by their nature exploratory, and their outcome was at the time unknown. Moreover, I would suggest that the lack of any official record of existing assets and local services, those that have been sold and those that have been disposed of or leased to the third sector or private companies, was and remains a barrier to understanding CAT. There is official recognition of this lack of information. Work by the Welsh Government to establish a database of its entire administrative estate (National Assembly for Wales 2013) is a welcome start to recognising the scale of the public assets. However, given that it appears to be led by financial pressures (National Assembly for Wales 2013) it may lead to more disposal of land rather than protecting it. Additionally, while the recommendation to draw up an Asset management plan for entire administrative estate of Welsh Government it is unclear how any equivalent registers of local estates at local authority level might be joined up to offer an overview of changes to local services.

In relation to the nature of the data presented here, while this chapter sets out an understanding of CAT, this quantitative data only reveals a limited view of Community Asset Transfer. There is a risk of generalising CAT through this data and a danger these findings default to speculation. On one level, my work is exploratory in nature and does not seek to present this data as a fixed 'truth' rather as a tool through which to further inquiry and problem resolution in keeping with a pragmatist approach. On another level, I continue to explore the contextual nuance of CAT at local authority level in the next chapter combining and triangulation this data with qualitative methods to explore the local logics, justifications, critiques and resistance behind why and how the process of CAT has emerged at local authority level. This in-depth and qualitative work I present in the next chapter and argue that this offers complementary ways of considering CAT practice.

While discussion of the different geographies of CAT attest to the party-political breadth and adaptability of this process of asset transfer, I suggest that it must be considered as part of a wider project to reduce the state. Kenny et al. (2017) argue that the withdrawal of the state from local services has been ongoing since at least the 1980s, and links to Latham's (2017) study of the demise of the state at local authority level that has been incremental, reaching back further than austerity, and indicating a shift away from the Keynesian post-war consensus around welfare state provision towards neoliberal policies.

This political economy approach to framing CAT, I argue is an essential dimension to constructing an understanding of this practice of asset transfer through helping to illustrate its impact and offering insight into one aspect of its political constellation. I propose that recognition of the role of a neoliberal governance approach usefully problematises CAT as an example of the neoliberal roll back of the state (Harvey 2005; Peck 2010) and contributes to tracing neoliberal austerity urbanism (Peck 2018). Accordingly measuring the way in which CAT has emerged through austerity provides a useful example of the local impact of deeper political changes to state government and the way in which it cares for citizens.

At the same time, and as set out and discussed previously, a further approach beyond such a reading of austerity is required to explore CAT practice more openly. CAT is an ambiguous practice, and while it does reinforce ideas of loss and the diminishment of the state it also serves as a way through which local services might be saved. Furthermore, communities, although coerced into taking on responsibility for these assets, take action to mitigate the withdrawal of the state. In looking at CAT in this way is to recognise the different facets of CAT rather than establish an either/or understanding of practice, to acknowledge the 'undecidability' in the worlds we research (Kern and Mclean 2017). Such a move is attentive to fears that although a neoliberal lens is offers a powerful explanatory explanation it may simultaneously close down other understandings reinforcing rather than challenging these processes (Newman 2014). In doing so, I attempt to read for difference (Gibson-Graham 2006), to continue to explore and (re)consider how we might as geographers frame CAT practice through witnessing and understanding local experiences on the ground. As such, this thesis turns to explore local experiences of CAT practices to ask how do local authorities position CAT, how do they justify CAT within austerity and to what extent might there be local critique and/or resistance? It is to these questions that I now turn in the next chapter.



## Chapter 5 Local government austerity and CAT: Justification, critique, and resistance

### 5.1 Introduction: Community Asset Transfer at the local scale

In the last chapter I outlined how the data from my extensive national survey provides new insight into the practice of Community Asset Transfer and its relationship with austerity. This relationship is complex. CAT is emerging within and rendering visible new and uneven landscapes of localist action often associated with fiscal retrenchment. In this chapter the ambiguity in the deployment of CAT is further examined at a different scale and in relation to its situated contexts to explore why and how local authorities are engaging in CAT practice.

CAT, as a shift in the management of public assets provokes deliberation. Through this process social control is enacted, resistance to the disposal by CAT of public assets is subordinated and critique is muted. My approach here is inspired by recent work in relation to the governance of local authorities in times of austerity (Fuller 2017; 2019) and similarly draws on a lens of 'pragmatist sociology' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]) to uncover the construction and deployment of discursive institutions that control behaviour and justify CAT practice. The use of discursive institutions identifies different junctures of justification, critique and resistance, offering the possibility for actions that move beyond incorporation to be recognised.

This chapter presents a thematic analysis of three local authority case studies based on semi-structured in-depth interview data supported by secondary documentation. The intention here is not to offer a comprehensive or comparative study of CAT but instead to offer different in-situ accounts of the variegated experiences of austerity through which practice has emerged. CAT is considered as a collective endeavour constructed by many actors and a product of the local authorities within which they emerge. As such names of research participants have been changed to safeguard individuals, and local authority names pseudonymised. To be clear, this study is not carried out as a normative judgement of the process of CAT, nor of the actors involved. Instead, it acquaints us with how embedded local values and norms are mobilised to deliver CAT. In doing so, it reveals some of the different power relations at play during key moments of practice. The themes presented here represent different facets of the deliberation that goes on behind the shift in the management of public assets that CAT presents. These themes testify to the emergence and deployment of local rationales that establish CAT practice and contribute to its development.

They include, i) justification and critique, ii) post hoc justification, and iii) emerging post hoc resistance.

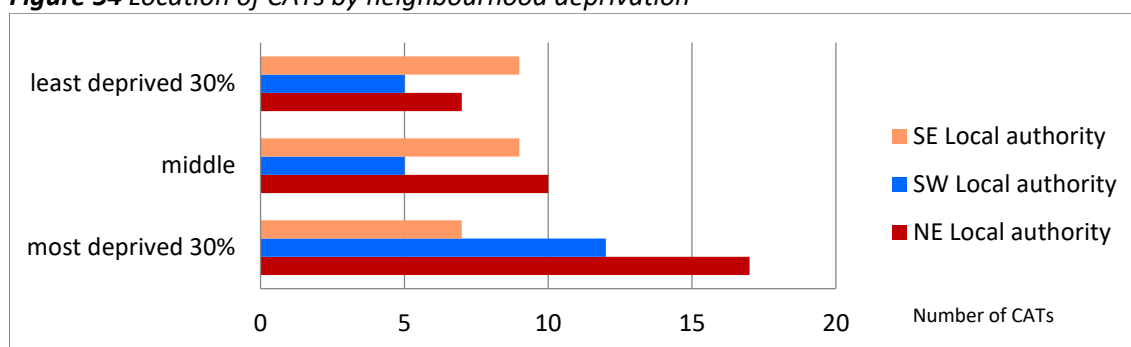
My contributions here are three-fold. Firstly, I make an empirical contribution through the recognition of some of the different rationales behind CAT at local authority level. This responds to my research question around what motivates involvement in Community Asset Transfer, here in relation to where it is imagined, deployed, and practiced at the scale of the local state and by public officials. Secondly, conceptually this work supplements a political economy approach to CAT by offering understandings of the deliberative practices that are involved in practice. Thirdly, theoretically, it provides understandings that begin to chart the links between acquiescence and resistance that these deliberative practices involve. Before presenting the empirical analysis, a summary of the three case studies is set out followed by a brief re-orientation of my theoretical approach to this more local context at local authority scale.

## 5.2 Uneven geographies of local authority CAT

The three local authority case studies selected offer different understandings of how CAT has emerged across distinct territories of austerity. As discussed earlier in the methodology chapter, the cases were chosen based on approximate similarities in urban classification and the high incidence of disposal of 'community services' through CAT. They rank amongst the first twenty most prolific local authorities disposing of 'community services' assets through CAT in Britain (See Figure 27 above).

The three cases represent experiences that broadly span across different landscapes of economic austerity and pre-existing inequality. The cases are: 1) Northwick in the north east of England which represents a high reduction in service spending (in the top quintile of deepest cuts between -46.1 and -30.9 per cent between 2009-10 and 2016-17) with a large percentage of its population living in areas classified as the most deprived (31 per cent of population live within 20 per cent of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England); 2) Nerton in the south east of England which represents a marginally lower reduction in spending (in the second quintile of deepest cuts between -30.8 and -22.0 per cent between 2009-10 and 2016-17) with less of its population living in areas classified as the most deprived (12 per cent within 20 per cent of the most deprived), and finally 3) Llandinas in South Wales which represents an area with a smaller reduction in spending (in the bottom quintile of deepest cuts between -15.0 and -0.1 per cent between 2009-10 and 2016-17) but with a large percentage of its population living in areas classified as the most deprived (28 per cent within the 20 per cent most deprived in Wales).

**Figure 54** Location of CATs by neighbourhood deprivation\*



Source: Data from FOI requests by author and IMD for England (Gov.UK 2015) and Wales (Gov.wales 2014).

Notes: \*Neighbourhood deprivation is calculated based on the postcode location of the asset and Index of Multiple Deprivation for England and Wales. Comparison between English and Welsh data are indicative only as they are based on different methodology and categorised within their own nation. SE refers to Nerton, SW to Llandinas and NE to Northwick.

As discussed in Chapter 4 above, the practice of CAT spans across many local authorities from those most affected by fiscal retrenchment to those that have experienced fewer cuts, albeit in England the prevalence of CAT practice is weighted towards areas that have seen greater cuts. The challenge here is to understand the process of CAT throughout these different areas. On one level, the Northwick case study offers insight into those deprived local authorities that have borne the brunt of austerity (Hastings et al. 2015), where vulnerable communities have been impacted the hardest (Beatty and Fothergill 2016b). On another level, the Nerton case study is a less deprived local authority adding nuance to a debate that frames austerity as contributing to the uneven social and economic conditions, which may be characterised geographically by a north/south divide (Martin et al. 2016). On yet another level, the case study of Llandinas also offers insight into the emergence of CAT in a context of a reduction in service spending, albeit to a lesser extent. Figure 54 shows the location of CATs by neighbourhood deprivation across the three local authority case studies in an attempt to refine understandings of actual practice. In both Northwick and Llandinas CATs are prevalent in the 30 per cent most deprived areas, and in Nerton there are also CATs in these areas. Additionally, this data presents a more complex understanding of practice at local level whereby CATs are distributed throughout different areas suggesting the need for further scrutiny of individual cases to both refine and be wary of assumptions based on generalised understandings.

To be clear my use of existing statistical descriptive figures and data from the Freedom of Information requests is intended to provide a contextualising approximation of the difference between each local authority case study. Drawing on general data for the quantity of deprived areas in a local authority, albeit corrected to account for a finer-grained understanding of deprivation based on Lower Super Output Area's (See Milbourne 2014), does not in itself account for CAT practice, is intended to offer insight into the wider context within which CAT is practiced.

Scrutiny of the actual locations of individual CAT cases does begin to address the potential for a risk of mistaken generalised understandings of CAT locations underlining the need to understand CAT at local level. As such these variables are intended as a guide, in the sense of an exploratory acknowledgement of differences, rather than establishing fixed conditions upon which generalisations of CAT might be made.

**Figure 55** *Change in local authority spending by service area, 2010-11 to 2016-17 [England]*

	Change in spend (£m)	Change in Spend (%)
Planning and development services	-1,180	-52.8
Highways and transport services	-1,270	-37.1
Cultural and related services	-1,204	-34.9
Environmental and regulatory services	-910	-16.9
Central services	-485	-14.6
Adult social care	-582	-3.3
Children's social care	238	3.2

*Source:* Adapted by author from National Audit Office analysis of Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (National Audit Office 2018a).

Unevenness is also present in terms of the variegated nature changes to local services. Nationally, there have been bifurcations in service spending cuts within local authorities. National figures for England demonstrate the greater impact of cuts on those areas that would have supported community infrastructure. Community Services CATs are likely to have been funded by service areas that have seen some of the largest changes in spending, i.e., cultural and related services which would have funded community centres, and in some cases planning and development which could have funded assets as centres of community development (See figure 55 Change in local authority spending by service area, 2010-11 to 2016-17 [England]).

**Figure 56** Change in service spending by service area, local authority case studies

**Figure 38 Change in service spending by service area, local authority case studies**

	Service spending by service area £ (gross)		% Change in service spending
	2010-11	2015-16	
<b>Northwick</b>			
Planning	24,971	35,118	40.6
Highways & transport	23,911	15,796	-33.9
Cultural and related	52,759	17,788	-66.3
Environmental and regulatory	30,776	40,987	33.2
Central services	8,059	4,596	-43.0
Adult social care	105,326	100,822	-4.3
Children's & education	246,790	172,807	-30.0
<b>Nerton</b>			
Planning	10,603	13,617	28.43
Highways & transport	29,877	25,777	-13.72
Cultural and related	25,632	15,939	-37.82
Environmental and regulatory	29,533	26,915	-8.86
Central services	32,487	11,278	-65.28
Adult social care	77,822	80,810	3.84
Children's & education	324,928	278,852	-14.18
<b>Llandinas</b>			
Planning	23,864	27,265	14.25
Highways & transport	74,455	64,534	-13.32
Cultural and related	62,658	59,698	-4.72
Environmental and regulatory	56,457	65,354	15.76
Central services	43,783	47,725	9.00
Adult social care	120,451	125,100	3.86
Children's & education	382,136	404,374	5.82

Source: Adapted by author from Statement of Accounts 2010-11 and 2015 from Northwick, Nerton and Llandinas local authorities. Notes: New bespoke categories of service spending by service area were introduced from 2016-17 across all three case studies which makes comparison between cases and with older data at this level of detail untenable.

Additionally, there is unevenness between local authorities. Changes to service spending by service area between the three case studies offers local detail on the variegated approach to services. For example, figure 56 shows higher gross spending cuts to cultural and related services in two of the cases than in the overall cuts reported, revealing proportionally greater cuts to these services within the local authorities.

This unevenness can also be seen in the overall total service spending cuts. In Northwick spending cuts were in the highest quintile nationally, between -46.1 and -30.9 per cent, between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (Amin Smith et al. 2016a). However, cuts to cultural and related services were reported at a more severe 66.3 per cent (See figure 56 above). Similarly in Nerton, total service spending cuts were in the second highest quintile nationally, between -30.8 and -22.0 per cent between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (Amin Smith et al. 2016a). Yet, cuts to cultural and related services reported locally at a higher rate of 37.8 per cent. In Llandinas, total service spending cuts were reported at between -15.0 and -0.1 per cent between 2009-10 and 2016-17 (Amin Smith et al. 2016a) whereas locally, with cuts to cultural and related services reported at 4.72 per cent. In the

two cases in England, the depth of cuts to cultural and related services is greater than the total across the local authority. These comparisons are offered as indicative only of the variation in changes to funding across local authorities and the vulnerability of funding to cultural services which may have previously supported assets disposed of through CAT. I recognise that Community Services CATs might also have been funded under adult social care, and that the periods of comparison are not equal, i.e., comparison of total cuts between 2009-10 and 2016-17 and local reporting of cuts between 2010-11 and 2016-17. Nonetheless, this evidence shows that local authorities approach changes to their funding differently with CATs also likely to be part of these differences.

### 5.3 Discursive institutions of Community Asset Transfer

When one is attentive to the unfolding of disputes, one sees that they are limited neither to a direct expression of interests nor to an anarchic and endless confrontation between heterogeneous worldviews clashing in a dialogue of the deaf. On the contrary, the ways disputes develop, when violence is avoided, brings to light powerful constraints in the search for well-founded arguments based on solid proofs, a search that thus manifests efforts toward convergence at the very heart of disagreement (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991], p. 13).

Community Asset Transfer (CAT) is an expression of a particular ‘political-social order ... [that] derives from a process of critique, debate and deliberation, which is profoundly structured’ (Eulriet 2014, p. 417). The disposal of public assets through CAT has provoked discussion and negotiation at local authority level. Focusing on CAT as a form of ‘discursive institution’ provides a framework to conceptualise how practice is reasoned (justification), negotiated (critique), and even opposed (resistance) (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]). By identifying the normative principles and values that individuals use to defend their actions, what Boltanski and Thévenot term as ‘orders of worth’ (2006 [1991]), an understanding of how people justify, perform and create the discursive institutions of CAT can be assembled.

Understanding the social construction of this process allows for the recognition of forms of local social action that pushes back against the imposition of CAT as another form of austerity governance. Study of the discursive institutions of CAT offers understanding of the line between acquiescence and resistance that this practice involves.

The following sections of this chapter are arranged to reveal the local logics employed behind CAT during deliberation as suggested by the discursive institution framework and drawn from my empirical data. Accordingly, the first section deals with justification and critique. This is followed by the post hoc legitimisation of CAT. Finally, forms of resistance are addressed. For analytical legibility, these forms of negotiation are discussed separately, nevertheless, they should be considered as overlapping processes that simultaneously co-constitute CAT practice.

My analysis is built around data from in-depth semi-structured interviews with six local authority officers, three local Councillors, three third sector workers and two government officials. These actors were identified as taking specific roles in the development of practice and are those who have been most closely involved in its implementation. This material is supplemented by secondary data from official documents.

### 5.2.1 Justification and critique

The rationale used by local authorities to justify CAT has been fundamental in establishing CAT practice and bringing in community groups to manage community assets. Focusing on the deliberative institutions of CAT within each case study allows for understandings of the different ways in which norms and values, or 'orders of worth' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]), are deployed to semantically frame and defend CAT practice. Rather than use the original 'orders of worth' derived from distant 1980s French management manuals (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]), I will draw on my empirical data to understand the performance of local norms and values that justify and answer critique of CAT in practice. This work offers an understanding of the ways in which civil society is incorporated into state retrenchment but also where local actions can offer some form of autonomy, albeit limited, through the different ways in which councils dispose of assets through CAT.

I propose that the decision to transfer assets through CAT always takes place through an assembly of the fiscal challenges of austerity and competing, sometimes symbiotic, often mutually supporting values of bureaucratic, moral, market and civic norms. In some cases, these norms work together in more concentrated ways, others establish different combinations of values. It is important to consider each case study as a particular constellation of these norms, how they work together and how different emphasis is placed on one or more of these values in different locations, depending on local conditions. Each case is presented here to illustrate a different dimension of these discursive approaches which are nonetheless present in different forms and to different degrees across all sites.

*The mobilisation of civil society in Northwick*

I suggest that in Northwick CAT has emerged alongside the mobilisation of 'civic' norms to promote the participation of civil society in the delivery of services. This change in governance is in line with a new management culture being established across the council that is (re)positioning its aims and values in how they meet the needs of their residents. Council documents outline the challenges that have instigated this bureaucratic reform that are at least three-fold. Firstly, there are financial pressures due to the external cuts that have already been made and which local authorities have had to negotiate over '10 years of austerity and major government policy changes including Welfare Reform, Housing Reforms, National Living Wage, duties through the Care Act and changes to the education system' (Northwick Council 2018, p. 13). Secondly there is ongoing fiscal uncertainty attributed to 'the impact of Universal Credit, implications of Brexit, Business Rate retention and Funding Formula changes' (ibid p. 13). Thirdly, there is the pressure of continuing existing service provision on a reduced budget where 'since 2010 budget has significantly reduced across all of the public sector providing services... [and] the Council alone has to make savings of over £143 million since 2010' (ibid p. 13). Fourthly, the council is overstretched, 'looking at a funding gap of a further £88 million in the next five years' (ibid, p. 13). In this context, the Council proposed a 'radical rethink about the way the Council works, how it spends money, how it works with partner organisations and with local people and communities' (Northwick Council 2018). Tying their new strategic approach to the deployment of civic values of participation and responsibility sets the scene for the justification of Community Asset Transfer as part of an invitation for greater civic involvement in the operation of the Council.

We want everyone to be involved in this transformation. We know we can do it, but only if we do it together. We need to know what matters most to you and what you think you can do to make sure [the local authority] is a place where everyone thrives (Northwick Council 2018, p. 3).

This extract from the Council's 'vision' for its future establishes in first-person plural the intention to bring citizens into a sphere of collective responsibility. The Council frames this move as a new form of social contract with the local population where they pledge to 'support our communities to support themselves and each other' (Northwick Council 2018, p. 3). This offer to citizens to participate in communal action is part of a call to those 'residents [who] care about the community they live in, [where] they don't want to live in a community alongside people who are struggling, and they want to help and support and do something about it' (Northwick Council 2018, p. 7). These ideas suggest that the mobilisation of paternalistic ideas of care towards people



who are less fortunate encourages participation. Individual civic responsibility towards society is also fostered where 'you can play your part in getting involved in your community... lead an active and healthy life... look after and take pride in your local environment' (Northwick Council 2018, p. 14). These notions evoke ideas of citizens taking on increased personal responsibility for themselves and for each other where communities are increasingly called upon to support themselves (Kennett et al. 2015). Such shifts mobilise ideas of civic duty that underpin how the council positions its own responsibility towards its population.

The Council has promoted volunteerism to increase community and individual 'resilience' (Northwick Council 2016a), suggesting the formal incorporation of community action into the management of the Council. The Council's role is outlined as 'supporting people to help themselves, whilst making sure that we work with our partners and residents to help and protect those most in need' (Northwick Council 2016b, p. 4). I have discussed the potential issue of 'resilience' as an approach to maintain the status quo above (See chapter 2 section 2.5), but here attention is paid to the vulnerable, albeit in this instance only discursively in council literature. Nonetheless resilience here recasts the municipal role from one which might once have been based on welfare state ideas of the redistribution of wealth (Wills 2016), a likely position in this local authority long controlled by a Labour majority, towards one that sees the 'council at the heart of co-ordinating services' (Northwick Council 2018). The issue is that communities are expected to be resilient, and look after the most vulnerable, alongside the implication that this is no longer the job of the council. The deployment of these new civic norms sees a change towards service management rather than service provision (Newman and Clarke 2009). In this scenario communities become a tool in the Council's organisation and management strategy, thus setting the discursive groundwork for CAT.

Furthermore, CAT is justified by local ideas to empower communities. Developed by the Neighbourhood management team and the Communities and environment department, CAT draws on notions around the devolution of power by 'giving communities control and influence over the assets in their communities, but also the services and activities that operate from them' (Northwick Council Officer 2019). As a result, CAT is seen to bring service benefits.

The operational benefits of community control are locally thought to be at least two-fold. Firstly, the control of assets by community groups is considered to be beneficial where they can 'secure investment that otherwise wouldn't be available, whether that's through a lottery grant or something else' (Northwick Council officer 2019). This suggests the deployment of market norms in justifying CAT since community groups, rather than the Council, can secure financial resources

to run the assets. Secondly, community control is positioned as being more responsive to local needs where CAT 'has enabled the offer to be targeted on the specific needs of the particular neighbourhood' (Northwick Council Officer 2019). Community groups are thought to be better positioned to deliver these services where 'the use of those buildings is better placed if they're managed locally, because the managing organisations understand the needs, have good relationships with residents and the networks that exist' (Northwick Council officer 2019). In this local authority most CATs have been taken on by small local charitable community groups, many of whom have their origins in pre-existing management committees set up by the Council. The inclusion of these groups in asset management suggests a practical turn towards existing local networks to 'save the services' (Northwick Council officer 2019).

That local groups might be better at attending to local needs underlines the use of the value of improved management by the Council to justify CAT. The Council plays on this idea of efficacy through claiming its own limitations in 'developing activities to reflect local needs... I think that's the bit that the Council would always have struggled with, we don't have that knowledge and their relationship to that extent (Northwick Council Officer 2019). The Council 'particularly as austerity started to come in, I think we would never have been able to deliver the programmes of activity that those localities would require' (Northwick Council officer 2019). Consequently, the Council further justifies and distances itself from direct control of these assets through bureaucratic norms of service improvement, pointing towards their own acquiescence to a diminishment of their own public role.

CAT practice is also underpinned by local logics that defer to austerity. CAT is acknowledged as contributing to the reduction of running costs where 'the council saved in excess of a million pound over the period of time that we transferred all of our community centres...' (Northwick Council Officer 2019). Additionally, it is positioned as a move to secure an independent future for the assets where there is recognition that the council is no longer able to provide services in the same way that it has done in the past (Northwick Council 2018). However, this does not represent a complete withdrawal by the local authority from these assets. Most CATs have been transferred on a 35-year repair and maintenance lease with the Council becoming landlord to the community groups who take on responsibility for their upkeep. At the same time, the Council positions itself as a benevolent landlord collecting a nominal peppercorn rent and setting up a support network for the groups operating the assets. This advice covered 'building management, governance, how to generate income' (Northwick Council Officer 2019), amongst other operational issues. As assets were taken on by local groups assistance was provided in the form of monthly meetings, external paid support from a development trust association and legal advice were offered to groups. This is

set out in the Council's offer, whereby 'we will help and support you... but the council won't operate it as it was' (Northwick Council Officer 2019). Thus, CAT was established as a distinct form of partnership between community and Council to manage these public assets.

At the same time, the Council's withdrawal from community infrastructure has also created unevenness in the provision of community services. The Council has been selective in the use of CAT. The establishment of the discursive institution of CAT has been created around a specific strategic withdrawal by the Council from their provision of community centres. From 2012 onwards CAT centred on supporting community groups to take on community centres, mitigating the Council's withdrawal of direct support from these assets where 'every community centre was up for consideration... we were very clear we weren't going to run any community centres' (Northwick Council officer 2019). By calling on community groups to 'save the services' (Northwick Council officer 2019), these assets remained open.

Withdrawal from community centres was justified by a lack of resources and a retreat to minimum legal obligations where 'the provision of Community Centres is not a statutory duty or requirement for the Council' (Northwick Council 2014, p. 5). Only a year earlier Council policy had been to support a network of community centres under a variety of different service arrangements, including those directly resourced by the Council, those with management committees who were progressing to become independent and finally some that were already operating autonomously without Council financial support (Northwick Council 2013).

The Council's pull away from its responsibility for community centres contrasts with the approach it takes to leisure facilities. Leisure was further integrated into the Council's strategic operation to 'meet the health needs of the borough, but also, it's an in-house service that have very clear targets' (Northwick Council Officer 2019). This implies that; i) local political priorities to improve physical health has ensured continuing support for leisure facilities, ii) leisure facilities can easily fit within a management environment of measurable key performance indicators demonstrating impact in health improvements which could contribute statistically to the development of the local authority. In contrast, the community centres provided 'services that supported young people... luncheon clubs for older people and group activities to try and address social isolation... to get them out the house' (Northwick Council officer 2019), activities whose benefits, often intangible, are tricky to measure and whose value for local authorities may be more difficult to quantify.

This final point was reinforced by a conversation with a Council officer (Northwick Council officer 2019) who worked in the library department. Libraries in the local authority were subject to increasing performance monitoring based on bureaucratic norms that had seen the Council withdraw its full support from some Libraries by implementing a system of volunteer libraries.

There was a very thorough analysis of library use done which led us to the conclusion that there were certain locations that weren't sufficiently busy for the council to continue to operate those sites. However, we recognize the importance of those sites to the local communities. So, the offer was we will help and support you, you can still rely on the library network, i.e., the receipt of books and you can still use the library system for sort of stamping books in and out, but the council won't operate it as a formal library (Northwick Council officer 2019).

In response the library department was planning to move itself under the more supportive public health department of the local authority: 'The Director of public health is totally convinced of the value of culture and the arts, they are sold on it' (Northwick Council officer 2019). At the same time an emphasis is placed on demonstrating value and incorporating new management techniques that 'might help us with the capture of outcomes and lead to more targeted well-being projects' (Northwick Council officer 2019). This willingness to develop a system to measure outcomes suggests the incorporation of new management values in a bid to justify funding without recourse to the integration of community groups into service provision. Sorting assets and services between those which make substantial contributions to the overall performance of the local authority and those which do not may help councils to justify which assets they are most likely to withdraw from.

The council's use of bureaucratic or market norms in establishing CAT are not limited to their own operations but include the operations of the community groups who take on assets. This is an important part of the justification of CAT practice where community groups are asked to demonstrate their suitability to run assets. Groups need 'a business plan and cash flow... they need to have an appropriate form of governance in place' (Northwick Council officer 2019). The Council then subjects these to 'sort of a health check or due diligence... to help us to establish; is this a group that we're confident have got the ability to run it? because what we also don't want to do is to impact on a group negatively, so a group that might do some really good stuff but at a very local level, you know, just happy doing what they're doing' (Northwick Council officer 2019). In addition, all community groups are Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) registered with the Charities Commission and obliged to return accounts and annual returns which are made

publicly available online (Charity Commission for England and Wales 2020). In conversation with a member of the Development Trust Association Wales, they claimed that this transparency is far more rigorous than partnerships with private companies who do not have to share this information providing a more rigorous form of public accountability. This compliance with these operational issues reveals the mobilisation of market, bureaucratic and civic norms therefore helping the Council legitimise practice.

Yet, oversight of the community groups by the Council has limitations. This is not the long arm of the state conditioning the management of the assets. Council officers have questioned and altered the extent to which community groups may be externally controlled by setting out a distinct form of partnership that offers some local agency. Community groups have 'free reign... to do what they wish with the building as long as it has community benefit... as long as they are reassuring us that they're delivering valuable services and activities for the local community' (Northwick Council officer 2019).

This 'free reign' is based on ideas that the council does not want to be 'too prescriptive... giving these organisations the ability to go off and be creative and innovative and deliver things that they think are important locally' (Northwick Council officer 2019). As a result, typical bureaucratic values used by public bodies to manage partnerships with external parties to run public services appear to have been avoided in this case (See Kenny et al. 2017). However, alongside what might be interpreted as more ideological notions of operational freedom this approach is tied to practical limitations.

'...we had the debate internally, did we want a partnership agreement which is appended to the lease, you know saying that you must do this, and you must do that and whatever, and I think my position at that time was 'well, who's going to monitor that?' because it ain't gonna be me. I've got a team that will help support and guide those organisations in the right way, but I'm not going to sit there and sort of go through everybody's partnership agreement and put a tick or a cross on it every year about what they are doing and what they are not' (Northwick Council officer 2019).

This suggests limits of the reach of the state in this practice which has raised concerns from within the Council of how to manage these new relationships. Currently there is recognition of the work that the groups do and a desire to re-engage with assets that are carrying out an important role in providing community benefit, once the remit of the council. This suggests that this local authority

is keen to bring CATs back within the organisational influence of the council which may alter their currently more autonomous status.

‘...a lot of these groups are delivering things that meet the council's priorities. So, you know, if it's about helping people in poverty, tackling inequality if it's helping around sort of improving People's Health and well-being, you know, they're all things that are really important to the council and these associations are actually delivering services daily to people, so that's something that we need to really start to look into’ (Northwick Council officer 2019).

### *Disposal within the state in Nerton*

The withdrawal from community infrastructure in the South East of England case study is simultaneously enmeshed in values of civic participation and economic necessity. CAT practice is firmly grounded as a response to fiscal austerity where following ‘the credit crunch 2010-11 we were starting to really hit the rocks; how could we save money?’ (Nerton Council officer 2019). The Council’s response was ‘a transformation programme all about saving money’ (Nerton Council officer 2019). Between 2011-12 and 2019-20 the local authority saved £144.7 million across its entire budget through a strategy of reducing costs, employing fewer people, putting more services online, sharing some of its services with other Councils and the redesign of service delivery (Nerton Council 2019a). Community Asset Transfer was one of the solutions developed to bring efficiencies to the Council’s ‘built community infrastructure’ defined as leisure and community facilities, libraries, open spaces and other public buildings and centres, to preserve the community benefits of the assets concerned and secure a reduction in the Council’s revenue funding (Nerton Council 2012a). Councillors were encouraged to support this strategy as an alternative to closing community assets. It was argued that once mothballed the buildings would fall into disrepair leading to higher costs, and that even when empty they would still attract costs such as security and standing service charges therefore not achieving the scale of saving required (Nerton Council 2012a).

This concern over costs is similarly present in the deployment of market values of fiscal restraint that underpin CAT. By giving external groups the leasehold of a community building the associated facilities management and maintenance costs of the assets would be passed on, relieving the Council of this liability. These included the transfer of immediate and cumulative running expenses: ‘it might only have been a sum maybe of a couple of grand a year, but when you think about that over a period of years...’ (Nerton Council officer 2019). Additionally, the

disposal of assets relieved the Council from future capital costs: 'so let's say it needs a new roof and say in ten years' time... there is no money slushing around, so you can't put in a plan to say this needs a new roof, it's going to cost fifty grand, that sort of money isn't available' (Nerton Council officer 2019). The logic of securing greater financial efficiencies is used to justify practice. Although the savings discussed appear quotidian in nature and scale they may also indicate a form of acquiescence by the local authority towards ongoing austerity reflecting attitudes seen in other local authority towards the 'inevitability' of austerity (Fuller 2017). Withdrawal from community infrastructure appears as an accepted action to reduce spending and manage long term financial decline.

The wider cost savings and drive to greater efficiency within the Council play a part in the justification of CAT. Council officers mentioned the 'resistance to change with officers in the council we were taking away the empire, the services, stripping away stuff that could potentially lose staff' (Nerton Council officer 2019). However, some reasoned that CAT helped to maintain the Council: 'actually by giving something away we are saving money, we are actually saving staff... if you don't do anything about our liabilities ... then you have to look at restructuring to get smaller... because of our liabilities we [then] can't afford staff' (Nerton Council officer 2019). This extrapolation of savings through CAT to the safeguarding of Council jobs underlines ways in which market logics can condition officers' attitudes towards withdrawal as a tool to ensure the survival of their own jobs.

Beyond financial concerns, Councillors were persuaded that bringing in external operators through CAT was the preferred option for approaching community assets because to not do so 'misses out on the wider opportunities available, for example outsourcing to the private sector or working with community partners like the other public sector organisations and the voluntary and community sector' (Nerton Council 2012a, p. 3). This was also argued on an understanding that the Council has to 'meet the requirements of the Localism Act whilst [being] mindful of the costs' (Nerton Council 2012a, p. 3). Therefore, as the Council pulls away from direct provision of community infrastructure, accepting decline where it 'cannot continue running a wide range of services as it has done in the past' (Nerton Council 2019a, p. 5), it simultaneously evokes civic values through promoting community action to help keep assets open.

The use of civic norms in CAT are part of a wider discussion within the Council to establish a 'co-operative' local authority. This is understood as a form of collaboration through 'social partnership... to engage our communities and give them a real say in the decision-making process; maximise social value; promote community-led solutions and innovate new ways to deliver

services people value' (Nerton Council 2016, p. 6). Based on the conservative's 'Big Society' as expressed through localist policies, and tied to New Labour ideas to help improve services and make communities stronger, while simultaneously promotes citizens taking on responsibility for themselves (Etzioni 1996). In operational terms community involvement through CAT is promoted as fostering local accountability in building management, continuation of service delivery, retention of the strategic function of the asset and increased community involvement (Nerton Council 2012c). The Council aims to encourage community benefit while securing public interests through guidelines that set out preferences for partner organisations to be 'locally run, locally controlled, non-profit distributing, inclusive, and democratic ...with a track record and experience of delivering services to the community' (Nerton Council 2012c, p. 2). By drawing on these values of not-for-profit local control of the new publicly orientated management of assets through CAT is endorsed.

The role of civic values in the establishment of CAT are instrumental in the incorporation of parish and town councils in the management of community infrastructure. The existence, 'fairly unique for a unitary authority' (Nerton Council 2019a, p. 3), of being covered by parish and town councils permitted these legacy 'constitutional institutions' (Wills 2020, p. 1) to be drawn upon as readymade local community groups. A turn to these institutions helped CAT practice by removing some of the risk from the process, substituting local government with local council control. In effect a rescaling of the responsibilities of the state and maintenance of public interests as these long standing 'democratic organisations [have] a track record and experience of delivering services to the local community' (Nerton Council 2019a).

...obviously parish town councils were the main front runners because in effect you know they are a public body like ourselves, they are accountable to their constituents as we are, so in terms of responsibility, they have, you know, in terms of looking after their residents they wouldn't do anything silly, they would have to get approval, they would have to consult like we would so you know, in terms of risk, the risk was low, I guess where you saw risk with a community group was that they could go belly up in a few years and find themselves handing it back (Nerton Council Officer 2019).

This move reflects a wider national call by local government interest groups to harness the potential of parish and town councils to encourage greater devolution of power. The position of local councils as the first tier of government some argue makes them unique through their democratic mandate and transparency in operation enabling them to hold a position of legitimacy



within their communities (NALC 2017). Wills (2020, p. 1) has observed this process in Cornwall and has called it 'institutional switching' which they argue serves to further legitimise CAT.

In this case study the use of parish and town councils is, in part, grounded in economic rationale. Council officers commented on the opportunity for these local councils to generate income which could be used to finance assets. Firstly, these institutions were unproblematically seen to be able to raise precepts as 'when local people know they are getting 'x' for their buck, more facilities or whatever, they think that's fair enough, you know, it's relatively small, when you think it's raised by five pence or whatever, people don't tend to notice' (Nerton Council officer 2019). Secondly, local councils would be able to use the assets as a reserve and raise investment which could then be used to improve facilities, 'now parishes say, we've got the investment, we got the sinking funds to invest, we can look after it better' (Nerton Council officer 2019).

