

# **Good Eggs, Fixers and Movers:**

## **The Cultural Elite in Wales**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of members of the cultural elite in Wales. This term is used to mean people who hold prominent, high profile and prestigious positions within the culture sector in Wales, specifically located around the capital city of Cardiff. Through the analysis of data collected from in-depth semi-structured interviews with twenty key informants I examine how they construct their biographies and make sense of the social world which they inhabit. I address two main research questions, firstly whether they see themselves as belonging to a closed, restricted and self-referencing network. Secondly, how do they try to justify their positions of power and privilege in society? Using themes from the literature I also consider to what extent the different sectors (culture, business and political) overlap, how the network is constructed in terms of a core and a periphery, what purpose this serves, and how the network is at once generally cohesive but also not without some internal divisions. This is all done in a specifically Welsh context and I argue that their national identity has a very important role to play in how they define and experience culture, and that this directly impacts on how they explain their reasons and motivations for their involvement. I use Bourdieu's notions of cultural and social capital and demonstrate how these are exchangeable commodities. While members of the cultural elite are in possession of large amounts of cultural capital, success in the network depends on them being able to demonstrate this, and this in turn increases their social capital. The act of networking is fundamental for sustaining the network and this is a performance on their part. How the interviewees performed for me, the interviewer, lies at the heart of the discussion.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction: It's Looking Up**

This thesis explores the experiences, values and opinions of members of the cultural elite in Wales. By this I mean people who hold, often numerous, prominent and prestigious positions within the cultural sector in Wales, as either heads of the organisations and/or members of their boards, which tend to transmit both high and Welsh forms of culture, for example Welsh National Opera, BBC Wales and The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.<sup>1</sup> By using data collected from semi-structured in-depth interviews I examine how members of an elite group within society construct their narratives and biographies in order to explain the social world and network that they inhabit. Rather than simply mapping the network that they belong to, with its various overlaps and connections, I explain how this network is formed and maintained, how it functions, and what membership means for its members. I also explore how the interviewees attempt to justify the positions of power, influence and privilege that they occupy in society.

In this chapter I begin by outlining the need for sociologists to study up in society and provide some brief reasons for why this approach has waned in popularity in the last four decades. I argue that studying up in the current economic climate is a particularly timely and relevant endeavour, but whereas studies of the financial world typically rely on corporate interlock studies, qualitative methods should also be employed for studying the powerful. I then turn my attention to Wales, making the point that very little research which looks 'upwards' has been done in this country, despite it being a prime site for such an investigation. I also explain my reasons for focusing attention on the cultural sphere and my

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<sup>1</sup> The reasons for the choice of organisations is discussed in Chapter Three and a full list of all the organisations represented in this study can be found in Appendix A.

personal reflections on embarking on a research project on an elite group within society. At the end of the chapter I state the aim of this thesis and the research questions before providing an overview of the proceeding chapters.

### **The popularity (or not) of elite research**

Traditionally elites have been well researched in the social sciences. The work of the classical elite theorists (Pareto, 1901; Mosca, 1939; Michels, 1958), C.Wright Mills's (1956) concept of the power elite in America and Marx's (1961) account of capitalism all helped cement issues of power and privilege at the forefront of sociological enquiry. However, this interest declined from the mid-1970s and the loss of popularity in, what has become widely known as 'studying up', led Nader (1972) to call for anthropologists to redirect their gaze upwards. In her often quoted article she argues:

'studying "up" as well as "down" would lead us to ask many "common sense" questions in reverse. Instead of asking why some people are poor, we would ask why other people are so affluent?' (p.289)

So, she reasons, in order to understand the systems of inequality attention needs to be paid to those who are in positions of power and economic privilege. Nader's rally cry has since been echoed in the field of anthropology by Marcus and Fischer (1986) and again by Gusterson (1997) who makes the point that this has still been largely unheeded. More recently sociologists interested in elites have commented on their 'glaring invisibility' (Savage and Williams, 2008:2) so that 'studies that critically examine elites remain scarce and limited in scope' (Aguiar, 2012:3). While this lack of research on elites in the last four decades or so has been viewed as a strange anomaly (de Grangeneuve, 2009) there have also been a number of explanations provided for it. These are outlined in detail by Aguiar (2012) and will only be summarised briefly here.

One ideological reason provided for the lack of elite research is the belief that it is not necessary to give a platform to people who already have one in society. By the nature of being an elite they are visible and outspoken (Gallaher, 2012). Coupled with this is the idea that the notion of ‘studying up’ is not a useful or desirable concept (Smith, 2006; Magnat, 2012). Aguiar (2012) argues that developments within sociological thinking and theory have also had the consequence of pushing elite research to the outskirts. Postmodernist and post-structuralist thought rejects the idea of pre-existing frameworks in society and so examination of class structure becomes obsolete. Definitions of class have been challenged and sidelined by neoliberalism discourse (Harvey, 2005) and the work of feminists have focused on patriarchy as the dominant force in society, rather than issues of class (Bannerji, 1995). There are also practical and methodological reasons provided. Elite groups are characterised as being closed and difficult to access, but as Nader (1972) herself argued these challenges should not be used as an excuse for not attempting it. The increased popularity of the scientific survey, and the collection and analysis of quantitative data, means that the small elite section of society becomes effectively ‘lost’ as they require other methods such as interviews and documentary analysis in order to study them (Savage and Williams, 2008). Finally, there is even the argument that it may not be in the best interests of the academic to effectively direct their gaze on to their own institutions, and this could jeopardise their position and chances of promotion within ‘the system’ (Whiteley, Aguiar and Marten, 2005).

Despite these perceived obstacles for the researcher embarking on a study of elites Nader’s call to ‘study up’ continues to reverberate in the social sciences, especially in the current economic climate. Society is increasingly divided between the rich and poor and one which is characterised by inequality and injustice. The rise of the ‘super rich’ has created an even larger gap between the very wealthy and those living in poverty (Harvey, 2005) and



researching upwards remains the approach for understanding how the disadvantaged come to be so (Cormon, Duffy and Pupo, 2012). As Froud, Savage, Tampubolon and Williams (2006) argue the notion of 'elite' still has potency in popular society and features frequently in political discourse, and so sociologists should afford it similar attention. The financial crisis of 2008 has served to help this cause, as has the increased popularity of the method of social network analysis, used primarily for investigating the extent to which corporate directorships interlock (Useem, 1984), but even this has not had the effect of raising the profile of elite research enough so that it occupies the dominant position in the social sciences that it once did (Windolf, 2002). Savage and Williams (2008) in their book entitled *Remembering Elites* argue not only for the return to studying elites but call for the development of new methodologies with which to achieve this. While social network analysis shows the number of ties and connections elite members possess, they believe that this needs to be supplemented with research of a more qualitative and ethnographic nature in order to understand elite formation across the upper tiers of society.

### **Turning to Wales**

A scan of the most recent (at the time of writing) issue of *Contemporary Wales* (Volume 25), an annual journal that has been published since 1987 dedicated to Wales, its politics, history and current affairs, provides a glimpse of the issues of interest to sociologists researching and writing about Wales. Attention is typically focused on The National Assembly for Wales, its evolving remit, function and effectiveness (Navarro, 2012) as well as its perceived relevance and impact on Wales and its people, as measured for example by participation in the 2011 Welsh Referendum (Scully and Wyn Jones, 2012). Issues of the strength of the economy (Bryan and Roche, 2012), Welsh productivity (Robinson and Blackby, 2012) and wage (Carey, 2012) all feature. As well as articles dedicated to the marginalised in society i.e.

people in receipt of incapacity benefit (Grant, 2012) and the experiences of minority groups living in Wales, such as Welsh-Italians (Giudici, 2012). Although clearly this is only one snapshot it does serve to highlight the key themes that are of interest in Wales quite effectively. The big issues for society generally are addressed, the political and the economic, alongside the importance of Welsh cultural identity, and it is worth noting that much has been written on the topics of Welsh national identity (see Fevre and Thompson, 1999) and Welsh nationalism (see Denney, Borland and Fevre, 1995). The voices of the elite in society are all but missing, and this is a pattern which in the main continues back across all issues of the journal.

Research that has involved ‘looking up’ in Wales has primarily been carried out in the political sector. The process of devolution and the creation of The National Assembly has given researchers the perfect impetus and platform to explore Welsh politics, with the majority of the focus being on the history of devolution (Osmond, 1998), the pragmatics and process of devolution (Osmond and Jones, 2003), the results of elections (McAllister and Cole, 2007), voter participation (Scully and Wyn Jones, 2012) and public perception of the Assembly (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2005), which once again turns the gaze of the researcher firmly downwards. There has been less research involving talking to the elite political actors themselves but noteworthy exceptions exist, including the exploration of the role of female politicians during the time of constitutional change in Wales (Chaney, Mackay and McAllister, 2007) and Stirbu’s (2009) ethnography of the Assembly as it went through internal restructuring in which she used elite interviews to highlight the tensions caused by this institutional change. These sojourns into the world of the Welsh elite, however, have been very much contained within the political sector and have not been expanded to look at if, and if so how, the powerful in Wales are a cohesive group across all of the upper echelons

of Welsh society. What are the relationships that exist with the business and cultural spheres for example?

The lack of attention directed upwards in Wales comes as no surprise when this has been the trend in sociology generally. There is no reason why Wales should be any different, but if anything researchers and commentators in Wales can be accused of being preoccupied with the working class, with much being written about the marginalised and disadvantaged in Welsh society. In the key sociological text about Wales *Making Sense of Wales* (2002) Graham Day makes this very point, that in Wales ‘attention has been directed far more systematically towards the working class, and the relatively powerless’ (p.100). Very little is written in this book about members of the elite because, as he explains, there is very little work or research to pass comment upon. He laments this fact, and effectively calls for more sociologists studying Wales to ‘study up’ seeing there as being an ‘almost total lack of examination of the characteristics of Welsh elites’ (p.100) and:

‘An almost total lack of scrutiny of the nature of power relationships within Wales, its patterns of elite formation and of the way in which networks of relations of influence are constructed and managed’ (p.211).

### **Rationale: Why Wales?**

This lack of attention directed towards the powerful in Welsh society provides the perfect rationale for this thesis. It assists with filling this gap in the sociological literature and it answers Day’s call to study up in Wales. I also believe that a study of the powerful in a specifically Welsh context makes for a particularly interesting one. Firstly because Wales is a small nation and so provides a concentrated setting for the study of ties and connections. This can starkly illustrate the nature of the interconnected world that elite members inhabit. Secondly, because of the opinions that are held about class in Wales. There is a general (and

historical) notion that Wales is more of a ‘classless’ society, as opposed to its neighbour England with ‘notions of the Welsh social structure as being relatively open and meritocratic’ (Rees and Delamont, 1999:233). So then, how do the advantaged deal with the issue of privilege? How do they explain it and make sense of it? This becomes even more of an issue when any affront to meritocracy in Wales is detested. The people of Wales do not like elites or elitism. Specifically they object to the individuals who form the *crachach* or the *taffia*. These are the terms used to describe the elite groups in Wales:

‘Crachach; literally means a scab that forms on a wound, it’s pronounced like the sound of a bronchitic spitting into a fire. It’s a term of mild abuse used to describe the elite, the posh, the upper class’ (Flynn, 1999:73).