Yet, economic benefits were not the only local norms used to justify practice. In addition, the deployment of specific moral values can drive CAT practice. Council officers were keen to point towards the benefits of local control, which is about doing the 'right thing to benefit the community... not looking at how many savings we can make but what benefits the community' (Nerton Council officer 2019). It was argued that local institutions understand local needs better, 'they would say it's our patch of land, you know, we are in touch with what the residents want' (Nerton Council officer 2019). Better local understanding has led parish councils' to 'put in play areas... make allotment sites, do bee keeping, all this biodiversity... (Nerton Council officer 2019). These activities are positioned as serving the wider needs of the Council, 'those Parishes are quite clued into what the unitary authorities were doing in terms of biodiversity, so yeah they are going to put in a bee keeping service, well, would we do that? I'm not saying that we wouldn't, but they are actually actively delivering strategy [laughs], that's the irony' (Nerton Council officer 2019). This ability to address bureaucratic ends is used in defence against some internal criticism that giving assets to local groups dilutes their role in addressing Council needs. The positive role that assets can play also addresses criticism that giving communities assets leads to fragmentation creating 'a patchwork of well, that person doing that, they are doing this, and they are doing that, there is no synergy across the board' (Nerton Council officer 2019). Thus, CAT is justified through management norms, where it is argued that Council goals are nonetheless addressed even if not directly by the Council itself.

While CAT is being positioned as offering an alternative to local authority management it is also seen as an alternative to, and critique of, private sector management. Currently, the local authority has an ongoing contract with a large international service company for the management

and maintenance of play areas. This agreement is seen as restrictive while offering a limited service. Some are frustrated by what they see as 'increasing problems around if something breaks, it is taken out, it is not replaced, it's a sticking plaster, it's just getting by' (Nerton Council officer 2019). In this context, some parish councils have approached the local authority to take on play areas, which has the benefit of 'keeping fund raising within the public realm, through precepts and borrowing on the value of the assets' (Nerton Council officer 2019). However, although on their own these plots are 'little bits of land, timed by twenty or thirty, or sometimes forty play areas in one parish' (Nerton Council officer 2019), they collectively constitute a sufficient change to the contract, frustrating the handing over of responsibility for land and services. Since changes to the contract are limited to under ten per cent of the total value, large scale shifting of management responsibility for play services to parish councils would 'vary the contract too much, so the service management company, are going to say no you can't do that' (Nerton Council officer 2019). Although constrained in this particular case, CAT is nevertheless being discursively mobilised as an alternative to commodification and privatisation.

The mobilisation of civic values to justify CAT should not be overstated. While the stated local authority aims to promote local involvement in practice bureaucratic pressures of time and money here meant 'that is an aspect we never explored, we never really went into, the volunteer side.... we didn't have the time to sit down and say that's a good idea, and we just had to get on with it' (Nerton Council officer 2019). While some local groups were 'developing themselves as community interest groups, so there is a case that some of them were getting themselves geared up to take on [assets]... but in the main it was parish town councils that took the brunt, I think, if I had more time at the beginning, I would have developed more that aspect of the programme' (Nerton Council officer 2019). These pressures are still thought to remain as the Council 'haven't got the capacity or the resource to return to that, those days, where you know, you have workshops and all that, which is great, but in my point of view it doesn't get me any closer to delivering, it's a difficult one' (Nerton Council officer 2019). This underlines a local approach to a wider shift to parish and town councils that has been described as a form of institutional switching (Wills 2020). Economic, bureaucratic and civic norms have been used to support the adoption of community infrastructure by this state body therefore securing the assets stretching the definition of 'community' in Community Asset Transfer.

Finally, the use of parish and town council legacy institutions also has a geographical dimension. In 2011 a feasibility study initially scoped over 700 council assets for CAT, including leisure and community; arts and heritage; libraries; play and youth centres; bereavement services and registrars; open spaces, parks play areas, landscape depots, free car parks and garages, HRA

housing revenue account and housing property, and Homes and community agency built assets (Nerton Council 2012c). Despite this planned and comprehensive disposal of community infrastructure, unevenness creeps into community infrastructure not in relation to service areas, but in relation to the new ultra-local territorial divisions that are reinforced where parish and town councils take on assets. While the council claims that all parish and town councils make 'a significant and important contribution to enhancing the experience and environment of our residents' (Nerton Council 2019a, p. 3), they do not all have the same resources to draw on to do so. These local councils vary in size with constituencies ranging from between 10,250 properties/households to less than 15 and where precepts raise between £500 and £960,000, with four local councils under no precept at all (Nerton Council 2019a). As such, the ultra-local division of assets under CAT suggests the potential reinforcement of territorial unevenness in the pursuit of local control through CAT.

#### *Property led disposal in Llandinas*

In the south Wales case study, CAT is administered from within the estates department whose wider approach to property assets and the bureaucratic and market norms that guide this management appears to have a strong influence on practice. The Council's approach to assets is motivated by, and is part of, a recent national (Wales) turn towards greater bureaucratic efficiency that is reframing the management of community assets. Top-down Welsh Government policy calls for 'land and building assets to be subjected to the same level of scrutiny as financial resources', in part driven by 'financial pressures [where] the Welsh Government budget is 7 per cent lower in real terms than it was in 2010-11, so that's £1bn less to spend, and that's in a budget of £15bn', and an uncertain financial future, 'it's not going to get any easier in the next few years, we don't know what the impact of Brexit is going to be, and that's why it's important that we make the best use of all the resources' (Welsh Government Officer 2019). This approach is ingrained at local level through calls from the Local Government Association for this Council to prepare a new strategy 'to provide a clear framework for improving the performance of their property estate', so the public can, 'access public services in an improved environment, whilst reducing the cost and environmental footprint of the Council's estate' (Llandinas Council 2015, p. 5). This approach to assets based on financial prudence provides a background for the local justification of new asset management across the Council.

The Council has re-organised their approach to assets through the deployment of a new administrative culture. The property department has 'taken it all [assets] in house' (Llandinas Council officer 2019) to establish a 'corporate landlord policy... to be in control of every single building' (Llandinas Council officer 2019), whereas previously assets were built or obtained and

run separately by each department to deliver their own services. This suggests a shift in approach to assets which focuses on the implementation of centralised bureaucratic control.

The local authority has undertaken a mapping and categorisation exercise of all assets. Properties are divided between the 'operational estate', held to support the delivery of council services, and the 'non-operational estate' that comprises of buildings held to generate income or to support broader economic, social and or environmental goals (Llandinas Council 2015; Llandinas council officer 2019). Assets are then further subject to a new three-fold property strategy whose aims include, i) development of a modern portfolio of assets that supports services but has lower running and maintenance costs, ii) collaboration with the public sector and community partners to identify opportunities for property and service partnerships and iii), rationalisation of the estate through disposal which can bring in capital receipts (Llandinas Council 2015; 2016a; 2018a). These new procedures are introduced to indirectly save money through greater efficiency and reduce direct costs by outsourcing services and generating income through the sale of assets.

Behind this cadastre is a discourse for 'fewer but better buildings' (Llandinas Council officer 2019) that simultaneously alludes to the acceptance of fiscal pressures whilst framing this rationalisation as an opportunity for improvement. 'Fewer' concedes to 'unprecedented financial pressures' (Llandinas Council 2014a), where 'rationalisation of the estate is inevitable as direct service area provision will reduce over time' (Llandinas Council 2015, p. 44). 'But better' suggests that the reduction in state support for some assets is being tempered by an expectation that remaining properties will benefit. This optimism follows official lines where new asset management is expected to deliver 'a programme of investment... [to] improve service delivery, customer satisfaction and staff morale; and significantly reduce the running costs of the estate and the maintenance backlog' (Llandinas Council 2015, p. 32). As a result, critique for the diminishment of state support may be muted by the prospect of improvement in some, if not all assets.

Actors draw on this new administration of assets to justify the shift in the role of the state toward community infrastructure in at least three ways. Firstly, through the property strategy officers review the value of assets to the Council through procedures to 'understand how the building is being used... whether it's underutilized... enabling us to make decisions on whether we keep buildings open' (Llandinas Council Officer 2019). An outcome of this was explained as where 'three services could potentially share one building, which frees up two buildings' (Llandinas Council officer 2019). This suggests an ad hoc site by site approach to asset management based on norms of facilities management. Under such an approach: 'every building that becomes

available, we have to put through a criteria of different things, what it is used for, what condition the building is in, you know, that there's a whole host of different things it goes through' (Llandinas Council officer 2019). This reappraisal of efficient use and attention to the material state of repair is underpinned by a parallel move to concentrate services in one location on one site in each of the council's different wards. A 'rationalisation' of services and the development of sites from which multiple services can be operated will reduce the average cost of delivery (Llandinas Council officer 2019). These centres operate libraries, family meeting rooms for social services, job clubs and some of the larger buildings offer rooms for community use. This rationalisation brings operational benefits in 'encouraging large scale collaboration across public services' (Llandinas Council 2015, p. 42), while locating services together brings 'significant economies of scale' (Llandinas Council officer 2019). This exposes other assets that fall outside this logic to disposal or relinquishment where they are deemed to be surplus to council needs.

Secondly, buildings that are deemed surplus are vulnerable to land-market norms, where assets can be sold and their value to the council is found in their capacity to return 'capital receipts' (Llandinas Council 2015). In this way assets can be used as a form of financial reserve, especially if they are on 'prime development land' (Llandinas Council Officer 2019) and can be called upon to help balance budgets where the Council is 'in a difficult position now where we are tasked with raising huge amounts of money' (Llandinas Council Officer 2019). Through the mobilisation of market logics this move to capitalise on the property value of assets is linked to Christophers' (2018) recent examination of widespread state privatisation of public land in Britain largely underway since 1979 which he denounces as a form of new enclosure. This local property strategy to finance and deliver services, then, may reflect a wider shift to draw on the financial value of public land resources.

**Figure 57** Llandinas Local Authority Asset Management Plan Target 2015-20

	TARGETS									
	2015/16		2016/17		2017/18		2018/19		2018	2020
	target	achieved	target	achieved	target	achieved	target	achieved	original target	projected target
Capital receipts (increase)	£6.2M	£6.8M	£7.3M	£6.9M	£7.3M	£9.2	£15.2	£14.6	£10M	£20M
Gross Internal Floor Area*	-3.5%	-3.5%	-4.2%	-7.8%	-1%	-1.1%	-4%	-12%	-10%	-15%
Running Costs (reduction)	£1.6M	£0.9M	£1.6M	£3.3M	£1M	£0.5M	£1.1M	£4.6M	£2M	£5M
Maintenance backlog (reduction)	£4.3M	£4.4M	£4.5M	£8.8M	£1.3M	£1.3M	£5.6M	£14M	n/a	-£20M

Source: Llandinas Council Corporate land and management property plan 2018/19.

Notes \*Gross Internal Floor Area is the area of a building measured to the internal face of the perimeter walls at each floor level.

The reduction in number of assets and their marketisation is set out in an asset management plan that instrumentalises the withdrawal of the state from these spaces. While this is mitigated partly through service provision in new centralised community service centres, there have still been closures of youth and community centres, representing a withdrawal of the state from the public realm. This pulling away of the state from assets is formally set out in yearly property strategy targets that seek an increase in capital receipts, and reductions in the size of the estate measured by floor area, in running costs and maintenance backlog (See figure 57) The way in which these bureaucratic norms are reiterated through annual targets may help to mute critique against this approach to asset management. This management may act in a similar way to Boltanski's (2011 [2009]) notion of 'truth tests', where ritualised assertions not only reveal the norms behind them but reduces uncertainty and confirms the current order of things (Stones 2014). Here the recurring bureaucratic reinforcement of the property strategy, which explicitly celebrates the reaching of targets, reinforces the symbolic value of the strategy itself helping to dissuade other forms of evaluation and judgement based on different criteria. Thus, these targets may serve to stifle critique.

Thirdly, market values are present in a move to seek efficiencies in the management of assets through the commodification of public services. Here the marketisation of services, rather than buildings, plays a role in the Council's new considerations. For example, leisure facilities and services have been outsourced to a national service provider, leasing the physical assets and taking on the service role with the aim of 'enabling [the provider] to improve facilities, generate income and reach a zero-subsidy position' (Llandinas Council 2019, p. 3). The market norms behind this privatisation of a local service, albeit to a not-for-profit social enterprise, was justified: 'although councils income from facilities is being sustained and the level of subsidy required to provide leisure services has fallen significantly, the continued impact of austerity presents a risk to the sustainability of these services' (Llandinas Council 2016b). Therefore, the turn to external providers is linked to addressing future financial uncertainty as much as addressing current concerns.

Alongside the outsourcing of services there is also a restructuring of council service departments representing further management justification for the disposal of assets. This is evident where the agreement of a leisure management partnership coincides with restructuring that has led to a state where 'the leisure department isn't even in existence anymore as such' (Llandinas Council officer 2019).

However, not all community assets or services that find themselves placed outside direct Council delivery are offered through service agreements in this way. There may be a limit to those assets which are taken on through service agreements. Mirroring a wider national trend (See Chapter 4), most assets that have been disposed of through CAT in this council are community centres. This raises a question around what assets and services are more attractive to commodification than others? Findlay-King et al. (2017) argue in their study of asset transfer that market solutions are most suitable for profitable facilities, such as leisure facilities that already participate in highly developed and established markets, whereas other assets, such as community centres are not. These assets are less likely to attract the interest of service providers as they are likely to be more difficult to financially sustain. This could suggest a financial rationale behind the prevalence of the disposal of community meeting places undertaken under CAT. These services that do not have an easily identifiable commercial value and are least likely to be taken on by social enterprises. Instead, for these 'non-profitable' services the council is able to attract the interest of local community groups who may have less interest in connecting to local markets and may be willing to sustain this community infrastructure through alternative economies of volunteerism and unpaid labour.

Rather than capitalise on the building through sale, or offer the service to profit through external provision, Community Asset Transfers do not generate a significant income for the local authority. CATs are let on leases of various lengths, most on peppercorn rents. This helps relieve the pressure to reduce running costs. Yet, this saving also takes a moral turn where disposal of assets safeguards other services, as one officer commented: 'one of our biggest costs is running property but that money could go to front line services like education, like social services and everything else' (Llandinas Council Officer 2019). Although the use of combatant language may underline the pressures councils are under, it is used against community infrastructure rather than to support it. A hierarchy of assets emerges where some are more valued than others suggesting the use of moral norms in the deployment of CAT. There is clear emphasis given to some 'priority' services implying that others are second-rate, perhaps expendable, and certainly less important to the essential functions of an embattled Council. Community meeting places, not being statutory services, may be particularly exposed to this form of moral distancing to 'save the front-line services' (Llandinas Council Officer 2019). This sorting of assets is indicative of a shift towards mandatory spending away from discretionary spending on social and physical infrastructure (Gray and Barford 2018). Correspondingly it forms part of a local management culture that decouples assets from their social role and as sites of public service by reframing them through a 'Corporate Asset Management Plan [that] identifies the strategic importance of utilising assets more effectively and sets targets for reduced costs and appropriate ownership... to manage assets as a

corporate resource, rather than on an individual directorate basis' (Auditor General for Wales 2016, p. 16). Accordingly, rather than understanding these sites as places from which individual directorates can provide services, e.g., youth services, they spaces are managed centrally and subject to cost reduction and more effective use. Nonetheless, decision making processes behind disposal do take account of other values in their 'assessment of the existing benefit provided to the community' (Llandinas Council 2014b), suggesting the recognition of civic norms in the management of assets. Norms which are more fully deployed under CAT.

The values deployed to manage assets across the Council also guide the logic behind Community Asset Transfer. However, placing properties in the hands of community groups is also justified through the mobilisation of civic values that alter the way in which these other norms are otherwise deployed and could be seen as a form of critique of the dominant property approach. Therefore, disposal of assets under CAT does not capitalise on land values to bring direct financial gain. CAT practice is not simply a form of privatisation of services and leasing of facilities to external providers to reduce Council overheads, attract investment and generate income for third parties.

Although CAT can be framed in management terms as 'innovation in service provision' (Llandinas Council 2015), CAT guidelines cite the potential for the community to act in their own interests as alternative service providers:

Local communities have traditionally been very resourceful in acting to help themselves. Indeed, community organisations have been at the very heart of local service delivery for decades. The need and the opportunity, however, is to enable more community-led activities to take place. To encourage more volunteers to 'step up' and take over the management of services and assets in their own communities (Llandinas Council 2014b).

The turn to civil society as potential operators of assets represents a bureaucratic shift in responsibility for these public services to communities and citizens (Lowndes and Gardner 2016). Yet, CAT also involves the deployment of civic values where CAT 'saved the Council the cost of running the property but still maintained an important community provision in the area' (Llandinas Council 2016a, p. 5). This is a recognition by the council of the public role of the asset beyond economic costs associated with facilities management. In addition, CAT is intended to promote the creation of 'stronger, more cohesive and sustainable communities' and 'where 'public assets are managed by local people for the benefit of local people' (Llandinas Council 2014b, p. 22). The mobilisation of new strategies to meet demands for greater public participation



in service provision for public benefit in the context of CAT suggests the incorporation of civic values in the justification of practice, where the monetised value of the asset is not perceived as its ultimate civic value.

### 5.2.2 Post hoc legitimisation as justification

Across all three Councils a common theme has emerged around the importance they place on temporal dimensions of CAT practice. One aspect of this theme is a focus on the past to justify CAT. Councils are keen to frame the disposal of assets to community groups as ‘something we have always done’ (Northwick Council officer 2019), linking current practice with a longer bureaucratic municipal tradition of disposal through ‘historic CATs’ (Llandinas Council officer 2019) where civil society takes a role in the provision of community infrastructure. This idea that CAT is a continuation of an older practice is an important aspect of discursive institutions. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006 [1991]) underline the influence of historic culture and legacies that influence justifications and critiques deployed locally. Although there was little reflection by Councils on the difference between agreeing a lease with a scout group and the wholesale transfer of service sectors or disposal of assets on a large scale, nonetheless the familiarity of the property transaction itself appears to have helped to position CAT as the continuation of known and existing practice. Additionally, and although not directly stated by the Councils, the idea that communities have often had to provide for themselves is common in community development circles that promote CAT practice. Some authors chart a long historic tradition of community business since feudal times (Wylar 2017), or of historic models of community and mutual ownership that can respond to current social problems (Woodin et al. 2010). However, I suggest that in the case of CAT where the state is retreating from these assets this work on the tradition of community action helps to distance the state further from responsibility for community infrastructure thereby muting critique of CAT as a practice.

The temporal justification not only looks to former practices of disposal but is often grounded in the most recent past experiences of CAT itself in a form of post hoc legitimisation to reinforce and perpetuate the practice. For example, in Northwick the Council focuses on the perceived success and achievements of local groups to take on and manage assets. The Council reports that ‘the vast majority, if not all of these Community facilities are far busier and have a broader program of activity than when we ran them as a council’ (Northwick Council officer 2019). Alongside the deployment of civic values this is an attempt to convince the listener that CAT is justified because in practice it has brought demonstratable benefits (at the time of the interview this was me, and beyond this any potential readers of my work). This same argument has been used before and

effectively to help justify the emergence of CAT. The experience of the pilot CATs was used to demonstrate the possibility of CAT practice allaying fears of 'some counsellors [who] were concerned that it may result in closure' (Northwick Council officer 2019). CAT was keeping buildings open and this further drove disposal.

...once we got some credibility and a reputation, people started to realize that this was a positive thing and see sort of the benefits to the groups that went early... it snowballed really and it got easier and quicker as we sort of went on till, you know, sort of the middle years. We were doing sort of half a dozen transfers a year, if not more, whereas in the first year we probably did one or two (Northwick Council officer 2019).

In Nerton, forms of post hoc justification are also apparent in the Council's development of discursive institutions of CAT. Support for practice exists through instances of mundane personal experience where a visiting officer 'as a member of the public thought "oh this is an improvement", I felt vindicated for doing it' (Nerton Council officer 2019). Post hoc justification of CAT is embedded in an attitude that one officer called 'seamless transfer' (Nerton Council officer 2019), where the measure of success is where community members who use the CATs are not affected by transfer: 'it shouldn't affect them, they should go and still pay whatever, it shouldn't affect their quality time, the time they spend on that, they wouldn't care who manages it, who owns it, that should be the case shouldn't it' (Nerton Council officer 2019). The certainty that this continuity of service is achieved in CAT is used to address discontent. The passage of time is also held to justify practice but where those who dissent against it accede to this shift in management:

...any kind of change, any conflict... you see it happen, you can see it in front of your eyes, and then they accept it and then they eventually move on. All those noises have accepted it now and you don't hear from them, so if I went back there now then it would be "what was all that about?" (Nerton Council officer 2019).

Although the absence of complaint here may be the product of fatigue and submission, it underlines the importance of the passage of time in contributing to addressing critique of CAT practice.

In Llandinas, post hoc legitimisation is also present in an appreciation by the Council of the new activities that community groups have introduced, resulting in CATs being perceived as 'super busy... going from strength to strength' (Llandinas Council officer 2019). This also includes Council workers who are less enthusiastic about CAT but are willing to acknowledge the work that

community groups can do. One Councillor came round to the idea of community groups taking on council assets. They stated, in relation to one disposal, that 'initially I have to say that I was probably a bit sceptical about where it was gonna go and what it was gonna do, em, and I have to say I've been impressed with the amount of work that has gone in' (Llandinas Councillor 2019). However, this Councillor continued by outlining their concerns over the long-term future of the CAT where 'you only need one or two of those motivated people to drop off and you'll have to find other motivated people to take their place' (Llandinas Councillor 2019). In this aspect the post hoc legitimisation of the discursive institutions of CAT are vulnerable. A successful past does not translate to a secure future and changing circumstances where the long-term ability of groups to continue to run assets may disrupt the logic of CAT based on its success in practice.

### 5.2.3 Emergent post hoc resistance

Analysis of the discursive institutions of CAT also allows for recognition of local resistance to state retrenchment under austerity where and if it exists. The three case studies illustrate different approaches to critique outlined above that appear to have muted more explicit and sustained resistance to withdrawal from community infrastructure across all three councils. My understanding of this dimension may partly be due to a methodological constraint, likely due to an unwillingness on the part of actors involved in CAT to talk about discord. Additionally, given the high prevalence of CAT in these cases this suggests that any initial resistance to disposal has been suppressed. Yet, some resistance to the withdrawal of the state has emerged, not against practice per se as a precursor to CAT but from within the afterlives of these spaces following transfer. This appears to have taken at least two forms. Firstly, this is directly linked to the management and running of assets by community groups following CAT where local practices are seen to reinforce inequality provoking dissent. Secondly, the other is a form of indirect contestation where through the spaces of CAT, community groups are exposed to wider inequalities and are beginning to show a willingness to act against the state.

The first form of resistance is seen specifically in the Nerton case study where the recruitment of parish, town, and community Councils to take on community infrastructure through CAT has led to a redistribution of funding, creating inequalities and contestation. Parish councils taking on assets are likely to be reliant on their precepts to fund these services. Although the money raised in Nerton for precepts has increased sixty-five per cent between 2010-11 and 2018-19 from £4,997,000 in 2010-11 to £7,677,000 in 2018-19 (Nerton Council 2012b; 2019b), this increase does not appear to have been equally redistributed, as one community council explained:

Parish and town councils raise their money through a local council tax precept on residents. The problem is that this is so much easier for the richer areas compared to the poorer areas. Areas with lots of high banded properties with low numbers on benefits have a big advantage over areas such as ours, which if not corrected leads to the highest levels of Council tax in the poorest areas (Wilson 2017, p. 3).

This Community Council claims that 'if we were fairly funded, we would be able to deliver many more services to the value of £350,000 per year or we would be able to reduce our Council tax precept by over £70 a year, or of course, a combination of the two' (Southton Community Council 2018, p. 9). One local Community Councillor sets out a three-fold argument as to why their area is suffering disproportionately as they are reliant on a smaller tax base. Firstly, as it has a very high percentage of houses with a low Council tax band. Secondly, a high number of single adult households such as older people living alone, and single parent households are entitled to a 25 per cent discount. Thirdly, there is a high number of people entitled to Council tax benefits which has the effect of reducing income (Wilson 2017). As a result, in passing on community infrastructures to local councils through CAT – where they had previously been planned and financed centrally by the local authority – assets and services become reliant on ultra-local tax bases which become a more difficult burden in areas where there are fewer local resources.

On one level, this restructuring is tricky for local councils who have fewer local resources. On another level it places further strain on communities who are simultaneously suffering other forms of state retrenchment in their daily lives on top of pre-existing inequality. Residents in this area are already experiencing the cost of Welfare reform estimated by Beatty and Fothergill (2016b) to be a loss per working age adult of between £519 and £221 per annum in this area between 2010 and 2016. This figure accounts for ten major reforms implemented in Britain between 2010 and 2016 including changes to; Housing benefit – Local Housing Alliance; Housing benefit – under occupation in the social rented sector; Non-dependent deductions; Benefit cap; Council Tax Support; Personal Independence Payment; Employment and Support Allowance; Child benefit; Tax credits, and; 1 per cent up-rating (Beatty and Fothergill 2016b). Thus, as these communities see a diminishment in support from central government in welfare support, so too are they expected at a local level to financially support local services through the payment of their precept. Where there are a high rate of exemptions from payment, local councils may not be able to afford to provide services - arguably for those who need them the most and are already taking the brunt of austerity.

This inequity serves to further illustrate, and importantly politicises, the local variant of scalar dumping as outlined by Janes Wills (2020) in her study of parish councils taking on community infrastructure in Cornwall. While scalar dumping refers to the process whereby cuts are passed on from national government to sub-national bodies (Peck 2012), Wills (2020) reports on a similar local redistribution of service costs from a larger institution to smaller bodies through what she calls 'institutional switching'. Although acknowledging 'concern' over potential dissent in relation to finance, Wills finds that local councils had 'risen to the challenge' (Wills 2020, p. 12) of taking on assets. Behind this apparent confirmatory outlook of practice are underlying arguments about the democratic nature of parish councils. Through a social contract with the people, Wills (2020) argues that parish councils take on assets based on their democratic mandate. Due to the nature of aggregational democracy, parish councils would put to a vote the taking on of assets where there is a majority. However, this overlooks that fact that while most may agree to this, a minority of those who may be least able to afford a rise in local taxes can be overruled. Therefore, vulnerable residents who already may be suffering from the wider impacts of welfare reforms are asked to pay again for local services which were once covered by the local authority. The Nerton case study shows that resistance to one of the outcomes of CAT is being mobilised where unevenness emerges. The Community Council is 'mounting a major campaign to ensure that this problem is addressed, and solutions found' (Wilson 2017, p. 3; Southton Community Council 2018), and this shifts the discursive institutions of CAT towards confronting inequality.

The second aspect of resistance relating to CAT is not focused on the outcome of disposal itself, but rather is related to emergent attitudes of contestation that these spaces foster against wider and ongoing state withdrawal from local service provision. Community groups taking on these spaces are coming into contact through their day-to-day operation with community members who are experiencing multiple issues due to economic austerity. There were anecdotal accounts of what this involved. For example, one community group operating an asset joined campaigns to save local bus routes (Llandinas Councillor 2019). Another where a group were operating a food bank from their asset (Nerton Council officer 2019). This fosters an idea that community groups are engaging in wider inequalities and are willing to become very involved in helping to improve the lives of community members. This begins to disrupt narrow understandings of the coercion of civic society into taking on a role of facilities management. Such issues are not well represented at local authority level discourse and are best addressed through interaction with the CATs themselves and this work is undertaken in-depth in the following chapter.

### 5.3 Discussion and chapter conclusion

In summary, this chapter has addressed my second research question; Why and how has the process of CAT emerged at local authority level? This place-based multiple case study analysis of discursive institutions of CAT reveals both commonality in approach and variation in local practice. On one level, a primary, and ubiquitous, justification for CAT are the bureaucratic and market norms associated with austerity. Despite differences in the magnitude of fiscal retrenchment each local authority has deployed CAT through values of tighter financial constraint. To some extent this should be expected since all Councils have experienced a reduction in service spending and where they will have acted in the knowledge of further and deeper planned cuts in public spending up to at least 2020 (Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Latham 2017). All Councils draw on bureaucratic, market, moral and civic values to justify their withdrawal from community infrastructure through CAT. However, while this approach is dealt with differently as outlined in the analysis above and rather than presenting radically different landscapes, the separate case studies offer nuanced variations on shared themes that collectively build a wider picture of the deliberative institutions of CAT. Four main themes have emerged from this analysis of justification and critique:

#### *Decoupling assets from their social role*

The incorporation of property led forms of governance is clear in the Llandinas case study but is also present in Northwick and Nerton. The use of bureaucratic and market norms to re-evaluate assets under building facilities management criteria helps to alter their status. This has served to decouple assets from their role as sites of service provision by the state. Through the application of technical criteria, it becomes easier to disassociate these spaces from their social role. Assets are quantified through internal floor area, running costs and maintenance backlog, all of which are measured in order that they can be reduced or even eliminated through sale to bring in capital receipts. This performs a variant of 'rendering technical' (Li 2007) by drawing on the technological aspect of governmentality where the value of the buildings is re-assessed based on technical issues. Framed as financial liabilities, it becomes easier to declare buildings surplus to the requirements of the local authority rather than understanding them as centres of community, learning and social interaction or local service provision such as youth services, citizen's advice and adult care. While CAT does offer a reprieve for these buildings from sale and loss by placing them in the hands of communities it does so through displacing the social value of these public goods.

### *Moral estrangement*

The moral values that Councils mobilise through the discursive institutions of CAT are useful tools to justify their withdrawal from assets. In Llandinas, CAT is positioned as a way of reducing Council costs to save 'frontline services' (Llandinas Council officer 2019). This explicit prioritisation of other essential services serves to devalue some community infrastructure. This helps to pre-empt critique of, and therefore eases the disposal of, community centres and other sites of community provision that are not considered to be essential. This reflects a wider shift by Councils to reduce their wider public role and where they (re)focus on statutory service delivery (Latham 2017). This shift draws responsibility away from for other discretionary areas. This might be considered as a form of moral estrangement from those assets which are relegated to being non-essential and serves as a form of direct existential justification for CAT. In Nerton, moral support for CAT takes another twist as it is also grounded in a rationale to reduce the financial liabilities of community infrastructure to save jobs within the Council. Here it is not the needs of the community that are protected but the needs of officers within the Council who fear redundancy.

### *Shifting of bureaucratic and market responsibilities*

Through CAT, councils have removed themselves from direct service provision of community infrastructure through entering into new 'partnerships' with community groups. Community groups take on various responsibilities from building maintenance and business management to cover their running costs. This takes various forms as buildings are leased on peppercorn rents to volunteer led community groups who operate through the rental of space within their properties (as in Northwick), and/or more professionalised groups who secure external funding for service provision and can have a range of staff (as evident in Llandinas). Councils save on running costs and staff wages but bring norms of marketisation to these assets where the groups who run them must address their own financial needs consequently transforming these public goods into a market-based system of individual enterprise. In becoming landlords these Councils outsource service provision becoming managers rather than providers (Newman and Clarke 2009). The Nerton case study offers a different model as freeholds are granted to parish and town councils who continue to be financially supported by the local authority. The Local authority collects local taxes for the local councils, the precept, then pays this to these constitutional institutions offering them shelter from the market norms that other groups are exposed to.

The case studies highlight the impact of CAT across different territories. Sorting of assets for CAT creates unevenness across community infrastructure. Different approaches to which assets are subject to CAT have rearranged the management of community infrastructure by service type. The differences in approach to which assets are given over to CAT means that while in Northwick most CATs are community centres, leisure facilities continue to be supported by the local authority. In Nerton most community infrastructure appears to be under consideration for CAT. In Llandinas, CAT is used as a tool where assets are deemed to be surplus. This creates greater variation between the management of public assets across local authorities and the potential for unevenness in service provision. Additionally, in Nerton the division of assets by parish and town council has created inequalities through different access to financial resources as the precept is locally collected and distributed therefore favouring wealthier territories. This is an example of the introduction of competition between assets which is likely to be present in other councils as individual assets manage their own financial sustainability.

Following these four themes the role of post hoc justification serves as a way to consider how the values and norms deployed through the discursive institutions of CAT are continually tested and mobilised to perform practice. The forms of post hoc justification of CAT, where councils point towards the ability of community groups to keep the assets open, could be understood through pragmatic sociology as a type of 'reality test'. 'Reality Tests' (Boltanski 2011 [2009]) are employed to assess how the constructed practices are translated into the routine, everyday practices and processes that constitute CAT. As Stones (2014) explains, local reflexivity 'tests' the symbolic truths against the reality of particular mundane processes which ends up either confirming the existing order or criticising it for not living up to its own ideals. As a result, 'reality tests' can enable critique from within deploying argumentation and evidence to 'challenge the confirmed representations of reality' (Boltanski 2011 p106). In this context the local authority test of CAT is whether they keep the assets open. In this sense practice has not fallen short of the proposed ideal, at least to date and in relation to those assets which the councils have discussed.

These justifications, viewed as post hoc forms of legitimisation, are restricted. Guided by the values and norms that local authorities themselves use to mobilise CAT external values are overlooked. This points towards the potential limitation of these justifications. As Stones (2014, p. 223) advises, because of the internal nature of these tests it is the institutions own values that are implicitly critiqued which indicates a respect for established procedures and test formats. Therefore, these internal justifications serve to reinforce the validity of the current forms of



organisation, apart from specific wrongs and injustices that need to be attended to, and where critique under these conditions are thus reformist rather than radical (Stones 2014). While attending to the rationales of local actors in carrying out CAT we should be aware of the role that these 'tests' play in validating state withdrawal from community infrastructure. This has implications for the way in which data is gathered and from whom suggesting that engagement with a broader constituency beyond those involved in the delivery of CAT would provide a wider understanding of practice. Although my intention here was to understand the justification of CAT through its application by councils, this is recognised as a limitation and future study of a greater variety of external actors would supplement knowledge of how this practice has emerged.

My critique of post hoc justification here is different from my own work in following chapters that engages in the afterlives of CATs and my examination of activities observed during my multi-sited ethnography of community buildings. While I do acknowledge the social benefits present in these spaces such recognition is not intended to justify or legitimise CAT but rather bears witness to and learns from the work that these groups have undertaken to (re)imagine the roles that these spaces have in providing for the public good. This does not intend to provide moral justification for further retrenchment of the state but acts as a guide to further the protection of community infrastructures and recognises their potential to foster different political environments beyond those narrowly defined as reactionary and/or co-opted.

Additionally, I suggest we should be wary of the narrative of post hoc justification which may take on an expanded discursive life in the hands of those who seek to perpetuate state retrenchment. By valuing austerity driven CAT based on an appreciation of its capacity to keep community facilities open it could be used to engender new logics for the wider participation of civil society in state welfare provision. This could lead to various new directions for practice including where; i) CAT is applied across a variety of other local authority assets and services, including housing, schools and health whereby the local state further transitions into the role of management landlord rather than service provider; ii) CAT is replicated across all levels and types of government bodies where the community and voluntary sector are relied upon for the upkeep of facilities and services. This is currently the case in Scotland under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 that permits grassroots community control of state assets where groups can make a case for better management. I propose that ongoing scrutiny of the outcomes of these wider moves is required.

These themes and their post hoc mobilisation justify and answer critique of the withdrawal of the state from community infrastructure. Yet, attending to the discursive institutions of CAT has also

revealed ways in which totalising narratives around the commercialisation of public assets or the coercion of civil society through localism may not do justice to the whole story. CAT offers a different form of disposal that mutes, anticipates and answers opposition to state retrenchment. CAT is not a move to commodify these assets. Offering sites to community groups does not seek to capitalise land values or bring in the private sector for profit. CAT does draw in civil society into the management of local public asset provision, but this is not framed forcefully as an articulation of a long standing conservative move to revive civil society as a response to the free market and oversized state (Blond 2010), at least not by the officers who are implementing it. While official council documents do indeed attempt to semantically draw citizens into a sphere of collective responsibility with moral undertones, council officers' responses demonstrate a more practical turn to CAT to get the job done rather than alluding to displays of ideological vigour. There is sensitivity in practice to not be 'too prescriptive' (Northwick Council officer 2019) over transfer, and community groups do not appear to be drawn into demanding agreements where the long arm of the state exercises its power. But communities do have to take up the mantle of marketisation and bureaucratic control. The resistance demonstrated by parish councils to the fracturing of the local tax base for the funding of assets under CAT demonstrates one way in which power is being challenged, as an unintended consequence of practice, and in doing so creates spaces of political opportunity. This external resistance follows Fuller's (2017) substantiation that rather than developing from within, contestation will take place from outside Councils and will be based on their ability to deliver services, or in this case fund others fairly to provide those services for them.

In this chapter I have argued that CAT practice is characterised by discursive institutions that draw on both top-down austerity logics, incorporate civil society into service provision and construct spaces of opportunity. CAT is situated as mitigating the effects of market and bureaucratic norms. Yet, deployed alongside shifting civic and moral values, this practice serves to mute wider critique and these values continue to be tested in practice with the emergence of forms of post hoc legitimisation and resistance.

In setting out the discursive institutions of CAT, understandings of the processes at play within local authorities begin to unsettle their framing as a mechanical or automatic enforcement arm of central government. Local authorities are taking decisions around how they react to austerity and CAT, as an expression of this, is couched in multiple rationales that are in constant flux. This work adds qualitative nuance to the quantitative data of the survey and adds to political economy understandings of practice as deeply embedded in, performative and productive of austerity logics. On one level, a focus on local authorities, like the national survey beforehand, keeps us

from the lived experiences of the individual assets, community groups and their publics. This is the work of my next and final empirical chapter, and it is here that I argue that we are able to witness how practices within CAT begin to transcend negative framings and which force us to engage with their ambivalence.

## Chapter 6 Austerity, ambivalence, and care: An ethnography of CAT

### 6.1 Introduction

Throughout this thesis, the focus of my study has moved across different scales of analysis from a national statistical survey (Chapter 4) to talk with bureaucrats in local authority case studies (Chapter 5). In this final empirical chapter I shift to analysis of local experiences which, I argue, are a critical arena to better understand Community Asset Transfer (CAT) and how its ethical and political dimensions play out in-situ.

Through ethnographic inquiry I will engage with the experiences of community groups and community members involved in CAT in three community centres located in an urban setting in South Wales. In doing so, I aim to show the ways in which CAT is co-constituted through forms that are still in the shadow of neoliberalism but bring very different constellations and relationships (See Williams et al. 2012). While CAT is a story of neoliberal co-option whereby public assets are privatised or offloaded onto the voluntary sector, I suggest there are also other processes at work that warrant academic attention. As a part of a messy politics implicitly drawn from communitarianism, it is important to recognise CAT in relation to the notion of collective endurance through which CAT members seek to maintain a service and care for their community. These sites offer emotional support and respite indicating the emergence of new spaces of care which may also promote a progressive role for these assets. These actions generate important questions around how academic inquiry can acknowledge the political ambivalence of CAT practice in ways that allow recognition of their contradictory ethical and political dimensions, especially their capacity to open out sites of refuge and future experimentation in community infrastructure.

This chapter makes three main contributions: Firstly, my work offers a different approach to theorising the ambivalence of community action in austerity. By drawing across theoretical boundaries I aim to acknowledge the ethical and political ambivalences of Community Asset Transfer. This work, informed by my empirical data responds to calls for more nuanced understanding of community and voluntary sector action to be developed (Newman and Clarke 2009; DeVerteuil et al. 2020).

Secondly, by bringing a new geographical territory to the critical study of spaces of care (Conradson 2003; 2011; Cloke et al. 2017), I invite scholars to engage with the existence of care in circumstances that might otherwise be overlooked. CAT as part of new infrastructures of care

contributes to wider understandings that community action can constitute powerful forms of activism, despite being grounded in everyday practices and entangled in policy programmes, and that those wanting to support this activity should begin by understanding these nuances (See Jupp 2012).

Thirdly, CAT practice can reorientate understandings of the potential of community action from one as subjugated to, product of and complicit in the perpetuation of neoliberal individualism. Within CAT there are also other forms of the organisation of society that promote the collectivism and mutualism which in some cases can offer new outlets for activism that challenges the impacts of austerity.

I begin by introducing how local perceptions of the 'thriving' community buildings of CAT merit further inquiry. I then set out to explore why and how community groups have engaged in CAT to sustain Community Centres in reading community (re)action with austerity, recognising collective endurance and acknowledging CAT sites as spaces of care. Finally, I reflect on how this work requires a (re)assessment of the politics of CAT practice in my discussion of the findings of the chapter.

## 6.2 'Thriving' community infrastructure

A central factor in any empirically grounded approach to CAT is that local perceptions frequently posit these buildings and community spaces as 'thriving' (Annette, volunteer, Cychfan, 2019; Bobbi, trustee, Cymorth, 2019). Objectively more community activities appear to operate from the transferred buildings than under previous Council management. Figures 58, 59 and 60 show the daily activities at each Community Centre showing the presence, quantity, and range of new activities on offer (in grey) as well as demonstrating continuity where some services, in operation before transfer, remain (white outlined in black). Two centres offer mostly new activities while at the third new activities complement an already extensive programme of activities. These programmes suggest a rich offer of community support.

This analysis should be considered as indicative only given that it is tricky to (re)establish with certainty what these spaces offered under Council control. Nor does it recognise or document the Council jobs lost, nor the potential shift in centre users displaced either through changes in provision and/or due to life-stage trajectories of community needs that shift dramatically over time (Jupp 2017). Nonetheless, these programmes are illustrative of a local experience of CAT that

values the services and activities offered, especially in a context of austerity where other sites are being closed and lost (Locality 2018).

**Figure 58 Daily activities at Cyrchfan Community Centre (Pre-March 2020)**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	
9am	W		W					New activities
	A	A	A		A			A Parent and toddler group
	B	K	K		D			L Ballet (preschool)
	C	L	C	A	C	U		M Fitness class (adults)
	D	D	D	K	D	Q		N Football (school age)
	E	D	Q	C	R	V	V	O Craft classes
4pm	F	F	F	F	F	O	O	P Cheerleading
	F	F	F	F	F	P		Q Netball (school age)
	G	B	G	N	N			R Neighbours group
	G	N	O	L	O			S Trampolining
	H	R	G	Q	N			T Community Garden
	I	C	C	D	P			U Hall hire
	J	L	E	J	N			V Church (Christian)
	X	X	X	X				
	X		X					
9pm								Pre-CAT activities
								W Fitness class (adults)
								X Martial arts

Notes: activities in grey denote new activity, those white outlined in black denote activities that have survived the transition from local authority management of the sites through CAT. *Source:* By author

**Figure 59 Daily activities at Cymorth Community Centre (Pre-March 2020)**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	
9am	T		U					New activities
	A		V	T	T			A Arts project
	B	T	T	Q	D			K "Living Room"
	C	N	P	N	Q			L Community shop
	D	O	C	R	O			M Hall hire
	E	N	E	N	E			N Language class (ESOL)
	F	F	F	F	F			O Shed workshop
	G	G	G	G	G			P Pantry
	H	H	H	H	H			Q Social groups /clubs
	I	I	I	I	I			R Pet supplies
	J	J	J	J	J			S Repair café
	K	K	K	K	K			
	L	L	L	L	L	S		Pre-CAT activities
4pm	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	T Workplace Youth Programme
	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	U Construction Skills Certificate Scheme
9pm								V Health and safety training

Notes: activities in grey denote new activity, those white outlined in black denote activities that have survived the transition from local authority management of the sites through CAT. *Source:* By author

**Figure 60 Daily activities at Cymdaithasol Community Centre (Pre-March 2020)**

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	
9am		D	D					New activities
		N	P					A Hall hire
	D	O	J	D		N		B Young adult learning
	E	J	E	N		P	M	C Wrestling club
	F	F	F	F	F	T	M	
	G	G	G	G	G	G	G	Pre-CAT activities
	H	H	H	H	H	H	H	D Café
	A	A	A	A	A	U	C	Q Film club
4pm	B	B	B	B	B	A	A	R Yoga / Meditation
	A	A	A	A	A	A	A	S Dog Training classes
	C	C	C	C	P		C	T Clothing sale
	H	H	H	H	H		H	U Councillor surgery
	I	I	Q	S	I		M	V Martial Arts
	J	P	P	M			V	
	K	M	R	J				
	J		L	R				
	L							
9pm	M							

Notes: activities in grey denote new activity, those white outlined in black denote activities that have survived the transition from local authority management of the sites through CAT. *Source:* By author

In conversation with community members, volunteers and staff, these centres are overwhelmingly lauded for offering multiple services, being friendly and welcoming (Research diary Cychfan 2019; Cymorth 2019; Cymdaithasol 2019). Some community members talk of these sites in contrast to the 'underused, dirty and unfriendly' (Community member, Cychfan, 2019) atmospheres of the centres as the Council 'ran them down' (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019). This denigration of place has echoes of territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant et al. 2014) understood as a process of the spatial tainting of place and its inhabitants that legitimises external intervention. Here the 'tainting' of the site by community members justifies the intervention of the community through CAT. Does the engagement of community groups in CAT then signal a form of co-option through their participation in narratives of stigmatisation where stories of decline act as a posteriori justification for community management and thus undermining the ideal of public service provision? However, not all community members engage in this narrative of the decline of these sites under local authority management. Other community members fondly invoke memories of these sites as places where relatives were helped to get on-line (Annette, volunteer, Cychfan, 2019), or where the efforts made by the Council workers to provide services under difficult circumstances were recognised (Bobbi, trustee, Cymorth, 2019). These accounts offer a positive appreciation of these spaces regardless of management.

What is clear is that these Community Centres taken on by community groups are now highly regarded by their communities and it is in this context that I set out to establish why groups have become involved in CAT, how they operate this infrastructure, and what subsequent role(s) it provides, albeit on an understanding that some research participants may be too close and celebratory of practice (Kenny et al. 2017).

### 6.3 Recognising community (re)action to austerity

From the outset, it is important to recognise the ways in which participants themselves perceived the anticipated, planned, and experienced decline of the state in different sectors of community infrastructure, driven by and entangled in multiple policies of state fiscal austerity, and how this motivated them to engage with CAT.

Through discussions with community members, volunteers, and staff across all research sites the withdrawal of the state has emerged as a key factor to incentivise groups to take on community centre buildings and a range of local public services, which I refer to collectively as community infrastructure. The local impact of austerity is present at all sites, albeit taking different forms and

corresponding to each situated context. From the three sites different stories emerge around how austere actions by the state are driving community groups to react through CAT. This includes community groups: i) (re)acting to the threat of the closure of a community space; ii) taking on a building to secure investment and then being left to sustain services and building as funding is cut, and iii) securing a space from which to continue a place-based community development project as state funding is axed. In setting out these arrangements I show how austerity has brought these community groups into both the physical and service community spaces once occupied by the state.

At the Cyrchfan Community Centre a group of individuals mobilised to counter the threat of closure to this community space. This group, of 'neighbours and interested local people, including a youth club leader who had worked at the site' (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019) gathered as the Council was understood to be, 'during that period of austerity since 2008, the banking crisis and then the building crisis and so on [the Council] naturally were looking for ways to reduce their spend... plac[ing] a number of buildings at risk of closing' (Nicky, ex-Trustee, Cyrchfan, 2019). In conversation with one of the trustees, I asked if the group had had a sense of what would have happened to the building if the community group had not taken it on. They replied:

It would have shut... from what I understand there was pressure [from the Council] if you don't take it on [the Community Centre], we can't get anybody else, it will be mothballed and that will be it' (Tom, Trustee, Cyrchfan, 2019).

This perception of the threat of loss combines with a sense of relief that by taking on the Community Centre through CAT the group had saved it for their own use and from it being given over to private interests:

...if it had closed down... we wouldn't have the centre we have got now. They would have pulled it down and put some more houses or flats' (Annette, Volunteer, Cyrchfan, 2019).

The threat of losing the building appears to have been an important factor in triggering local engagement in CAT. This move, I suggest, is motivated by a strong emotional response where the community group anticipating the loss of a building that they clearly valued reacted against its potential eradication through funding cuts. This has at least three implications.

Firstly, the emotional pull of a community building serves as a device to co-opt communities to take on assets which local authorities can dispose of through CAT. Secondly, in evoking the



emotional attachment to the building reflects part of Horton's (2016) argument that the emotional impact of austerity is greater than a simple linear understanding of cuts which then lead to impacts. For Horton (2016, p. 349), the 'anticipation' of austerity cuts in children's and youth services is 'more wide-ranging, intractable and troubling than the impacts of the cuts themselves', therefore arguing that understandings of austerity must account for the wider emotional impacts that it engenders. In this context, the anticipation of cuts has an emotional impact, manifest in fear of losing a community space. However, rather than simply causing anxiety it has driven and sustained various layers of collective action, including raising concern; instigating the organisation of a community group; generating and sustaining group action in and through the various bureaucracies of taking on and running a community building through CAT. This response is significant in highlighting the strength of heightened emotions surrounding austerity cuts and reforms to welfare services (Jupp 2021).

Thirdly, as I will reveal in the following sections, and as would be expected, the impacts of austerity are not easily resolved through taking on buildings through CAT. Rather engaging in CAT takes a new toll on communities by asking them to take on the challenges of building management and service provision. Most problematically, where these new responsibilities are laid down on the lives of community members already impacted by austerity the additional weight of CAT further compounds the sedimentary nature of austerity cuts.

This layering of austerity can be clearly seen at the Cymdaithasol Community Centre where the withdrawal of the state from the direct provision of local services took place following a community group taking on responsibility for the operation of a building. In this case the community group, a long-established grassroots charity youth project, had been resident in a council owned building for over forty years. It was encouraged to take out a new lease that included an adjacent abandoned meeting hall, also owned by the council, 'when austerity kicked in and money dried up, the building was left to the charity' (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019). The charity was persuaded to take out an extended lease on the building they occupied and the adjacent hall on a peppercorn rent, becoming liable for the physical maintenance and repair of both buildings. The council offered this arrangement on the basis that it was a route for the charity to secure external funding for necessary financial investment to 'completely redo the centre' (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019) since:

the community centre thought that they would be getting this big lottery grant ... as part of this grant, they wanted the lease to be extended ... at that point to around thirty to

thirty-five years and the maintenance and repair part came in (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019).

This move by the Council towards external sources of funding indicates a form of stepping back from directly supporting physical infrastructure where community groups are brought in and used to secure investment. This represents a break with the past where spending on capital projects was previously funded directly by the council, albeit reluctantly where 'if something came up, the Council went, oh, and eventually they paid for it' (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019). For the Charity taking on the lease, this meant that:

the council will not spend any money on the building, on any repair ... they want to wash their hands, if you've got a contract that says maintain repair, that's just their stock answer ... there is no support' (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019).

This raises questions over the value of the building as an 'asset' for the community in its current condition as it now requires 'a lot of money to be spent on it' (Vania, volunteer, Cymdaithasol, 2019) and issues around the extent to which it is 'feasible for a charity ... to maintain this building effectively' (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019). This reflects concerns raised elsewhere that these buildings rather than acting as an asset for a charity are often a liability (Aiken et al. 2016). The extent to which the Council bases their decisions on disposal by taking into consideration which assets have the highest running or maintenance costs is not known. However, as discussed earlier (see Chapter 5), local authorities can employ detailed calculations and targets to reduce overall running costs, the physical size of their built public estate and the cost of their maintenance backlog, suggesting an overarching technical framework behind service disposal to reduce local authorities own financial liabilities for physical community infrastructure.

At this site, the switch in responsibility from the council to community group to care for the building coincided with a local authority wide restructuring of its youth services prompting a staff member to warn me 'not to conflate the taking on of the building with the cuts they faced elsewhere in service provision' (Research diary, Cymdaithasol, 2019). In other words, the cuts of economic austerity coalesced through both a reduction in spending on assets driving CAT and cuts to local services impacting service provision. The change to youth services was understood to be driven by an 'ethos to generate income, a business led model, to carry on provision but at a fifth of the cost' (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019). Twenty-five youth clubs were reduced to seven across the city (Research diary, Cymdaithasol, 2019), a local expression of the national loss to youth services (UNISON 2017). The remaining centres were in prioritised areas and kept on by

tendering out to the third sector (Research diary, Cymdaithasol, 2019). For Cymdaithasol Community Centre, historically the Council had paid the wages of the manager, which were cut, and although the Council paid for individual community members to use the services the staff team had to be greatly reduced (Research diary, Cymdaithasol, 2019). These cuts to services placed the management of the building in a new light, as a staff member noted that following the withdrawal of council funds to pay wages there was an added imperative in taking on the abandoned meeting hall as the charity realised:

we need to make money, let's do it up, do it up and use that to generate money ... taking over the hall ... then became a bit more important because [of] the big change of austerity cuts which resulted in the loss of a paid manager and just a loss of income from the local authority for youth services (Lionel, Staff member, Cymdaithasol, 2019).

The evaporation of support for community services was also connected to the community group taking on a building at the third research site. The Council's withdrawal from youth centre provision at this third site made it available for a different community group to inhabit the space left behind. A staff member explained their engagement with CAT as one of convenience given that it was 'the only building available in the area really' (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019). However, importantly for Cymorth this space gave an existing community development group a base from which they could rebuild a community project that was struggling to survive funding cuts. The group comprised of ex-council employees that had been working in the area for over a decade employed as place-based fixed-term community development workers. These workers had been employed on a state funded place-based government programme 'building local relationships and developing little groups that responded to local issues... tackling anti-social behaviour' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). As one staff member made clear, as that project was implemented questions were raised around 'what happens when it finishes?' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). In response they set themselves up as an independent charity to continue their work when state funding ended taking on responsibility for the project and then in turn for the management of a building from which to run it.

Across these sites austerity is present through changes to local service arrangements and in national shifts in the provision of national resources. While the wax and wane of state support for community development projects is not new, historically this type of work has often been the target of governments looking to reduce expenditure (Taylor 2011), its presence within a large scale shift in the provision of community infrastructure through CAT ties it into wider ideas of austerity. From a political economy perspective, CAT goes far beyond simply local fiscal book

balancing by local authorities to propose 'a more 'radical' reform of the welfare state, cutting or dismantling many publicly provided services and benefits' (Clarke and Newman 2012, p. 304). In this way, austerity shifts from being an economic problem of how to deal with the economic fallout of the banking crisis to a political problem that has 'focused on the unwieldy and expensive welfare state and public sector, rather than high risk strategies of banks, as the root cause of the crisis' (Clarke and Newman 2012, p. 300). Thus, CAT community groups are being used not merely to address the fall out of a financial crisis but also the supposed inefficiencies and failings of the welfare state.

## 6.4 Community assets in austerity

Spending time at these sites and witnessing how these new responsibilities are being met suggests further associations between CAT and neoliberalism, offering useful explanatory understandings of this transfer of assets. I now turn to discuss the ways in which community groups have been compelled to engage in neoliberal technologies to secure the survival of these spaces. State withdrawal and responsibilisation of community groups to operate Community Centres through CAT not only creates these spaces but encourages, and often requires, ongoing engagement with neoliberal technologies to secure the necessary resources to sustain these sites. This work draws on two of Tronto's (2017) critical elements of neoliberalism; one, the assumption that the market is the institution best able to allocate resources, and two, that practices shape people to fit within this market-driven world. My empirical data partly illuminates how these elements work in action across different dimensions: firstly in creating understandings of the role of capitalist markets in the running of these community spaces and how they are drawn further into market logics albeit in mundane forms; secondly, in registering ideas of the formation of the neoliberal subject as can be seen in attitudes towards on the one hand, unpaid labour and volunteerism, and on another level forms of external control through performance management linked to external funding. It should be noted that although these forms are separated here for analytical purposes, they overlap in practice and help provide insight into the different arrangements that sustain community action in CAT practice.

### 6.4.1 Mundane markets

During the fieldwork it became clear that market values were being extensively deployed by the community groups to operate their buildings. Mundane markets are loosely defined here as a variant of a process of marketisation. This form of marketisation through CAT exposes these services to market forces, forming and establishing new markets (Çalışkan and Callon 2010), albeit

tempered as 'not-for-profit' regimes rather than for private gain. One example of the incursion of capitalist market logics was the positioning of the building itself to generate income through the hire of space. Reliance on this form of financial production through 'sweating' the asset varied across the sites but was nonetheless pervasive as the many of the social, educational, religious or political gatherings and events held in the physical spaces of the community centres (see Figures 58, 59, 60) paid hourly rentals.

Securing revenue income from community centre space be a simple strategy but in practice was hard won. The Cyrchfan community group had to build up enough 'clients' to bring in money (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019). This work put a strain on staff and trustees. Annette, a volunteer, recounted how 'in the beginning, the centre manager was desperate to get people in. She did deals with groups. One month free if the group had less than five people and then they would have to see how it went after that' (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019). Consequently, market logics of supply and demand were applied and activities that could not generate enough interest, and therefore cover rental costs in the long term, were considered unviable.

The cost of renting out community space was often covered by local community members who paid for the activities they attended. The clatter of coins deposited in the till or the electronic chirp of contactless payments at a quarter to the hour every weekday afternoon at Cyrchfan Community Centre (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019), marked a three-pound fifty pence payment per child for after school clubs. The community group tries to keep prices 'affordable and were told that their after school clubs are 'the cheapest in the city' (Tom, trustee, Cyrchfan, 2019) but Tom explained that 'we're gonna have to put the prices up next year, no matter how hard we try, our insurances are going up and light and power is going up ... we keep everything as low as we can for as long as we can, but commercially we have to be fit' (Tom, trustee, Cyrchfan, 2019). Current 'affordability' may be a legacy of the early period of the group taking on the centre when for the first three years where one trustee mentioned that 'all we were interested in was raising footfall, getting people in the building (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019). Additionally, there are signs of the limits to the marketisation of space, where 'we can't bring in new groups – we are full in the evenings, but we do get asked and there is a call for it. I can't say it would be looking for profitability, but you know what I mean' (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019).

This strategy became integral to sustain the building ushering in entrepreneurial practices. Ashley, a staff member, talked about how they had developed 'partnerships' with 'clients' who rented space and in turn provided many of the activities at the centre (Ashley, staff member, Cyrchfan, 2019). These 'clients', often individuals who operated independently or as a franchise of larger

private companies, 'are people we need to keep happy' (Ashley, staff member, Cychfan, 2019). The community group 'catered for' them by promoting activities through their social media, setting up equipment in the rooms and ensuring floors are 'swept and mopped' (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019). The rental income from the hire of these spaces was used to cover running and staff costs.

The Cychfan Community Centre also entered other mundane markets to raise income. Proceeds from an 'honesty café' that offered inexpensive tea, coffee and bottled drinks for a pound, toast for thirty pence or two slices for fifty pence, sticky banana loaf for a pound or lemon sponge cakes for three pounds, 'go to keeping Cychfan open' (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019). Centre volunteers are asked to keep the café well stocked. At one point during early 2019 the café brought in over one thousand pounds in one month, which at the time was considered an achievement (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019). Although such income contributes little to the suggested overall eighty-thousand-pound outgoings of the centre or would not cover the 'frightening' one-off twelve-thousand-pounds cost for the replacement of a boiler (Tom, trustee, Cychfan, 2019), an ever-present focus on the small-scale generation of revenue underlines the marginal financial precarity of the centre.

On one level, the experience of community members paying for activities did not arrive with community management. One volunteer talked about how under the Council a nineteen pounds a month payment for a leisure card gave access to most activities at all centres throughout the city, but that 'they couldn't use that system when it was taken over' (Community member, Cychfan, 2019). However, CAT brings fragmentation whereby each individual asset will have to rely solely on the individual income each can bring in – as opposed to sharing income from across the council area as happened under local authority control in the past.

The result of community buildings being reliant on highly localised funding sources, through the commodification of space, or services, draws on the resources of community members who pay-for-access. Extracting local resources in this way places an additional burden on communities and has the potential to exclude those who are unable to pay for the services that are being offered in this way (Spade 2020, see also Chapter 5). It is important to recognise that engagement with market forms here is not the same as profit seeking marketisation since as not-for-profit charities the income generated goes back into keeping these organisations going, nonetheless a fiscal imperative still exists as assets must operate as financially autonomous charities under CAT agreements. Additionally, these mundane economies sit alongside other forms of exchange that do not rely on wage labour and capitalism.

#### 6.4.2 Unpaid labour / volunteerism

Across all sites the role of volunteerism, was essential to the operation of the buildings and their services. Volunteerism provided free labour to sustain the buildings as community groups took on responsibility to resource the staffing, running and maintenance of these sites. Volunteering was present in at least three forms. Firstly, volunteering was written into the charitable governance structure required by the local authorities for CAT, with unpaid trustees overseeing, and often directly involved in, the operation of the community centres. Secondly, volunteers were also individuals who worked without financial reimbursement on either externally funded community activities, often receiving time credits for their work which they could exchange for other services and activities (Cymorth), or education exchange programmes where volunteering was a constituent part of their professional training, e.g., as was the case at the Cymdaithasol Community Centre. Furthermore, volunteering was present through more local arrangements whereby community members were deployed to take on what could be described as a 'caretaker' role, representing a distinctive form of volunteering that merits further consideration under a neoliberal lens where volunteering has been positioned as a low-cost alternative to state provision (See chapter 2 sub-heading 'Volunteer Labour')

At the Cyrchfan Community Centre, a broad form of volunteerism existed which was described by a member of staff as 'getting involved in administration, cleaning, making tea and coffee, communicating with the public, setting up equipment' (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019), suggesting a form of 'caretaker' volunteerism. This role was considered 'massively essential for running the Community Centre ... if we didn't have volunteers, we would not survive at all' (Ashley, staff member, Cyrchfan, 2019), but came with an important caveat that 'we don't like people thinking we're taking volunteers just to satisfy us... it's not just about the volunteer coming on board and helping us, but it's also them benefitting something from it as well' (Ashley, staff member, Cyrchfan, 2019). The benefit to the volunteers was, amongst other things, considered as:

Learn(ing) something new... something you need to learn for the future. You can advance your career or develop a new interest or hobby and you can try out new skills in a low-risk environment before putting them into use in the workplace (Ashley, staff member, Cyrchfan, 2019).

On one level, this suggestion of a mutually enhancing relationship between volunteer and community centre was a genuine attempt to mitigate the absence of financial reciprocation for

the work undertaken by the volunteer. On another, this unpaid work undertaken based on the future marketability of the skills they gain through volunteering has neoliberal undertones. The idea that volunteers give their time freely to enhance their employability, evokes ideas of the construction of the neoliberal self where market rationality is used to frame social relationships (Gershon 2011). For Gershon this individual is composed of 'a flexible bundle of skills that reflexively manages oneself as though the self was a business' (Gershon 2011, p. 537). It could be seen as indicative of wider moves to turn public services towards the market by encouraging people to understand themselves as specific sorts of economic agents motivated and powered by economic means (Newman and Clarke 2009). In this context, the motivation to perfect the 'self as a business' is posited as a rationale for the individual taking on unpaid work. A new 'employer/employee' relationship between the community group and the individual is established where the volunteer is given an opportunity to improve their skills and future 'marketability' to secure a job. It is important to acknowledge that this justification for volunteer participation sat alongside ideas of reciprocity such as 'giving back to the community' and 'helping out' (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019) which I will discuss in later sections. Nonetheless, this promotion of private economic self-interest presents a cultural challenge to the collective ethos of the community groups and their charitable aims of care for others rather than for oneself. While there are concerns over the motivations of individuals to volunteer, there are also questions raised around who is actually volunteering.

A central issue related to unpaid labour and volunteerism is the danger that this work is gendered, racialised, classed, and so an unequal one (Fraser 2017; Hall 2020) (See also chapter 2 sub-heading 'Volunteer Labour'). This is particularly important where the state has retreated and policy makers have then looked to community members to fill the gaps in care for the elderly, children, community services, etc. (Hall 2020), work that has historically fallen to women and is a greater burden where it coincides with low wages and fewer resources. Indeed, analysis of my data reveals volunteering as a yet another potential manifestation of social reproduction which combines with the multiple, significant, hidden and private worlds of social reproduction work undertaken by women within the home when dealing with the increasing and wider impacts of austerity (Hall 2020). Focusing on what and whose labour is maintaining social infrastructure (ibid), the potential of CAT volunteering to reinforce gender inequality is raised.

Across the sites, I suggest that the wider issues of the disproportionate impact of austerity on women are often overlooked. For example, there are often attempts to demonstrate and work towards inclusivity where community members develop discourses where 'everyone is treated equally' and where members 'don't care whether people are male or female, what colour they



are, or sexual orientation' (Research diaries, 2019), and where social groups defined by gender are discouraged and actively challenged, e.g., where a 'men's' workshop admitted women to their management board and encouraged wider participation. This inclusivity influences the lists of formal volunteers across the sites which at first glance testify to a gender balance.

However, sometimes the nature of the volunteering work did reinforce gender stereotypes where maintaining the building fabric, or cleaning were predominantly undertaken respectively by men and women. However, and more pertinently, a minority of informal activities such as parent and toddler groups or social clubs that attended to community member wellbeing were very often unfunded and staffed by women who gave their time for free. There were concerns over these precarious activities and the work volunteers did to sustain them. At one site, concern over volunteers giving too much time translated into attempts at mitigation by arranging cover and giving volunteers 'holidays' (Research Diary, Cymorth, 2019), but it was not clear if the issue of gender was recognised as a problem. Nonetheless, as Pearson outlines, given that 'women are increasingly treated as an expandable and costless resource that can absorb all the extra work that results from cuts to the resources that sustain life' (Pearson 2019, p. 28) recognising their role in sustaining community resources is fundamental to understanding how these spaces and networks function.

#### 6.4.3 External funding and performance management

Ethnographic immersion in the Community Centres allowed me to observe how formal everyday activities were resourced not only directly by the community but through external funding. Those community groups who consisted of ex-state employed community workers had existing skills and expertise, suggesting the legacy of the state in current localist endeavour (See Wills 2016), who were able to continue to deliver long-term community services associated with the Council's legal statutory obligations, e.g., at Cymdaithasol where young adult day provision was provided. These skills could also be used to bid for competitive external grants from the state, third or private sectors to fund discrete community projects orientated to support specific communities of interest, e.g., at Cymorth where there were activities for community and mental health support. The existence of these resources is part of a wider and established shift in welfare provision from the state to the third sector (See Fyfe and Milligan 2003; Kenny et al. 2017) and is here considered as drawing community groups further into neoliberal technologies that include competitive bids for funding, engagement with performance indicators implying the presence of a long arm of authority and introducing the insecurity of short-term contracts.

Bidding for external funding, on one level, brings a new labour-intensive role to the management of Community Centres. Some of the staff who administered and sought out new funding were known as the 'worker bees' (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019) and some staff were employed to work:

towards ensuring the sustainability of the project beyond the funding we have currently got ... I'm developing a funding strategy and putting in bids and working out other ways of funding to kind of keep it going consistently and expand it (Leslie, resident artist, Cymorth, 2019).

This work was said to distract workers from carrying out 'the fun stuff' (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019) and staff commented that they found that they often did not have the time they wanted to engage with the community members and projects. In addition, 'putting in bid's' implicitly positioned community groups in competition against each other for resources:

the staff, they get disappointed when they put in a grant application, and it fails. I mean most people fail all the time, but X has got a reputation which has served it very well and I think continues (Gareth, trustee, Cymorth, 2019).

Approaching this competitive work through neoliberalism underlines how the agency of these groups can be constrained by the power of those who provide funding. Spade's (2020) discussion of neoliberal forms of competitive funding highlights how grassroots organisations are restricted to work according to funder's beliefs about the causes and solutions behind problems rather than challenging those beliefs. For Spade the agency of these groups is muted to secure funding and 'keeps non-profits from doing work that is threatening to the status quo' (Spade 2020, p. 24). The political work that the community groups who take on community centres do, or do not do, is the subject of the final section of this chapter, however although project leaders talked about evaluation criteria being very diverse and dependant on the funder (Leslie, resident artist, Cymorth, 2019), on at least one project the role of external performance indicators did raise issues.

On one funded project, a project leader Mike, recounted some of the issues that groups can face in relation to attending to funders requirements. Working on a pilot project for the local health board at a different site an attempt was made at gathering data to demonstrate the public cost benefits for health care of individuals attending a community activity for mental health and wellbeing. Mike commented that the evaluation of the project was, in part, based on 'personal

feedback from volunteers, [through] a lengthy and quite in depth 30 question questionnaire... we did this at the beginning and at the end, and throughout because you didn't know when they might stop using the service' (Mike, project leader, 2019). Alongside a feeling that this generated a lot of work there were ethical concerns over the nature of the questions, 'it was quite an intrusive questionnaire covering different health elements, physical, mental, well-being, sleep, food' (Mike, project leader, 2019). Monetising the benefits was considered as 'quite callous and the wrong way to look at health... I don't really understand at what point that needs to be monetarised' (Mike, project leader, 2019). These forms of control may have the potential to turn community groups into bureaucrats and may further co-opt them into contributing to effective public services through similar forms of performance management systems that were originally set up to improve public management (Osborne 1992).

Finally, reliance on competitive external funding can be precarious. Again, in discussion with Mike the impacts of short-term funding of projects become apparent. Mike was employed by a charity external to the community centre where he worked one day a week and was part of a larger project of social prescribing to improve mental health and wellbeing running at various sites across the city. For the previous three years the project had been run on small amounts of money from local general medical practitioner surgeries and third sector funders. These resources sustained the project for between three and six months at a time but during the ethnography things came to a head when a recent rejection for a three-year long grant to sustain the project brought disappointment and exposed its precarity. Mike was 'acutely aware that the project could just be finished six weeks from now and on a hope and a prayer we get more funding' (Mike, project leader, 2019). He explained:

I need my boss to pull out a couple of really good funding bids because personally its quite mentally exhausting knowing if you are going to be employed six weeks from now, and think about all the people who think they are reliant on the project, but have taken great steps but you know are perhaps still a bit shaky, yeah... I don't know, that's the scary thing. Plus, I can't work two and a half days a week for the rest of my life because I will be poor, well I am poor (Mike, project leader, 2019).

Here several layers of austerity are exposed. Personal fatigue and uncertainty over job security and future wealth alongside a sense of responsibility towards the community members 'reliant on the project' reveal how emotional and material burdens of austerity coalesce. While this experience is not directly linked to the taking on of community spaces through CAT per se, it does testify to the insecure nature of the short term funding model that makes the livelihoods of staff

hired to organise and push forward across the community organisation sector (Blake 2020), and its wider emotional cost for both those who deliver and receive services.

Through a political economy lens my reading of some of the CAT operational systems acknowledges the ways in which volunteering, the marketisation of space and the role of performance management can pull community groups further into capitalist machinery, control and logics that undermine the traditional role of the welfare state. Yet, as outlined above, this narrow viewpoint risks ignoring much of what happens on the ground.

## 6.5 Acknowledging collective endurance

Spending time alongside and learning from the community groups who jointly operate these spaces I witnessed other actions that unsettle a narrow political economy understanding of CAT. Other processes at work in these sites suggest different political opportunities that move us beyond narratives of the subjugation of community groups to market values as the state draws back and where these spaces become newly infused with technologies of economic gain. Instead, the work of community groups might be better framed as a form of collective endurance: ‘collective’ in the sense that it brings people together, offering a counter to the individualisation promoted under neoliberalism, and a form of ‘endurance’ in the sense that it is concerned with survival as community groups endure the withdrawal of the state.

Under a lens of collective endurance CAT is about local persistence, of trying to maintain a service, looking out for other people and part of a messy politics of a certain type of communitarianism. In this context, the notion of communitarianism is empirically grounded in the sense of togetherness and collectiveness that research participants construct through their own informal ethics and beliefs. Although communitarianism, has performed the role of an empty signifier to which people bring different contradictory meanings (Taylor 2011), used here it ‘recognises the embeddedness and interdependence of human life and promotes social and civic values above individual ones’ (Driver and Martell 1997, p. 29). This posits a collectivist endeavour that leans towards more progressive arrangements. In this section, I set out how collective endurance is co-constituted through technologies of quotidian capitalist markets, volunteering, and engagement with external funding and performance management in a way that can usurp the dominant meanings attached to these dimensions of CAT activity.

### 6.5.1 Mundane markets

At the community centres although there was consideration of how the use of the space might be used to bring in an income, this arrangement did not permeate every activity. Some activities were protected. This was particularly evident at the Cymorth Community Centre where many of the volunteer led activities and independent groups, such as a weekly mental health and well-being social group, do not pay rental. A staff member explained that community group 'takes a hit on the bureaucracy' for these small informal groups, that include craft and social clubs, helping them address regulatory requirements and insurance, therefore supporting them to be able to function (Research Diary, Cymorth, 2019). At Cymorth this support, that does not expect or demand monetary exchange, provided a forum for a community member initiative to exist outside market logics.

At a volunteer run Community Shop at Cymorth, Sarah, a volunteer, told the story of how the shop began. At a weekly craft club 'people starting to bring in bits of stuff to swap ... then we were given a little cupboard to store it all in, so the community members came in and had a little look and they kept saying you need a bigger space... we moved to the front of the building' (Sarah, volunteer, Cymorth, 2019). The shop is considered an important community service and does not pay rent (Gillian, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). It is stocked from donations of clothing, household items and food from national charities and suppliers operating on a 'pay what you can' basis, where charity shops are thought to be 'too expensive' (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019). The shop is said to be 'popular... in high demand' with 'more and more people coming through the door' (Jocelyn, volunteer, Cymorth, 2019). This takes on a particular significance where some community members are 'coming in quite upset because their money is not stretching, so we are trying to help them out with what we've got' (Jocelyn, volunteer, Cymorth, 2019). The shop offers an alternative way, or at least a cheaper way, for people to access goods that disrupts expectations around the primacy of financial exchange for both goods and in the occupation of this space.