In an article for the BBC the journalist and broadcaster Carolyn Hitt<sup>2</sup> defines the *crachach* as ‘the elite who look after one another, the powerful, great and good of Wales’. She identifies them as being largely Welsh-speaking and nationalist, as dominating the arts, culture and media sectors in Wales, and as a group in which ‘who knows who’ is of fundamental importance. This term carries such political significance and force within the popular imagination that when Rhodri Morgan was running for the leadership of the Labour Party in Wales he promised ‘Cynulliad y werin, nid Cynulliad y *crachach*: An Assembly of the people, not of the establishment’ (cited in Flynn, 1999:73). Wales then is perceived as both meritocratic and elitist. This contradiction is worthy of investigation and talking to members of the elite is one avenue that can be used to explore it.

### **Rationale: Why cultural elites?**

The decision to focus my attention on preliminary and predominantly cultural elites was a deliberate one. I did not want to be ‘treading on the toes’, as it were, of the researchers of the politicians in The National Assembly for Wales and I wanted to add a distinctly different

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<sup>2</sup> Hitt, C. (2006) ‘So just who are ‘the *crachach*’?’ *BBC News*, 1 March 2006, accessed on July 17<sup>th</sup> 2013.

perspective on power in Wales, but researching the cultural sector had other merits, aside from novelty. It is interesting to explore an elite group that is labelled and perceived as such within popular society. Does this influence how its elite members attempt to portray themselves? The notion of the crachach is a pervasive one and allowed me to investigate this. As members of the crachach are seen as occupying prominent positions in the arts and media world, my attention was firmly set on the cultural domain in Wales. I also recognised the possibilities of examining a sector that had already been researched in England (Griffiths, Miles and Savage, 2008) and Scotland (Bechhofer, McCrone, Kiely and Stewart, 1999) and comparing these findings to Wales. Wales has its own distinct cultural heritage and traditions so how would this impact on members of the cultural elites' understanding and experience of culture and how they think it should be transmitted to the mass in society? Of particular interest was how their appreciation of 'high' culture, a prerequisite for being a cultural elite, sits with their duty and obligation to promoting specifically Welsh forms of culture. This is all played out on a backdrop of a country that has its own language, but one that only 19% of the people living there actually speak. The majority do not but it remains a mandatory requirement for roles in broadcasting or the National Eisteddfod.<sup>3</sup> How does this further shape and /or divide the experiences of the powerful in Wales?

Although I could not have anticipated it at the time of the inception of this project the financial crisis of 2008 has had an impact on this piece of research. Funding cuts have hit the arts sector particularly hard, with the little money there is being channeled to areas such as health and education. In 2009 The Arts Council for Wales announced that they would be

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<sup>3</sup> Results of the 2011 census were published in the online article 'Census 2011: numbers of Welsh speakers falling' *BBC News Wales*, 11 December 2012, accessed on September 28<sup>th</sup> 2013. 562,000 (19%) of the population declared themselves as Welsh-speakers in the 2011 census which was a drop from 582,000 (21%) in the previous 2007 census.

carrying out an investment review, the outcome of which was published in June 2010<sup>4</sup> (during the main period of my data collection). As a result of this, funding was stopped for thirty-two groups, but continued for another seventy-one. This clearly has implications for my data, especially considering the fact that I interviewed people working for, or involved with The Arts Council, and this highlights how the decisions of the few, can affect the lives of the many. Organisations which continued to be funded were unsurprisingly ‘the big guns’ as one of my interviewees called them, including Welsh National Opera and BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and it is on the boards of these that the cultural elite reside, is this coincidence? This squeezing of money was accompanied with the rhetoric that culture should be experienced by everyone in society. This was articulated in the Arts Council’s investment review document. Under the heading ‘We’re about arts for everyone’ it stated ‘We’re interested in the many, not just the few.’<sup>5</sup> So culture should be open and accessible to all, but is this really what the cultural elite believe and what they are aspiring to?

### **On justifying my research (and on justifying myself)**

At a point, somewhere in the middle of my PhD journey, I gave a paper based on the preliminary analysis of my data at a conference entitled *Class in Wales* which took place at Cardiff University.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the day presenters and delegates were invited to a roundtable discussion to draw out the overlapping themes and issues from across the various papers. What follows are my feelings about this experience which I originally recorded in my research diary:

I am very aware that I am the only person studying up. Everyone else is very much looking down. I am in the minority. The minority of

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<sup>4</sup> A full explanation of this, its process and outcome, can be found on The Arts Council of Wales website [www.artswales.org.uk](http://www.artswales.org.uk)

<sup>5</sup> ‘*Renewal and Transformation: Building a Stronger Future For the Arts in Wales*’ *The Arts Council of Wales’ Investment Review*, Arts Council of Wales, p.10.

<sup>6</sup> Clayton, A.C. (2011) ‘Well somebody’s got to make the wheels turn’: The motivations of the cultural elite in Wales’ paper given at the *Class in Wales* conference, Cardiff University.

one. I am odd out. We are invited to talk about where our interest in studying class stems from. The discussion takes a much more personal tone. How their own biographies have shaped their interest in class (read *working* class). The father who worked all his life in a factory which resulted in his early death. The mother who could not understand their desire to go to university rather than getting a 'proper job'. I am uncomfortable because I feel that the automatic assumption of everybody around me is that because I am studying elites then I must either be an elite myself or, at the very least, be wholly sympathetic with them. I am on their side. Which is not the side of the underdog (i.e. the rest of the people sat around the table). Nobody says any of this of course and I respond by saying nothing myself, but I can feel myself visibly squirming.

Were these feelings simply paranoia? They certainly were not helped by an incident earlier in the day when, over lunch, I was reintroduced to someone, having already met her for the first time at the British Sociological Association annual conference the previous year, and she remembered me as 'the posh one'. I am certain that doing 'posh' research does not make me posh. The fact that I am so far socially and culturally removed from my elite interviewees actually posed issues for me during my research (and this is discussed at length in Chapter Three of this thesis). Throughout this project I have borne in mind the words of Cochrane (1998:125) that during the process 'we have grown to know and understand them' so we can get too familiar with our elite respondents. It would be a lie to say that I am not in some way attached to my interviewees, in the same way that any researcher gets involved with their participants whether they are studying up, down or across. I am greatly appreciative of their willingness to talk to me and I have worked with their voices on paper and in my head for a very long time, but throughout I have tried to maintain a critical distance.

My PhD supervisors had warned me about the hostile reactions that I may face when presenting my work to an audience. The fact that people read or hear the word elite and they immediately get agitated. They do not like it. They do not like elites because of the connotations of elitism and being elitist. I was advised by them to use the retort 'better the

devil you know'. The idea that knowledge about them is a powerful thing. That only by studying elite groups can we really be in a position to criticise them. What I think is so important is that this anti-elitist feeling extends to the elite interviewees themselves. This is at the core of how they try to present themselves to me the interviewer. As someone who does not fit this stereotype of an immoral elite, consisting of someone who is removed from the people or the mass of society, born with a silver spoon in their mouth, who does little work for a large salary, is involved in a range of things in order to be seen to be busy, for the kudos and the accompanying cocktail receptions. This prickliness about being an elite permeates the interview site itself and shapes how the interviewees choose to present themselves. They know that society at large feels animosity towards them so they work hard to declare themselves as not being like that (while simultaneously implying that others might be). This is done to relative degrees of success as this thesis explores.

So what should I have done / said during the roundtable discussion at the conference? I considered declaring myself as 'one of them' by professing my own humble origins (as my interviewees themselves are prone to do) and my single-mother upbringing. Should I have slipped in something about my previous research that I carried out for my MSc on a group of disadvantaged young Welsh working-class girls?<sup>7</sup> Would that have got me 'off the hook'? I should have been braver and justified my being there with the sentiments already expressed in this introduction. My belief in the importance and relevance of studying up because in order for sociologists to understand society surely they need to study all sections of it. Studying the working class in isolation will only ever tell a partial story. Despite this incident, and a few others like it, I can honestly say that my commitment to this project has never wavered. Although elite voices already have a platform in society from which to be

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<sup>7</sup> Clayton A.C. (2008) 'You can't do that in a Salon: An ethnography of a vocational course' unpublished MSc thesis.



heard, I believe that this provides even more reason why these voices should actually be *scrutinised*. Shutting our ears to them achieves nothing and certainly does not change the fact that these are the people who fundamentally control society, in the case of this study the culture sector in Wales.

## **Aim**

This is a qualitative piece of research which aims to explore how members of the cultural elite in Wales construct and make sense of the social world which they inhabit and how they explain their roles and positions within it. This in turn can then be used in order to address the bigger issues of identity, power and place that elite groups have in society, which in this study is a specifically Welsh one. The fundamental principle that has guided the collection and analysis of the data is the recognition that the interview site is a place of performance. The members of the cultural elite that I spoke to were all highly intelligent and very articulate, and so were capable of choosing to present themselves to me, the researcher, in particular ways, not necessarily always truthfully. I believe that this does not invalidate the data or impact on its usefulness, rather it requires thoughtful, thorough and critical analysis in order to read through the lines of their performances and rhetoric. By acting to present themselves in a particular way they are showcasing how they wish to appear and so are ultimately revealing what they themselves place value on or what they think they should be heard to say, in other words, what society wants to hear. I aim to look deeper than other commentaries which typically, using social network analysis, simply state that a network exists, rather I explore how these interlocks and overlaps are utilised (Knoke, 1990). By this I mean the reality of what it means to belong to the network and why this is of benefit to them in order to understand their social world from the vantage point of the elite participants

themselves (Becker, 1969) rather than mapping membership from a distance, outside of their lived realities.

## **Research Questions**

At the beginning of the research process I did not have a set of tightly framed research questions. My overall aim and guiding principle was to explore how members of the cultural elite in Wales construct and present their personal narratives and biographies, with the belief that this would uncover important issues of networks, connections, power and influence. As the number of interviews conducted increased, with preliminary data analysis occurring concurrently, the research questions become more specific and defined and resulted in two primary research questions and a number of subsidiary ones, as follows:

**1. Do the Welsh cultural elite belong to a closed, restricted, self-recruiting and self-referencing network?**

- How is the network characterised?
- How is the network structured?
- To what extent do the different spheres (cultural, political and business) overlap with one another?
- How is membership to the network achieved and sustained? In other words, how does a person get in and then stay in?
- What are the perceived advantages of belonging to the network?