This uncommodified approach to community services is part of various economies of exchange, of time, of labour and economies that do not rely on wage labour and capitalism. On one level, this offers new empirical examples contributing to understanding of a proliferation of diverse economies that emerge from an experimental, performative and ethical orientation to the world (Gibson-Graham 2008). On another level, considering Tronto's (2017) discussion of Polanyi's limits to the market society argument, in this data we can see the beginnings of organisational forms of community infrastructure as a 'principle of social protection aiming at the conservation of man and nature as well as productive organisations, relying upon the varying support of those most immediately affected by the delirious action of the market' (Polanyi, 2001 [1944]: 138, quoted in

Tronto 2017, p. 34). To be clear, I do not bring in this argument to discount the neoliberal reading of the operation of CAT which I presented earlier but suggest that through scrutiny of the ethnographic data other forms which undercut the idea of market primacy are present.

#### 6.5.2 Unpaid labour / volunteerism

While volunteering can be used as way for participants to exercise their individual marketability, this was far from the only justification given for community groups drawing on, or community members offering, unpaid labour. Ashley, a staff member at the Cychfan Community Centre commented on why they had originally started volunteering at the centre:

I grew up just behind the centre here, and when it first opened [under local authority control], I spent a lot of time here, so it was, a second home to me when I was a kid, I was very passionate about it ... I got involved, I put my heart and soul into it (Ashley, staff member, Cychfan, 2019).

Ashley's evident personal attachment to place was based on the enjoyment she had in coming to the centre when she was younger and that it had given her a place to go. Ashley spoke of other volunteers who like her 'gain a sense of giving back to the local community' (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019) suggesting the wider role of reciprocity in volunteering to keep this centre open.

Helping out to sustain a place and/or activity that is beneficial for others is implicit in voluntary work to run a weekly mental health and well-being social group at the Cymorth Community Centre. Lisa, a volunteer who leads the group says that 'people come along to the group for something healthy to eat, to get out the house, for some this is the only time they go out all week' (Research Diary, Cymorth, 2019). This underlines the important social benefit of these spaces where people can connect to address issues of isolation, loneliness, and wellbeing.

These issues link to volunteering in complex ways where the boundaries between giving and receiving care are often blurred. Ashley explained that the Christmas day community event at Cychfan gave some people an opportunity to both give and receive care providing an excuse for some people to socialise who might otherwise be isolated:

too many people are afraid to go 'I'm lonely', 'I can't be involved', but then if you say can you help us volunteer, they bite your arm off, so even though the reason they are coming

is that they are lonely, the actual reason they give is to help out (Ashley, staff member, Cychfan, 2019).

Talk of this motivation reveals, a perhaps hidden agenda, where mutual benefit is secured by people offering care through volunteering (See also chapter 2 sub-heading 'Volunteer Labour'). This reciprocity ties into emerging literatures on the geographies of loneliness where the complexities of people's lives, and especially those who live on lower incomes, can mean that volunteers and service users are hard to distinguish, as both groups may be vulnerable to loneliness and isolation (Blake 2020; British Red Cross 2020). Yet, although loneliness may not discriminate as people from all sections of society can feel lonely, there is unevenness in where the work of addressing loneliness falls and in the opportunities that people have to escape it (Stenning and Hall 2018). For scholars, the weight of austerity policies, welfare reforms and poverty mean that people on lower incomes are least able to address government expectations in tackling loneliness (Stenning and Hall 2018; Blake 2019). Stenning and Hall (2018) point out that there is no mention of poverty in the government's strategy to tackle loneliness (HM Government 2018), further compounding the uneven impacts of austerity that are gendered and disproportionately impact black and ethnic minorities. As Stenning and Hall (2018) stress:

Austerity chips away at those who are already exhausted and disenfranchised, compounding experiences of poverty, isolation and hardship. Placing responsibility back on these same communities to solve problems that were not of their own making will simply pile on more pressures.

The stress of austerity on people's lives can also be seen in the motivations of volunteers to provide for people's material needs at these sites. Sarah, who helps run the Community Shop shows empathy for 'the people who come on their own on two buses just to get help, just because they needed stuff... we've all been in the same situation' (Research Diary, Cymorth, 2019). Thus, Sarah reveals both the sensitivity and empathy some volunteers feel towards community members and, importantly, the feelings of solidarity that often underpins these services.

Volunteering to deliver activities that address collective social wellbeing or attending to peoples' material needs are far from the motivations of individual entrepreneurialism to enhance personal productivity. Participants framed activity in reference to ideas of reciprocity or solidarity, suggesting an interpretation of collective shared acts which unsettle notions of well-resourced individuals engaging in philanthropic or altruistic forms of charity for those less fortunate.

Additionally, in the case where individuals choose to volunteer, to socialise and connect, such motivations sit uneasily with a top-down communitarian ethos that individuals must assume responsibilities and make self-sacrifices as part of a wider moral culture to build the 'good society' (Etzioni 2000). Parcell and Clarke (2021) have written about charity and volunteerism being praised as an end in itself, as part of cultivating ethical citizens and a 'good society'. Consequently, volunteering is subject to expectations that might be distorted to justify offloading community infrastructure onto communities the basis that the volunteer work which they will have to engage in to do so contributes towards a 'good society'.

While recognising volunteering in CAT is diversely motivated, I propose that the perspectives shared above do underline a more collective approach to this work without financial reward and link to longstanding traditions of mutuality in the UK where self-help initiatives come from within communities to ensure against ill-health and poverty (Taylor 2011). These voluntary actions sustain activities that provide support and friendship that can also be considered as participating in a more politicised form of organisation in austerity to help people survive the devastating conditions unfolding everyday (Spade 2020).

#### 6.5.3 External funding and performance management

Although drawing on external funds implicitly brings community groups into competition with each other, often for short-term projects and exposure to external controls, the Cymorth Community Centre demonstrated how the shift to being able to choose funding sources had brought a form of freedom. As one of the trustees explained, the group 'get[s] money in small little pots, here and there, but they have been getting two three, you know, five-year projects funded... I think that that, you know, that is, in a way sustainable, in a bizarre sort of way. It's not, not what you might expect because that kind of funding is obviously very precarious isn't it.' (Gareth, trustee, Cymorth, 2019). This precarity is still a 'big concern' and the centre manager is thought to 'lie in bed and worry about it'. Nonetheless, this pulling together of different funding sources was a response to share resources and sustain 'the core of the organisation ... management fees, etc.' (Gareth, trustee, Cymorth, 2019). This funding helped the group transition from being a state funded community development programme so that:

when it finished almost everybody was found a job, I think there were one or two people who were made redundant, which is pretty amazing, they went to other organisations to work but that was an extraordinary transition and it's actually continued, the alternative funding is coming and of course it's not only grant funding it is contracts with the health



service. So that's a different kind of funding, gives you a lot more flexibility with what you do with it. Some of that money can be put aside for new activities' (Gareth, trustee, Cymorth, 2019).

The end to the government-led community development programme from which this community group emerged reflects the longstanding precarity of community infrastructure where state support waxes and wanes (See Kenny et al. 2017) and although an approach to external funding still follows market logics, the group have been able to at least, and so far, survive the withdrawal of direct state funding.

The role of external funding in bringing community groups into a market-led culture where they act as rational economic actors through adopting or engaging with technologies of performance management is aligned with governmentality discourses around power (See Lemke 2019). Yet, in the case of Cymorth Community Centre the shift to external funding from state funding appears also as a form of freedom from then neoliberal technologies of government programmes. As Daniel, a member of staff recalled that the programme offered 'quite stable funding' but expected:

...restrictive outcomes. Measures they wanted to see... You are continually trying to manage a tension between what the government wants you to do and working co-productively with a community. It's all very well saying to the community oh well you're interested in that, but we're only paid to do this (Daniel, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

Gareth the trustee offered further detail, commenting that under the government programme:

your purpose was ultimately to be able to fill in the forms. So, you know, it was all geared to being able to make the report rather than to deliver any kind of service on the way. I mean, obviously, one was, and all of them were like delivering services on the way (Gareth, trustee, Cymorth, 2019).

The transition from state control then might be seen as releasing the community group from the neoliberal technologies of the former programme. Within this shift there was also an appreciation that the group is now able to curate a more responsive service for their local community and is not directly restricted through the imposition of a top-down regime. In contrast:

what we are trying to do at the moment is developing funding streams, which enable us to work more genuinely co-productively with the community so, working with helping families is an example that working genuinely co-productively with the community, so we have flexibility in terms of how we deliver. But also, when we were working on the training project, or the Pantry, then we've got income, you know, which can then enable us to run activities which are sustainable and are addressing what the community want and needs (Daniel, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

The actions of this community group appear as a shift away from a situation where the spatial limitations of statistical governance at a distance frustrate the construction of targets which reflect local priorities (Enticott and Entwistle 2007), where objectives were once tailored to abstract quantitative data. Yet, funding still comes with strings attached and will limit what can be provided, and how, but the fact that community groups can pick and choose allows them some opportunities which they did not have previously rather than having to apply a one size fits all approach.

These approaches to mundane marketisation, the use of unpaid labour and drawing on external funding here appears as a form of endurance in the sense that people are helping each other in everyday situations. Endurance is distinct from other notions of having a capacity to withstand change such as resilience, a widely discussed notion in human geography (See Adger 2000; Wilson 2018). In agreement with Mackinnon and Derickson's (2013) discussion around 'resilience' I am also wary of this often top-down imposed concept that focuses on the maintenance of the status quo. Mackinnon and Derickson (2013) warn of the danger of this concept that promotes an ideal to secure the stability of an (unequal) existing system and how this places the onus for this capacity on individuals, communities and places, and expects them to use their own resources to get back up after they have been knocked down. I propose an alternative in 'endurance' which also suggests a capacity for continued existence, but it does not burden community groups and community members with an expectation to maintain an existing system or where people must use their own resources and possess the ability to get up after they have been knocked down, nor that the previous state is one to which communities should wish to return. The use of the notion of endurance with austerity is not new. Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcázar (2019) write about individual endurance in austerity and an emotional 'right to be weary'. However, here I argue for endurance as a collective act of getting by where people come together to help each other out to withstand hardship and pain.

In this section, I have suggested how the community operation of community centres through CAT could be considered through different theoretical lenses. Seen through a neoliberal lens CAT is a reaction to neoliberal processes of state withdrawal and offloading onto the community sector. Through a communitarian lens we can see how further engagement in neoliberal technologies is mitigated through a form of collective endurance by community groups to keep these spaces open raising questions around the political approach and opportunities for CAT.

I now turn to the role community centres play as emergent spaces of care and the significance of this amid state withdrawal in times of austerity.

## 6.6 Reading CAT sites as spaces of care.

The community groups and spaces associated with CAT provide important community services with sites offering emotional support and respite to individuals. Reading these CAT sites as spaces of care helps underline the collective nature of these social organisations in operating these buildings that are not quite entirely explained through allusions to entrepreneurship and communitarianism. I suggest that reading these spaces for the care provided by these community groups reveals a new territory of care that can unsettle otherwise wariness around care in austerity (Wiesel et al. 2020). Current neoliberal understandings of care posit the market as the solution to care making the individual responsible for their own care (Cox 2013), or reliant on family or faith-motivated communities (Chatzidakis et al. 2020; Cloke et al. 2020). In the case of CAT, part of the burden of care is taken up by these community groups and their centres, suggesting an expansion to existing networks of care that sit between the market and the state. Therefore, CAT in austerity might be considered as an emergent site of new spaces of care.

Furthermore, rather than merely proposing care as an alternative process, or one in opposition to neoliberalism (See Tronto 2017), I build on conceptual approaches that seek to articulate the messy emergent ethical and political responses to welfare ‘in the meantime’, introducing values other than those of neoliberal capitalism as a response to the austere conditions of the here and now’ (Cloke et al. 2017, p. 704, italics in original). In doing so, I propose an approach that goes beyond endurance and that is not apolitical as it offers a way to recognise the potential for progressive possibilities that can arise out of these spaces.

Through the ethnographic data we can start to understand how these sites, although created by the waning of the state, have become key nodes in the reconfiguration of care. These sites provide care and often intersect with other dimensions of everyday austerity. In this section, I will

consider the role of the community spaces of CAT and how they provide spaces of everyday care. I suggest that this takes at least three forms; (i) momentary acts of care that provide emotional support and respite, (ii) experiments in care through sharing resources where the setting up of long-term mutual aid contrasts with short term individual charity, and finally (iii) a hope for compassionate activism and the potential for the beginnings of a more vocal advocacy where groups are tentatively using knowledge of local experiences and through wider support networks seek to campaign against inequality. Here I bear witness to survival practices that go beyond but are intrinsically interconnected to the spaces from which they take place, through which communities are finding ways beyond a condition of 'getting by' through the reconfiguration of care in austerity.

#### 6.6.1 Momentary acts of care

Observing and being part of the activities that took place in the centres I began to appreciate the relational intimacies that develop between community members in the spaces of CAT. Scrutiny of these social relationships offers insight into the types of encounters that take place at these sites and furthers understandings of the important care role that these community spaces sustain. This approach is, in part, based on Sarah Marie Hall's (2019b) recent conceptual approach to austerity as a personal and relational condition, and where care and support can be developed beyond the family through friendship, acquaintanceship and intimate strangers (Hall 2019b). My analysis draws on this work to reveal how care can operate through many layers of austerity in these new emergent institutional community spaces of CAT.

My ethnographic diaries are full with my own experiences of the small acts of kindness that community members, volunteers and staff showed towards me, such as: being invited to eat homemade soup around a table by staff members (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019) which offered material sustenance and inclusion into social networks; frequently being made cups of tea by centre managers and trustees (Research diary, Cyrchfan, 2019; Cymorth, 2019; Cymdaithasol, 2019) that was perhaps evidence of micro practices of ongoing institutional work to maintain flat organisational structures (Spade 2020). While these experiences help to construct a sense of welcome and camaraderie, my analysis is directed towards the encounters between community members who attended and used the different amenities and services offered at the community centres. Over the months I witnessed a pattern in some of the quotidian forms of care taking place between community members which I understand as being fleeting and momentary in nature.

These momentary encounters took place between ‘strangers’, often in the public spaces such as gardens, receptions and/or cafés where multiple encounters take place (See Appendix 9 Description of a Thursday morning in the community ‘living room’ at Cymorth Community Centre). One encounter, at the Cymorth Community Centre, illustrated the nature of these meetings and how they often provided immediate emotional relief:

Sitting beside the reception I hear a woman complain to Maggie, ‘my Dad doesn’t have a job, my Mum doesn’t have a job, I don’t have a job, there’s no job’s out there’. The woman is visibly upset and starts to cry. Maggie stands up, walks round the counter and puts her arm round her. A few minutes later we are chatting about dog walking and the woman, now more composed, offers to walk Maggie’s dog. Maggie suggests that the woman comes back for the community advice drop-in (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019).

This encounter demonstrates a direct, corporal and emotionally charged form of care that temporarily alleviates wider concerns. Genuinely offered and accepted, this embrace is a potent example of many other individual acts of attention, too numerous to mention and/or given in confidence and unreported here, offered by many of the volunteers and staff to distressed community members. Notably, in this case, Maggie’s invitation to the woman to return to the ‘community advice drop-in’ is indicative of the way in which, at this centre, the existence of different support services on one site provides connections to wider care networks, including those that are professionalised and formal:

in terms of what we actually do, it’s a whole bunch of stuff, the health service I’ve just mentioned, a lot of community support around food poverty and fuel poverty and again there is a professional element to that around advice and support around debt problems and whether or not people are getting the benefits they are entitled to, negotiating fuel debt for people, helping them get free baby meters and really practical stuff (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

These care networks sit alongside more experimental, and volunteer led projects set up by community members that creates:

this whole network of things that local people are generating themselves. So, the community shop [is] run by a family and they negotiate all the donations and things, and we support them and that, but they are quite independent and [have] a very strong sense of ownership of that work (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

The grammars of 'independence' and a 'strong sense of ownership' link to this aspiration of the community group at Cymorth to foster a 'a culture of empowering people to take control' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019), to change people's perceptions because 'they have just had the message for too long that they have nothing to contribute, and as soon as you start challenging that you start to see really remarkable things happening' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). This framing suggests that the possibilities offered to community members to organise their own activities is strategic in creating an environment 'to nurture people' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019) alluding to a wider ambition for care that might start with but endures beyond a fleeting moment. These languages are commonly associated with the neoliberal lexicon of offloading responsibility onto community groups to take ownership. However, at these sites, the evidence points to a form of mutualism that challenges assumptions of working-class subjects as deficient (i.e., lacking skills and having the know how to run projects etc.).

The role of momentary care also played out between 'acquaintances' during organised activities. The art project at the Cymorth was one example where these caring interactions took place. The project was set up to 'provide free arts activities on a regular basis in an area that just didn't have them' (Leslie, resident artist, Cymorth, 2019) and was important for the community group that ran the centre not only because 'the arts can enable people to express themselves and contributing to better mental health and well-being... and also that kind of process of people becoming artists in their own right contributes to that bigger vision of asset-based community development... where people develop their own resources' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). Community members who commented on why they came to the art project talked about ideas of improved well-being since attending the class 'takes you out of yourself for a bit' (Community member, Cymorth, 2019), or works to 'keep me busy, you need things that keep you busy or you get in trouble' (Community member, Cymorth, 2019) or where you can 'meet new people' and 'make new friends' (Community member, Cymorth, 2019). The community members talk furnishes a quiet sense of asset-based development as attendees enjoyed 'getting encouragement from other people', 'branching out, trying new things' and where one community member commented 'I think it is some sort of achievement that you are able to do something that you don't normally get to do' (Community member, Cymorth, 2019).

These encounters suggest mundane momentary acts of care that can contribute to personal and collective wellbeing. This form of care has links to wider policy concerns to address social isolation that sits within a context of a rise in mental health issues over the last decade (Marmot et al. 2020). It links to the claim that these spaces that allow for relationships and support networks to

develop are often taken for granted (Klinenberg 2018), associated with a longstanding argument around the decline of public life and social connection (Putnam 2000), and where there is a longstanding deficit in gathering places that foster an informal public life (Oldenburg 1989). Thus, we might think of these activities as highly valuable in a context where they are increasingly needed yet overlooked and/or absent.

Further work is needed to examine the extent to which these encounters are meaningful beyond etiquette and 'civility' (Valentine 2008), however, the ethnographic evidence points to these mundane spaces becoming part of new infrastructures of care, where people go when they are having a bad day; need advice; want company; need material help (e.g., food and/or clothes). In this sense, CATs are more than institutional spaces of neoliberal offloading of public services onto the community. We need to understand CATs and the ways people engage with them, as contributing to everyday social infrastructure, not as the only support to community members and groups, but as alleviating wider structural pressures and the unequal burden of social reproduction (Hall 2020). Amid increasing social isolation and mental health issues, which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, the spaces of care emerging through CAT potentially offer respite from caring responsibilities, help individuals and communities endure, and counter, the 'accelerated social system of organised loneliness' where 'we have been encouraged to feel and act like hyper-individualised, competitive subjects who primarily look out for ourselves' (Chatzidakis et al. 2020, p. 45).

Where these encounters intersect with other dimensions of austerity, where community members are being challenged in their personal lives by funding cuts, they take on new significance. Conversations with Jenni, a volunteer and attendee of the art project commented that the group was 'relaxing' (Jenni, Volunteer, Cymorth, 2019) offering an idea of recreation or leisure, but which understood in context also takes on other significance. Jenni is the guardian of her grandchild and worries about the diminished support from the council and uncertainty for their long-term wellbeing and care. Following the council 'selling off' a local youth centre, Jenni says:

there's nothing for children and young adults with disability and they can't always engage with mainstream because it just doesn't work ... They used X youth club for years and years and even now he's still put back by the fact that it's not X... the children with special needs, that's a big knock back ... [it] was really the only centre for children with disability... it's very hard for children with disabilities to go to the mainstream youth centre, because it doesn't work. If it was lower numbers, it might be, but I know it doesn't work, I know

you have to engage in the centre but a long-term youth centre ... I'm not sure how long they can stay at the leisure centre, but then they are restricted because they only have like a small room upstairs and then half of the hall downstairs' (Fieldnotes, Cymorth, 2019).

Therefore, mundane spaces of social interaction can also offer temporary escape and respite from the mental stress induced by austerity in other realms of people's lives, and importantly in a context of otherwise diminishing spaces of community care.

Yet, these social environments are fragile. Spaces are often temporary as they are dependent on short term project funding as discussed above, but additionally the more mutualist momentary aspects of care can also be curtailed or circumscribed through material barriers to access where financial payment is required and people cannot afford to pay, or through cultural barriers which discourage participation and make community members feel unwelcome. For example, one community member at the art project at the Cymorth Community Centre talked about their experience attending a different activity at a different site that led to them feeling excluded:

Joy talked about the shame she felt at one art class where if you didn't have the money to pay for the class then your name was entered into ledger which would be pulled out the following week. This debt would then need to be paid. For Joy it wasn't about the money, 'it wasn't expensive', it was about how people were treated. She didn't go back (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019).

This raises questions over how the micro-management of these spaces can discourage accessibility and how and if community members are made welcome. This calls for a better understanding of the different organisational conditions under which activities take place. This tricky work of 'welcoming' was underlined by a staff member who commented on what they considered fundamental to creating a space that offered support:

Gillian talked about the work done to make the spaces welcoming to all. 'Code of conduct signs' were 'strategically' placed and then sensitive conversations with key people took place, challenging 'in the right way', if something happens that isn't quite right (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019).

On another level, one volunteer spoke of their appreciation of how one issue between community members was being addressed which had been done sensitively, respectfully and confidentially.



They mentioned that this ‘confidentiality’ was essential to their wellbeing, having previously experienced a breach of confidentiality in a different volunteer setting (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019). As a result, care appears to permeate interpersonal relationships and social interactions.

This potential for conflict between community members concerns universal and longstanding challenges in creating communities of openness that foster and recognise the ‘politics of difference’ (Young 1986). While such a task in curating open and public community space is not exclusive to CAT, it does however reveal an important observation made by community members and organisations around the skills needed to manage these spaces. These issues were frequently discussed by the community group at the Cymorth Community Centre. Here, the long trajectory of this group meant that staff had training in community development work and longstanding experiences of community work point towards a legacy of skill accrued under state operation. In this case the legacy of the state does indirectly support the third sector (See Wills 2016), which is likely to contribute to the levels of care developed and informed by the past. Notably, these experiences are likely to be highly situated and uneven across different spaces and offer little substitute for necessary ongoing training to address current practice and the challenges of the future.

The examples I have referred to above focus on how staff and volunteers curate activities and how some spaces become more welcoming and inclusive. The data were based on conversations, rather than observations, with people’s stories relating to their negative experiences of other places often evoked in contrast to the relationships that community members said they enjoyed at my study sites. It is useful to make a methodological observation at this point as community members framing of conflict elsewhere may reveal an unspoken bias or loyalty towards the site where the data was being collected. It also reveals the reliance of the ethnographer on these remembered conversations and limits of participant observation where the researcher might not be in the right place at the right time (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; 2019), and therefore miss witnessing conflict which later can be (un)deliberately concealed.

In this section, the evidence shows the role that CAT spaces play in contributing to community life and illuminates different ways in which these settings can be fostered and/or stifled. These encounters promote health and well-being. This has special significance for those who are experiencing austerity in other aspects of their personal lives where these collective spaces offer refuge from other challenges. These intimacies might be considered forms of palliative care, where they offer forms of respite and endurance. Understanding these momentary acts of emotional investment and attachment to others as quotidian forms of care sets the scene for

connections to wider networks of more explicit forms of care, also evident in CAT which I want to consider further under instances of experimentation in monetary care.

#### 6.6.2 Experiments in care through sharing resources

In different ways each community centre promotes care through the sharing of resources. The data from my fieldwork supported an idea of the importance of sharing, both immaterial skills and knowledge and material goods in creating caring environments (Chatzidakis et al. 2020). In some cases, community members are supported through the sharing and redistribution of resources that help shift dependencies on financial income reinforcing their role as spaces of care and indirectly addressing austerity. In others, more collective experiments are undertaken that have links to ideas of mutual aid that contrast with short term individual charity. These instances are context dependent operating at specific centres and/or through specific activities rather than being associated with or being a direct outcome of CAT itself. Yet, I argue, as community groups are intimately engaged with the lives of community members the wider stresses of austerity are clearly recognised and evident in group responses to individual needs.

The sharing of knowledge as a form of care was present in some of the CAT community centres. At the Cymorth Community Centre, a community advice drop-in connects community members with a dedicated staff member employed to offer community support to 'deal with anyone in debt, or who needs benefits, or anyone who is sort of, like in crisis, they go to Charlie and then she makes sure the correct support is in place' (Beth, volunteer, Cymorth, 2020). At this centre providing knowledge and support to working families through classes for budgeting and access to welfare was a further way in which the centre was able to care for community members through sharing knowledge and tailored to the needs of the community where there was concern over a local rise in the national problems of in-work poverty (Wills and Linneker 2014; Research diary, Cymorth, 2019)). Giving people access to welfare also takes place informally here as one centre manager commented 'those kinds of conversations are going on all the time. It's just a culture of conversations' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2020). This sharing work suggests modest quiet forms of care helping people to 'get by'.

People sharing time also offered an opportunity for reciprocity. For example, at the Cymorth Community Centre volunteers who assist externally funded projects can earn credit which they can spend on a range of recreation activities throughout the city, such as 'to see a film, soft play, or theatres' (Jenni, volunteer, Cymorth, 2019). Here in exchange for giving time to support activities volunteers can access other services and activities.

Sharing also involves material goods. The community drop-in advice service at Cymorth Community Centre gives access advice on debt, state benefits and charitable support such as a Save the Children program to provide referred 'vulnerable families with essential household items... [like] a washing machine' (Daniel, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). At the Cychfan Community Centre the 'honesty café' alongside its economic role to bring in money, also offers bread and cakes to the community, donated by local businesses, 'who recuperate a tax benefit' (Tom, trustee, Cychfan, 2019) at a 'nominal cost' which then goes towards the upkeep of the centre (Research diary, Cychfan, 2019). The sharing of goods to meet material needs also took place at the previously discussed Community Shop at the Cymorth Community Centre that redistributes various material resources to community members. Sarah one of the volunteers explained, people can 'message ahead of time, saying 'look can you help?', with I don't know, say with food and I say 'yes, if we get it, you are quite welcome to it', the shop is open to anybody' (Sarah, volunteer, Cymorth, 2019). During the times that I was in the shop the volunteers tolerated difficult customers and where the 'pay-what-you-can' deposit box, although mentioned by the volunteers, was not insisted on when offering goods (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019). This is an example of community members having come together to set up the shop to help each other out, a charitable act in the sense of giving aid, but not as a top-down organisation interested in making decisions about support, deciding who gets help, nor what strings are attached (Spade 2020), but between each other.

Sharing food was also a care practice at the Cymdaithasol Community Centre through a 'community fridge'. This was as one volunteer explained 'where you can bring food free for people to take, if you have some left-overs, or often there are left-overs from events and people come and take free food' (Vania, volunteer, Cymdaithasol, 2019). Beside the fridge were boxes with clothes and shoes which community members exchanged or donated. Located in a quiet corner, that was not overlooked, people had some privacy to come and go and take what they wanted throughout the day. Accordingly, both the community shop and the fridge offer access to material resources in relatively informal settings where community members can pass through without the requirement to engage in particular behavioural requirements that longer-term charitable interventions might demand (See Sager and Stephens 2005). These actions offer relief through providing important material care and might be seen to promote environmental sustainability and community collaboration. Nonetheless, they appear to help communities endure, to get by, rather than actively address inherent underlying issues of material poverty and need.

During my fieldwork, one further food project that was being set up offered a new model for action to provide for, and in common with, community members. This project involved the setting up a local food pantry to address need through a form of mutual aid. At the Cymorth Community Centre, the setting up of a food club membership scheme was cited by community members as a more active form of care. The community group applied for a lottery grant 'that helps us with our initial set up like buying the big fridges and freezers and things like that' (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). Forty people originally signed up as members (July 2019) which although staff member Daniel thought that 'it might be quite popular' he was 'keen to start on a modest scale and grow it' (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019). Each member pays five pounds a week, 'everyone's five pounds goes in the pot and that's what pays for the food' (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2020). The food is sourced from FareShare, the UK wide network of charitable food redistributors who:

have a network of supermarkets who donate their surplus stock for free ... so you get so many kilos of food per member you have in the pantry. We have to pay for that, but it's really little compared to the value of the food (Daniel, staff member, Cymorth, 2020).

This food is supplemented by 'other useful staples' bought wholesale using a proportion of the membership fee, and an ambition to support micro businesses like the 'local meat man' or the 'fruit and veg guys'. In the pantry a colour coded system is used with members allowed to help themselves to items, 'the fruit and the veg, they can have as much as they like, it's not limited' (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

During early conversations with Daniel, a staff member who helped set up the pantry, and later conversations with Beth the manager it was clear that the intentions behind the pantry went beyond simply providing food. There was talk of events organised by and for the members around food that involves:

either sharing the skills the membership has, so people might say, you know, 'I'm a great cake decorator. I'll run a workshop', and kind of supporting that to happen, or it's bringing some outside person in who's going to then share their skills (Daniel, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

One of the events that took place centred on 'certain vegetables people wouldn't even contemplate taking, because one, they don't know what it is, and two, the definitely wouldn't know how to cook with it, so it's getting them in and showing them how to use it' (Beth, staff

member, Cymorth, 2019). These interactions link to wider debates around 'healthy' eating yet are less demanding and reciprocal in the space of the Pantry than other practices that solicitate participation in cooking classes that can have more moralist overtones. For example, in other situations the highly problematic positioning of food knowledge and practice as a general problem for the working-class has been used to mobilise condescending philanthropic interventions to teach people how to cook (Hollows and Jones 2010).

The pantry also served as a space for people to get advice and support, Beth commented that some pantry members 'had never heard of the Cymorth Community Centre before' and 'through conversations they were having with people as they were sat down waiting, or I'd be walking through and having chats with people' then 'they'd start the arts group or make an appointment to see Charlie, who runs the community advice drop-in (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). The aims behind the pantry project also suggest an intention to go beyond ideas that people used the service only because of need and sought to give people a more dignified experience as mentioned by Daniel the project lead:

the pantry is an example of the centre moving things in a certain direction, Daniel says it is 'trying to be more aspirational, in a good sense, giving people something that is not second best, they are not here because they don't have money'. Daniel is keen that the pantry is somewhere where people want to come and shop, not to do a weekly shop but somewhere that people want to come, to get what they want, to have social engagement, they want people here not only because of economic drivers, they want people to have a positive experience. (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019).

The idea of a positive experience chimes with ideas the community group has behind the pantry to challenge other forms of care that may have a negative impact on community members. This was most keenly expressed through conversations around why the centre decided on adopting a pantry model rather than taking a more conventional approach to offer food through a foodbank:

basically, we are trying to remove the stigma of foodbanks, because people who are in our communities, even though they are in crisis they won't use a foodbank, so this is offering them an alternative to it. You know, very low-cost way of being able to supply them with good nutritious food (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

This intention influenced the way in which the space was configured, i) physically, with smart new upright glass fronted fridges, stainless steel shelving units and wicker baskets that gave it the

aesthetic of an upmarket grocer, ii) operationally, where members could come in and relatively freely choose the food they wanted, and iii) through a sense of ownership, where members accessed a space for food that they had contributed towards. Beth summed it up as follows:

we wanted to completely step away from a foodbank, we didn't want it to look like a foodbank, we wanted it to be more of a shop, we wanted to make sure people have choice, you know, when they go to foodbank they are just handed a bag of food, we wanted it to be completely opposite to that, we wanted it that when they came in they didn't feel like they were coming into a charity building they were coming into a shop basically, like as if they were wandering around Tesco's or whatever (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

Therefore, in setting up the Pantry the community group was aware of its challenge to the social stigmatisation of food banks. Yet, this switch brings its own challenges as the Pantry model is dependent on surplus food distribution from FareShare whose modus operandi might be described as 'corporate market correction mechanism' (Warshawsky 2018).

At the same time, the organised mutualism of the pantry also has parallels with the co-operative food stores that emerged from the co-operative movement that aimed to combine the formation of mutual aid businesses with the creation of communities that centred on co-operative life from which emerged co-operative societies where investors, workers and customers built up activities and shared in the surpluses (Wyler 2017).

Sharing also took place at Cymorth and by January 2021 there were 'four hundred and thirty members on the books' (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019) and the pantry had been instrumental in providing access to food throughout the 2020 Covid-19 lockdowns where over a 'six-month period we delivered three and a half thousand food bags of veg, chilled and like your tins and stuff' (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). As Beth explained 'we've had a lot of people that were not pantry members come to us through one or other service' (Beth, staff member, Cymorth, 2019) again attesting to the role of the centre in providing care, in this way through forms of altruism.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020, the centre expanded this mutual aid scheme, distributing food through a newly established Community Food Service that 'moved out to a delivery model ... delivering to fifty to sixty families a week and managed to keep the membership model going' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). The centre, which was otherwise closed to the public, used

the food that was left over to prepare meals for people who needed them and food bags for young people where 'they get a new recipe with all the ingredients they need and maybe sharing what they make online' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019). This new food work that the centre was involved in was part of a:

city-wide bit of work around food resilience and supporting other communities to get pantries up and running and things like that. So, the food side of what we do is becoming more and more kind of important part of what we do, and we are starting to look at influencing policy and things around that (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

These intentions begin to speak of the sense of a stronger role of community in care emerging at the Cymorth Community Centre, about acting and going beyond merely meeting peoples' needs, the seeds of which can be found in the pantry. In my original conversation with Daniel, he talked about his aspiration to engage with people and their needs, to move beyond charity:

what [do] people already know and what they're interested in and trying to bring those into the centre, not to try to make the centre a place that fills gaps, some of that inevitably happens and is important if people who come here that are hungry, we will fill in that gap, if they are needing that we will do that, but we didn't want to just be doing that, we want some stuff that is life enhancing. It's not just about people's basic needs (Daniel, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

These actions suggest a potential for more than momentary relationships to contribute towards proactive practices of care that can engage with and counter austerity. Might these actions be understood as the basis of a caring politics? What Tronto calls 'caring with' referring to how we mobilise in order to transform our world (2013). This attempt to go beyond charity by organising people together to provide support to help each other has parallels to similar forms of mutual aid in history.

An important historic local example of mutual aid is the Tredegar Medical Aid Society that allowed workers to provide medical attendance for their families through a weekly financial contribution that could be seen as a forerunner of five-pound weekly pantry payments. As Thompson (2003) outlines the Tredegar Medical Aid Society developed a variegated payment system over 50 years which covered 95 per cent of the town's population by the 1920s. Miners and steelworkers paying 2d for each pound which was deducted from their weekly wages with so-called 'town subscribers' paying 18s per year directly for the service. Thus, different means were accounted for but under

the same provision. Additionally, the scheme also supported aged workmen and widows free of charge, and with other similar societies in south Wales made provision for the unemployed during the interwar depression (Thompson 2003). These societies were ‘an articulation not only of an individualised notion of self-help, but also of collectivised mutuality that made the sick and ill a charge on the whole community’ (Thompson 2003, p. 88), and in the words of one subscriber ‘one helps the other, and hundreds and hundreds there are who, if they did not club together in this kind of way, would never be able to get any doctor at all’ (Merthyr Express, 25 January 1902. quoted in Thompson 2003, p. 88). Crucially, one of the workmen who sat on the committee, Aneurin Bevan, later as minister for health in the Labour government at Westminster (1945-51) was responsible for the introduction of the National Health Service and it is this link that is often evoked by scholars as a lesson in the potential for local action that informs national practice with international influence (Chatzidakis et al. 2020; May et al. 2020). In common with this argument, I suggest that the pantry shows the potential of community action where the spaces of CAT can act as a fulcrum, or pivot, around which these new agendas of mutual aid beyond charity might develop.

### 6.6.3 A hope for compassionate activism?

Explicit talk of activism across these sites of CAT is rare. Actions are orientated towards ‘getting by’, and are otherwise, or at least outwardly, largely understood through the caring forms of collective endurance described above. On one level, ‘activism’ as a practice of political action to elicit political change is quite distinct from this empirically grounded idea of collective endurance that does not appear to be intentionally or consciously political in the sense of trying to change the world. Nonetheless in offering different forms of care this work is deeply political. Attending to emotional, social, and material needs has deep political significance in contributing to the ways in which people endure everyday life under capitalism. The emergent actions of care I have sought to document in this chapter are, I argue, part of the wider work that sustains society of social reproduction, understood as ‘complex networks of social processes and human relations that produce the conditions of existence’ (Bhattacharya 2017, p. 2). This work is very important in austerity. In agreement with Nancy Fraser (2017), I would argue that in a context where the capacities of individuals, households and communities to sustain themselves, and more broadly society, are currently being ‘squeezed’ by capitalism this contributes to the general economic, ecological and political crises that all intersect and exacerbate each other. Therefore, in this way collective endurance is politically important even if it is not always recognised as such, either on the ground and/or within academia.



On a different level, locally based 'activism' can also carry ideas of resistance. The work of community groups here is not outwardly opposed to the state but rather engages with government mechanisms for survival. Resistance then would not be loud and spectacular (For example see Harvey 1972; 2012), but is perhaps aligned with quieter and/or more everyday actions. In the literature review I have already discussed the intricacies and nuances of such work that repositions activism, variously qualified as: 'everyday' (Larner and Craig 2005; Chatterton and Pickerill 2010), 'dormant and embedded' (Maynard 2018), 'implicit' (Horton and Kraftl 2009) and, 'quiet' (Pottinger 2016) (See literature review for a fuller discussion). Each of these in their own way might serve to help (re)frame the forms of collective endurance I posit above. However, within these works that draw out new grammars of activism there are underlying political intentions that drive these understandings. Political intentions have often been elusive in my ethnographic work, although present in different forms of care, a notion which itself is often used within geography to suggest political and ethical work beyond endurance and towards more progressive action, if not activism (See Conradson 2011; Williams et al. 2012). Such political endeavour is also part of an understanding of mutual aid as a 'collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them based on a shared understanding that the conditions in which we are made to live are unjust' (Spade 2020, p. 7)

In conversation with many of the community members the idea that they are engaged in a form of activism was often rejected, where changes to the operation of the building mean that 'mainly the focus for us has been on a business model, a lot of it is about keeping the building going' (Research diary, Cymdaithasol, 2019). Such approaches do not detract from the care work that they do, nor do they restrict the potential for social transformation where the care and attention that individuals receive allows people to lead better lives.

Yet, more explicit and intentional 'activism', albeit speculative, did also exist. In asking Peter, one of the centre staff and the Cymorth Community Centre, about the community groups role in austerity he talked about how 'in terms of the political engagement side of things' the centre was set up around asset-based Community Development. This approach Peter explained was based on asking:

What can a community like ours do for itself in cooperation with each other...  
approaching it more positively and acknowledging that people do have solutions to local issues (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

Peter went on to clarify that this approach can be transformative, and political:

You know when they're able to contribute and have that celebrated amongst a group of people... That has massive implications for mental health and physical health and all sorts of other things. I think in that sense we react against the whole danger that you make everything into a political issue in as much as you expect someone else to problem solve your problems (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2019).

Here then there is a recognition that people can contribute towards their own wellbeing. However, as Peter goes on to explain, this is not simply asking people to take responsibility for themselves encouraged by communitarianism (Etzioni 1996), there is recognition that there are many external issues that impact on the everyday lives of the inhabitants to which different responses are necessary:

moving into sort of political take on things, we also recognize that a lot of the things we're struggling with in communities like ours do have structural and sort of political aspects to them. It's about decisions that are being made by people, you know, in government or by employers... and that we don't have the power to challenge to change that in our community (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2020).

Beyond recognition of the limits to local action, Peter explained that one way to tackle external pressures was in being involved in wider community networks and organisations (See Alinsky 1989) through actively participating in different groups across the city, Wales and the UK. The group is affiliated with a UK wide alliance of community organisations committed to taking action together for social justice and the common good:

So, we're involved... What we try and do is work together to identify sort of shared needs across those Communities and then we campaign, and we push for sort of political change (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2020).

Peter describes the current projects of this national organisation that include 'pushing the living wage agenda', and 'work around Refugee support and resettlement and sponsorship'. As Peter explains, this broader work is involved in:

'Tackling local issues, very localized issues with the same approach, which is that we will pinpoint an issue. So, one issue we've tackled is local parking problems outside a local

primary school and we seek to get a seat at the table with whoever's responsible for that issue be it Council officials or counsellors, and we sort of look to get them to change things and it will put pressure on and find ways of putting pressure on creatively if we're not getting what we want' (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2020).

The link between bringing together the wider political activism of the organisation and the local experiences is key to this community group to collectively address the everyday issues that people are confronted with:

That grows out of our asset-based work ... that's the grounding, that's about what people can do with each other and for ourselves together ... for us is never about that sort of Tory individualistic each man for himself looking after himself. It's about a collective sort of cooperative sort of approach, but actually like from that you're also building power because you've got people then that can put pressure on the people that they will or will not vote for in the next election (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2020).

Peter is passionate about how the centre 'engages politically' and how 'it's really an important part of what we do' but something that 'we have struggled to do' and looks forward to how staff might become more involved in 'small-scale actions together in our community and then growing from there' (Research diary, Cymorth, 2019). This is quiet activism that has wide implications, is cognizant of the challenges of protest and of addressing austerity:

I think the danger is a lot of what's done in the name of trying to get political change is that it's not particularly effective, it's just, you know, turn up for a march or wave a placard. I was involved in the Iraq War demonstrations back whenever that was, you know, and it just felt so frustrating by the end of it. You can get that many people out on the street and it makes fwck all difference. So, I think, you know, for us the good thing about the X organisation is it really wants to get action and see change and they are not really interested in doing things for the sake of making a noise or just you know, it's actually about organizing really well and building power. So, I think for us we're the beginning of our journey, but it is really important, and austerity is obviously part of that we're trying to challenge (Peter, staff member, Cymorth, 2020).

As a result, alongside everyday actions that recognise people's struggles are ways in which new solidarities can be grown that through wider networks go beyond the neighbourhoods securing food for themselves to challenging systems of distribution or can fight in-work poverty national

through a collective call for a living wage, building broader political participation and mobilisation to tackle root causes of distress. Is there then a hope for compassionate activism in these spaces and the potential for the beginnings of a more vocal advocacy where groups use knowledge of local experiences and through wider networks seek to campaign against inequality?

## 6.7 Discussion and chapter conclusion

My ethnographic work has shown that community groups have engaged in CAT, to variously secure community space, local services and as a site from which to sustain a place-based community development project, in response to state withdrawal of financial support for community infrastructure. Constructing an understanding of this process through a neoliberal lens to explain these actions as the co-option of community helps to understand the wider political and economic forces behind this very local practice. Attending to the technologies of operation reveals how these spaces are co-constituted by drawing community space into market logics, relying on volunteerism which promotes ideas of the marketable neoliberal self (Gershon 2011) along with the potential to reinforce multiple inequalities as a gendered, racialized and classed practice (Hall 2020) and offers a site for insecure work that is subject to short term funding leaving workers economically vulnerable while putting the long term benefits of projects at risk. Recognising these challenges is important.

Yet, as I have aimed to show, alongside these technologies of CAT, other processes co-exist that unsettle the narrative of an 'unstoppable and hegemonic global set of forces that remake human societies to conform to market logics' (Tronto 2017, p. 28). I propose that thinking about the actions of community groups as a form of collective endurance helps to recognise these existing empirical experiments in diverse economies (Gibson-Graham 2008) as a countermove to the market (Polanyi 2001 [1944]). Furthermore it shows how unpaid work can be born out of solidarity and reciprocity, rather than the assumption of responsibility and self-sacrifice (See Etzioni 1997), but within the context of great precarity.

As emergent but precarious infrastructures these spaces become key nodes in the reconfiguration of care in these 'meantimes' (See Cloke et al. 2017). The momentary acts of care that provide emotional support and respite, the experiments in care sharing resources and setting up new practices of long term-mutual aid, and the hope of compassionate activism. These forms of care intersect with many dimensions of everyday austerity and position community, alongside the family (Cox 2013) and religious groups (Cloke et al. 2020) as another arena to mitigate the neoliberal responsibilisation of individuals to care for themselves through the market. For

example, as part of new infrastructures of care these organisations and spaces can collectively help to alleviate the additional burden of social reproduction on women disproportionately affected by austerity (Fraser 2017), albeit using individual gendered unpaid labour (Grimshaw 2011).

Yet, these spaces offer more than simply a balm to austerity. Learning about these spaces help us to understand the importance of care and the care work that takes place but also reveals new forms of collective, mutual and reciprocal care that are not tied to individualism and/or the promotion of private interests through the market. Here also is the potential for new mechanisms through which to understand the needs of local communities and the ways in which these voices can be heard, listened to, and acted upon through compassionate activism.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion

In this final chapter I reflect on my findings and argue for continuing open theoretical engagement with practice to explore the emergence of CAT and its impacts. In doing so, I propose that my approach offers an opportunity to uncover not only what is possible but also what is obscured from view (Gibson-Graham 2006). I have worked to develop modes of thinking and approaches that I believe offer insight into how people cope with the messiness of everyday life in the context of economic and associated institutional change (Wood and Smith 2008). I call for engagement with the ambivalence of Community Asset Transfer and for sensitive inquiry that seeks to identify problems as part of a wider conversation around their resolution. In approaching CAT in this way, I propose that we can develop a wide, broad, and nuanced threefold understanding of CAT practices. Firstly, this acknowledges the context and role of austerity but is not overwhelmed by structural accounts. Secondly, it recognises how CAT as an event of economic austerity coalesces with and illuminates multiple layers of pre-existing and austerity induced inequalities. Thirdly, it goes beyond framings of community groups as merely co-opted in order to see and engage with their survival following the withdrawal of the state. In doing so, we can also reveal new spaces of care, collective endurance and a hope for compassionate resistance. I now draw this thesis to a close by setting out my contributions, the limitations of this study and suggest further considerations for future research.

### 7.1 Contributing

My thesis contributes to academic knowledge: empirically through analysis of extensive new data; conceptually through exploring different approaches, and theoretically through maintaining a politically open understanding of CAT.

#### 7.1.1 Empirical contributions

My thesis makes a four-fold empirical contribution. Firstly, by presenting original analysis and data of the spatial and temporal characteristics of CAT based on a new fine-grained dataset of CAT practice in Britain based on individual cases. Secondly, in acknowledging the nuance of the deliberative work of local authorities. Thirdly, in bearing witness to how these sites are becoming key nodes in the reconfiguration of care. Fourthly, in drawing these threads together to suggest new understandings of CAT practice.

Firstly, I have created one of the first datasets on CAT in Britain. This data contributes to understanding the scale, prevalence, and uneven geographies of CAT, and contextualises this within neoliberal austerity. This dataset demonstrates intimate relationships between austerity and CAT. This is particularly evident in the data for England where there is a very strong correlation between the increase in the number of CATs and the decrease in the revenue spending power of local authorities. This association between austerity and CAT was further drawn out through exploratory statistical work based on cluster and bivariate analysis (See Marsh and Elliott 2008). This work revealed that the spatial patterns in the CAT data shared similar characteristics with recent studies of the uneven geographical distribution and impact of austerity (Amin Smith et al. 2016b; Beatty and Fothergill 2016b; Gray and Barford 2018). The data suggest that the more prevalent CAT practice the more likely it coincides with these austerity landscapes. The data for England shows that there is a greater prevalence of CAT in areas that, i) have had greater cuts to local government spending, ii) higher cuts to welfare by local authority, and iii) are more deprived. In Wales and Scotland, the data is less conclusive being limited by small case numbers and outliers, yet neither do they rule out the possibility that CAT is statistically associated with austerity.

Secondly, I offer empirical detail on the local logics employed in the establishment of CAT practice. This acknowledges and reveals the in-situ narratives and justifications that guide practice and present a local expression of politics that is necessary to understand CAT. These local logics ranged from, i) the decoupling of assets from their social role through 'rendering technical' (Li 2007) their management under objective building, ii) a form of moral distancing whereby CAT were sacrificed to save 'frontline services' (Llandinas Council officer, 2019), iii) shifting of responsibility and incorporation of assets into a market-based system of individual enterprise, iv) different approaches that fragment the ethos of a coordinated and universal provision of assets. These attest to the bureaucratic and market-focused norms associated with neoliberalism. CAT can also mitigate the effects of bureaucratic and market norms deployed alongside changing civic and moral values, serving to mute critiques of CAT practice. Yet, local knowledge of local practice of CAT also offers a looseness in the resulting relationship between local authorities and community groups. Groups are largely left to fend for themselves and given a degree of autonomy by councils. This is partly due to a practical response by councils who consider long term scrutiny of CATs impractical where local authorities lack financial resources. However, my engagement in the afterlives of the transferred CAT recognises action that includes local resistance where unequal access to resources causes dissent and/or establishes them as sites where wider inequalities can be contested. Recognizing these details is important in how we understand CAT beyond notions of co-option.

Thirdly, my ethnographic work contributes empirically by giving a sense of how community groups are working within these spaces of state retrenchment to provide care and in doing so are appropriating them for more progressive actions. As such, these spaces of care offer refuge, and/or challenge neoliberal austerity at the same time as being products of and subject to these rationalities.

CATs offer momentary and experimental acts of care that promote a form of collective endurance. 'Collective' in the sense that they bring people together, offering a counter to the individualisation promoted under neoliberalism, where the burden of care is mitigated through being shared between community members. This care infrastructure stands as another safety net alongside family and friends as the state recedes. 'Endurance' in the sense of surviving not only state abandonment from these assets and services, but also where these spaces offer respite from other forms of withdrawal that emerge through fiscal constraint.

In the spaces of CAT, a quiet politics (Askins 2014) of care with an emphasis on the role of emotions is established. 'Quiet' as in Pottinger's (2016) quiet activism that recognises small everyday acts of kindness, connection and creativity that avoid more vocal and antagonistic forms of activism. This is important here since some local people modestly frame care 'not as a protest but as supporting people and making sure they can make ends meet' (Beth, Centre worker, Cymorth, 2019). Although quiet, this care is deeply political. Care that attends to emotional and material needs, understood as social reproduction, helps people endure everyday life under capitalism (Bhattacharya 2017). Community Asset Transfer is at risk from being gendered, classed and racialised (Fraser 2017; Hall 2020), therefore require further investigation.

Additionally, there exists, in some CATs, more explicit political acts of care that provide hope for compassionate activism and resistance. Forms of care are evident where communities are motivated to address the issues that impact on their lives through engaging with external support groups. This is an opportunity for community organisation where this care work recognises local experiences and sets out to collectively address the everyday issues that people are confronted with (See Alinsky 1989). Thus, there is a hope for a growing community activism that seeks to build broader political participation and can mobilise to tackle the root causes of inequality that are found at and through these spaces.

Fourthly, through the triangulation of data, across scales, theoretical viewpoints and methods, new notions emerge around how CAT reinforces and/or transcends social inequality. Bringing



together the findings from across the three research stages addresses an overarching concern over the relationship of CAT with social inequality. I propose that this issue, implicit in many of the conversations with research participants, is integral to any exploration of CAT that seeks to engage in the 'real-world' problematic as part of a process to find solutions. On one level, the data can be drawn together in such a way as to tell a powerful story of austerity. The mapping of CAT draws strong associations with economic austerity. As local authorities apply local logics of market norms to contend with austerity this justification is used to compound and justify CAT practice. Additionally, in the spaces of CAT workers' personal fatigue and job insecurity are revealed. While these experiences are not directly linked to the taking on of community spaces through CAT per se, they testify to the insecure nature of the short term funding models of the community sector (Blake 2020), and show how emotional and material burdens of austerity coalesce for both those who deliver and receive services. Yet, on another level, understanding these sites based on the evidence of their function as spaces of care, collective endurance and compassionate activism must also be recognised. (Re)assessed in this way, the mapping of CAT contributes not only through recording an austerity event and its geographies but can additionally be read as co-existing with other practices that invite more hopeful interpretations.

#### 7.1.2 Conceptual contributions

In my literature review I drew on a variety of concepts and notions associated with CAT - such as austerity localism, progressive localism, the shrinking state, and the rise of volunteerism – which warrant further consideration at this stage. I argue that on their own these ideas were not sufficient to reach a sufficiently detailed understanding of CAT on at least two accounts.

First, approached individually each discrete concept cannot, and does not, fully cover the myriad viewpoints, intentions and experiences of communities dealing with CAT. For example, 'austerity localism' could be used to position CAT as a practice whereby the state applies localism as a discursive tool through which to promote anti-state and anti-public narratives to implement roll-back neoliberalism (Featherstone et al. 2012). Linked to this idea CAT could also represent a quotidian manifestation of the potential retreat of the state from its customary interventions of redistribution (Boschma et al. 2018), embodying not only a withdrawal physical assets but also cuts to social programmes, a reduction in public service jobs and underfunding of social infrastructures (Lobao et al. 2018). These suggest a regressive and reactionary form of CAT practice.

However, as my empirical data demonstrates these are not the only processes at play whereby communities are developing more progressive practices of care, mutualism and activism. This in turn suggests, and at the other end of the spectrum, notions of 'progressive localism' can may account for these aspects of CAT. Yet, 'progressive localism' is set up to oppose and reclaim localism as offering potential for more politically progressive actions through outward looking strategies for negotiating global processes and creating positive links between places and social groups (Mackinnon et al. 2011). Yet, CAT has been shown to be neither wholly reactionary, nor progressive. Thus, given that CAT is neither one form of localism or the other, understandings that attempt to position it as such are fraught with difficulty and could potentially ultimately limit understandings of this practice by preconfiguring its politics before empirical scrutiny. In some ways this has parallels to the indeterminacy of volunteerism, a key component of CAT practice, which can be linked to both conservative political thought that argues for a revived civil society as a response to an oversized state (Blond 2010), and more progressive aspects of mutual support and service (Kenny et al. 2017). CAT appears to be co-constituted by opposing rationalities meaning that definitive accounts are tricky to establish.

Second, and related to the indeterminateness of CAT practice, is the undesirability of any attempt to articulate a definitive account of CAT. CAT is highly contextual and dependent on a constellation of different factors that include the deliberation of local government values, the legacies of assets, local services and community group capacities and experiences. This presents a challenge to wider understandings of this practice which need to account for the actual existing possibilities for on-the-ground innovation as well as the devastating effects of austerity driven state retrenchment.

To understand CAT I have taken a non-foundational, non-deterministic approach that is not dominated by totalising or overpowering political economy narratives of austerity, yet also seeks to acknowledge the political economic shifts that shape CAT practice. Such an approach to knowledge allows for new ways of thinking about community action in times of austerity to emerge through consideration of on-the-ground practices that both local authorities and community groups experiment with to realise CAT. Here pragmatism is a useful tool to openly explore CAT. It is useful politically to reach beyond retrenchment and totalising structural narratives to engage with forms of care in austerity, where community action results in new, different, or unexpected practices that promote different ways of being. This includes actions such as collectivism and mutualism beyond but still within the vicissitudes of neoliberalism.

This can be seen in relation to my consideration of local authorities where through study of deliberative institutions, understandings of the local politics involved in CAT are revealed. This involves asking how we should understand local authorities in relation to this practice. We should not approach local authorities and CATs through overdetermining narratives of retrenchment and co-option. Likewise, we should not see local authorities as functionary and mechanical conduits for government policy. Rather, and drawing on the work of Fuller (2017), we should acknowledge and understand them as deliberative actors that apply local logics to drive CAT practice. Therefore, far from docile functionaries in the implementation of austerity, local authorities are conceptualised as deliberative actors in relation to CAT often bringing into play distinct rationales and values. Engaging in these local logics allows for an understanding of the multiplicity of CAT practice to emerge. This acknowledges the local narratives and justifications, the essence of the politics of what happens on the ground. In doing so, this also opens and recognises the opportunities for agency that can foster different results and politics.

Furthermore, an open conceptual approach to the lived experiences within individual CATs makes an important contribution to knowledge. This work involves asking open questions about Community Asset Transfer such as, what is happening in these spaces? Who is involved? What purpose do these spaces serve? These questions are important because in responding to them different ideas are brought to the fore which subsequently helps to move beyond well-worn caricatures.

This takes concrete form in relation to the critique of community action being driven by the 'usual suspects' (Wills 2016), who profess the skills and capacity to engage. On one level this warns of potential unevenness where some groups are more able to take on active roles. Across my case studies there is strong participation of those who conform to this stereotype. However, on another level and of greater concern, some academics have drawn one-dimensional derogatory caricatures of community linked to a critique of the role that community plays in governance. For example, where community action is intertwined in top-down policies or initiatives it has been castigated as a tool complicit in a neoliberal dismantling of the state. As noted earlier, Peck and Tickell (2002) notoriously branded 'community' as "little platoons" of local voluntary and faith-based associations who were mobilised in the service of extra market forms of governance and as part of a wider bid to organise society through market economies rather than state interventions. This language undoubtedly mirrors Edmund Burke's (2003 [1790]) eulogy to traditionalist conservative values of the community unit encouraging individuals 'to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections' (2003 [1790], p. 40). Consequently, community action becomes narrowly defined as complicit, co-opted and

staunchly conservative where it takes on such a role. However, as I have shown the community groups that I have worked with show stories of collective endurance, survival and even activism. This decentres distorted representations of community where spaces are adopted by well-meaning middle-class volunteers or social enterprises at the instigation of the state.

In this way my work unsettles literatures on community infrastructure in times of austerity. Critical scholarship on contemporary community infrastructure often focuses on the affective geographies of loss, where 'the uncertainty generated by these moves is tied to feelings of loss and anxiety over the shrinking of our collective social worlds'. (Hitchen and Shaw 2019). However, through CAT the loss experienced through austerity has also been accompanied by community action and survival. The specific case of CAT demands new ways of understanding and links to calls for a wider exploration of the growing role of community in the city (Amin 2000; DeVerteuil et al. 2020).

Additionally, my non-foundational approach regulates my own work and highlights the value of openness to further and changing understandings of the world. This was present in my own (re)interpretations of my survey data. On one level, this dataset represents a documentation of CAT as an austerity event, further revealing and detailing the impact of austerity. This is CAT understood as a tool to reduce local authority budgets by offloading the running, maintenance and employment costs for these assets and associated services onto community groups. Yet on another level, CAT represents a form of mitigation, where the taking on of assets by community groups offers an alternative to closure and/or privatisation for private financial gain. In recognising the work that community groups do within these spaces further alters understandings or CAT practice towards possibilities for care, quiet politics and even a hope for activism.

### 7.1.3 Theoretical contributions

Theoretically, pragmatism offers a useful way to think about CAT. Through embracing pluralism, we can understand the nuance of local understandings and theorise these individual sites as spaces of care. As such, this framework offers an approach to CAT that can challenge dominant stories in other areas.

Where a political economy approach offers strong theory to understand CAT, pragmatism as a 'weak' theory based on an exploratory non-foundational approach is a useful tool to explore the politics and ambivalences of CAT and other sites implicated in austerity where retrenchment and structural violence have removed people's social and community infrastructures (I use the term

‘weak’ here as a description of the contingent nature of knowledge that pragmatism posits in contrast to more prescriptive ‘hard’ theory such as Marxist political economy or governmentality which have predetermined approaches to knowledge). Politically, pragmatism is useful because it can bring polarised arguments together around issues that emerge in-situ and move away from what might be narrow political approaches.

My thesis does not foreclose what constitutes politics, activism, or care are. Rather I have attempted to see these as they are practiced and as they emerge in-situ. In this regard, taking a pragmatist approach engages with the work of Sarah Hughes, which aims to disrupt conceptualisations of resistance within geography that are ‘characterised by a predetermination of form that particular actions or actors must assume to constitute resistance’ (Hughes 2019, p. 1141). We should question how we are to understand and account for types of emergent resistance, question what counts as reworking activism, resilience, and politics. In doing so, we may productively transcend and/or refine current notions. This seeks to understand actions beyond narrow framings of politics, as either ultimately progressive or reactionary in a bid to encourage recognition of other practices and approaches. Through this theoretical toolkit many questions can be asked, especially with regard to the nature of political agency and how it might be expressed? This offers an open approach to knowledge rather than resorting to a particular doctrine which might otherwise involve more focused data collection and analysis but potentially default to confirmatory hypothesis testing and thus closing the possibility for new ideas to emerge.

Underpinning my thesis, then, is this central theme of openness. My thesis seeks to offer a theoretical framework to bring to light, rather than conceal, the ethical and political ambivalences and possibilities of community practice. The example of CAT reorientates understandings of the potential of community action away from totalising characterisation – a co-opted product of neoliberalisation – and instead suggests that community action may also incubate forms of collectivism and mutualism that offer an outlet for activism that challenges the impact of austerity, albeit co-constituted through austerity.

In addition, there are wider implications on my use of pragmatism, as a problematic, and as a method, and for pragmatist approaches across the social sciences. As a problematic the world view of pragmatism offers a philosophy of knowledge that is not bounded by universal laws or truths, but rather is based on a belief that ideas are not fixed but are instead formed contingently and experimentally in response to particular needs (Barnes 2008). This helps transcend mechanical hypothesis testing and (re)engages academic work in difficult uncertain problems that

are not decided, definite or settled. On reflection, given my prior vocational/professional training as an Architect I am perhaps pre-conditioned and drawn to practical and grounded approaches that seek to solve problems rather than challenge processes through abstract theoretically driven critiques. Yet, I also sustain that there is also enormous value in grounding academic inquiry in pragmatism that starts with a 'real-world' problem that requires resolution rather than pursuing theoretical fealty. Wills (2021) has argued that such an approach through pragmatism can lead to the development of new ideas so that new actions, outcomes and consequences are possible. This is important in a context where processes are often simply dismissed as yet another example of the subjugation through the narrow application of theoretical perspectives such as Marxist political economy, governmentality, or notions such as austerity localism, or struggle to establish themselves definitively as progressive due to their inauspicious origins.

To be clear, my support of pragmatism here is also grounded in critical reflection and draws on theoretical ideas where they are useful to help further knowledge of processes – where part of the value of academia in pragmatist debate is to bring other knowledge for discussion (Geiselhart 2020). Yet theoretical ideas are brought as tools for debate not to constrain or limit understandings and outcomes of the processes within which people are involved. This is also related to an idea of pragmatism as engaged in *experimenting* (Bridge 2021) where academics should exercise humility and/or modesty in their approach to knowledge and resist making claims of knowledge about real-world processes a priori. Furthermore, we should also be aware of the possibilities of pragmatism as recognising the ability of community members to engage in deliberation (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]; Boltanski 2011 [2009]; Fuller 2017). This sensitivity to the potential of debate and dialogue is important to help social science engage with processes as possibilities which might otherwise be overlooked. This open approach is especially important in highly contested circumstances such as austerity, and highly ambiguous practices such as CAT, since it offers the possibility of encouraging further discussion and even fostering productive advances through agreement, rather than retrenchment through recourse to binary ideas and/or opposing ideologies. This is of course difficult work and exposes academics and academia to the pitfalls of coercion and engagement with potentially regressive political ideologies. Yet as my empirical data for CAT demonstrates, in some cases some social processes remain politically ambivalent and progressively hopeful, and thus suitable for further exploration. CAT sometimes demonstrates reactionary politics and also sometimes strive to implement more progressive actions – the offer of pragmatism is engagement in these processes with the opportunity to guide them towards better solutions. This suggests that there are opportunities for social science to engage with some contemporary processes in a productive way that moves beyond mere critique.

My use of pragmatism here as a method also has implications for pragmatist approaches in social sciences. I have shown how through a pragmatist framework different ways of knowing can be incorporated into overall understandings of CAT as a messy practice with the potential to be both reactionary and progressive. My focus across three different geographical scales, national, local authority and individual asset-level has drawn different understandings through different empirical data. Collectively this has calibrated my overall view of practice that is not exclusively confined to the uneven geographies registered across national practice, nor is it only an expression of the mobilisation of local justifications at local authority level, nor simply a more ambivalent action of care in austerity within individual sites. This work has helped to challenge the ossification of my own biases towards CAT practice as my work on my thesis has developed over time and has led me to appreciate the productive value of ambivalence and search for solutions that pragmatism fosters.

On a more practical note, my use of pragmatism as a method has helped to operationalise my different approaches to data collection in relation to how elements of quantitative and qualitative inquiry can be combined for the purposes of gaining an understanding of breadth, depth and corroboration (Johnson et al. 2007). In doing so, I suggest that my thesis demonstrates the value of pragmatism to systematise such open and experimental inquiry that produces useful multiple connections and understandings. Engaging across different scales and methods has provided rich data and goes beyond that which might otherwise be obtained from a more limited approach to study population and research instruments.

## 7.2 Limitations

The limitations of my work span across these empirical, conceptual, and theoretical contributions. Empirically I present potentially the most extensive mapping of CAT to date but cannot offer an exhaustive account of CATs in Britain. My data is selective, offering partial insight and knowledge. This is not merely a practical issue, where my mapping of the distribution of CAT produced an antimacassar of coverage with some non-responses to the Freedom of Information requests, but also relates to the pragmatist nature of the data that is understood as always fallible, incomplete and in flux. Nonetheless the data provides an empirical resource through which concepts may be explored to aid understanding of CAT among the public, practitioners, academics, policy makers and politicians.

Similarly, there are empirical limitations to ethnographic data due to the temporalities of fieldwork. Immersion in these sites took place over a considerable period and are highly contextual. Data comes from a particular viewpoint that may not relate to what went before or what has come after – this is particularly pertinent where most fieldwork took place before Covid-19 lockdowns – data is bounded by very specific configurations of time, place, and actors that are constantly changing and being formed differently. Yet, being exploratory in nature and taking an approach that does not seek to present this data as a fixed ‘truth’ I use this data as a tool through which to further inquiry and seek problem resolution in keeping with a pragmatist approach.

Moreover, there is a potential theoretical limitation to my use of pragmatism. Wills (2021) suggests that pragmatism must be alert to the pluralism of community and context rather than assuming problems are part of abstract debate. For Wills (ibid), pragmatism is a contingent response to a problematic situation and provokes a process of social inquiry that involves thinking about the problem, considering its solutions and their consequences while testing things out and taking action (Wills 2021). While I situate my work within a pragmatist response to the ‘real-world’ problems of CAT, my work marks the beginning of an exploration of these issues rather than making any claims to offering resolution and/or action. Additionally, I also argue for a broad understanding of the contextual nature of CAT which usefully includes consideration of the plurality of academic understandings. In acknowledging and bringing together theoretical contexts such as political economy and ideas of individual agency understandings of CAT emerge without reverting to narrow or totalising binary positions. Therefore, I suggest that my approach that seeks to hold different theories together and in tension offers a holistic appreciation of CAT. Importantly it is one that does not close opportunities for other local practices and politics to emerge.

### 7.3 Future considerations

Although austerity has slipped from the current political idiom its legacies remain. CAT is one example where the impact of austerity will be felt for many years to come. Community groups often take on these spaces for twenty-five years or more demonstrating a long-term commitment to stand in where the state has withdrawn. Beyond merely being a product of austerity where CAT practice relieves financial pressures of local authorities, CAT is a point around which other austerity effects coalesce. Crucially from the perspective of community members these spaces offer support. Following the afterlives of CAT practice and sites over a longer period will offer insight into the ways in which local people adapt and take on the role of the provision of community benefit and what this means in practice.



Linked to this requirement to continue to undertake empirical work is a recognition of the highly contextual and contingent nature of CAT practice. Given current circumstances due to COVID-19 this task is possibly even more important. Changing political priorities will inflect new approaches to CAT. The current Conservative Culture Secretary Nadine Dorries is promoting investment in libraries and is reported to be tackling councils who try to shut them down (Nicholson 2021; Sheldrick 2021). The contradictory nature of this move by the party that has presided over the closure of community infrastructure aside, this presents a new phase in the narrative of CAT and raises questions over their role within new 'community-powered conservatism' (Kruger 2020). As a result, further, and ongoing scrutiny of CAT and its national and local politics are necessary.

Conceptually and theoretically, I suggest that future work can examine spaces of collective endurance and survival in the vicissitudes of neoliberalism, especially those that on the surface might appear entirely in keeping with neoliberal values and processes. Research should consider how such spaces can be curated to be incubators of more than reactionary politics – though we must be aware of the presence of such rationalities – towards potential spaces of more hopeful activism.

Building on scholarship on the affective working of neoliberal subjectivity (Anderson 2016) and ideas of 'precorporation' which refer to 'pre-emptive formatting and shaping of desires, aspirations and hopes of capitalist culture' (Fisher 2009, p. 9 cited in Cloke et al. 2017), this thesis points towards the need to examine the capacity of political affects (Anderson and Harrison 2010) emergent in spaces of CAT. Questions remain as to how these spaces generate, interrupt, or rupture the different affects in society through regimes of desire and feeling. How might mundane spaces of care spill over into affective politics that can challenge the individualisation and spiritual weariness commonly associated with the possessive neoliberal subject-citizen (Cloke et al. 2019). This thesis has foregrounded the divergent possibilities emerging in and through CAT, emphasising the need for empirically sensitive ethnographies of the emotional and affective geographies fluidly constructed and performed within CAT spaces. Maintaining a non-reductionist approach in future research is necessary to examine what constitutes 'hopeful' affects and their differential nature, longevity and political implications. This opens up further questioning of CAT through affect. In recognising these dimensions, we might understand and learn how they might be fostered and thus harnessed in the future.

## 7.4 Concluding remarks

Finally, in my thesis I have developed a thorough analysis of the interstices of austerity and community action, where there is deep ambivalence around CATs as a government strategy and community practice. In engaging with the deliberative practices of local authorities and the lived experiences of community groups, I have demonstrated how these physical infrastructures co-opt communities and are shot through with austerity. However, in addition they offer precarious spaces of care and experimentation through acts of collective endurance, a quiet politics of care and activism. Whilst embedded in capitalism the afterlives of these assets demonstrate an affective politics and orientation that do not always algin with neoliberal policies. In (re)configuring collectivism and mutualism they offer a different sensibility to community space and care.

I propose that acknowledging the often contradictory ethical and political dimensions of CAT requires careful calibration of the stories we tell about these places and calls for an understanding of them as current sites of refuge and experimentation in future community infrastructure. In doing so, and more widely, my work calls for new considerations of the composition of what is progressive, and how we might continue to (re)consider the affective politics and ethics of community action as a way of supporting new 'real-world' collective methods and practices that engender hope.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: List of Local authorities

List of Local authorities contacted through Freedom of Information requests.