**2. How do members of the Welsh cultural elite explain and justify their position of power and privilege?**

- What qualifies a person to be a 'cultural elite'? What skills, characteristics and attributes are valued by them?
- What explanations do they give for their involvement in the culture sector in Wales?
- What significance does culture play in their own lives and biographies?
- What ideas do they construct about culture for society? And specifically for Wales?

## **Overview of thesis**

### **Part I**

In the first part of the thesis I present the background and context of this research project and its findings. I start by examining the sociological literature on elite groups within society, and use this to argue that there has been no such systematic study in Wales. Chapter Three is a reflexive account of the process of collecting and analysing the data generated from the semi-structured interviews.

摄

#### **Chapter Two                      Examining the Elite Landscape**

In this chapter I use the existing literature on the topic of elites to consider its usefulness for my research questions concerning cultural elites in Wales. I begin by outlining the difficulty of defining ‘elite’ and how this has created key debates throughout the literature concerning whether it is different to the concept of class and whether there is one power elite in society (as C. Wright Mills, 1956 suggests) or a fragmented elite. While recognising that divisions between the typologies of elites (political, financial and cultural) are superficial, as sectors do overlap to some extent (Carroll, 2008) I use these groupings to organise my literature review to examine findings from a variety of different countries, paying particular attention to cultural elites, the work of Bourdieu and the idea of cultural capital. In the final section I turn my focus to what has been written about Wales, highlighting the lack of attention to studying up generally, and cultural elites specifically. I then use this as justification for this current project.

#### **Chapter Three                      Elite Interviewing: Power and Performance**

In Chapter Three I discuss the research methods used to gather my data. I begin by reflecting on the issues created by doing a piece of research which involves ‘studying up’ and the power

dynamics that this involves. The chapter is then divided into three sections. The first concerns the initial stages of the research, including the analysis of secondary material, location of a sample, issues of access and preliminary interviews. Then I turn my attention to the interview process itself. I justify the use of semi-structured interviews as the most appropriate method available, then discuss issues of the preparation and use of the interview schedule, questioning techniques and self-presentation. In the final section I focus on the process of analysis of the data and the ethical considerations of this piece of research.

## **Part II**

In Part II I present the data gathered from the interviews. In these three empirical chapters I analyse the words of the interviewees in order to explore the research questions. The data is divided thematically, with each one examining differently (although far from mutually exclusive) aspects of how members of the cultural elite construct their sense of identity within their social worlds.

### **Chapter Four                      ‘Movers’: Using the Network**

In this chapter I use the term ‘mover’<sup>8</sup> in order to signify that one important aspect of being a true member of the cultural elite is to be at the core of the network and this requires them to be proficient at networking. Here I address the first research question concerning the nature of the network. I argue that the concept of a network exists in the minds of the interviewees and describe how they characterise and construct it, as at once cohesive but also as one not without divisions. I explore how the network is sustained through acts of networking and what successful networking depends upon before exploring how the interviewees attempt to portray the process of getting appointments (further strengthening their position in the

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<sup>8</sup> The terms ‘movers’ ‘fixers’ and ‘good eggs’ were used by an interviewee during one of my preliminary interviews. They have been very useful terms for me in the analysis of the data as they denote the key characteristics of the cultural elite, and so I have continued to use them in the write up of my findings.

network) as a fair and meritocratic process. Finally I address why it is the case that belonging to the network is perceived as an advantage for its members.

## Chapter Five

### ‘Fixers’: Having the Skills

Chapter Five outlines the perceived qualities, attributes, characteristics and motivations required to be a member of the Welsh cultural elite, and the term ‘fixer’ is used to sum up the essence of this. I begin by outlining the interviewees’ concept of a bad board member. They use this to construct their own identity, one that is in direct contrast with it. I argue that in some ways they do fit this stereotype and so they work extremely hard to justify this. In the next section I examine their motivations for their involvement in the cultural sector and how this creates the dialogue of a fixer. I explore the characteristics required to be a fixer and how they use this to further emphasise the importance of belonging to the network.

## Chapter Six

### ‘Good Eggs’: Being Cultured

In the final empirical chapter I turn my attention to how the elite interviewees in my sample are specifically a cultural elite and a Welsh elite. The term ‘good eggs’ is used to signify people who hold the correct attitudes, values and beliefs. Firstly I explore how they define culture, and how this is experienced as high, and positioned in opposition to mass culture. I then look to how they explain Welsh culture and how this is intrinsically related to their own self-identity, revealing the importance of being Welsh to the cultural elite. Especially as, as I argue in the next section, they are working to promote a specifically Welsh culture out of a sense of duty and loyalty to their country. I contrast this with their more selfish reasons for involvement and by way of conclusion I talk of their reluctance to retire.

## **Part III**

### **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion: Long Live the Good Egg, the Fixer and the Mover?**

In this chapter I start by summarising what the thesis has done and sum up the main conclusions and findings. I draw the empirical data from the previous three chapters together in order to address the research questions and highlight the main themes which cut across all of the data. I present the implications that the research may have for the sociological literature on elite groups, for society and for future policy. I finish by suggesting further possible avenues for studying up in Wales.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Examining the Elite Landscape**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the relevant literature that is important for understanding and contextualising the empirical findings of this thesis. It begins with a discussion concerning the difficulty in defining the term elite because this will have implications for any piece of research that aims to study an elite group. I outline two important debates related to this issue. Firstly, whether the concept of an elite is a separate one from the definition of an upper class and secondly I consider whether there is one cohesive elite (or power elite) in society or a number of fragmented elite groups. I then use this as a platform to examine the main elite typologies, while also acknowledging that in reality such hard and fast distinctions do not exist because there is significant overlap between them. I provide examples of research on political, financial and cultural elites from around the globe, and give particular attention to the ideas of Bourdieu and his notion of cultural capital. The last section of the chapter focuses on what has been written about Wales, how the country is typically characterised and its (changing) culture. I use this to once again emphasise that research in Wales has not been systematically directed upwards, and to show how this current piece of research aims to fill this gap.

#### **Part I: Definitions and Debates**

##### **The problem of definition**

The term elite is one that has undergone changes in meaning. It has been subject to reinterpretation, and as a result still has no clear and solid definition (Daloz, 2010). This may on one hand pose an issue for the researcher wanting to study elites, as it lacks substantive

conceptual depth (Woods, 1998) but the ‘inclusive and flexible’ nature of the term could also serve as an advantage (Aguilar, 2012:6). Its inherent vagueness allows for a broad interpretation of the term so that researchers can define it as they see fit and in relation to the specific purpose of their individual study. There are, however, a number of key common features. The word elite is ‘closely linked with abstract notions of power and privilege’ (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002:301) and its members are characterised as a group which has ‘cohesion and solidarity’ (Pakulski, 2011:329-30). They are united together by their sharing of common values and goals. They are typically portrayed as ‘small minorities who make decisions on behalf of the majority’ (Hiller, 1996:127) so that the decisions of the powerful few affect the lives of the many. Keller (1991) describes the modern day elite as ‘strategic elites’. They are vital in maintaining institutions in society and are clustered in the business and political sectors. It is important to emphasise that the concept is gender-blind, having been predominantly applied to men (Pakulski, 2011) and this is why it was felt that it was very important to include both men and women in my sample.

### **An upper class or an elite?**

One influential debate surrounding the definition of elite is whether it is a separate and different concept from class. Marcus (1983) believes that the term elite is a difficult to define and untangle from ideas such as class. It remains an ambiguous term which:

‘In general usage has a certain force ... only when elite is elaborated as an interest of social theory and research ... does the inherent vagueness of the concept become a major difficulty’ (p.7).

Definitions of elite exist which have tried to convey this distinction, for example defining elite to mean ‘social distinction by rank’ (Williams, 1983:113) which allows for elite status and superiority to be earned, rather than it being assigned at birth through class origins.



Whether society is divided upon class lines or whether it is an elite group, rather than an upper class, that holds power continues to be a significant debate for elite theorists today.

Class theorists, most obviously Marxists, use the ideas of Marx (1961) to see power as resulting from enclosure of land and the ownership of capital. The bourgeoisie are able to maintain their position through their control of the economy and so political leaders will be drawn from the dominant economic class who own the means of production. As Lerner, Nagai and Rothman (1996) argue Neo-Marxists have criticised this approach for over-emphasising the role of the economy because it is not just about who owns capital but also who controls and runs the institutions, including those in the political and cultural sectors. This maintains the social order and benefits the bourgeoisie by promoting their interests. Domhoff (1983) sees the ruling class in the United States as being based in the large banks and corporations but that its influence extends over both the economic and political spheres. This is made possible by the closed networks that exist which mean that leadership roles are not given to those outside of this class meaning that it can reproduce itself successfully and can remain tightly integrated. He developed indicators of social class according to club membership, educational pedigree, and inclusion on social registers.

On the opposing side of the debate a non-Marxist analysis of society rejects the concepts of class dominance by the upper class, rather it is members of the elite who hold power because of their positioning at the top of key sectors, institutions and organisations within society. The ideas of the classical elite theorists (Pareto, 1901; Mosca, 1939; Michels, 1958) have continued to influence and inform research on elite groups. They concentrated on how society is only ruled by a few and how the members of this elite group are recruited. Pareto's model of society involves giving everyone a 'grade' (0-10) for earnings as an indicator of his

capacity. Those with the highest number in their 'branch' or area of expertise is then called an elite. He further divided this group into the governing elite who influence government and politics and those who do not (the elite personnel). Pareto believed that the most successful governing elite must consist of what he called 'Class I residues' who favour doing battle with words while Class II are people who believe that the use of physical force is necessary to overcome the opposition. Parry (1969) discusses the similarity here with Machiavelli's concepts of leaders who are either foxes, who are cunning, or lions who are strong and brave.

While in the past society was organised according to clans, kinship or religion, Mosca (1939) sees that as society has modernised and become more complex the rules for gaining membership to the elite have also become more complicated. He calls the group in society with power the 'political class' and this consists of a small minority who have been able to secure their positions by adhering to both formal and informal rules of recruitment. They are drawn from a range of different sectors, including the military and judiciary. The classical elite theorists were writing in response to socialism because they recognised that despite the ideals of socialism, society was still being ruled by a small minority. Michels (1958) studied European socialist parties (especially the German Social Democratic Party) and argued that while these claimed to be organised democratically in reality, and in order to be successful and win elections, they had to be hierarchical in nature, this is what he called his 'iron law of oligarchy'.

Common themes which run through the work of all the classical elite theorists is that the elite in society is portrayed as a unified group. Members do not act independently, but are bonded together 'like the members of some exclusive club, individuals in the elite know each other well' (Putnam, 1976:4). They are a coherent and self-conscious group. They are able to

maintain their dominance by controlling the selection of members to the group by only recruiting from a small section of society. Two levels or strata within the elite are also commonly identified, for example Pareto's governing elite, who have political influence, and the non-governing elite who do not, but whose opinions need to be considered by the decision-makers. Having, what is effectively, an upper and lower tier is important for how members of the elite maintain their own positions. The lower strand forms a bridge between those at the core and the rest of society and is the level to which outsiders are first given access to. As Mosca (1939) argues members can come from outside of the group and can be drawn from the middle section of society if they have the relevant skills that are required by those in power. The lower tier also serves as a pool of talent from which new members of the inner circle can be selected from in the future. It is the members at the core who decide whether admission is granted to either level. They control membership so that it remains a closed, tight and exclusive group. The classical elite theorists also 'regard power as cumulative. Power gives access to more power' (Parry, 1969 p.32). In other words, having once secured a position of advantage, it becomes easier to achieve further advantages, such as more wealth and status, which in turn makes them more powerful.

### **A power elite or a fragmented elite?**

Another intellectual debate that has been the concern of elite theorists and political scientists is whether there is one single power elite in society or many elite groups, this would mean that elite fragmentation is actually more common than its integration (this debate is reviewed in Useem, 1982 and Zeitlin and Ratcliff, 1988). This has dominated the debate ever since Mills (1956) analysed the American elite and saw it as a 'ruling triumvirate' of big government, big business and the military. People who occupy these 'strategic command posts of the social structure' (p.4) enjoy a privileged position as with them comes power,

money and social status. Members of the power elite benefit from its cohesive and autonomous nature and only act to increase and secure their own position and interests rather than to benefit the masses. The power elite is characterised by its 'consciousness, coherence and conspiracy', with the latter meaning its unity as a result of shared common goals (Meisel, 1962, p.4). In a similar way to how the other classical elite theorists depict the elite Mills talks of the 'inner core' which consists of the decision makers and those at the 'fringes' whose views and interests need to be considered by the core. Like the vast majority of the work on elites, the concept of the power elite does not recognise the role and positioning of women within it, and the work of Mills has been criticised for failing to take gender into account (Kanter, 1977).

Another power elite theorist, Dye (1986), saw the American elite as not as closed or secretive as the one portrayed by Mills, but he still identified an inner group which he called 'an elite within the elite'. These are the men who occupy the key positions that allow them to traverse different sectors and key organisations. Crucially they are able to link the political world with the corporate one and can also simultaneously influence the cultural domain. This is because they all hold the same core values as one another, so when points of dispute occur this is over specific policy rather than fundamental principles. While recruitment to this group overwhelmingly favours upper-class, white, protestant males, Dye saw that elite membership can be open to those outside of the group from the middle of society, just as Pareto (1901) and Mosca (1939) argued, in fact the continued legitimacy and viability of the power elite may depend upon this openness. Studies examining the social, educational and occupational backgrounds of the top leaders in the areas of government, business and the military (Mills' power elite) indicate that while diversity among its members has increased since the 1950s, with women and minorities being represented in greater numbers in the late 1990s than in

previous decades (Rothman and Black, 1999) those at the core continue to be white, wealthy, Christian men (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1998).

The pluralist argument states, in opposition to the concept of there being a power elite in society, that there are actually multiple groups of elites rather than a single united one (Polsby, 1980). Each elite circle is too preoccupied with its own professional interests to look outside of itself. They are largely autonomous, only coming into contact with each other at the fringes (Bottomore, 1964). Similarly, Bell (1976) believes that elites do not function in a single tight interlocking network. He sees this as a result of the increased variety and number of elite groups in society which makes integration over the numerous different spheres impossible. It also increases the likelihood that different factions may actually be in conflict with one another, for example the cultural and technological sectors. While in any one organisation power is only held by a small minority, the sheer number of different spheres in modern society creates a complicated landscape made up of multiple arenas for power to be played out in. Rose (1967), therefore, argues that no one single group can come together to dominant at the national level as the power elite, rather they tend to only influence their own sphere. Rose, however, does also recognise the possibility for overlap between the political and business worlds because businesses lobby politicians and governments make policies on the economy, and this is facilitated by them sharing similar backgrounds.

According to pluralists elite networks are complex so that sometimes they cooperate with each other and at other times they are in conflict with one another. Dahl (1961) explored this by looking at the political involvement of three high status groups in New Haven in America. These he called the 'social notables' who are generally the least politically active, the 'economic notables' who get involved with issues concerning business and finance and the

‘political notables’ who are the most active on a wider range of issues. Dahl concludes that people only really become interested in political matters when it affects them directly. One group cannot control the community but a number of rival leaders compete for dominance, therefore, those at the top of society are not as self-conscious or cohesive as power elite theorists like Mills (1956) and Meisel (1962) describe them to be. Another proponent of the pluralist perspective is Keller (1991) who describes contemporary elites as ‘strategic elites’. Again, this is not a cohesive group. Different occupational sectors function independently from one another, but they do have relevance for, and an impact on, modern society. They maintain institutions, and are instrumental and responsible minorities in society who ‘feel committed to larger collective purposes within a common cultural framework’ (p.76). She sees that there has been a growth in the number of these strategic elites because of increased bureaucracy and occupational specialism.

## **Part II: Elite Typologies**

### **The political elite**

Political scientists are interested in those who have significant political power. A great deal of attention has been given to the political elite because the decisions they make affect the whole of society. The political elite have been defined as those with close proximity to power or policy making (Lilleker, 2003) and as Nadel (1956) argues this ‘governing elite’, which includes political leaders, is the most important of all the elite groups because they have the greatest scope of influence. They were the concern of the classical elite theorists and form one strand of Mill’s (1956) power elite. In order to study political elites it is first important to identify who it is in society that holds political authority. Positional analysis identifies people who hold positions of power in major institutions and Mills (1956) argues that people who occupy these key roles will have the most impact on society.

However, conceptualising political power can be complex and difficult and so can result in too narrow a definition of the political elite (Putnam, 1976). Lerner *et al.* (1996), therefore, use the term to ‘mean more than just politicians’ (p.12) and in their analysis of the political sphere used survey results of federal judges, federal civil servants and congressional aides because they argue that all exert some degree of political influence. In Britain one particular area that has been well researched has been the senior British Civil Service (Glass, 1954; Kelsall, 1955; Chapman, 1970; Du Gay, 2008). This has shown that its recruitment strategies have tended to favour male candidates from public schools and specifically graduates from Oxford and Cambridge. Putnam (1976) argues that while the advantage of being male, well-educated and from a privileged family background increases as a person’s position in the political strata rises, the issue for social scientists should be whether social position actually makes a difference to how this group of people behave, does their background influence their politics so that they favour the interests of their own social group?

Political elites do not function in isolation from other elite groups. Guttman (1968) argues that the political elite actually now share their position at the top with other elite groups which ‘flank the world of politics proper’ (p.380). He mapped out the affiliations of governments to other organisations, including ones in the economic sphere, (e.g. banks and large companies) and the cultural sector (e.g. the BBC). The people who surround the political elite were typically men in their fifties and sixties who having:

‘achieved the zenith of success and who feel the weight of responsibility press on their shoulders. Their names spell solidity and their distinction will reassure’ (p.380).

Compounding the complex nature of who actually make up the political elite is the ‘simultaneous’ and ‘sequential’ overlap of the posts that they hold (Putnam, 1976, pp.109-10) as they typically have a number in different organisations in various sectors at any one time. As Mills (1956) argued, holding successive top positions helps elite groups to enhance their

coordination and integration. Specialisation has declined in Britain (Stanworth and Giddens, 1974) and this has also increased the movement between spheres. The ability to change roles facilitates this integration further still.

In the main, research on the political elite has concentrated on their background, qualifications that are perceived to be required, and the beliefs and attitudes of elites. Taking a historical approach Wasson (2000) analysed the characteristics of people holding seats in the Commons and Lords from the Middle Ages to World War I. This reveals that the political structure was closely integrated with the social structure as those involved in politics were taken from the leading wealthy families. Political power was sought by those who already had economic success and social standing in society. This picture has now changed. Analysis of the social composition of the political elite since 1852, shows that the landed aristocracy is no longer the dominant group. It is members of the middle class, perceived as the 'intellectual experts', who are seen as being in possession of the skills that the system needs (Guttsman, 1968). Recruitment favours people who possess political skill, it is this which determines who will rule (as argued by the classical elite theorists) and so the power structure is determined by the character and abilities of its political leadership (Parry, 1969). A key component of this, which is crucial for success, is being in possession of good interpersonal skills or 'the ability to charm, cajole, conciliate and coordinate people' (Putnam, 1976:58) and it may be that the process of competing for positions of power actually trains them in the competencies required by the system (Easton, 1965).

In order to uncover the beliefs and attitudes of political elites, Putnam (1973) carried out a comparative study using semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with British and Italian politicians. He wanted to find out about the values that they use in order to orient



themselves in their world, crucially their opinions about democracy. British politicians saw that the issue for society was to try and engage more people with politics, so achieving a more 'participatory democracy' but they found this hard to define and articulate. Putnam argues that these difficulties arise from their inability to envisage a different type of society, whereas the Italians were able to be more specific about how the democratic system could be improved in their country. Another key difference between the two countries was that a third of the British MPs (but no Italians) reported that an appealing thing about being in politics and government was the conviviality of their colleagues at Westminster, even if they were opposed in their politics. There was a 'club-like atmosphere in Parliament' and 'sense of fellowship' (p.87). This would suggest that the political elite are a cohesive group that shares some common values, but also that women may be sidelined in what is predominantly a 'gentleman's club' (Puwar, 1997).

Political scientists often make use of survey data, for example how those in politics voted on particular issues, but a focus on their beliefs and attitudes requires researchers to actually talk to those involved in political decision making. Fenno (1978) argues more research should be done that involves asking members of the political elite about how they perceive the people that they represent (see Dexter, 1969). In his ethnography of eighteen members of the House of Representatives in America he visited their constituencies with them. He used the concept of 'home style' for how they presented themselves. They wanted to be seen as someone that was trustworthy and in order to do this they made use of their qualifications for the job, as well as displaying identification (I am one of you) and empathy (therefore I understand you). They also had to make decisions about how they were going to explain what they had been doing while they had been away, which meant that:

'every congressman carries a speech or a mini speech of this sort around with him – usually in his head- to be delivered at a moment's notice' (p.137).

While this is explanatory in nature it also serves important presentational purposes, allowing them to show themselves as qualified and capable. Within contemporary British politics, many political leaders engage in populist anti-elitist and anti-establishment discourse (Walden, 2004) but, as Du Gay (2008) argues, this strategy of stating that you do not exist could actually mean that you are then able to get away with doing a lot.