A total of 407 councils across England, Scotland and Wales were contacted (Based on Local authorities in existence in August 2018). Including:

England	Metropolitan districts ( <i>n</i> =36)
	London boroughs ( <i>n</i> =32) plus the City of London ( <i>n</i> =1)
	Unitary authorities ( <i>n</i> =55) plus the Isles of Scilly ( <i>n</i> =1)
	County councils ( <i>n</i> =27)
	District councils ( <i>n</i> =201)
Scotland	Unitary authorities ( <i>n</i> =32)
Wales	Unitary authorities ( <i>n</i> =22)

England – Metropolitan districts ( <i>n</i> =36)					
1	Barnsley	13	Leeds	25	Solihull
2	Birmingham	14	Liverpool	26	South Tyneside
3	Bolton	15	Manchester	27	St. Helens
4	Bradford	16	Newcastle upon Tyne	28	Stockport
5	Bury	17	North Tyneside	29	Sunderland
6	Calderdale	18	Oldham	30	Tameside
7	Coventry	19	Rochdale	31	Trafford
8	Doncaster	20	Rotherham	32	Wakefield
9	Dudley	21	Salford	33	Walsall
10	Gateshead	22	Sandwell	34	Wigan
11	Kirklees	23	Sefton	35	Wirral
12	Knowsley	24	Sheffield	36	Wolverhampton

England – London boroughs ( <i>n</i> =32) plus the City on London ( <i>n</i> =1)					
1	Barking and Dagenham	12	Hammersmith & Fulham	23	Merton
2	Barnet	13	Haringey	24	Newham
3	Bexley	14	Harrow	25	Redbridge
4	Brent	15	Havering	26	Richmond upon Thames
5	Bromley	16	Hillingdon	27	Southwark
6	Camden	17	Hounslow	28	Sutton
7	Croydon	18	Islington	29	Tower Hamlets
8	Ealing	19	Kensington and Chelsea	30	Waltham Forest
9	Enfield	20	Kingston upon Thames	31	Wandsworth
10	Greenwich	21	Lambeth	32	Westminster
11	Hackney	22	Lewisham	33	The City of London

England – Unitary authorities ( <i>n</i> =55) plus the Isles of Scilly ( <i>n</i> =1)					
1	Bath and North East Somerset	9	Central Bedfordshire	17	East Riding of Yorkshire
2	Bedford	10	Cheshire East	18	Halton
3	Blackburn with Darwen	11	Cheshire West and Chester	19	Hartlepool
4	Blackpool	12	City of Nottingham	20	Herefordshire
5	Bournemouth	13	Cornwall	21	Isle of Wight
6	Bracknell Forest	14	County Durham	22	Kingston upon Hull
7	Brighton and Hove	15	Darlington	23	Leicester
8	Bristol, City of	16	Derby	24	Luton

England – Unitary authorities (n=55) plus the Isles of Scilly (n=1) (Cont.)					
25	Middlesbrough	36	Redcar and Cleveland	47	The Medway towns
26	Milton Keynes	37	Rutland	48	Thurrock
27	North East Lincolnshire	38	Shropshire	49	Torbay
28	North Lincolnshire	39	Slough	50	Warrington
29	North Somerset	40	South Gloucestershire	51	West Berkshire
30	Northumberland	41	Southampton	52	Wiltshire
31	Peterborough	42	Southend-on-Sea	53	Windsor and Maidenhead
32	Plymouth	43	Stockton-on-Tees	54	Wokingham
33	Poole	44	Stoke-on-Trent	55	York
34	Portsmouth	45	Swindon	56	Isles of Scilly
35	Reading	46	Telford and Wrekin		

England – County councils (n=27)					
1	Buckinghamshire	10	Hampshire	19	Nottinghamshire
2	Cambridgeshire	11	Hertfordshire	20	Oxfordshire
3	Cumbria	12	Kent	21	Somerset
4	Derbyshire	13	Lancashire	22	Staffordshire
5	Devon	14	Leicestershire	23	Suffolk
6	Dorset	15	Lincolnshire	24	Surrey
7	East Sussex	16	Norfolk	25	Warwickshire
8	Essex	17	North Yorkshire	26	West Sussex
9	Gloucestershire	18	Northamptonshire	27	Worcestershire

England – District councils (n=201)					
1	Adur	35	Chiltern	69	Fylde
2	Allerdale	36	Chorley	70	Gedling
3	Amber Valley	37	Christchurch	71	Gloucester
4	Arun	38	Colchester	72	Gosport
5	Ashfield	39	Copeland	73	Gravesham
6	Ashford	40	Corby	74	Great Yarmouth
7	Aylesbury Vale	41	Cotswold	75	Guildford
8	Babergh	42	Craven	76	Hambleton
9	Barrow-in-Furness	43	Crawley	77	Harborough
10	Basildon	44	Dacorum	78	Harlow
11	Basingstoke and Deane	45	Dartford	79	Harrogate
12	Bassetlaw	46	Daventry	80	Hart
13	Blaby	47	Derbyshire Dales	81	Hastings
14	Bolsover	48	Dover	82	Havant
15	Boston	49	East Cambridgeshire	83	Hertsmere
16	Braintree	50	East Devon	84	High Peak
17	Breckland	51	East Dorset	85	Hinckley and Bosworth
18	Brentwood	52	East Hampshire	86	Horsham
19	Broadland	53	East Hertfordshire	87	Huntingdonshire
20	Bromsgrove	54	East Lindsey	88	Hyndburn
21	Broxbourne	55	East Northamptonshire	89	Ipswich
22	Broxtowe	56	East Staffordshire	90	Kettering
23	Burnley	57	Eastbourne	91	King's Lynn & W. Norfolk
24	Cambridge	58	Eastleigh	92	Lancaster
25	Cannock Chase	59	Eden	93	Lewes
26	Canterbury	60	Elmbridge	94	Lichfield
27	Carlisle	61	Epping Forest	95	Lincoln, City of
28	Castle Point	62	Epsom and Ewell	96	Maidstone
29	Charnwood	63	Erewash	97	Maldon
30	Chelmsford	64	Exeter	98	Malvern Hills
31	Cheltenham	65	Fareham	99	Mansfield
32	Cherwell	66	Fenland	100	Melton
33	Chesterfield	67	Forest Heath	101	Mendip
34	Chichester	68	Forest of Dean	102	Mid Devon

England – District councils (n=201) (continued)					
103	Mid Suffolk	136	Ryedale	169	Teignbridge
104	Mid Sussex	137	Scarborough	170	Tendring
105	Mole Valley	138	Sedgemoor	171	Test Valley
106	New Forest	139	Selby	172	Tewkesbury
107	Newark and Sherwood	140	Sevenoaks	173	Thanet
108	Newcastle-under-Lyme	141	Shepway (Folkestone & Hythe)	174	Three Rivers
109	North Devon	142	South Bucks	175	Tonbridge and Malling
110	North Dorset	143	South Cambridgeshire	176	Torridge
111	North East Derbyshire	144	South Derbyshire	177	Tunbridge Wells
112	North Hertfordshire	145	South Hams	178	Uttlesford
113	North Kesteven	146	South Holland	179	Vale of White Horse
114	North Norfolk	147	South Kesteven	180	Warwick
115	North Warwickshire	148	South Lakeland	181	Watford
116	N. W. Leicestershire	149	South Norfolk	182	Waveney
117	Northampton	150	South Northamptonshire	183	Waverley
118	Norwich	151	South Oxfordshire	184	Wealden
119	Nuneaton and Bedworth	152	South Ribble	185	Wellingborough
120	Oadby and Wigston	153	South Somerset	186	Welwyn Hatfield
121	Oxford	154	South Staffordshire	187	West Devon
122	Pendle	155	Spelthorne	188	West Dorset
123	Preston	156	St Albans	189	West Lancashire
124	Purbeck	157	St Edmundsbury	190	West Lindsey
125	Redditch	158	Stafford	191	West Oxfordshire
126	Reigate and Banstead	159	Staffordshire Moorlands	192	West Somerset
127	Ribble Valley	160	Stevenage	193	Weymouth and Portland
128	Richmondshire	161	Stratford-on-Avon	194	Winchester
129	Rochford	162	Stroud	195	Woking
130	Rossendale	163	Suffolk Coastal	196	Worcester
131	Rother	164	Surrey Heath	197	Worthing
132	Rugby	165	Swale	198	Wychavon
133	Runnymede	166	Tamworth	199	Wycombe
134	Rushcliffe	167	Tandridge	200	Wyre
135	Rushmoor	168	Taunton Deane	201	Wyre Forest

Scotland – Unitary authorities (n=32)					
1	Aberdeen City	12	East Renfrewshire	23	Orkney Islands
2	Aberdeenshire	13	Falkirk	24	Perth and Kinross
3	Angus	14	Fife	25	Renfrewshire
4	Argyll and Bute	15	Glasgow City	26	Scottish Borders
5	City of Edinburgh	16	Highland Council	27	Shetland Islands
6	Clackmannanshire	17	Inverclyde	28	South Ayrshire
7	Dumfries and Galloway	18	Midlothian	29	South Lanarkshire
8	Dundee City	19	Moray	30	Stirling
9	East Ayrshire	20	Na h-Eileanan Iar	31	West Dunbartonshire
10	East Dunbartonshire	21	North Ayrshire	32	West Lothian
11	East Lothian	22	North Lanarkshire		

Wales – Unitary authorities (n=22)					
1	Blaenau Gwent	9	Flintshire	17	Powys
2	Bridgend	10	Gwynedd	18	Rhondda Cynon Taf
3	Caerphilly	11	Isle of Anglesey	19	Swansea
4	Cardiff	12	Merthyr Tydfil	20	Torfaen
5	Carmarthenshire	13	Monmouthshire	21	Vale of Glamorgan
6	Ceredigion	14	Neath Port Talbot	22	Wrexham
7	Conwy	15	Newport		
8	Denbighshire	16	Pembrokeshire		

## Appendix 2: Association between CAT and Austerity

Descriptive analysis of data set and variables for calculation of the association between the national expansion of CAT and the impact of austerity.

### *Descriptive analysis of variables:*

Descriptive analysis of dataset: No. of all CATs per year 2010-11 to 2017-18 (England)

Dependent variable	measure	categories	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
All CATs	Scale	1 2007-08	3	0.6	6*	34.0	39.56
		2 2008-09	6	1.2			
		3 2009-10	10	2.1			
		4 2010-11	6	1.2			
		5 2011-12	19	3.9			
		6 2012-13	34	7.1			
		7 2013-14	34	7.1			
		8 2014-15	67	13.9			
		9 2015-16	88	18.3			
		10 2016-17	97	20.1			
		11 2017-18	106	22.0			
		missing	12	2.5			
		Total valid cases	482				

Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

**No. of All CATs per year 2010-11 to 2017-18 (England):** Frequencies show the percentage of total CATs is highest in 2017-18 ( $n=106$ , 22 per cent of total). There is a low number of missing cases ( $n=12$ , 2.5 per cent of total). The data for 2007-8, 2008-09 and 2009-10 ( $n=19$ , 3.9 per cent of total) are not included in the association as they fall outside the period for which there is data (see below).

Local authority Revenue Spending Power (England) [% change per year since 2010-11 (2010-11 to 2017-18)]

Independent variable	measure	categories	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
LARSPower	Scale	4 2010-11	1	9.1	28.6*	-17.8	10.357
		5 2011-12	1	9.1			
		6 2012-13	1	9.1			
		7 2013-14	1	9.1			
		8 2014-15	1	9.1			
		9 2015-16	1	9.1			
		10 2016-17	1	9.1			
		11 2017-18	1	9.1			
		missing	3	27.3			
		Total valid cases	8	100			

Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

**Local authority Revenue Spending Power (England):** Frequencies show data available for the categories set out for the **No. of All CATs per year 2010-11 to 2017-18 (England)** above. Here the number of missing cases is not problematic as the association is measured according to available data, i.e., 2010-11 to 2017-18.

### Appendix 3: Policy and legislative instruments

Policy and legislative instruments that have contributed to the development of CAT guidance at local authority and government level in each UK home nation.

England	Wales	Northern Ireland	Scotland
<i>Local Government Act 1972</i> * <sup>1</sup> General Disposal Consent (2003) as set out in circular 06/03		n/a	<i>Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973</i> * <sup>1</sup>  <i>Land Reform Act 2003</i> * <sup>2</sup>
Quirk Review (2007) <i>Making Asset Work</i> . UK Westminster government report to explore the barriers and incentives to the transfer of public assets to community management.			
<i>Localism Act 2011</i> .  1) <i>General Power of Competence</i> – giving local authorities some powers to act in the interests of voters. 2) <i>Community Right to Challenge</i> – gives community groups with an interest in taking over a local service or facilities a right to challenge local authority provision. 3) <i>Community Right to Buy</i> – requires local authorities to maintain a list of assets of community value which groups and individuals will be able to buy for community use, when it comes onto the market.		n/a	n/a
2008 £30 million national lottery fund	2011 £13 million Community Asset Transfer fund set up by the national lottery for Wales		
		Community Asset Transfer Policy Framework 2014	Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015  Community right to buy, extended to urban areas
2021 £150 Million Community Ownership Fund for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland			

Source: (Rocket Science UK Ltd. 2010; Murtagh et al. 2012; SQW Ltd. 2013; Rocket Science UK Ltd. 2016)

Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> These acts, and subsequent revisions, gave local authorities legal autonomy to dispose of land at less than the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained – thus allowing for a local authority to transfer an asset at below market value. On the one hand this is distinct from CAT practice which requires that assets will go on to be used for community benefit. However, this is the legal framework through which CAT takes place.

\*<sup>2</sup> Provided a *Community Right to Buy* for rural communities – although by 2010 only nine schemes had been completed.

## Appendix 4: Cluster analysis of CAT across time and space

Rationale and descriptive analysis of data set and variables, including location, political control of local authority (at time of transfer), urban/rural classification and asset use for calculation of 2-step cluster analysis of exploratory dimensions of the emergence of CAT.

### ***Rationale***

Table of variables, data sources, scale and theory

Variables	Data source	Scale	Link to theory
Political control of Local authority	Council compositions by year dataset (The Elections Centre 2021).	Local authority	To explore if party-political allegiance - Conservative practice of austerity (Conservative Party 2010) or New Labour communitarianism (Etzioni 1996).
Urban Rural classification	England and Wales: LSOA11CD Urban Rural Classification* <sup>1</sup> Scotland: Urban Rural Classification (6-Fold)	LSOA/DZs	To explore the morphological setting of CAT practice where services are likely to be in urban areas
CAT by region	By author from Freedom of Information requests	Region	Consideration of geographical distribution of CAT and its broader relationship with austerity (Gray and Barford 2018).
CAT by asset use	By author from Freedom of Information requests	Individual asset	Assessment of the CAT typology where non-profitable assets are disproportionately taken on by community/charity groups (Findlay-King et al. 2017).

Source: By author. Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> (Office for National Statistics 2011), \*<sup>2</sup> (Gov.scot 2016b)

A two-step cluster analysis of my dataset for *all* CATs was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. This procedure explored how CAT practice was grouped around different categorical variables outlined above (and where the number of clusters was determined automatically by SPSS). The dataset was separated into three temporal stages, 1) 2007-08 to 2009-10, 2) 2010-11 to 2012-13, 3) 2013-14 to 2017-18, and as set out in chapter 4. See below for a descriptive analysis of this data.

### ***Descriptive analysis of variables:***

Descriptive analysis: **No. of all CATs at each temporal stage**

Dependent variable	measure	categories	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
All CATs	Scale	1 First CATs	29	3.5	22.0*	60.5	316.23
		2 Significant increase	92	11.2			
		3 Fire sale	677	82.6			
		missing	22	2.7			
		Total valid cases	820	100			

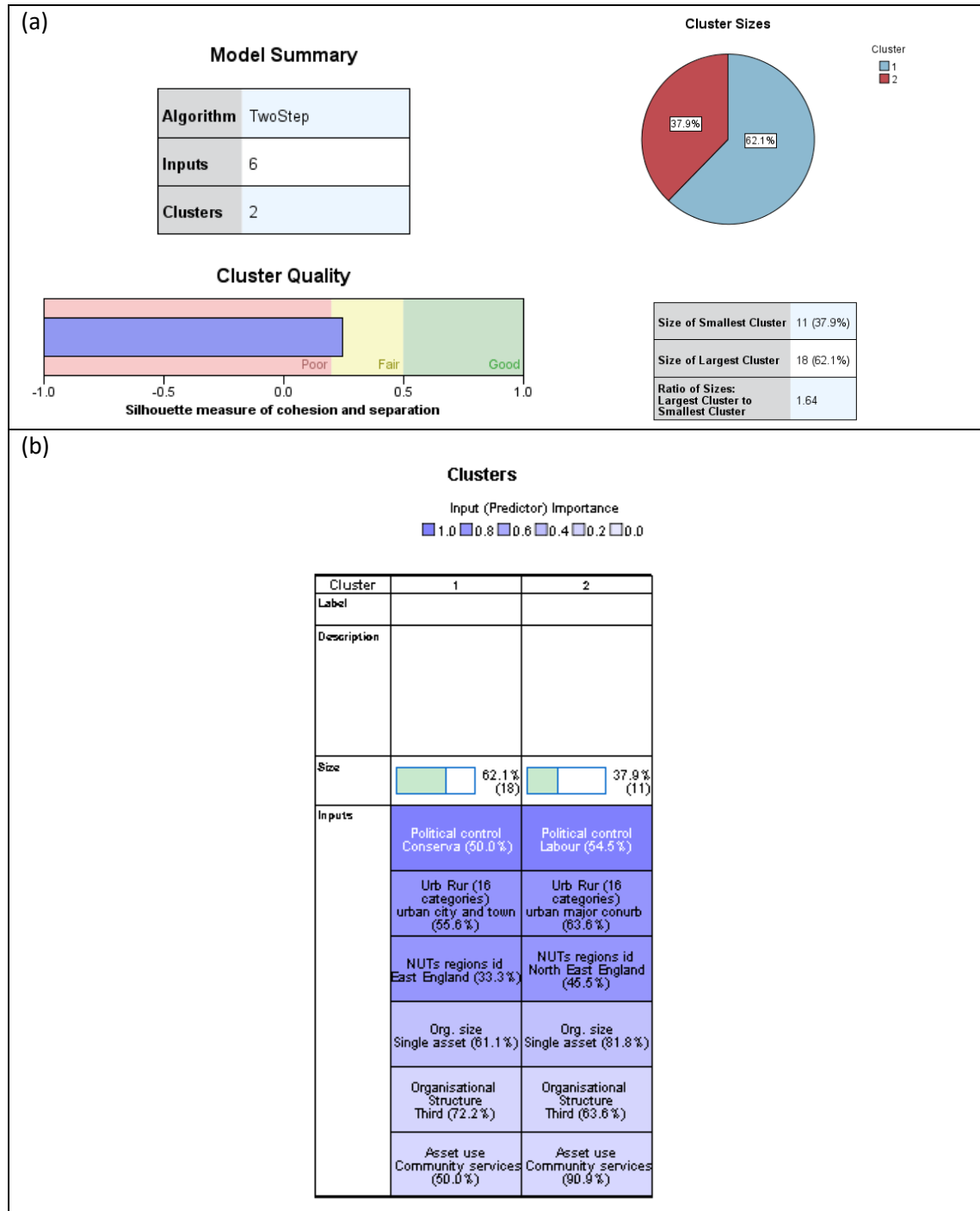
Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

**No. of all CATs at each temporal stage:** Frequencies show the percentage of total CATs is highest at stage 3 Fire sale ( $n=677$ , 82.6 per cent of total). There is a low number of missing cases ( $n=22$ , 2.7 per cent of total). Given the difference between the frequencies the mode, median and standard deviation offer little contribution to understanding the patterns.



**Stage 1: The first CATs (2007-08 to 2010-11):** Two clusters are identified. The cluster quality, or silhouette measurement of cohesion and separation, is 'fair'. At <30 cluster sizes are small, although present the best available data. The ratio of sizes between the largest cluster to smallest cluster is 1.64, thus...

Stage 1 The first CATs TwoStep cluster analysis, (a) model summary, (b) clusters. [Cluster 1 = 'Town and country Conservative', cluster 2 = 'Urban Labour'].



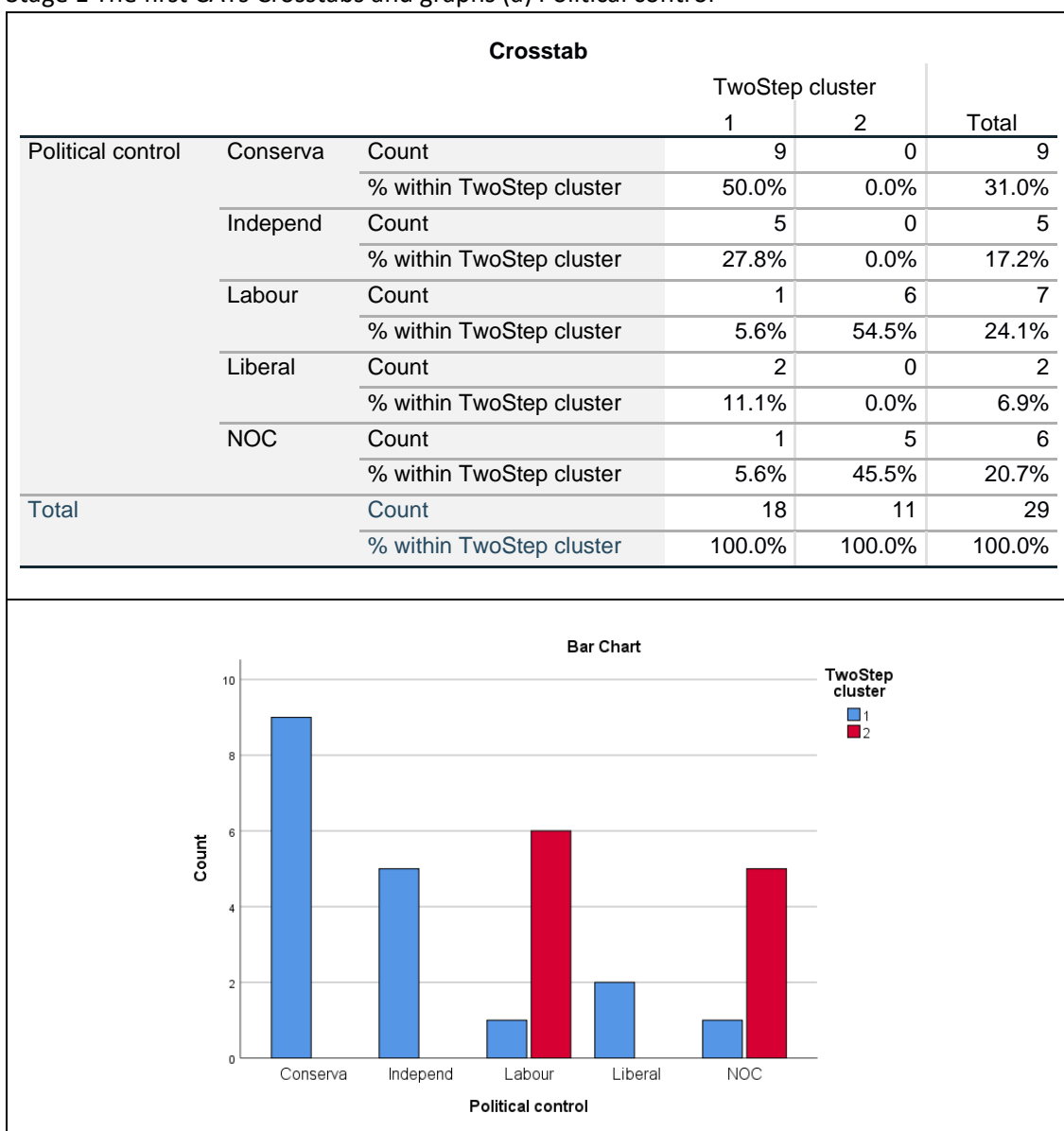
Source: By author

Stage 1 The first CATs Crosstabs (a) Political control, (b) Urban Rural categorisation (c) NUTs regions identification.

Case Processing Summary						
	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Political control	29	100.0%	0	0.0%	29	100.0%
Urb Rur (16 categories) *	29	100.0%	0	0.0%	29	100.0%
NUTs regions id	29	100.0%	0	0.0%	29	100.0%

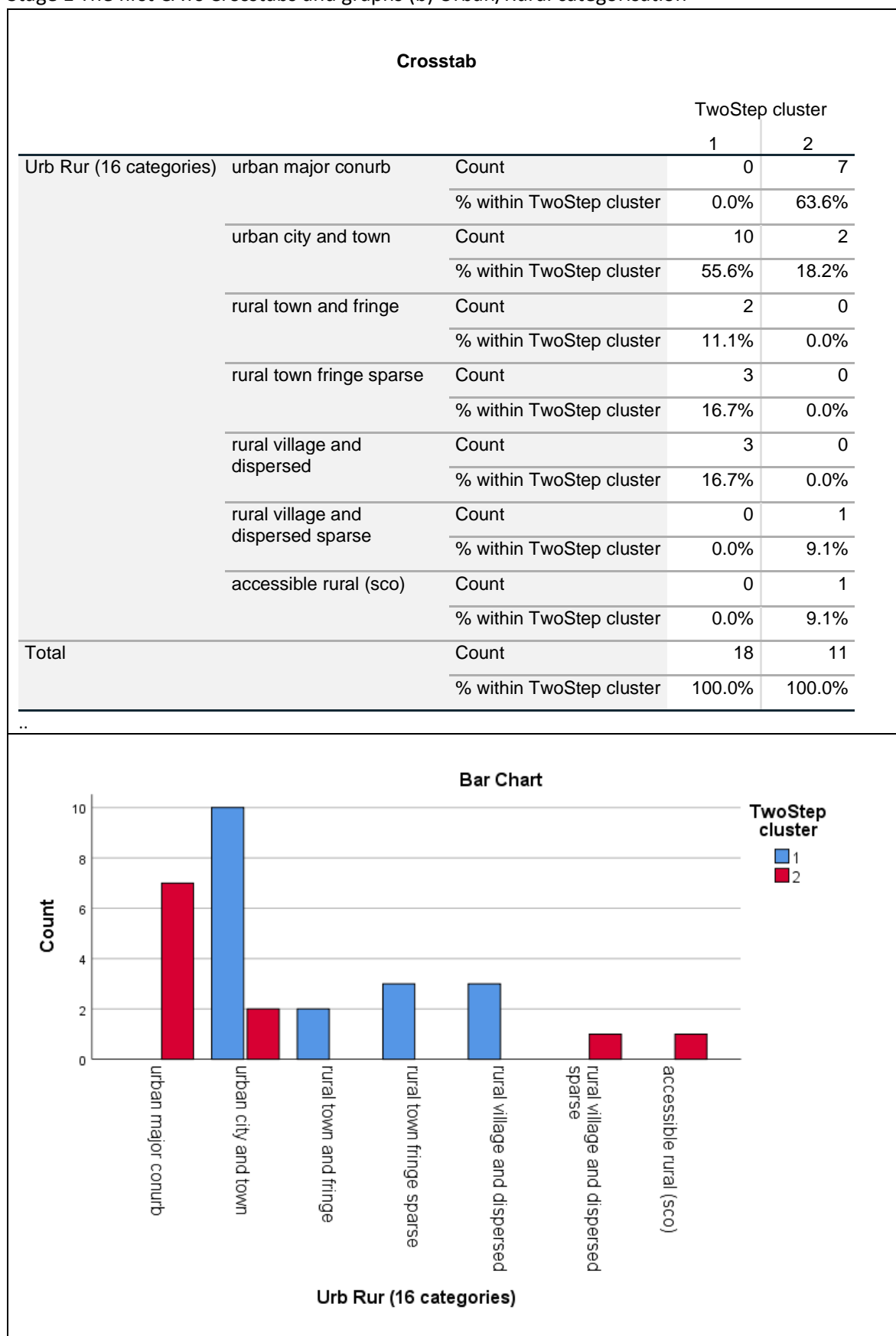
Source: By author Notes: \* Urb Rur (16 Categories) as set out below

Stage 1 The first CATs Crosstabs and graphs (a) Political control



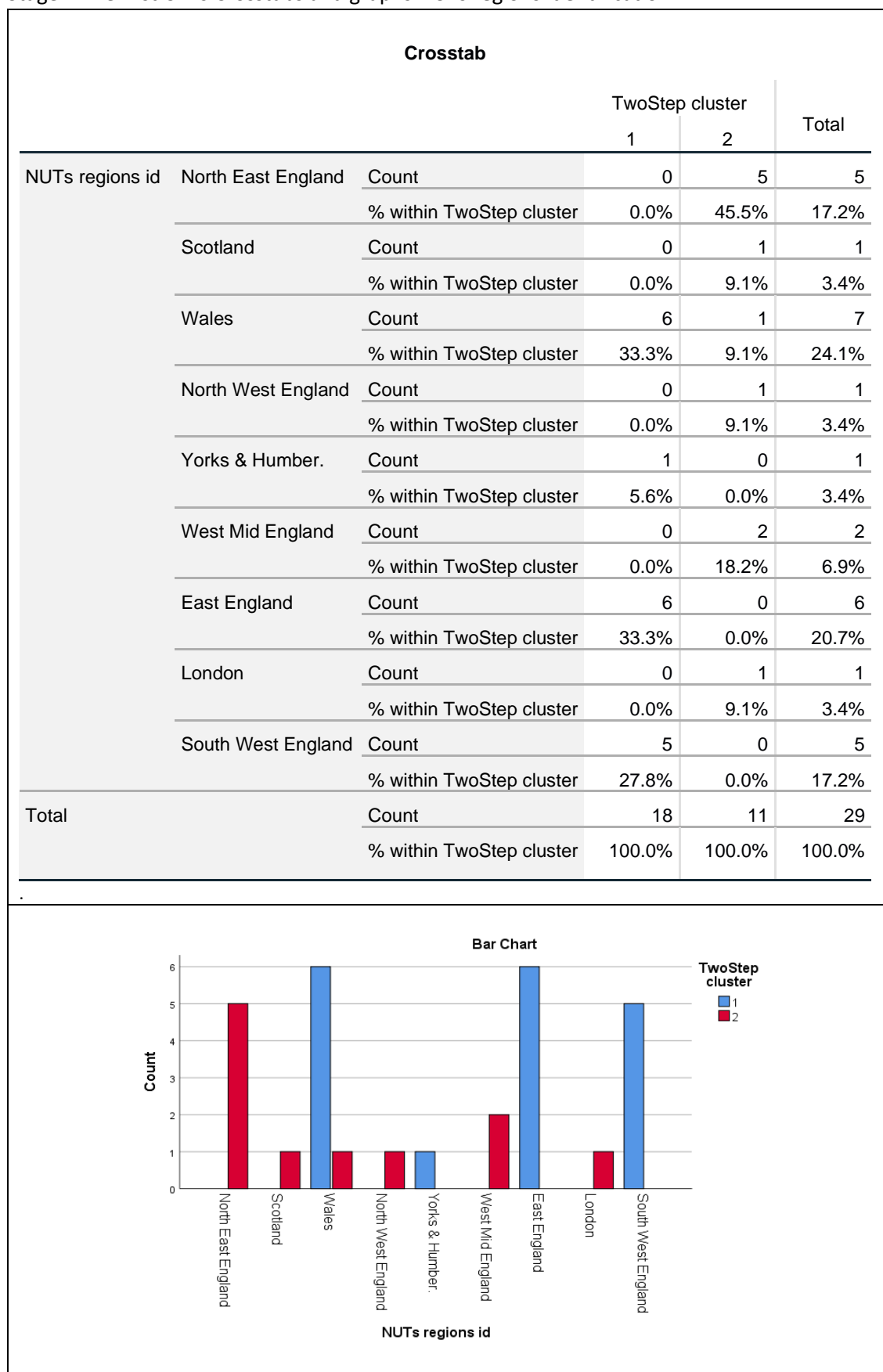
Source: By author

# Stage 1 The first CATs Crosstabs and graphs (b) Urban/Rural categorisation



Source: By author

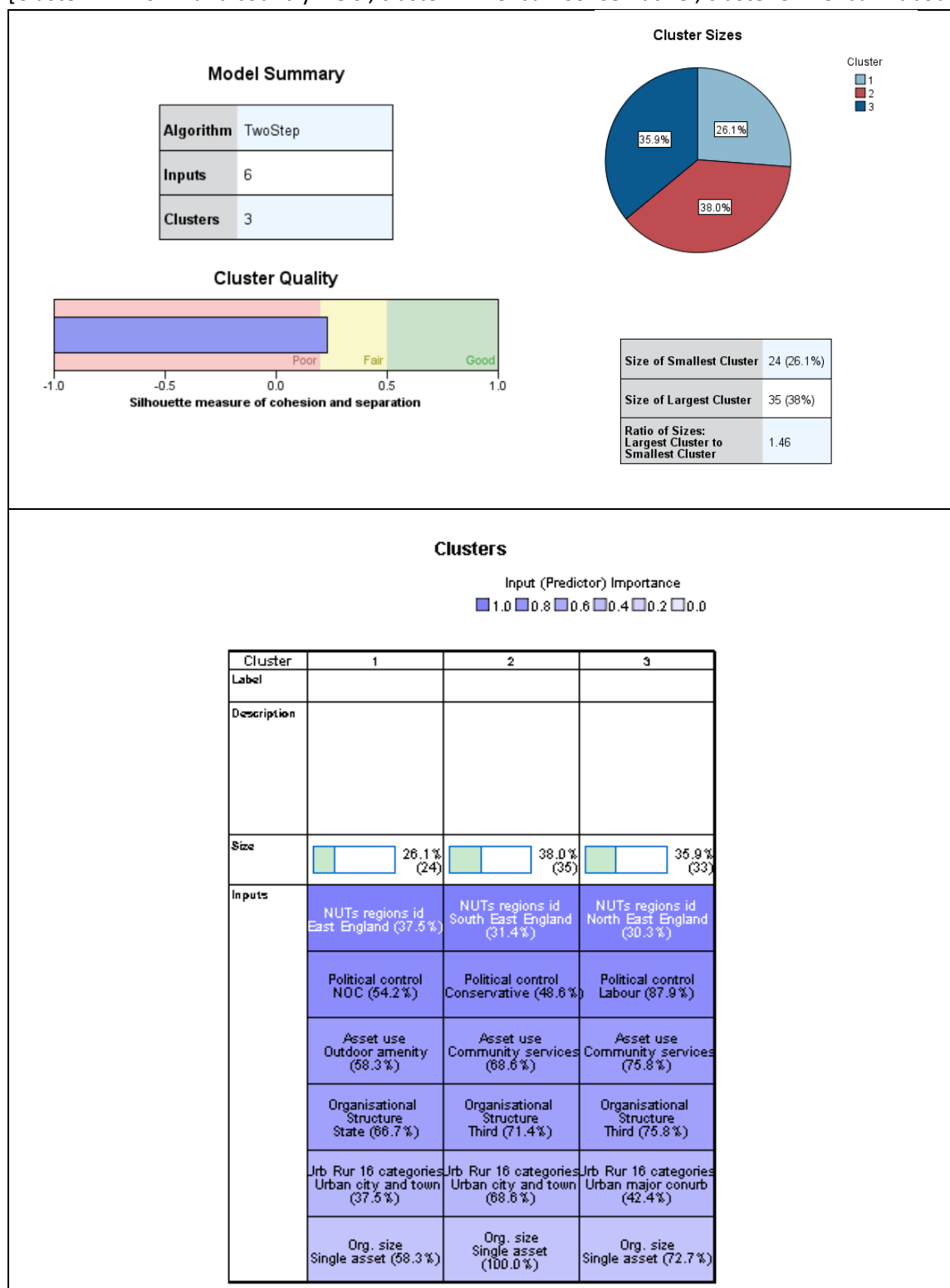
# Stage 1 The first CATs Crosstabs and graphs NUTs regions identification



Source: By author

**Stage 2 Significant increase in CAT (2010-11 to 2013-14):** Three clusters are identified. The cluster quality, or silhouette measurement of cohesion and separation, is 'fair'. At <30 cluster sizes are small, although present the best available data. The ratio of sizes between the largest cluster to smallest cluster is 1.46, thus...

Stage 2 Significant increase in CAT TwoStep cluster analysis, (a) model summary, (b) clusters [Cluster 1 = 'Town and country NOC', cluster 2 = 'Urban Conservative', cluster 3 = 'Urban Labour'].