### **Financial Elites**

A popular method for studying the financial elite is through the use of social network analysis and this has been developed from the 1950s. It is used for mapping the connections between individuals, groups and organisations, in order to see the extent of the relationships between them (Knox, Savage and Harvey, 2006). As Savage and Williams (2008) argue members of the financial elite are not fixed or isolated in the corporate landscape, rather their success and ability to dominate depends on being able to make connections with others in the sector. They exist within networks or ‘webs’, and it by belonging to these that they can further enhance their elite status. How integrated the elite strata is in society is a key debate within the literature, and one that has already been outlined in this chapter. Research has provided evidence to show that the corporate sphere is an especially cohesive one while attempting to answer questions about what this integration is based on and who it might benefit.

Interlock studies often make use of quantitative data from published directories (Useem, 1984; Palmer, Friedland and Singh, 1986; Bearden and Mintz, 1987) in order to highlight key figures within the landscape, so for example corporate managers, who have at least two leading positions in major corporations are seen as the ‘big linkers’ (Windolf, 2002). They have shown that these interlockers possess status typically associated with belonging to the upper social class. They are more likely to have attended public schools and be members of

private clubs which suggests that they will share common interests and goals. This method has been used extensively by Scott (1992, 1997) in order to look at the corporate sector in Britain and evaluate the cohesiveness of directorships of companies (Scott and Griff, 1984). Through looking at the composition of these boards Scott developed the concept 'constellation of interests' to explain how the different parties on them represent various interests and this serves to maintain the overall balance of power.

The recruitment strategies for getting a place on these boards uses the 'old boy network' which is 'the system of social contacts which stem from family and education' (Scott, 1982:159). Scott sees that this is still in operation in the business world, and is maintained through clubs, dinners, meetings and official events, so that the City of London remains dominated by 'public school proletariat' (Sampson, 1965). This can mean that people without this background can encounter difficulties, as McDowell (1997) found in her study of merchant bankers who felt discriminated against along class and gender lines. The importance of a public school and Oxbridge education also lies in a particular set of values that this imparts on the individual, and this is also seen as having permeated the main grammar schools. These include the belief in the legitimacy of the social structure which, therefore, justifies the privileges that they have and also the attitude that they are working incredibly hard for the good of society (Scott, 1982). While this old approach to recruitment remains important it is also supplemented by more formal methods. The present day is the era of equal opportunities. The world of finance is keen to present itself as one which does not use outdated modes of selection, preferring to be seen as fair, open and meritocratic. While positions lower down the hierarchy may be filled in this way this allows for those at the very top of the corporations, those with the real power, to be able to justify their positions and deflect away from them any criticisms of bias (Savage and Williams, 2008).

Comparative studies, using similar methods of examining board membership and social background, have been used to explore how cohesive national business elites are (Laumann and Pappi, 1976; Hughes, Scott and MacKenzie, 1977; Scott, 1991; Burt, Hogarth and Michaud, 2000). In their study of the financial elite in Australia, Germany and the U.S. Higley, Hoffman-Lange, Kadushin and Moore (1991) analysed quantitative data, gathered from interviews, to show that there is comprehensive integration and to suggest that this cohesion allows members to come together to negotiate compromises. Without the opportunities to meet with one another (which board member overlap provides) this would be made much more difficult. Elite theory generally suggests that this interaction is a conservative force because members of the elite in society can use it in order to serve their own interests and maintain the status quo (Kadushin, 1995) but others have argued that these informal networks can be used effectively to facilitate change (DiMaggio, 1992).

In America attention has been paid to Wall Street and how elite bankers and brokers justify their actions (Ho, 2009). These lawyers and finance sector workers were described by Wolfe (1987) as the 'masters of the universe'. This new generation of financial lawyers saw their powerful position as a direct result of their qualifications (Dezalay, 1990) This mirrors the argument that the rise in the business, or 'managerial' elite is because the profession has been 'credentialised' with qualifications and this allows its members to justify their position as the new dominant group (Burnham, 1942). They also explained their success as being a result of their personal characteristics, attitudes and skills (specifically their energy and dynamism). This was juxtaposed with the old, and what they saw as outdated system, of the gentleman's club mode of selection and its accompanying strict code of conduct. They did not perceive this as being representative of the new globalised market and its meritocratic and competitive

nature which required the use of more aggressive, and distinctly non-gentlemanly, tactics in order to survive and progress.

The financial elite in Canada has been well-researched since Porter (1965). He argued that ethnicity was as an important factor as class for gaining access to it. Canadians of English origin had retained a charter status and so were the dominant group, with French Canadians being unable to gain access to it. As a consequence this elite strata was not representative of the ethnic structure of the country. He entitled his book *The Vertical Mosaic* to reflect this, as its hierarchical structure is also a segregated one. The Canadian elite has also been characterised as being divided between an indigenous elite, dependent on finance and transportation and a purchasing elite who monopolise manufacturing (Clement, 1975). This was re-examined by Carroll (1984) who focused his attention on the centre of the power structure and the leaders of industry and finance. He argued that its cohesiveness, facilitated by traditional male club relationships, has declined but that its more fragmented nature actually serves to make some members even more important (or more 'elite') if they can successfully bridge the gaps or 'structural holes' in the network (Burt, 1992).

In a similar way Scotland has changed as a result of large scale economy restructuring in the twentieth century. These changes have impacted on the character of the Scottish elite, and this is charted by McCrone (1992). He argues that traditional forms of power, based on land and local property have declined and that elites have become more 'diverse, diffuse and defensive' now exerting their control at a level of distance. The Scottish corporate world has also been researched in terms of its relationship with London. The Scottish capital is a distinct system, having its own pattern of development and unique characteristics meaning

that 'London is both political centre and economic metropolis whilst Scotland is a peripheral satellite' (Scott and Hughes, 1980:171).

Recent attention has been given to the new global elite, called 'globals' (Elliott, 2012) or the 'transnational classes' (Van Der Pijl, 1995; Sklair, 2001). These have formed as a consequence of the process of globalisation of financial markets and the global reach of the mass media. The global elite are acknowledged as a key component of this landscape (Castells, 1996) and they are typically characterised as having multiple identities and existing in numerous social worlds (Forschauer and Wong, 2012). However, this is only now emerging as a research topic so while this group is often evoked in debates, there is currently a lack of empirical data to support its importance (Pakulski, 2011). Focus on a global scale ignores the processes involved in the formation of local elite groups (Savage and Williams, 2008). Local communities can use their own standards to define what is 'elite' and these do not necessarily correspond to the ideas held in broader society. These 'community elites', therefore, may have different characteristics from the national elites, who are identified as such by the economic and cultural signifiers required by that particular country (Cormon, Duffy and Pupo, 2012).

It is not really possible to look at how the entire elite sector interact in society so studies tend to focus on a small inner core. People who have membership of two, three or more corporate boards can be seen as the 'inner-circle' (Useem, 1984; Swartz, 1985) and it is these people who are the most likely to have the 'right' social background. Kadushin (1995) identified an inner circle of the French financial elite. He interviewed sixty-seven of its members and asked them for the names of people who they thought were the most important and also those who had influence over them. This produced a core of twenty-eight people with twenty-two

of these being linked by forty-four different boards. They were also members of at least one corporate board on which another person from this core twenty-two sat on. He concluded that inner circle membership depended on social prestige, club membership and a career in the Treasury, especially graduation from the Ecole Nationale d'Administration.

The French financial system is very much centred around the capital city to the extent that one of Kadushin's (1995) interviewees likened Paris to a 'village' (p.210) because it seems as if everyone grew up there and now lives, works and socialises there. This means that members of the business elite inevitably meet the same people at social functions 'It's always the same ones who talk, always the same ones who are there. It doesn't stop. We meet all the time' (p.210). There is a suggestion that the French system is a tighter one than the one in Britain, as it is supported by institutions and the state. In Britain the ties are weaker, however, actually having a lot of weak connections can be more useful than a small number of strong ones when looking for a job (Granovetter, 1973). The onus is on the individuals to network. They must make use of activities such as sport, art and charity work, in order to fulfill their own social ambition. Harvey and Maclean (2008) argue that this is reflected in the large number of directors who belong to London clubs, golf clubs and participate in sport or attend high-profile sporting events in order to increase 'social bonding' (p.115) and these provide them with the opportunities to network.

Social capital is, therefore, fundamental in determining who advances in business and who does not (Laird, 2006; Finkelstein, Harvey and Lawton, 2007). It can facilitate social coordination and integration if the group has a shared set of norms (Putnam, 1995) and an insider to the world has access to embedded resources that an outsider does not (Granovetter, 1973). This will all depend upon the centrality and importance of each individual's position

(Burt, 2005). A person's social capital does not just depend on the number of positions that they hold but where these positions are situated in the social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1986). Research has shown that it is business and political leaders who have the most connections to other sectors and so form an 'elite within an elite' (Denord, Hjellbrekke, Korsnes, Lebaron and Le Roux, 2011). Useem (1982) used qualitative interviews and found that sitting with the same people creates opportunities for informal interactions which then allow them to gather useful information about the business sector. The financial world is one where deals are constantly being done so trust is very important to facilitate this. A small cohesive network promotes 'enforceable trust' (Porter and Sensenbrenner, 1993) where compliance with the group or community results in the accumulation of social capital. This trust is a complex system of rewards and sanctions that are created over time and across many different deals and depends upon people being able to successfully demonstrate their integrity (Mintz and Schwartz, 1985).

A longitudinal study comparing the business elite of France and Britain was carried out by Maclean, Harvey and Press (2006) which used data about the top one hundred companies in each country, information gathered about the biographies of directors, as well as semi-structured interviews with past and present business leaders. One theme that they were interested in was how the business elite reproduce itself and how newcomers can gain acceptance to the group. The 'nouveaux riches' are often rich in economic capital but lack cultural capital (Anheier, 1995) and so they seek honorific capital such as 'honors' to help them secure a place in elite ranks (Crook, 1999). As Bourdieu (1990:67-8) argues it is difficult to be accepted to the elite as a newcomer and so it can only happen 'by birth or by a slow process of co-option and initiates which is equivalent to a second birth'.



Financial elites often report their belief in meritocracy. This was found by Harvey and Maclean (2008) and one of their interviewees explained this as ‘it matters not where you went to school, it really does not matter as long as you are good enough’ (p.108). Biographies of the successful credit individual factors but also reveal social elements that have benefited them in the form of social connections, networks and mentors (Laird, 2006). Business leaders in Maclean *et al.*’s (2006) study attributed success to help from other people in positions of power and influence as well as the belief and outlook that they could achieve anything that they wanted given to, which was given to them by their parents. Although they often profess to having ‘tres modeste’ backgrounds, in reality they predominantly come from upper and upper-middle class families. In order to assist their positions in the corporate world members of the business elite strengthen their standing by using marriage (Bourdieu, 1972). 75% of French business leaders in the 1960s married into the same social class as themselves (Hall and Bettignies, 1986). Harvey and Maclean (2008) argues that a commitment to marriage is a useful asset for financial elites because it shows ‘constancy, reliability and a belief in family values’ (p.111) which are all important business credentials.

Although studies of corporate board overlap are very useful for providing information on the existence of connections and interaction between different people and organisations they are also limited. While they show that relationships exist, it does not show what purpose these connections serve and so the ‘so what?’ criticism has been levelled at them (Pettigrew, 1992). In other words, of course these people know each other but what difference does this actually make to their behaviour? It might mean that ‘to be effective network connections need to be linked to other lines of analysis’ (Savage and Williams, 2008:6). Used on its own it may not be able to convey the existence of connections which are less formalised or the importance of ‘structural holes’ and how people who can bridge these gaps in the network are at an

advantage (Burt, 1992). It is through the use of more qualitative and ethnographic methods, which can be used alongside the analysis of documentary sources, which can provide this insight (Knox *et al.* 2006). As Knoke (1990) phrases it, what is needed is an understanding of ‘the actual use to which interlocks are put’ and so he calls for more studies that provide:

‘information about the subjective meanings, environmental perceptions, and interpersonal attractions that go on among corporate directors as they meet behind closed doors’ (p.114).

How relationships and connections are formed, maintained and managed in the network of the Welsh cultural elite, is an important focus of this study.

### **Cultural Elites**

The cultural elite have been defined as the group of people ‘involved in the creation and distribution of symbols’ (Lerner *et al.*, 1996:5). In this section I include intellectuals and academics in this category, as well as philanthropists who donate large sums of money to the arts. Culture can either be mass (or ‘low’) which appeals to the majority of people in society or ‘high’ which is appreciated by a smaller minority. It is this high culture that is perceived as the reserve of the elite and upper classes and includes classical music, opera, ballet, theatre and fine art. The arts have been deeply institutionalised, especially in higher education, and so are now widely recognised as the most prestigious forms of culture throughout Europe and the Americas (DiMaggio, 1982).

Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital states that holding distinctive aesthetic tastes and knowledge serves to reinforce class boundaries. Bourdieu argued that there are different types of capital, while this can be economic capital, there are also less tangible forms, including cultural, social, symbolic and honorific capital. Cultural capital is inherited by children from their parents. It takes a long time to acquire but this socialisation begins at a very early age. It

includes hearing how their parents speak, the value that is placed on education, the number of cultural artefacts (such as books and pieces of art) in the home, visits to places like libraries, galleries, museums and the theatre. They are given an understanding of ‘good taste’ and an appreciation of high culture. Within this is the implicit notion that the different forms of culture are organised in a hierarchical fashion, so that some are perceived as being more valued and worthy than others. Being in possession of these certain legitimate tastes reinforces class boundaries within society because those who are familiar with, and fluent in, high culture are rewarded with positions at the top of the social structure and involvement with high culture carries prestige (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985) while it also serves to make that strata cohesive and exclusive (Bourdieu, 1984).

Whereas in the past class reproduction was dependent on lineage and inheritance, Bourdieu argues that in modern society the success of the next generation depends on the investment in their cultural capital. This will give them an early advantage at school because these are the preferences that are valued by teachers and familiarity with high culture is the best cultural predictor of school success (DiMaggio, 1982, 2001). They will do well in the education system, attain good jobs and reproduce their parents’ elite status (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore it is culture that plays a fundamental role in social reproduction and it is this which maintains elite privilege and dominance (Swartz, 1997). Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) provided evidence for this by showing that class reproduction in France was associated with family socioeconomic status, educational achievement and cultural tastes.

This means that a class can reproduce itself without needing to make use of personal networks, as people can occupy the same position by being in possession of the same cultural capital but do not necessarily have to know one another (Knox *et al*, 2006). Being familiar

with this high culture and possessing expert knowledge of it, therefore, is an important symbol of social status (Lamont, 1992). However, when considering indicators of cultural capital such as high culture arts attendance and appreciation, it has been observed that the position of high art as cultural capital is actually declining, especially in the United States (DiMaggio, 1991). It has been suggested that the new dominant class could come from those who are ‘omnivores’ meaning people who participate in high culture and popular culture and everything in between (Peterson, 1997).

In Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the dominant class in society people belonging to this class are not only in possession of more economic capital than the members of other classes but also more cultural capital, but this is not to say that the dominant class is not itself divided. Some members will be richer in economic capital (coming from the financial elite) and some will have greater amounts of cultural capital (i.e. intellectuals and academics). Each group will place differing amounts of value on the types of capital. This is complicated further by the other types of capital that a person can possess. These include honorific capital, which is the formal recognition in society that a person can be given for their contributions. In Britain this takes the form of the ‘Honours List’ and people can be awarded MBEs, OBEs and CBEs. While these do not carry any financial reward, they are valued by the elite because they represent great achievement. Social capital relates to a person’s reputation and the status and standing that they enjoy within their social world. These different types of capital can function independently from one another, for example having large amounts of social capital does not necessarily depend on being materially rich or having lots of cultural capital. There are also possible points of exchange, so that somebody who is financially wealthy can try to buy themselves a place in the upper classes by purchasing pieces of ‘high art’ or making large donations to arts organisations. Money can also buy a good education and going to public

school not only equips a person with cultural capital but also provides them with personal contacts which they can then benefit from in the future, both of these should result in them achieving a well-paid job as adults. In this way the different forms of capital become inter-related as being in possession of cultural capital and social capital will ultimately increase a person's economic capital. Capital, therefore, can be cumulated and converted into other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

The English cultural elite is chronicled in Annan's autobiography *Our Age* (1990). As a Cambridge don himself, who researched the family connections amongst Oxbridge dons from the later 19<sup>th</sup> century (in Annan, 1999) he gives a highly romanticised view of this intellectual elite, commenting that these type of people were 'not concerned with the means of production and creation of wealth, what marked them out was not wealth but standing' (p.10). They naturally rose to positions where academic and cultural policy was made. He sees it as a (rightly) closed group of men, a gentlemanly club of people with the necessary academic and artistic credentials. Membership was determined by coming from the right families, attending the right schools, and knowing the right people:

'How did one get accepted as a member of Our Age? In the same way that most people have always got accepted – by ability, by family connections and knowing somebody' (p.9).

Rubinstein (1993) traced the historic formation of this group and concluded that the public schools and elite universities were fundamental in shaping its composition. Aristocratic intellectuals were able to successfully unite with other groups of the ruling elite in post-war England and so remain influential in shaping society (Shils, 1955) whereas in France there was much more tension between the 'intellectuals' and 'industrialists' (Bourdieu, 1984).

However, Annan (1990) believes that this English gentlemanly elite has now declined in size and power and he blames the demise of the grammar school in favour of comprehensive education and the expansion of the new universities for this. He also cites the move towards more policy-driven politics which have served to undermine the role of the intellectual so that simply being an 'intellectual' is no longer enough of a qualification to be allowed to legislate (Bauman, 1989) as neo-liberal governments now require a new breed of expert (Rose, 1999). Evidence to support these claims has been provided by Du Gay's (2008) study of the British Senior Civil Service where the dominance of the traditional elite has declined in favour of people who possess the right qualifications and credentials. Similarly in America professionals now justify their status in market terms (i.e. their skills are in short supply) rather than because of their intellectual pedigree (Brint, 1993). While Collini (2006) agrees there has been such a decline, citing specialisation and the rise of celebrity status as its cause, he also makes the point that the claim that there are no intellectuals in Britain is generally made by people who 'were they living in certain other societies, would unhesitatingly be recognised as intellectuals' (p.4) and that increasingly the term carries negative connotations of 'pretentiousness or self-importance' (p.24).

This apparent demise of the English cultural elite led Griffiths, Miles and Savage (2008) to investigate if there was evidence to support these claims. They used social network analysis to map membership of cultural quangos to find out whether the 'old boy network' was still in place. They argue that England is a particularly interesting case study because from the mid-1990s it saw an:

'intense wave of 'quango formation', possibly the most marked sustained state intervention in 'culture' which has ever been seen in the UK' (p.194).

Against this backdrop of change they looked at board members and chairs of boards to see whether their personal characteristics had altered. In many ways they resembled the

traditional gentlemanly elite. They tended to be older men with a university background, with a predominance of Oxbridge and London university graduates, but this was less marked than in the 1960s and 1970s, which suggests that there is some opening up of the channels of recruitment. Twenty-five of the members sat on more than one cultural quango and many were also trustees of charities, on boards of educational establishments, had received official honours (e.g. MBEs) and were members of London private members clubs. Griffiths, Miles and Savage suggested that there is a 'socially distinctive, metropolitan dynamic in the governance of the cultural world' (p.196). They found that differences do exist between quangos, with older London and museum ones, which tend to have either 'national' or 'royal' in the title seeming to carry the most prestige. They had the 'right cachet' (p.207) and are also the most traditional and gentlemanly, whereas newer, regional organisations had more equal gender dynamics.

The study by Griffiths, Miles and Savage (2008) also focused specifically on the Arts Council of England because of its profile and role in funding 'high' culture (such as opera) to see whether the composition of its members had altered from the 1960s/70s to the 1980s/90s. Although there had been some changes with the number of women doubling and the number of people with CBE or club memberships falling it was still influenced by 'a male, Oxbridge educated, academic / literary elite' (p.198). They go on to argue that even if networks appear more open this can actually have a paradoxical effect because it means that certain links and ties that exist become more important (Carroll, 2008). They use Burt's (1992) concept of 'structural holes' in order to explain this. A thinning out of networks can mean that individuals who can occupy the gaps have more strategic power because they can unite areas that would otherwise be distinct, and so become more important than if there were dense elite connections in place. It is not, therefore, as simplistic as saying that the traditional elite have

declined in power and influence, it may be that they now occupy key positions in a more disconnected network but they believe:

‘In our analysis, we are only able to trace the potential for these individuals to link institutions: it would be necessary to examine ethnographically and through appropriate case studies, how such connections might be significant in practice’ (p.207).

Employing ethnographic methods when studying the cultural elite can provide greater insight into their behaviour within their own social world and provide a context to how they explain their actions. Often these worlds are difficult for the outsider to penetrate. They need to be armed with the necessary knowledge, language and terminology and know the correct ways to behave, as shown in Thornton’s (2008) observations of the art world in a variety of locations around the globe, including London and New York. She aimed to show the complex interactions, negotiations and performances that people put on during events such as auctions and the opening night of exhibitions. McDonogh’s (1986) ethnography of Barcelona explores how a modern elite function within one geographical location. This is a relatively small and closed group of industrial and financial elites that make up the ‘good families’. Through his observations recorded during his time in the field and interviews with key members he specifically explores how the Opera House Liceu is a key site of importance in their lives. It acts as a ‘microcosm of society as a whole’ (p.186). This plays out in the physical positioning of elite families in relation to other classes and the Circulo del Liceu serves as a meeting place for the leaders of the city (even when the ballet and opera season have finished) and this is a distinctly male club, one where women can never be members, only guests.