### Clusters

Input (Predictor) Importance  
■ 1.0 ■ 0.8 ■ 0.6 ■ 0.4 ■ 0.2 ■ 0.0

Cluster	1	2	3
Label			
Description			
Size	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 26.1%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, #90EE90, #FFFFFF);"></div> <div style="margin-left: 5px;">26.1% (24)</div> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 38.0%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, #90EE90, #FFFFFF);"></div> <div style="margin-left: 5px;">38.0% (35)</div> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="width: 35.9%; height: 10px; background: linear-gradient(to right, #90EE90, #FFFFFF);"></div> <div style="margin-left: 5px;">35.9% (33)</div> </div>
Inputs	NUTs regions id East England (37.5%) Political control NOC (54.2%) Asset use Outdoor amenity (58.3%) Organisational Structure State (66.7%) Urb Rur 16 categories Urban city and town (37.5%) Org. size Single asset (58.3%)	NUTs regions id South East England (31.4%) Political control Conservative (48.6%) Asset use Community services (68.6%) Organisational Structure Third (71.4%) Urb Rur 16 categories Urban city and town (68.6%) Org. size Single asset (100.0%)	NUTs regions id North East England (30.3%) Political control Labour (87.9%) Asset use Community services (75.8%) Organisational Structure Third (75.8%) Urb Rur 16 categories Urban major conurb (42.4%) Org. size Single asset (72.7%)

Source: By author

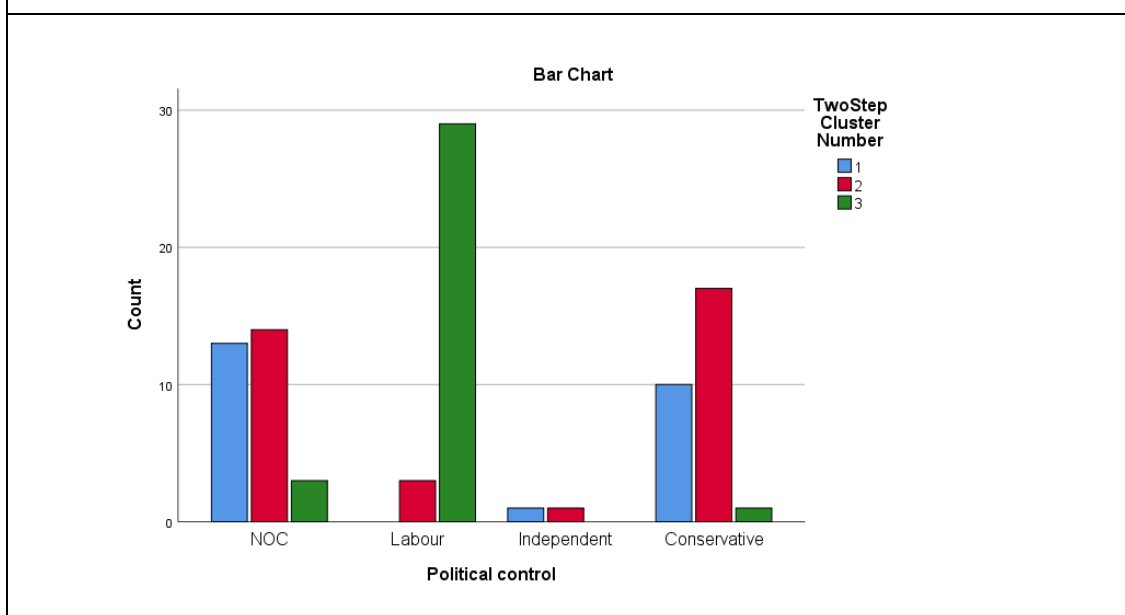
Stage 2 Significant increase in CAT Crosstabs NUTs regions identification, Political control, Urban/Rural categorisation

Case Processing Summary						
	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Political control	92	100.0%	0	0.0%	92	100.0%
Urb Rur (16 categories)	92	100.0%	0	0.0%	92	100.0%
NUTs regions id	92	100.0%	0	0.0%	92	100.0%

Source: By author

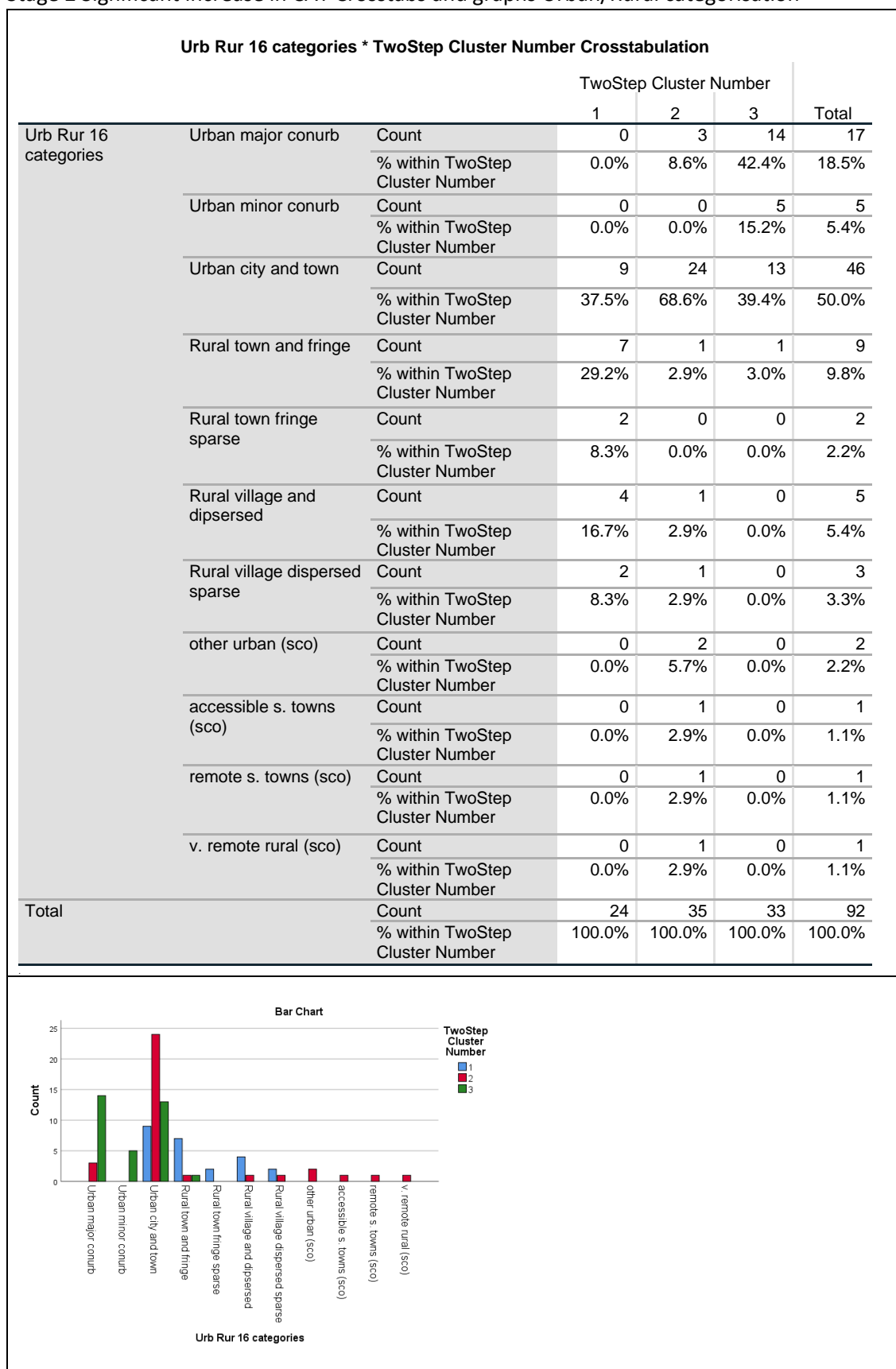
Stage 2 Significant increase in CAT Crosstabs and graphs Political control

Crosstab						
			TwoStep cluster			Total
			1	2	3	
Political control	Conserva	Count	10	17	1	28
		% within TwoStep cluster	41.7%	48.6%	3.0%	30.4%
	Independ	Count	1	1	0	2
		% within TwoStep cluster	4.2%	2.9%	0.0%	2.2%
	Labour	Count	0	3	29	32
		% within TwoStep cluster	0.0%	8.6%	87.9%	34.8%
	Liberal	Count	0	0	0	0
		% within TwoStep cluster	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
	NOC	Count	13	14	3	30
		% within TwoStep cluster	54.2%	40.0%	9.1%	32.6%
Total		Count	24	35	33	92
		% within TwoStep cluster	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%



Source: By author

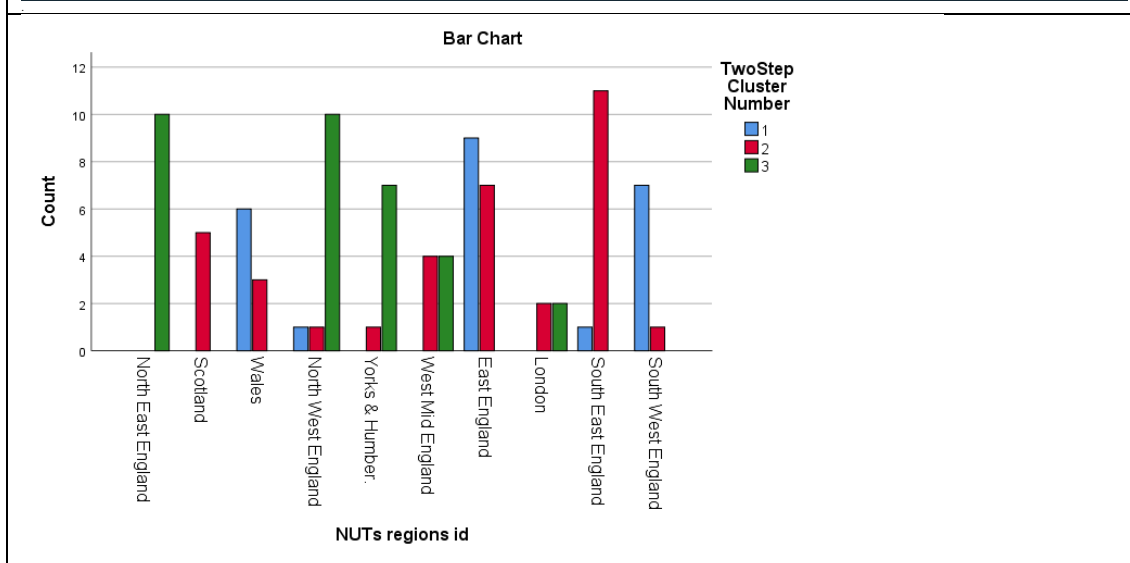
## Stage 2 Significant increase in CAT Crosstabs and graphs Urban/Rural categorisation



Source: By author

## Stage 2 Significant increase in CAT Crosstabs and graphs NUTs regions

NUTs regions id * TwoStep Cluster Number Crosstabulation						
			TwoStep Cluster Number			
			1	2	3	Total
NUTs regions id	North East England	Count	0	0	10	10
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	0.0%	0.0%	30.3%	10.9%
	Scotland	Count	0	5	0	5
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	0.0%	14.3%	0.0%	5.4%
	Wales	Count	6	3	0	9
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	25.0%	8.6%	0.0%	9.8%
	North West England	Count	1	1	10	12
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	4.2%	2.9%	30.3%	13.0%
	Yorks & Humber.	Count	0	1	7	8
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	0.0%	2.9%	21.2%	8.7%
	West Mid England	Count	0	4	4	8
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	0.0%	11.4%	12.1%	8.7%
	East England	Count	9	7	0	16
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	37.5%	20.0%	0.0%	17.4%
	London	Count	0	2	2	4
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	0.0%	5.7%	6.1%	4.3%
	South East England	Count	1	11	0	12
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	4.2%	31.4%	0.0%	13.0%
	South West England	Count	7	1	0	8
		% within TwoStep Cluster Number	29.2%	2.9%	0.0%	8.7%
Total	Count	24	35	33	92	
	% within TwoStep Cluster Number	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

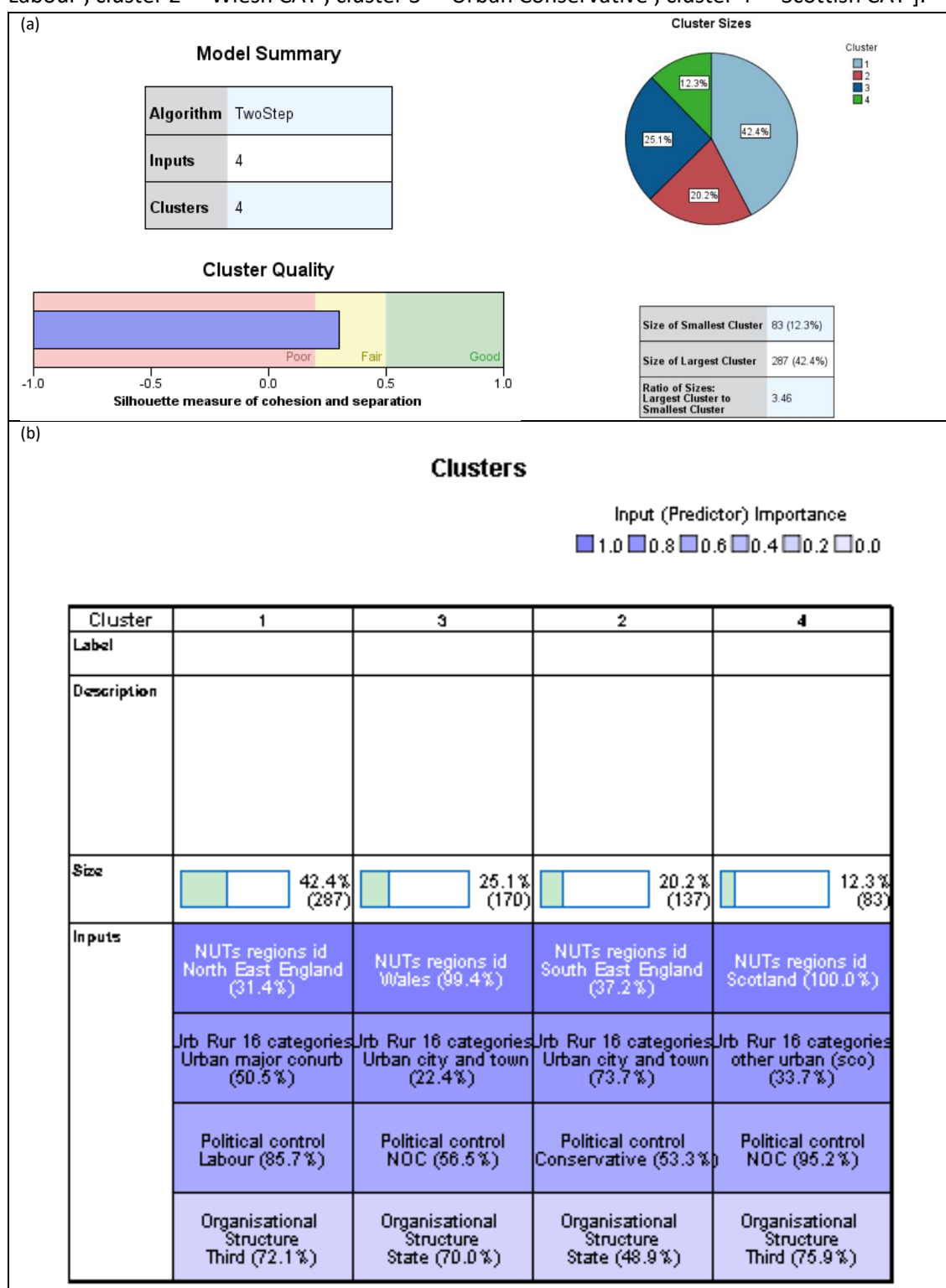


Source: By author



**Stage 3 Fire sale (2013-14 to 2017-18):** Four clusters are identified. The cluster quality, or silhouette measurement of cohesion and separation, is 'fair'. At >30 cluster sizes are strong. The ratio of sizes between the largest cluster to smallest cluster is 3.46, although high, is accepted here offering theoretically useful clusters.

Stage 3 Fire sale TwoStep cluster analysis, (a) model summary, (b) clusters [Cluster 1 = 'Urban Labour', cluster 2 = 'Wlesh CAT', cluster 3 = 'Urban Conservative', cluster 4 = 'Scottish CAT'].



Source: By author

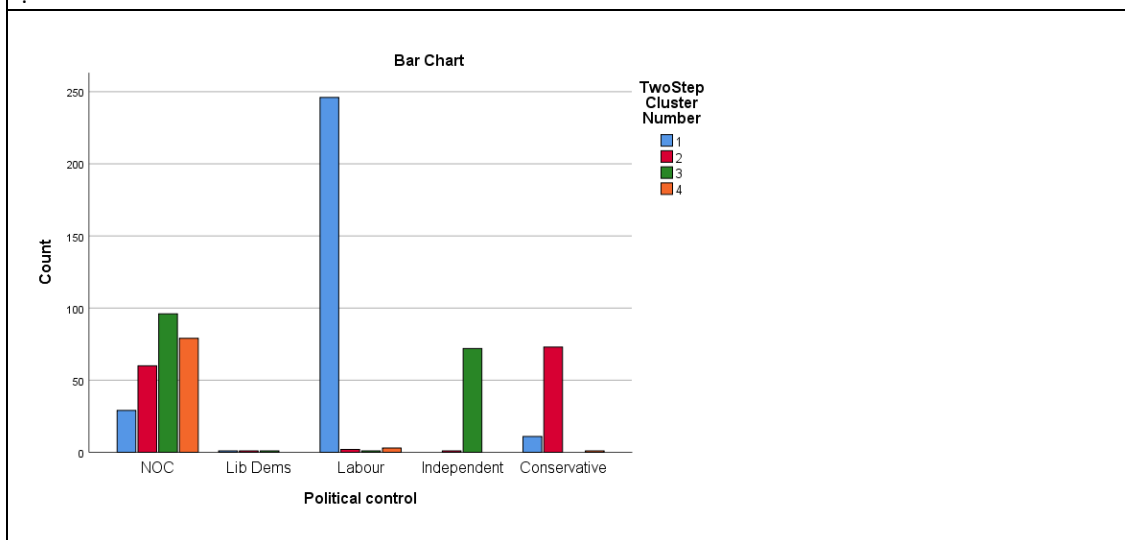
Stage 3 Fire sale Crosstabs NUTs regions identification, Political control, Urban/Rural categorisation

Case Processing Summary						
	Valid		Cases Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Political control	677	100.0%	0	0.0%	677	100.0%
Urb Rur (16 categories)	677	100.0%	0	0.0%	677	100.0%
NUTs regions id	677	100.0%	0	0.0%	677	100.0%

Source: By author

Stage 3 Fire sale Crosstabs and graphs Political control

Political control * TwoStep Cluster Number Crosstabulation							
			TwoStep Cluster Number				
			1	2	3	4	Total
Political control	NOC	Count	29	60	96	79	264
		% within Political control	11.0%	22.7%	36.4%	29.9%	100.0%
	Lib Dems	Count	1	1	1	0	3
		% within Political control	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	Labour	Count	246	2	1	3	252
		% within Political control	97.6%	0.8%	0.4%	1.2%	100.0%
	Independent	Count	0	1	72	0	73
		% within Political control	0.0%	1.4%	98.6%	0.0%	100.0%
	Conservative	Count	11	73	0	1	85
		% within Political control	12.9%	85.9%	0.0%	1.2%	100.0%
Total	Count	287	137	170	83	677	
	% within Political control	42.4%	20.2%	25.1%	12.3%	100.0%	



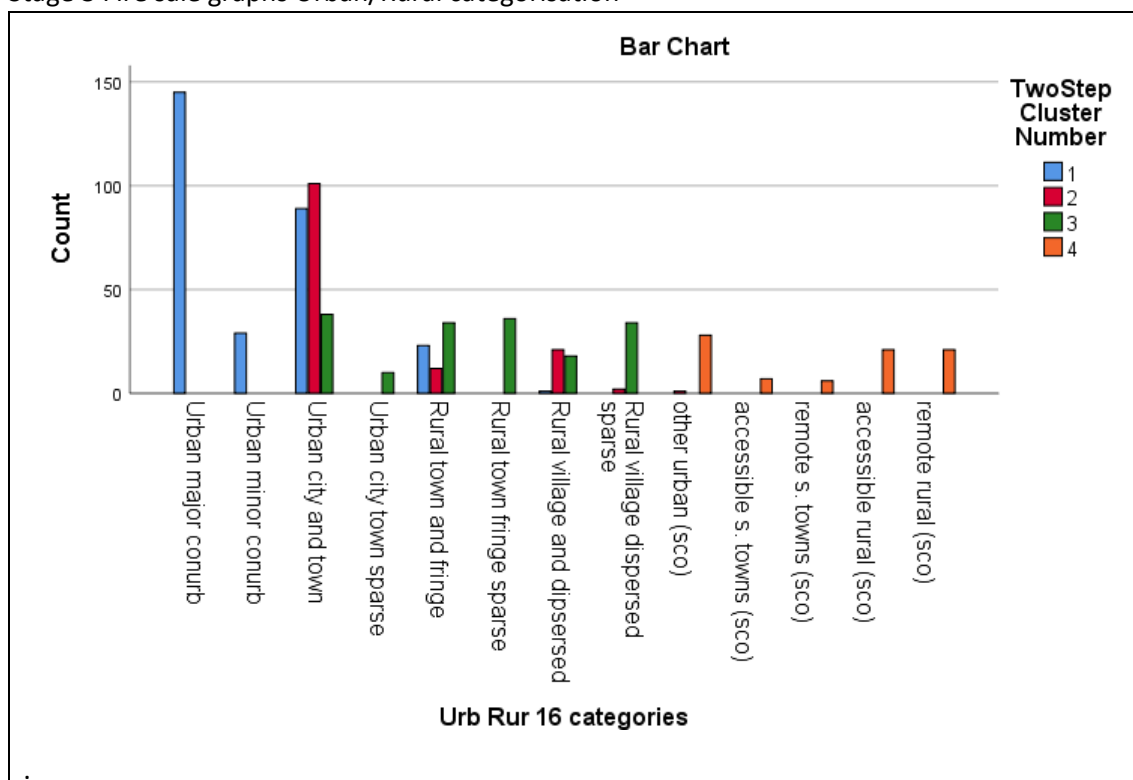
Source: By author

Stage 3 Fire sale Crosstabs Urban/Rural categorisation

Urb Rur 16 categories * TwoStep Cluster Number Crosstabulation							
			TwoStep Cluster Number				Total
			1	2	3	4	
Urb Rur 16 categories	Urban major	Count	145	0	0	0	145
	conurb	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Urban minor	Count	29	0	0	0	29
	conurb	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Urban city	Count	89	101	38	0	228
	and town	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	39.0%	44.3%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	Urban city	Count	0	0	10	0	10
	town sparse	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Rural town	Count	23	12	34	0	69
	and fringe	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	33.3%	17.4%	49.3%	0.0%	100.0%
	Rural town	Count	0	0	36	0	36
	fringe sparse	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Rural village	Count	1	21	18	0	40
	and dips.	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	2.5%	52.5%	45.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	Rural village	Count	0	2	34	0	36
	disp. sparse	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	5.6%	94.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	other urban	Count	0	1	0	28	29
	(sco)	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	3.4%	0.0%	96.6%	100.0%
	accessible s.	Count	0	0	0	7	7
	towns (sco)	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	remote s.	Count	0	0	0	6	6
	towns (sco)	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	accessible	Count	0	0	0	21	21
	rural (sco)	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	remote rural	Count	0	0	0	21	21
	(sco)	% within Urb Rur 16 categories	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count	287	137	170	83	677
		% within Urb Rur 16 categories	42.4%	20.2%	25.1%	12.3%	100.0%

Source: By author

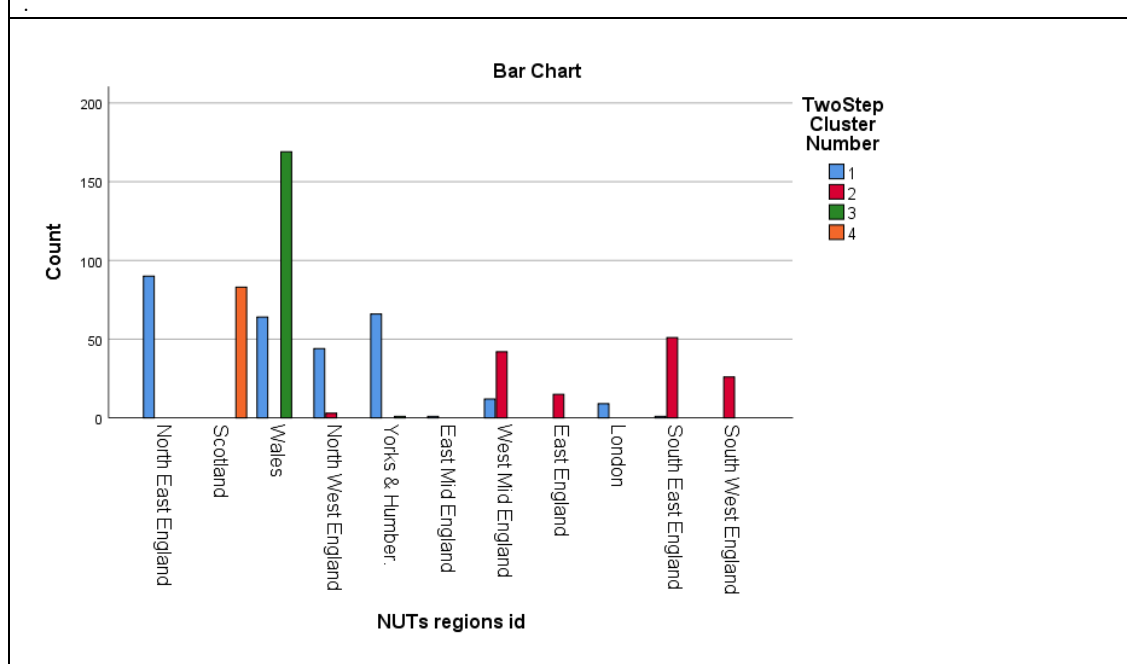
Stage 3 Fire sale graphs Urban/Rural categorisation



Source: By author

### Stage 3 Fire sale Crosstabs and graphs NUTs regions identification

NUTs regions id * TwoStep Cluster Number Crosstabulation							
NUTs regions id			TwoStep Cluster Number				Total
			1	2	3	4	
North East England	Count		90	0	0	0	90
	% within NUTs regions id		100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Scotland	Count		0	0	0	83	83
	% within NUTs regions id		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Wales	Count		64	0	169	0	233
	% within NUTs regions id		27.5%	0.0%	72.5%	0.0%	100.0%
North West England	Count		44	3	0	0	47
	% within NUTs regions id		93.6%	6.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Yorks & Humber.	Count		66	0	1	0	67
	% within NUTs regions id		98.5%	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	100.0%
East Mid England	Count		1	0	0	0	1
	% within NUTs regions id		100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
West Mid England	Count		12	42	0	0	54
	% within NUTs regions id		22.2%	77.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
East England	Count		0	15	0	0	15
	% within NUTs regions id		0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
London	Count		9	0	0	0	9
	% within NUTs regions id		100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
South East England	Count		1	51	0	0	52
	% within NUTs regions id		1.9%	98.1%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
South West England	Count		0	26	0	0	26
	% within NUTs regions id		0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		287	137	170	83	677
	% within NUTs regions id		42.4%	20.2%	25.1%	12.3%	100.0%



Source: By author

## Appendix 5: Three CAT landscapes

### Cross tabulation of characteristics of local authorities with high prevalence of CAT.

*Cross tabs of local authority characteristics:*

Table of categorisation of local authorities with high prevalence of CAT

Local authority	Rural / Urban classification * <sup>1</sup>	Beatty and Fothergill (2014) area classification	Ranking of national cuts to welfare * <sup>2</sup>	Cuts to local government spending since 2009-10 as % * <sup>3</sup>	Deprivation % of all LSOAs / DZ in 20% most deprived of home nation * <sup>4</sup>	Classification
Gateshead	Urban (6)	Old industrial	3	-36.4	25%	urban austerity
Kirklees	Urban (6)	Old industrial	3	-30.5	25%	urban austerity
Wirral	Urban (6)	Old industrial	1	-16.2	30%	urban austerity
Newcastle upon Tyne	Urban (6)	Old industrial	4	-32.9	36%	urban austerity
Sunderland	Urban (6)	Old industrial	2	-26.6	38%	urban austerity
Oldham	Urban (6)	Old industrial	1	-38.0	41%	urban austerity
Knowsley	Urban (6)	Old industrial	1	-16.5	61%	urban austerity
Rotherham	Urban (5)	Old industrial	2	-23.5	31%	urban austerity
Doncaster	Urban (5)	Old industrial	2	-25.9	36%	urban austerity
Stoke-on-Trent <b>1</b>	Urban (4)	Old industrial	1	-13.8	51%	urban austerity
Middlesbrough	Urban (4)	Old industrial	1	-30.1	57%	urban austerity
East Ayrshire	Urban (α)	Old industrial	3	-8.2	33%	urban austerity
Cardiff	Urban (a)	Old industrial	5	-10.0	13%	urban austerity
Merthyr Tydfil	Urban (a)	Old industrial	1	-9.7	86%	urban austerity
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Urban (a)	Old industrial	2	-8.2	19%	urban austerity
Flintshire	Urban (a)	Old industrial	5	-8.3	13%	urban austerity
Wrexham	Urban (a)	Old industrial	4	-6.5	15%	urban austerity
Hartlepool	Urban (4)	Seaside towns	1	-26.1	43%	urban austerity
Redcar and Cleveland	Middle (3)	Seaside towns	2	-24.8	35%	urban austerity
Trafford	Urban (6)	OES	6	-26.0	9%	Commuter towns
Milton Keynes <b>2</b>	Urban (4)	OES	4	-10.0	14%	Commuter towns
Basildon	Urban (4)	OES	4	n/a	24%	Commuter towns
Scottish Borders	Rural (β)	OES	7	-9.4	4%	rural practices (a)
Powys	Rural	OES	5	-7.1	5%	rural practices (a)
Dumfries & Galloway	Rural (β)	OES	5	-20.0	8%	rural practices (a)
Herefordshire	Rural (2)	OES	6	-23.3	8%	rural practices (a)
Wyre Forest <b>3</b>	Middle (3)	none	4	n/a	20%	rural practices (b)
Swale	Rural (2)	none	3	n/a	31%	rural practices (b)

Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> for rural / urban classification see table below.

Source: CAT data from FoI returns collated by author; \*<sup>2</sup> Ranking of national cuts to welfare based on total anticipated loss by 2020-21 from pre and post 2015 welfare reforms ordered for financial loss per working age adult £ per year presented as deciles (Beatty and Fothergill 2016b), \*<sup>3</sup> For England, Real terms change in local government spending 2009-10 to 2017-18 at upper tier level (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2021). For Scotland and Wales Real terms change in local government spending 2009-10 to 2015-16 at unitary authority level (Amin Smith et al. 2016a), \*<sup>4</sup> Data refers to % for each home nation and is thus not directly comparable.

#### Categories

1. Urban austerity
2. Commuter towns
3. Rural practices

Table of adaptation of rural / urban categories for England, Scotland and Wales

Nation	New urban / rural category	Existing urban / rural category (at Local authority level)
England* <sup>1</sup>	Urban (␣)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban with major conurbation (6), Urban with minor conurbation (5), Urban with city and town (4)</li> </ul>
	neither* <sup>2</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Urban with significant rural (3)</li> </ul>
	Rural (␣)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Largely rural (2)</li> </ul>
Scotland	Urban (α)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>East Ayrshire; Other urban (42%), Small Towns (29.4%), Access. Rural (20.6%)</li> </ul>
	Rural (β)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scottish Borders; Rural (46.8%), Small towns (28%), Other urban (25.1%)</li> <li>Dumfries and Galloway; Rural (45.1%), Other urban (29.7%), Small. Towns. (25.1%)</li> </ul>
Wales	Urban (a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cardiff; Large towns less sparse (95%), small towns less sparse (5%)</li> <li>Merthyr Tydfil; Large towns less sparse (80%), small towns less sparse (20%)</li> <li>Flintshire; Large towns less sparse (60%), small towns less sparse (20%)</li> <li>Wrexham; Large towns less sparse (60%), small towns less sparse (20%)</li> </ul>
	Rural (b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Powys; Sparsest context (85%)</li> </ul>

Notes: \*<sup>1</sup> For urban / rural categorisation of English Local authorities see table above. \*<sup>2</sup> Urban with significant rural (3) is not classified as either urban or rural.

Source: Categories adapted from (Statistics for Wales. 2008; DEFRA 2016; Gov.scot 2018)

## Appendix 6: Bivariate analysis of CAT

Descriptive analysis of variables for calculation of bivariate associations between the prevalence of CAT per 100k residents at local authority level and i) Percentage change in local government spending, ii) National cuts to welfare by local authority, iii) Deprivation.

Table of independent variables, data sources, scale and theory for bivariate analysis

Independent variables	Data source	Scale	Link to theory
Percentage change in local government spending	Amin Smith, N. et al. 2016. Real-terms change in local government service spending by LA decile of grant dependence, 2009-10 to 2016-17, England, Scotland and Wales. Institute for Fiscal Studies, London.	Upper tier district (England), Unitary authority (Scotland and Wales).	To explore the relationship between the depth of austerity cuts to local authority service spending (as percentage change in local government service spending) and the prevalence of CAT.
National cuts to welfare by local authority	Beatty, C. and Fothergill, S. 2016. The uneven impact of welfare reform: the financial losses to places and people. The University of Sheffield, Sheffield.	Local authority (England), Unitary authority (Scotland and Wales).	To consider the relationship between the depth of impact of austerity through the cuts to national welfare, expressed as financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) by Local authority, and the prevalence of CAT.
Deprivation	Index of Multiple Deprivation for England <sup>*1</sup> Scotland <sup>*2</sup> Wales <sup>*3</sup> type	Local authority (England), Unitary authority (Scotland and Wales).	To consider the relationship between places of pre-existing inequality through Index of Multiple deprivation and the prevalence of CAT.

Source: by author. Notes: <sup>\*1</sup> (Gov.UK 2015), <sup>\*2</sup> (Gov.scot 2016a), <sup>\*3</sup> (Gov.wales 2014) [Indices of Multiple deprivation correspond to categorisation at time of transfer).

Bivariate analysis of associations between the prevalence of Community Service CAT per 100k and different dimensions of austerity were tested to ascertain any statistical relationships that may be explained through existing theory. Calculations were separated for each home nation, which was not directly comparable given the different data used. In the case of England, re-coding of the CAT dataset was required (see table below).

Dependent variable re-coded to allow for bivariate analysis

Dependent Variable	Data source	Scale
Community Service CATs per 100k, upper tier district, England	From Freedom of Information requests organised by upper tier district level ( <i>n</i> =152)	Upper tier district
Community Service CATs per 100k, Local authority, England	From Freedom of Information requests organised by Local authority ( <i>n</i> =353)	Local authority
Community Service CATs per 100k, Unitary authority, Scotland	From Freedom of Information requests organised by Unitary authority ( <i>n</i> =32)	Unitary authority
Community Service CATs per 100k, Unitary authority, Wales	From Freedom of Information requests organised by Unitary authority ( <i>n</i> =22)	Unitary authority

Source: By author.



### Descriptive analysis of independent variables of Percentage Change in local government spending by local authority, England, Scotland and Wales

Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 top 2016-17 (England) – No missing data.

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Percentage change in local government spending (England)	Scale	Valid data	152	100	-0.27	-0.232	0.101
		Missing	0	0			
		Total valid cases	152	100			

Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 top 2016-17 (Scotland) – No missing data.

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Percentage change in local government spending (Scotland)	Scale	Valid data	32	100	-0.20*	-0.105	0.072
		Missing	0	0			
		Total valid cases	32	100			

Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 top 2016-17 (Wales) – No missing data.

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Percentage change in local government spending (Wales)	Scale	Valid data	22	100	-22.56*	-11.73	4.411
		Missing	0	0			
		Total valid cases	22	100			

Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

### Descriptive analysis of independent variables of National cuts to welfare by local authority, England, Scotland and Wales

Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) England, Scotland and Wales

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Financial loss per working age adult (£ per year) England, Scotland and Wales	Scale	Valid data	379	93.0	680.00	650.00	170.4
		Missing	28	7.0			
		Total valid cases	407	100			

Frequencies show a low number of missing data (n=28, 7.0%).

## Descriptive analysis of independent variable of deprivation for England, Scotland and Wales

% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%, England

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Deprivation expressed as percentage of LSOAs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation	Scale	Valid data	353	100	0.00	0.09	0.154
		Missing	0	0			
		Total valid cases	407	100			

% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%, Scotland

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Deprivation expressed as percentage of DZs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation	Scale	Valid data	32	100	0.0*	0.1	0.136
		Missing	0	0			
		Total valid cases	32	100			

Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%, Wales

Independent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%	mode	median	sd
Deprivation expressed as percentage of LSOAs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation	Scale	Valid data	22	100	0.05*	0.19	0.246
		Missing	0	0			
		Total valid cases	22	100			

Notes: \* Multiple modes exist the smallest value is shown

**Descriptive analysis of dependent variable Community Service CATs per 100k at local authority level, for England (re-coded for both upper tier and local authority), Scotland (unitary authority), and Wales (unitary authority).**

Community service CATs per 100k by upper tier district (England)

Dependent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%
Percentage change in local government spending (England)	Scale	Valid data	101	66.4
		Missing	51	33.6
		Total valid cases	152	100

Frequencies show a high number of missing data ( $n=51$ , 33.6%), however the valid data ( $n=101$ , 66.4%) is the best possible available data.

Community service CATs per 100k by local authority (England)

Dependent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%
Percentage change in local government spending (England)	Scale	Valid data	253	71.6
		Missing	100	28.4
		Total valid cases	353	100

Frequencies show a high number of missing data ( $n=100$ , 28.4%), however the valid data ( $n=253$ , 71.6%) is the best possible available data.

Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Scotland)

Dependent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%
Percentage change in local government spending (Scotland)	Scale	Valid data	26	81.2
		Missing	6	18.8
		Total valid cases	32	100

Frequencies show a low number of missing data ( $n=6$ , 18.8%), the valid data ( $n=26$ , 81.2%) is the best possible available data.

Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)

Dependent variable	measure	N	frequencies	%
Percentage change in local government spending (Wales)	Scale	Valid data	19	86.3
		Missing	3	13.7
		Total valid cases	22	100

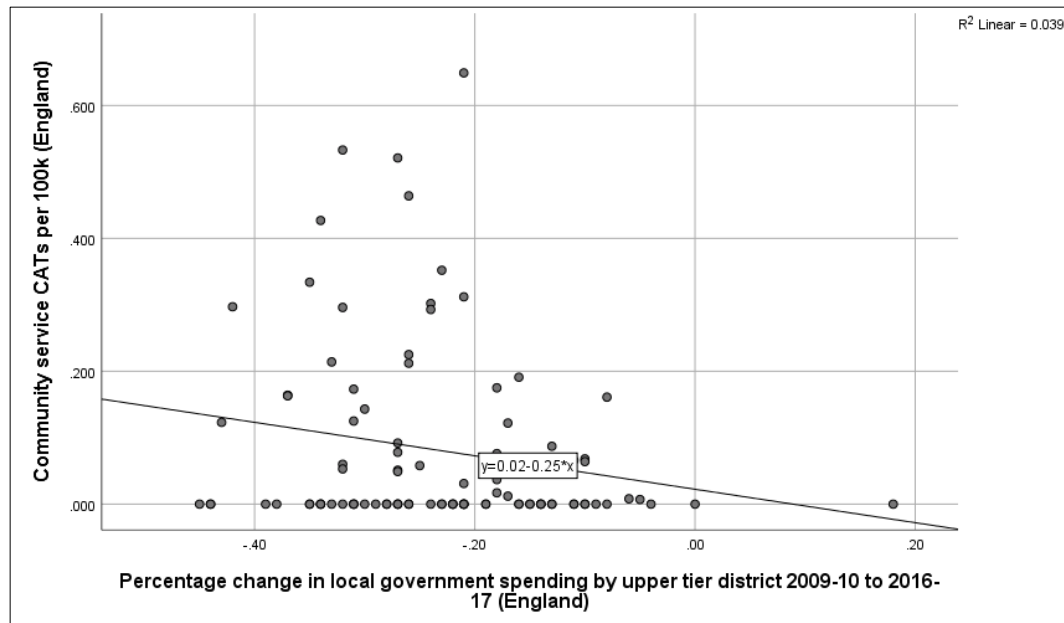
Frequencies show a low number of missing data ( $n=3$ , 13.7%), the valid data ( $n=19$ , 86.3%) represents the best possible available data.

## Appendix 7: Outliers of bivariate analysis

### Change in local government spending and CAT – outliers removed

#### ENGLAND

Relationship between percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England) and CATs per 100k by upper tier district – removal of outlier



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and percentage change in local government spending at upper tier district for England from Amin Smith et al. (2016a).