Philanthropists give more than just their leisure time to cultural activities but donate large amounts of their money to arts organisations. Ostrower (1995) studied ninety-nine very wealthy donors who gave money to American institutions. Many of these did not actually



perceive themselves to be rich, but this may have been because they tended to compare themselves with their peers who were often more wealthy than themselves (Domhoff, 1983). She also interviewed seventy-six trustees of four major arts institutions because, as she argues, philanthropy is not just about giving money but also their time, skills and personal efforts. While they all reported a love of high culture and were knowledgeable about it they did not claim to be experts, although they thought the professionals in charge of the day to day running of the organisation should be (Ostrower, 1995). Their involvement in culture in this way promotes social cohesion because it provides an arena in which they can meet one another and make and strengthen their social connections. It is a 'way of being part of Society' (Ostrower, 1998:6) as well as actually increasing their own individual profiles especially as membership on certain boards carries particular prestige and status.

In a similar study Odendahl (1990) interviewed millionaires who donated money to things like the ballet, opera, theatre and the visual arts. Their involvement in this way helped them to 'acquire status within and outside their class' (p.4) and gave them a chance to network within a closed society where the boards were 'self-enclosed, self-referencing, and self-reaffirming' (p.34). It was a particularly useful tool for those self-made millionaires, not possessing 'old money' (Aldrich, 1988) who could use large donations to help "pass" into the upper class' (p.38) as well as a way for the wives of wealthy men to use their time for a cause that they perceived to be worthwhile, in a similar way as affluent women can become civic leaders in the volunteer sector (Daniels, 1988). One woman explained her involvement as being because 'I cannot stand inefficiency. I like things to work ... I like doing long-range planning' (p.110) so highlighting the practical skills that they believe they can offer and their industriousness nature.

Cultural elites are not distinct from other elite groups rather membership is overlapping, fluid and complex. Political and business leaders consume and utilise culture in order to further their own personal positions in networks and in order to implement change to wider society. Yudice (2002) uses the case study of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao to show how investment in culture, in the form of a flagship museum, was used to transform the image of a city and provide it with a 'creative economy' (p.20), one which inevitably favours the tastes of the professional-managerial class. This can be seen as actually deepening class divisions in the locality. Warde and Bennett (2008) interviewed eleven influential people, including MPs, senior Civil Servants and CEOs, and asked them about their cultural tastes. They predominantly reported enjoying what is perceived as 'high culture' including reading, opera, classical music and attending art galleries. Although they were not employed in these areas, and despite being very busy people, they invested a large amount of time and energy in participating in these cultural activities and it 'was a high priority not as end in itself but, rather, as a corollary of work' (p.253). As Erickson (1996) argues people in management benefit from being able to display their wider cultural knowledge in this way. As they acquire and use their cultural capital they have the opportunity to meet people and establish relationships with them so simultaneously increasing their social capital, which further illustrates how the different types of capital can be inter-related and are exchangeable.

### **Part III: Wales**

#### **Characterising Wales and Welsh Society**

In one of the key sociological texts about Wales Day (2002) argues that Wales is often presented as being confused and uncertain about its identity. This is reflected in the choice of titles of books about Wales, including *When Was Wales?* (Williams, 1985) and *Wales! Wales?* (Smith, 1984). It is also a country which is typically represented using dichotomies. It

has two parts; North and South, industrial and rural (Dunkerley, 1999) and while these images of Wales which typically centre around the coal mines, slate quarries and the rural hills are at once stereotypes these 'clichés are too close to the truth for most of us to avoid them' (Smith (1984:3). Wales is often portrayed as a country organised around the local community or as a 'land of local cultures' (Jenkins, 1976). Belonging to these communities gives a person a social identity which is more pervasive than class labels so that Wales is often perceived as a classless society and one which lacks a hierarchical structure.

Education is seen as being highly valued in Wales and this is captured in the notion of the *gwerin* (Williams, 1985). This is a term used to describe the ordinary people of Wales who, although not financially affluent, are culturally rich. They are self-educated, hardworking and disciplined and committed to learning for its own inherent value. This is very similar to the 'lad o'pairs' motif which is pervasive in Scotland. This is a talented youth, the son of a peasant or crofter, who has the ability but not the means to benefit from education (McCrone, 1992). This presents society not as egalitarian, it is not that all men are equal, rather it is a meritocratic society because all men should be given the opportunity to be equal (MacLaren, 1976). It is specifically men which these ideas apply to and women in Wales have made only very limited progress in terms of achieving the top jobs in the country, and these continue to be dominated by men (Rees and Fielder, 1991).

Historically education was seen as a way of improving a person's occupational prospects. It was through education that the sons of miners or farmworkers could move into middle-class occupations (Rees and Delamont, 1999). Stereotypically this was as either 'preacher or teacher, although there is debate about the extent to which this is a romantic invention (Morgan, 1986). Nevertheless, gaining access to university was seen as a way to escape the

pit or the quarry and simultaneously gain status (Jones, 1960). The homes of the *gwerin* were places which valued education and self-improvement through learning. In other words, they were rich in cultural capital, and this lies at the heart of Welsh identity and helped to fuel aspiration and ambition (Phillips and Harper Jones, 2002). It also meant that once these individuals arrived at university they felt that they had a right to be there, even if they were originally from disadvantaged backgrounds. They had been equipped with the appropriate cultural capital from an early age and this eased their transition into the middle class (Baker and Brown, 2008).

Another element to being Welsh which has received attention is the pride that people feel about their identity as a Welsh person. They can be extremely patriotic. This is not simply about declaring their nationality but actually using this as a motivating factor in their lives:

‘Your active Welsh patriot, one who consciously works for the Welshness of Wales, lives and dreams his country and his culture. It is his hobby, his profession, his ecstasy. Every aspect of his life is affected by his obsession, every event is measured by its significance to Wales’ (Hannan, 2002:447).

While this suggests that part of being Welsh involves working and acting for Wales, it is also a country which employs a significant number of people who are not themselves Welsh (Williams and Morris, 2000) and this can create tensions. The English are usually portrayed as implementing change on the places where they settle, but Day, Drakakis-Smith and Davies (2008) argue that the English who come and live in Wales themselves undergo a transformation, but that the language often serves to keep them at a distance from the native Welsh communities. National identity is never fixed, as Bechhofer *et al.* (1999) show in their study of members of the Scottish landed and arts elite. Members of the art elite were particularly sensitive to debates about culture and identity and saw their own identities as Scottish as fluctuating, depending on the context they were in and how they felt other people reacted to them.

## **Culture**

Wales is presented as a cultural nation. A land where the people are appreciative of high forms of culture (Morris, 2000). It is a country of poetry and song which draws upon its Celtic music and literary traditions (Petro, 1998). Despite this, negative stereotypes about Welsh culture and its media exist in England which perceives Wales as having ‘never made any significant contribution to any branch of knowledge, culture or entertainment’ (Pritchard and Morgan, 2001:171). The past, and the customs and symbols of Welsh heritage, continue to be an important element in how the identity of Wales is constructed and understood today. As Morris (2000) observes ‘an obsession with the past, real or imaginary, was already one of the characteristics of the Welshman’ (p.49). So while the opening of the Senedd (The Welsh Assembly building) in March 2006 was at once the beginning of a new chapter in Welsh history and politics it was accompanied by the reading of a specially commissioned bilingual poem by the national poet. Gareth (2010) argues that this is a public acknowledgement of the importance of the Eisteddfod and the traditions of poetry in Wales and that this image of Wales was used in order to symbolise that the National Assembly was going to speak for the country. Whether these traditions have relevance for the majority of people in contemporary society today remains unclear, but McCrone (1992) argues that a similar use of ‘tartanry’ has been imposed on the people of Scotland which has little to do with reality.

Interpreting cultural artefacts, the images presented by artists and writers in Wales about Wales is a useful way of exploring how the nation and Welshness is understood and interpreted (Humphreys, 1995). A study by Houseley (2006) used in-depth interviews with elite established artists in Wales to explore their experiences and perceptions of devolution and how they make distinctions between being a Welsh artist as opposed to an artist who lives in Wales. It is the case that Welsh cultural traditions of the past are not simply recalled

but are actively reconstructed. Certain elements are emphasised and the language used to do this is carefully chosen in order to portray a particular image of Wales (Manning, 2004). This can be seen in Dicks' (2000) study of the Rhondda Heritage Park where community, and specifically Welsh working-class experience, is centralised in order to make the past more appealing.

## **Language**

An important part of the cultural tradition of the country which is often invoked is the Welsh language. This further divides Wales into two segments, into Welsh-speakers and non-Welsh speakers, and it has been argued that the only point of similarity of these two groups is that they are not English (Hobsbawm, 1968). The language is intrinsically tied up with definitions of Welshness so being a real Welsh person requires speaking the language (Osmond, 1988). It is seen as the only obvious remaining symbol of Welsh difference (Aitchison and Carter, 1998) so that 'the language is the true badge of Welsh identity' (Morris, 2000, p.171). The language holds particular significance in the cultural life of Wales so that the continuing tradition of the Eisteddfod is used to show that:

'The language is still creative, the traditions are not lost, and the loyalty of the Welsh people to their origins is by no means dissipated' (Morris, 2000, p.168).

The language is a way to reconnect with Welsh heritage, and these traditions are seen as benefiting the individual so that a specifically Welsh cultural upbringing, including early involvement in the Eisteddfod, is cited as a reason for later success at university (Baker and Brown, 2008). The Welsh-speaking minority also enjoys advantages in the labour market in Wales. They are over-represented in the South as this is where the political and cultural sectors physically reside and access to these are facilitated by speaking the language (Williams, 1985). However it is too simplistic to say that the only division which exists is between Welsh-speakers and non-Welsh speakers because even within the Welsh-speaking

community the use of the language is ranked according to its perceived value (Day, 2002). In order to access the core of this people must be fluent and proficient in literary Welsh, associated with the educated professionals, teachers and minsters (Trosset, 1993).

### **A modern Wales**

While ideas of Wales are constructed in relation to its heritage, using romantic notions of the past, it is also a country which has undergone some recent reinvention. This can be seen by the economic and social regeneration of parts of Cardiff, specifically The Bay, which has seen the construction of the new Assembly Building and the Wales Millennium Centre. These are identified as having ‘given Cardiff a new sense of power, purpose and confidence’ (Hannan, 2002, p.335). ‘Cool Cymru’, or a reinvented Wales is spoken of, which has a new energy, culture and identity (Blandford, 1999). This is seen to have benefited from Welsh popular music which has been used in order to showcase the country and act as a ‘marker for a ‘modern Wales’’ (Edwards, 2006, p.155). In 2008 Cardiff gained a new logo, which replaced the previous image of a dragon, and so ended the use of ‘the stereotypical images of daffodils and dragons’. It was rebranded as something new as opposed to a place which is preoccupied with images of the past (Houseley, Moles and Smith, 2009, p.204). These changes have been seen as positive for Cardiff and Wales but there has also been some hostility towards projects like the redevelopment of The Bay because they are seen as ‘elitist and exclusive ... it will benefit only those who have all the advantage already’ (Hannan, 2000, p.153). Investment in culture is being used to transform the image of the city but actually this can act to reinforce class divisions (Yudice, 2002).