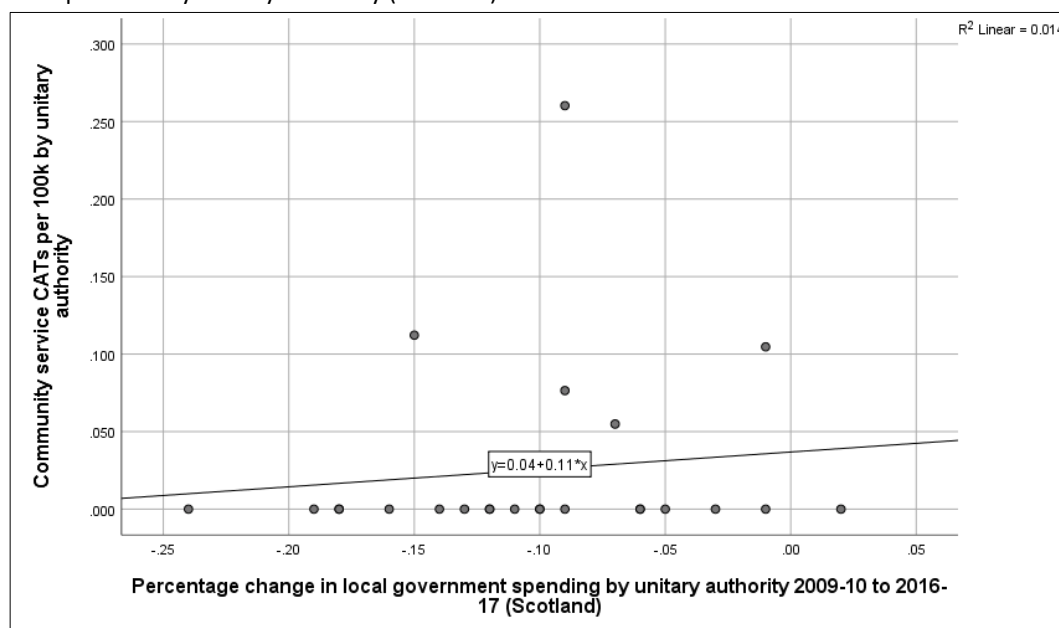
Correlation coefficient between the percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district (England) and Community service CATs per 100k by upper tier district (England) – with removal of outlier

Correlations			
		Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Change in local government spending (%) by upper tier (England)
Community service CATs per 100k (England)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.197*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.050
	N	100	100
Percentage change in local government spending by upper tier district 2009-10 to 2016-17 (England)	Pearson Correlation	-.197*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	
	N	100	151
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Source: IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## SCOTLAND

Relationship between percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority (Scotland) and CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Scotland) – with outliers removed



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and percentage change in local government spending at upper tier district for England from Amin Smith et al. (2016a).

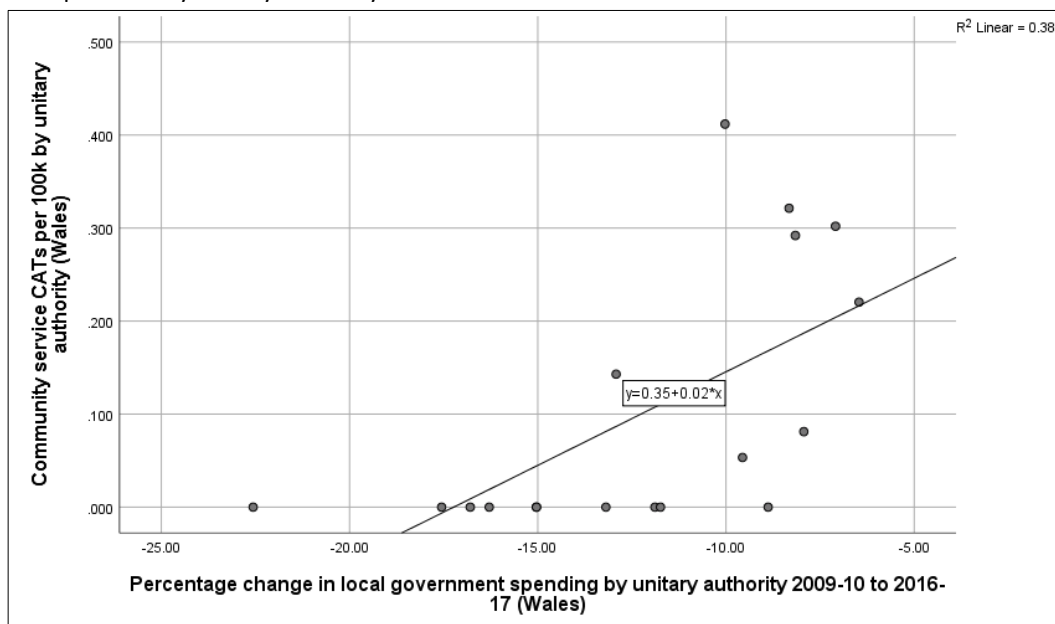
Correlation coefficient between the percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority (Scotland) and Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Scotland)

Correlations			
		Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority	Change in local government spending (%) by UA (Scotland)
Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority	Pearson Correlation	1	.117
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.586
	N	24	24
Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	.117	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.586	
	N	24	30

Source: IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## WALES

Relationship between Percentage change in local government spending by Unitary Authority (Wales) and CATs per 100k by unitary authority – with outlier removed



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and percentage change in local government spending at upper tier district for England from Amin Smith et al. (2016a).

Correlation coefficient between the percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority (Wales) and Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)

Correlations			
		Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)	Change in local government spending (%) by UA unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)
Community service CATs per 100k by unitary authority (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	1	.617**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	18	18
Percentage change in local government spending by unitary authority 2009-10 to 2016-17 (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	.617**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	18	21

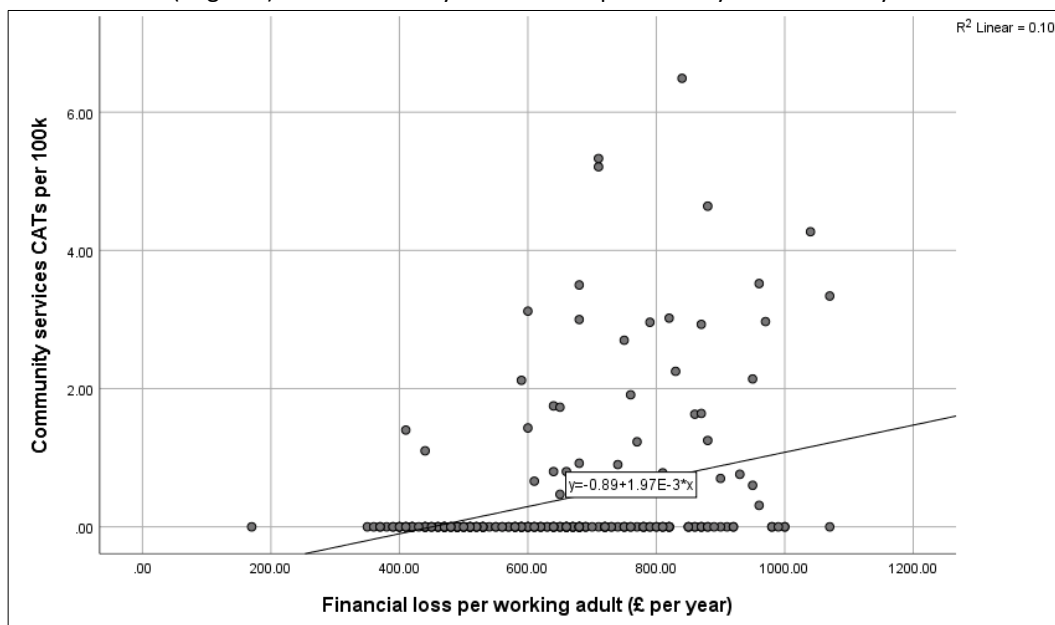
\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## National cuts to welfare by Local authority and CAT – outliers removed

### ENGLAND

Relationship between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (England) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority – removal of outliers



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (England) based on total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reforms since 2010-11 from Beatty and Fothergill (2016a).

Correlation coefficient between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (England) and Community service CATs per 100k – removal of outliers

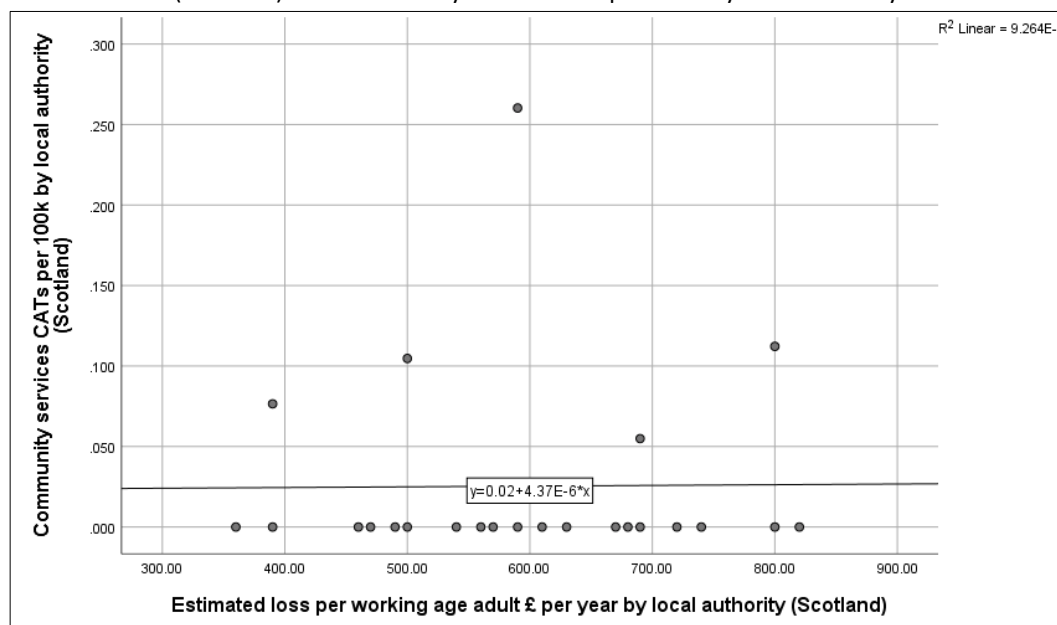
Correlations		Community services CATs per 100k	Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)
Community services CATs per 100k	Pearson Correlation	1	.324**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	252	232
Financial loss per working adult (£ per year)	Pearson Correlation	.324**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	232	323

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## SCOTLAND

Relationship between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Scotland) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority



Source: CAT data from Freedom of Information requests by author, and Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (England) based on total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reforms since 2010-11 from Beatty and Fothergill (2016a).

Correlation coefficient between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Scotland) and Community service CATs per 100k

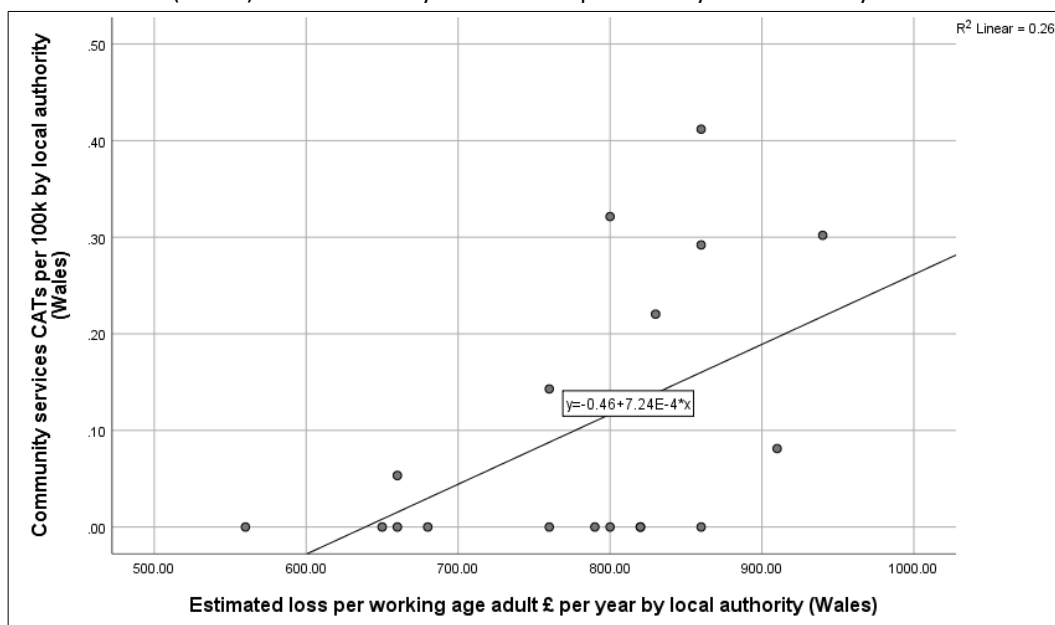
Correlations			
		Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Scotland)	Estimated loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority (Scotland)
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	1	.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.964
	N	24	24
Estimated loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority (Scotland)	Pearson Correlation	.010	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.964	
	N	24	30

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25



## WALES

Relationship between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Wales) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority – outlier removed



Source: Community service CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain, and Financial loss per working adult (£ per year) (Wales) based on total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from welfare reforms since 2010-11 (Beatty and Fothergill 2016a)

Calculation of the correlation coefficient between financial loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority through national cuts to welfare (Wales) and Community service CATs per 100k by local authority – outlier removed

Correlations			
		Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)	Estimated loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority (Wales)
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	1	.515*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.029
	N	18	18
Estimated loss per working age adult £ per year by local authority (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	.515*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	
	N	18	21

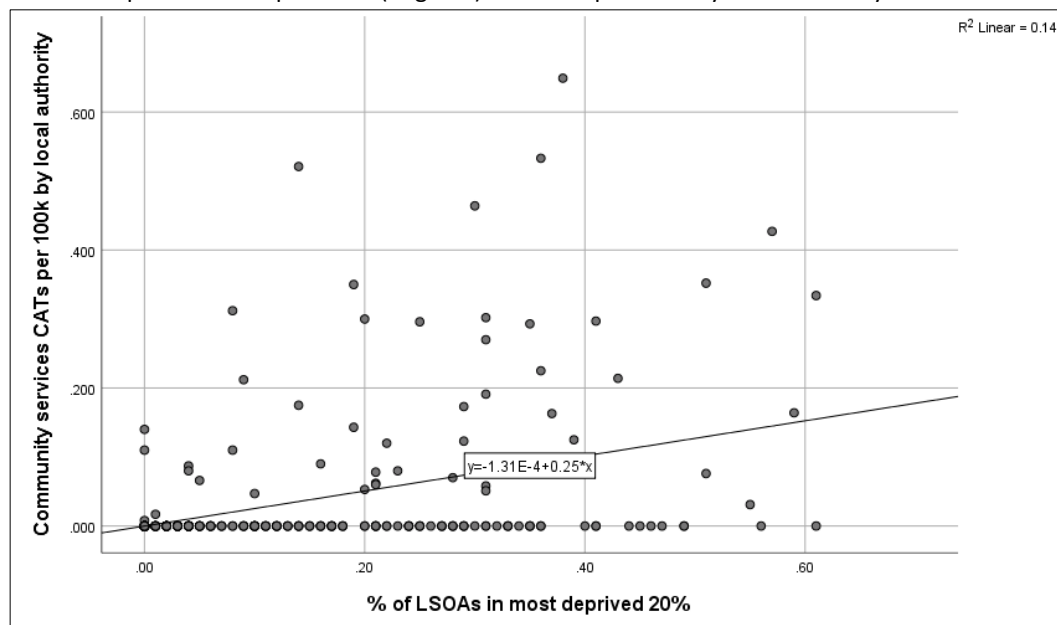
\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## Deprivation and CAT at Local authority level – outliers removed

### ENGLAND

Relationship between deprivation (England) and CATs per 100k by local authority – removal of outliers



Source: CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain. Deprivation expressed as percentage of LSOAs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation (Gov.UK 2015). This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities (See Milbourne 2014).

Correlation coefficient between deprivation (England) and CATs per 100k by local authority – removal of outliers

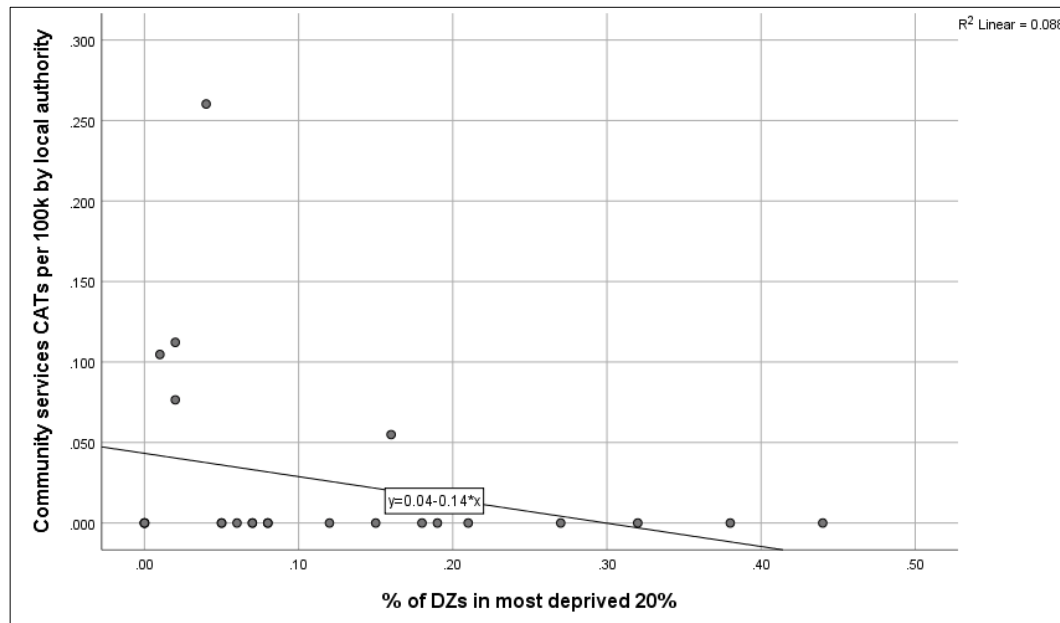
Correlations			
		% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%	Community services CATs per 100k by local authority
% of LSOAs in most deprived 20%	Pearson Correlation	1	.385**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	352	253
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority	Pearson Correlation	.385**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	253	253

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## SCOTLAND

Relationship between deprivation (Scotland) and CATs per 100k by local authority – removal of outliers



Source: CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain. Deprivation expressed as percentage of DZs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation (Gov.scot 2016a). This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities (See Milbourne 2014).

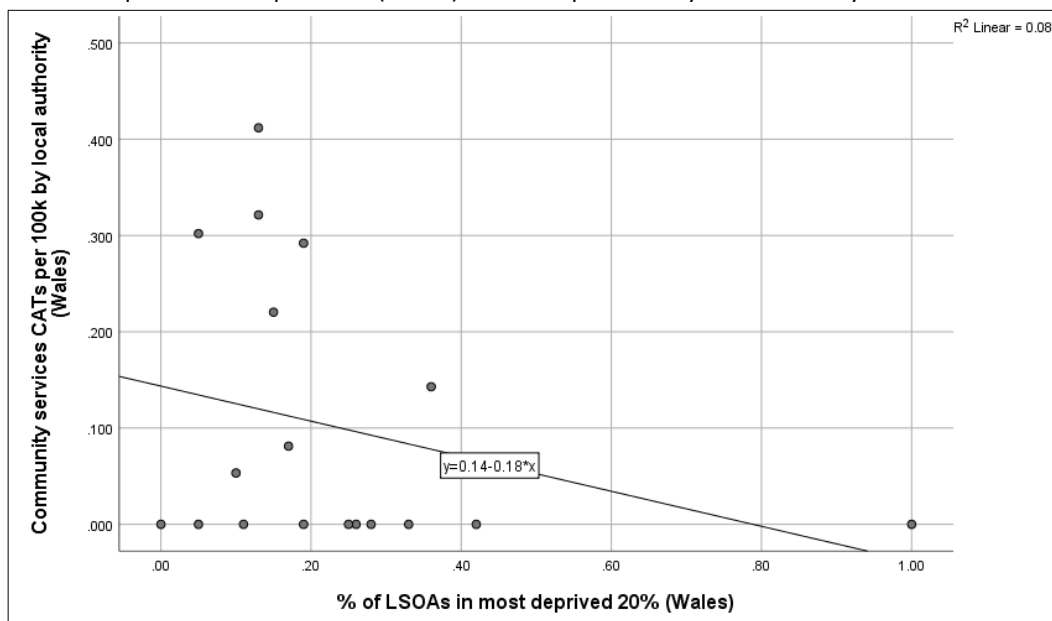
Correlation coefficient between deprivation (Scotland) and CATs per 100k by local authority

Correlations			
		% of DZs in most deprived 20%	Community services CATs per 100k by local authority
% of DZs in most deprived 20%	Pearson Correlation	1	-.296
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.160
	N	30	24
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority	Pearson Correlation	-.296	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	
	N	24	24

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## WALES

Relationship between deprivation (Wales) and CATs per 100k by local authority – with outlier removed



Source: CAT data by author from Freedom of Information requests to local authorities across Britain. Deprivation expressed as percentage of LSOAs in each local authority that fall within the twenty percent most deprived in the nation (Gov.wales 2014). This measure of deprivation accounts for rural poverty as local authority ranking tends to overlook deprivation in less deprived local authorities (See Milbourne 2014).

Correlation coefficient between deprivation (Wales) and CATs per 100k by local authority

Correlations			
		Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)	% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% (Wales)
Community services CATs per 100k by local authority (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	1	-.285
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.251
	N	18	18
% of LSOAs in most deprived 20% (Wales)	Pearson Correlation	-.285	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.251	
	N	18	21

Source: By author from IPM SPSS Statistics 25

## Appendix 8: Table of asset typologies

Table of land use typologies of assets transferred under CAT

CAT typology	Land use code	
	code	Land use
1 Outdoor amenity	U041	Outdoor amenity and open spaces
	U046	Allotments and city farms
2 Outdoor sports facilities	U044	Sport facilities and grounds (outdoor)
3 Indoor sports facilities	U044	Sport facilities and grounds (indoor)
4 Other recreation and amenity	U042	Amusement and show places
	U045	Holiday parks and camps
5 Community services	U043	Libraries, museums and galleries
	U081	Medical and health care services
	U082	Places of worship
	U083	Education
	U084	Community services (incl. community meeting places, public hall, church hall, youth club, excluding public sanitation facilities and conveniences)
	U085	Community services (including Community protection and justice administration, e.g., police stations, fire stations, coastguard and life boat stations, and law courts - Community protection and justice administration, e.g., police stations, fire stations, coastguard and life boat stations, and law courts - Community protection and detention centres - Animal welfare facilities.
6 Public sanitation	U084	Public sanitation facilities and conveniences
7 Business and retail	U090	Retail3
	U100	Industry and business
8 Land and infrastructure	U101	Agriculture and fisheries
	U020	Forestry
	U050	Transport
	U060	Utilities and infrastructure
	U110	Vacant and derelict land
	U120	Defence
	U130	Unused land
9 Unspecified	n/a	n/a

Source: By author adapted from Land use codes (Offices of the Deputy Prime Minister (2006) National Land Use Database: Land Use and Land Cover Classification).

## Appendix 9: Layers of ethnographic description

### Layers of ethnographic description: Cyrchfan Community Centre

Layer	Description
(a) Locating the ethnographic setting	This community centre is located in a suburb of an urban area in South Wales. Based on the postcode, this centre is located in a less deprived neighbourhood (9 <sup>th</sup> decile of WIMD, where 1 <sup>st</sup> is the most deprived). Local councillors are Conservative, Independent and Labour.
(b) The physical space	The community group are a couple of years into a twenty-five-year repair and maintenance lease from the Council. It is a relatively new building. It is run mainly by volunteers with a couple of paid staff. The building has one large indoor hall, one meeting room and a café. It has toilets, changing rooms and a reception. Externally it has a fenced sport pitch, car park, garden and external grassed area.
(c) Interactions within the building	At this centre I took on a role of 'volunteer' working one day a week (from May 2019 onwards) and participated in the daily life of the centre. This brought me into regular contact with staff, other volunteers, both caretakers, trustees, activity providers and the public. Through this work I engaged in spontaneous conversations about the work of the centre, people's lives and concerns. These interactions took place in a relatively structured setting as the public came in to attend mostly timetabled classes and activities.
(d) Participating in interactions in the building	<p>As a volunteer, I spent time in the reception taking payment for activities, cleaning, setting up equipment for classes and work in the garden. As I got to know some of the regulars a deeper understanding of their appreciation of the centre and motivations for being involved unfolded. What at first had seemed a conventional community sports centre offering community activities but run on a shoe string and reliant on volunteers, slowly revealed close ties to the local community and different ways in which the centre affected people's lives.</p> <p>Staff and other volunteers checked boundaries of what I was willing to do and made efforts to stress that I should only do things with which I was happy – of my own free will. Learning from the staff and other volunteers of how they approached this work took place over the time I spent there. I was explicit about the purpose of my being there which served to elicit interested questions and answered about the centre. Some members of the public were reluctant to talk and one or two remained wary of speaking to me throughout the time I was there, I left these people in peace. Given the information that people shared with me my research focus altered to account for more nuanced views of volunteerism which was clearly a central experience at this centre.</p>
(e) Reflecting on the research process	My understandings of this centre developed over the time I spent there, whilst I did not 'never want to leave' (Research diary, 2019) as had been suggested by one of the workers, I did develop an appreciation of the work that the group does which challenged me to think different about the politics that operate at the site.
(f) self-reflections	My willingness to engage through volunteering positioned me as part of the 'team' which, at first, made me uncomfortable as I felt too embedded in the process – however this experience was essential to understand the centres and my apprehension dissipated as I developed a sense of how I was engaging in the ambivalence of CAT and how I would tell the stories of the people involved. Emotionally, at first, I found carrying out work (cleaning, setting up equipment) difficult as this had until recently been undertaken by council employees – however this was part and parcel of the ambivalence I needed to recognise. Also, much of the time spent there was exceptionally mundane which I countered by otherwise engaging in theory on my days away from the sites.

Source: By author adapted from Paul Cloke et al. (2004) *Practicing Human Geographies* p201-204. London and Thousand Oaks, Calif. SAGE.

### *Description of 'reading the rooms' an introduction to the Cyrchfan Community Centre*

I walk through an open doorway where underfoot the standard cream municipal floor tile of the hallway gives way to the dark timber effect of inexpensive vinyl. This is a roughly square room with windows at one end overlooking a garden. The walls are freshly painted light blue with scuffed square ceiling tiles and office style lighting suspended above. I am alone in the room and rearranging jauntily coloured cushions take a seat on one of the re-used church pews with new square tables and expensive multi-coloured plywood chairs. This is the community café.

On the walls a curated display of informative or instructive notices communicates with the centre users. These notices represent four types of information: The first type is the 'notices of material regulation' which could potentially be 'official' or mandatory in nature. These notices include, for example stickers for 'door and window maintenance, door reference number 3' or 'Electrical safety test, retest due one year from this date'. Who is responsible for these, is it necessary to have 'door reference number 3' checked and how often? What other regulations is the space subject to and how, and who is expected to deal with them?

The second type are the 'notices or norms of social regulation'. These are both of a mundane 'official' character such as standard off-the-shelf 'Fire Exit' and 'CO2 fire extinguisher instruction'. Or they are 'home grown' norms which talk to ideas of how the space should be used, for example: 'Kitchen only 3 people at a time. No children under 16. Thank you', or the exhaustive eleven-point laminated A4 'Café / kitchen checklist' which seems to be directed towards casual volunteers or members of the public and appears to have been drawn up by the trustees or management committee.

The third type are related to 'commerce'. These range from text simply chalked beneath a stack of industrially produced cakes, £1.00 for a 'delicious and sticky banana loaf cake' or £2.00 for a 'lemon drizzle sponge cake'. I find out later that these are donated by a neighbouring bakery who pass on seconds or misshapen goods they cannot sell. Another declares 'Honesty café self-service please put your payment in the honesty pot', while another suggests that a cup of coffee costs £1.00.

The fourth type are 'notice boards'. A large 4ft by 6ft board displays the formal activities of the centre. Further exploration of these activities, the people who run them, their status as employees, free-lance or volunteers, what liabilities they take on, who the users are? These are questions which can help to build up an idea of the communities of the centre and their relationship with the space. I wonder to what extent my observations in this room inform the spatial practices that I am interested in. Are these simply indicators to prompt further questions about how the space is curated? Is this minutia representative of wider issues or are they useful in their own right?

They do suggest questions: How has the community group intervened in the physical space? Is the use of cheerful colours a deliberate mark against municipal influence, or a desire for a more domestic kind of habitation? How does the materiality remember the past and represent ideas for the future – how do the users and volunteers feel about the past use of the space and how does this affect the ways in which they act, today and imagine how it could be in the future?

What are the rules for the space? Who is setting them? What are the relationships between the local Authority, the management group/trustees, the users?

Layers of ethnographic description: Cymorth Community Centre

Layer	Description
(a) Locating the ethnographic setting	This community centre is located in a suburb of a city in south Wales. Based on the postcode, this centre is located in a deprived neighbourhood (1 <sup>st</sup> decile of WIMD, where 1 <sup>st</sup> is the most deprived). Local councillors are Labour and one independent.
(b) The physical space	The community group have a repair and maintenance lease for the building for 99 years. It is run by paid staff and there are some volunteers. The building mainly dates from the early C20th with some later additions. Since being taken on by the group it has undergone refurbishment. The building is the smallest of the three. It has a reception area, a number of smaller meeting and teaching rooms, a hall, offices, community shop, art room, a workshop, toilets and a kitchen. Externally it has a small garden and yard with parking.
(c) Interactions within the building	At this centre I attended different activities and hung out in the common areas, café, garden etc., to participate in the daily life of the centre. This brought me into contact with staff, volunteers, members of the public. Especially in the activities I engaged in conversation with staff and the public – these were preceded by declaring my role as researcher and why I was there. These facilitated further conversations which were undertaken with signed consent forms.
(d) Participating in interactions in the building	I spent time in the common areas of the centre and being part of activities. Contacts snowballed from initial conversations with the site manager who introduced me to some staff and then being in place was an opportunity to approach people for conversations – and often where others engaged with me first to find out what I was doing. I spent time observing, either at the edge – or more often as part of the group who were involved in the different activities. These included art groups, garden clubs, workshops, social clubs. Through these settings the social, economic and development role of the centre was mirrored and attended to through the activities that took place and understandings of the myriad of ways in which forms of support manifest emerged from my encounters. People's behaviour was often fleeting but sorting through my research diary I began to bring together data that constituted ideas of care that I was experiencing. In relation to other descriptive methods such as photography, I decided early on not to take photographs of activities as they happened. Partly because I am uneasy of the ways in which such depictions can be misconstrued. I was not there to create images of 'happy people in the community' and wanted to be sensitive to people's privacy.
(e) Reflecting on the research process	Again, my understandings of this centre developed over time, and I developed an broad appreciation of the work that the group does which challenged me to think different about the politics that operate at the site.
(f) self-reflections	Some of the research encounters were upsetting. Some community members who came to the centre were distressed – with centre staff providing support – which was nonetheless troubling. While many of these events were recorded in my research diaries – and underpinned my overall sense of the work that the group does – they are largely absent from my account to protect individuals' privacy. I was fortunate that this group was very skilled in dealing with these issues and was able to speak with them when I had concerns about community members. During the fieldwork I developed a growing sense of the importance of my work in recognising the care work of the group and this helped me to focus on the productive ways in which I could help, first and foremost by telling this story.

Source: By author adapted from Paul Cloke et al. (2004) *Practicing Human Geographies* p201-204. London and Thousand Oaks, Calif. SAGE.



*Description of momentary encounters on a Thursday morning in the community 'living room' at Cymorth Community Centre*

I am sitting at the back of the front room of the community centre on what is called the 'hot desk' writing by hand my observations. There is a smell of toast, the room is bustling with noise, the low bass of radio 2 underpins quiet conversations between couples, and louder, shouted interjections from individuals contributing to a group activity. Taking in the room anticlockwise, opposite me sits Lynne typing on a keyboard looking at the monitor behind a low reception desk. Lynne is a paid employee taking room bookings and is a friendly face or voice for people calling in.

On the seat next to her is Sarah a volunteer who runs the shop. Sarah and her mum, also a volunteer, set up the shop. The shop grew out of a cupboard in the main hall where centre users at the 'knit and natter' group began to bring in things they didn't need and swapped them for things they wanted. Now the shop is being extended again and the range of clothes, toys and school uniforms is being separated from the food. New chillers being put in place to store donations from supermarkets. People who visit the shop are asked to donate for the things that they take, they decide how much they want to pay.

Sarah is talking to her teenage son Daniel. He is doing an apprenticeship in 'Animal Care' and work experience at a local pet shop, he also volunteers at the centre one day a week and has set up and runs an 'Animal food bank' to help pet owners as the promotional sign says 'who might be struggling to afford the high prices of pet products' The centre manager states that 'It's fantastic to see Daniel running a pet stall. More importantly he has increased in confidence. Not a lot of people his age would give the time that he does to this. His work is very much appreciated by the community'. How do these volunteers use and create the space of the community centre? How are they supported by the centre? What contribution do they make, how much time do they give, who in the community appreciates this?

Beside the reception desk sits a well-dressed older man speaking to a woman from a local charity. She runs a drop-in service for community groups who want advice on funding applications or solutions to problems that they might have in their organisations. She says she comes here because it is one of the few places that she can 'access' or be 'in the community'. In the centre of the room is long line of tables around which are sat 8 older women. Jenny who is younger than the rest wears a t-shirt with writing that marks her out as a volunteer, she moves round the women giving them a head massage whilst one woman shouts out trivia questions from a stack of cards. The other women, including people sitting round the room shout back answers. One woman says to another 'you make the tea now; I've made three cups already for you lot'. Tea and coffee are free at this community centre, although a small box sits beside the kettle for any donations which are then given to charity. Jenny says the group is founded on ideas of health and well-being, a space for vulnerable older adults to come and spend time together to eat breakfast and lunch, Jenny says, for some it is the only time they will go out all week.

The quiz master shouts out the scores. One of the two Police Community Support Officers who have been sat on the table for the duration of the quiz is declared the winner. Most of the group, the receptionist and others in the room applaud and cheer. Back at the 'hot desk' four men in their 20s and 30s walk past me to the bar to make themselves a hot drink. They wait in line behind some women who have filed out from the English class that has just finished in the main hall. The men have been at a training session to get a 'Construction Skills Certification Scheme' card, this is an essential Health and Safety qualification that allows them to work on building sites. One of the centre workers has told me that this is the way that the centre brings in money. The community centre is an approved test centre with a locked and dedicated room for testing equipped with CCTV to prevent/discourage cheating as part of the official requirements. This activity has past associations with the building that was previously used as a youth centre that held construction training.

These observations, in part illuminated by my 'being there', begin to suggest further questions about the space. The role of volunteers or volunteering in delivering social benefit, the presence of different agencies such as the third sector and the police who use the space, and activities where the space is, or is not, 'rented' out for profit are perhaps useful points for consideration.

Finally, there are also ethical issues, sitting observing these people has not always been a comfortable experience. Access was granted by the managers of the centre, but this does not cover those who come and

go in the space, I try to make my presence explicit and talk about my work with those that I can. I don't report sensitive overheard conversations to protect privacy and think about whether anonymisation is sufficient.

Layers of ethnographic description: Cymdaithasol Community Centre

Layer	Description
(a) Locating the ethnographic setting	This community centre is located in the centre of a city in South Wales. Its postcode locates it in an area that is less deprived (8th decile of WIMD). Local Councillors are all Labour
(b) The physical space	The group has a maintenance and repair lease from the Council for 35 years. It has been described as a 'historic CAT' (Llandinas Council officer 2019) being leased before implementation of this policy but based on what became its standard terms and conditions. The building has two large indoor halls, a number of meeting rooms and music suites, a café, reception, kitchens and toilets. It has a garden onto the street.
(c) Interactions within the building	At this centre I attended different activities and hung out in the common areas, café, garden etc., to participate in the daily life of the centre. This brought me into contact with staff, volunteers, members of the public where I was able to introduce myself and talk about my project. These facilitated further conversations which were undertaken with signed consent forms.
(d) Participating in interactions in the building	I spent time in common areas and contacts snowballed from initial conversations with the site manager who introduced me to some staff and then being in place was an opportunity to approach people for conversations – and often where others engaged with me first to find out what I was doing. I spent time observing, either at the edge – or more often as part of groups involved in different activities. Through these settings the role of the centre emerged from my encounters. The number of people passing through this centre was high although I soon came to be known by some of the people who attend the centre. This centre was the largest and had the most activities. It quickly became apparent that it would not be possible to go to every group and I adopted a form of selective sampling where access was possible and where it might offer insight into the work of the centre. Additionally, there were a number of groups for potentially vulnerable young adults which I did not engage with as it would have required specific ethical considerations. Such work would benefit from further inquiry in the future.
(e) Reflecting on the research process	Again, my understandings of this centre developed over time, and challenged me to think differently about the politics that operate at the site. Contact with trustees and staff was particularly useful as they offered highly reflective accounts of the operation of the site.
(f) self-reflections	Some of the ethnographic work here, as at all of the sites, was mundane and did not always appear to produce useful insight. However, even this work allowed me to have the time and space to think about what was going on and how I might report it. It is easy to romanticize these community spaces where people are friendly and compassionate – this is not dulled by spending long periods of time in the space – but it became important to recognise the more productive aspects of this environment as an essential part of the story.

Source: By author adapted from Paul Cloke et al. (2004) *Practicing Human Geographies* p201-204. London and Thousand Oaks, Calif. SAGE.

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