How the city of Cardiff is presented to the rest of Wales, and its own residents, was explored by Kompotis (2005) using a discourse analysis of marketing materials of Cardiff, specifically

the documents that accompanied the (unsuccessful) European Capital of Culture 2008 bid. This is a useful strategy for accessing the attitudes and values of the powerful in society without directly talking to them. The purpose of this marketing exercise was to ‘sell’ the new and reinvented image of Cardiff to the local people. The people in charge of this were white, middle aged or older people in white collar, managerial professions. They belonged to the Welsh middle and upper classes, were well-educated and affluent, in other words, they are members of the cultural elite of interest in this current study. They saw the bid as a way of connecting business with the cultural sphere so that the business sector could invest in, and benefit from, culture. By examining how they chose to present the city Kompotis argues that what they are actually doing is justifying their own positions of power. They say they want radical change for Cardiff, using the ‘momentum of transformation’ (p.177) but this is on an aesthetic, rather than a social and political level and they impose their own aesthetic views on the city. Their representations of Cardiff are also contradictory in nature, so while they talk of a young and multicultural city, the people who sat on the panel did not reflect this. The material does not contain the voice of the people, rather it aims to teach them using declarative sentences. They are keen to present the city as young and vibrant, and although do draw on some of its heritage (a common marketing strategy) they are keen to avoid any negative stereotypes of its industrial past.

### **The crachach in Cardiff**

As already argued in the previous chapter, sociological research in Wales has predominantly been focused on the working class. Much of the research about Wales has focused on the ‘Valleys’ in South Wales, the impact that the loss of industry has had on the lives of the people living there and how this has shaped the identity of those communities (Dicks, 2000). Some attention has been directed upwards, but this has mainly been within the political sector



(Chaney *et al.*, 2007; Stirbu, 2009). Noteworthy examples exist, however, such as the aforementioned study by Houseley (2006) which explored the opinions and attitudes of elite artists living in Wales and Fowler and Jones' (2008) exploration of the role of the intelligentsia in shaping Welsh nationalism. Using interviews with one key member (Cynog Dafis) they show how the national elite can play an influential role in constructing ideas of a nation (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) but that it is also a process of negotiation, sometimes resembling a dialogue between the elite and the masses (Smith, 1986). Another example of 'looking up' in Wales is Oti's (2008) study which focused on the Further Education sector in Wales. She used elite interviews with key stakeholders in order to show the power relationships which exist within a small country. Whereas, she expected to find a large amount of consensus between them, in actual fact each individual used the interview site in order to try to justify their own position and importance.

The lack of systematic attention upwards led Day (2002) to call for more studies on the powerful in Wales in order to fill the 'gaps in knowledge' (p.100). Importantly he recognises that it is in and around Cardiff where this that attention should be specifically directed towards. Cardiff is a prime site for such research because it is the powerhouse of Wales, and is also a relatively small place so that people in positions of influence all know one another to a large extent:

'There are also numerous personal ties and sympathetic understandings among those who by origin and experience form part of the same regional-metropolitan elite ... As a leading figure within the WDA once put it, naturally they sing from the same hymn sheet. The concentration within Cardiff of both the major institutions of regional governance and many of the leading academics with an interest in Wales has an intimate interactions at times verging on the incestuous' (pp.210-1).

This is made even more relevant since Welsh devolution. Academics and intellectuals could now play an even bigger role in policy formation but there is still absence of investigations of

the institutions and individuals involved in making economic policies in Wales (Lovering, 1999).

The commentary of Patrick Hannan (2000, 2002) is particularly useful when looking at the arena of Cardiff. He occupied a place in this society and had access to it in a way that I could not. His writing on the subject is a form of participant observation and provides a context for understanding the experiences of my interviewees and the nature of the social world which they occupy. He argued that Wales is a small nation, so much so that:

‘If you live in Wales long enough it becomes increasingly like the world described in Anthony Powell’s great fictional work *A Dance to the Music of Time* sequence of twelve novels, lives of dozens of characters repeatedly touch each other in different ways. Wales is so small that you cannot help but regularly stumble over old friends and enemies’ (Hannan, 2002, p75).

This smallness allows for a network to exist where people will frequently come into contact with each other both professionally and socially. This is particularly true for those at the top of society, or at the core, who meet on the ‘small social dodgem tracks on which the Taffia bump into each other night after night’ (Hannan, 2000, p.132), which again emphasises the inevitability of these meetings. This group is given a distinct identity. They are the ‘Crachach’ or the Taffia ‘the allegedly self-perpetuating oligarchy of South Wales, industrialists, officials, financials, broadcasters and academics, has an unsavoury reputation’ (Morris, 2000, p.215) so to outsiders, the mass in society, they are viewed with suspicion and distrust.

Members of the crachach congregate in places like Cardiff County Club, which Hannan (2000) describes as ‘a jam roly-poly pudding kind of a place, a kind of Toytown version of the establishment clubs of Pall Mall and Mayfair’ (p.132). He makes fun of it, portraying it as innocuous, in the same way that he argues its members do. They try to reassure themselves

that it is harmless by joking about it, calling it their 'fascist club', and they attempt to distance themselves from it, saying they 'mainly use it for the parking' (p.140). Hannan also recognises the value of having these types of contacts in order to successfully participate in the social and political life of Wales. It helps them to increase their social capital, but women are at a disadvantage here. Rees (1999) argues that there are still very few women in senior management in Wales, and she sees one reason as being because:

'networking is crucial in recruitment to such positions, but this is difficult for women who are excluded from freemasonry and from some of the business and golf clubs in Wales where such networking takes place' (p.262).

Another site where members of the crachach congregate is at the opera, specifically Welsh National Opera. In his ethnography of the company Atkinson (2006) argues that the opera is a place of 'intersecting elites' (p.151), where powerful people from different sectors can congregate and be united on common ground. They can use the opera to demonstrate their cultural capital, as opera is a valued and prestigious form of high culture. At the same time, the opera company is keen to get financial support from sponsors and partners, and so people who invest in the company are rewarded with drinks receptions and priority bookings. This then helps individuals to build their social capital and it becomes a setting for numerous social performances.

## **Conclusion**

Reviewing the literature has raised a number of issues which will be considered in the following empirical chapters. There is no fixed definition of 'elite' and this means that the term is not restrictive (Aguiar, 2012). As I understand it, being a member of an elite group in society is not solely dependent on social class. I use the term to denote people who run institutions and are positioned at the top of their organisations, which in this study are cultural bodies in Wales, although how the interviewees construct notions of class will be considered

in Chapter Six. There does appear to be a degree of overlap between the different spheres, so that even proponents of the pluralist argument, while stating that there is no single power elite in society, do see there being some possible overlap (Rose, 1967). The extent of any crossovers in Welsh society is an important issue, therefore, which this thesis addresses. A number of key elite theorists (Pareto, 1901; Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956) argue that the elite group in society actually consists of two layers, the outer fringes and the inner core or circle (Useem, 1984). The purpose of the periphery is to assist newcomers to the group without destabilising the centre, which can remain closed to outsiders. Membership to the network is seen as important and success depends on making connections (Savage and Williams, 2008). Cohesion allows members to negotiate compromises built on a sense of trust and obligation (Porter and Sensenbrenner, 1993) so it is not just how the network is structured but also how the network, and the connections in it, are used which require attention.

Entrance to the network is dependent on a particular set of characteristics, such as having excellent interpersonal skills (Putnam, 1976) and the ability to network effectively in order to build up contacts and connections (Granovetter, 1973). Members of the cultural elite also need to possess large amounts of cultural capital, and it is important to consider how this can be used to increase social capital. This thesis acknowledges that different forms of capital can be accumulated and converted (Bourdieu, 1986) and going to the opera, for example, is a physical location where this can occur (McDonogh, 1986; Atkinson, 2006). People at the core of the network tend to be traditional candidates, using recruitment methods resembling that of the ‘old boy network’, so favouring males with public school backgrounds who are members of private clubs. The question this raises is whether this actually influences their behaviour when they carry out their roles. Do they favour the interests of their own group? (Putnam, 1976). There have been changes so that there is now more diversity amongst the elite sections

in society (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1998) but it is still the case that the core remains dominated by traditional candidates. Interpretation of how open a network is must be done with caution, as apparent openness can actually mean that certain connections which can link otherwise distinct sections become more important which then benefits the individuals who can occupy these (Burt, 1992; Carroll, 2008). Also, what does this mean for the experiences of people in the network who are not traditional candidates, such as women? (McDowell, 1997). A problem with the majority of the elite research is that it is gender-blind (Pakulski, 2011) but how women experience these traditionally male-dominated arenas is important, as highlighted by Puwar (1997) in her study of female Members of Parliament, and so the experiences of both men and women will be considered in the following chapters.

As a piece of research on a specifically Welsh cultural elite, a previously under-researched group as this literature review reveals, how do its members characterise Wales? Do they call upon the typical images and stereotypes or do they try to construct an image of a modern Wales? To what extent is their identity as a Welsh person important for their understanding of culture and is it (and specifically Welsh patriotism) useful in helping them to explain their motivations? Nationality has been seen to influence the views of the political elite (Putnam, 1976) and can divide the experiences of elite groups within society, putting restrictions on who can gain access to it, as illustrated by Porter's (1965) study in Canada. Wales as the setting for this piece of research allows for an exploration of these issues, as well seeing as the extent to which the Welsh network is connected to an English one and how the relationship between the two countries is understood.

In the modern day era of equal opportunities, a supposedly open, fair and meritocratic system of recruitment, it is important to evaluate whether this is reality or simply rhetoric. How the

interviewees respond to claims that it is a biased system, whether they engage in anti-elitist discourse (Walden, 2004), make claims that an elite group in society does not really exist (Collini, 2006; Du Gay, 2008) and distance themselves from elitist practices, such as private club membership (Hannan, 2000) is of interest. Is it the case that members of the cultural elite use the interview site in order to justify their positions of privilege, and assert their right and legitimacy to be there? This self-presentation is the focus of this study, particularly how they explain their motivations for their involvement. This highlights the methodological need for actually speaking to elite actors (Fenno, 1978). I believe that qualitative methods of enquiry allow for an exploration of their subjective meanings and their understanding of the network and their positions within it (Knoke, 1990; Knox *et al.* 2006; Savage and Williams, 2008). In the next chapter I present a critical account of how I gathered the data using the method of in-depth interviews and discuss the issues that this raised.

## Chapter Three

### Interviewing Elites: Power and Performance

#### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the process of conducting this piece of qualitative research. I begin with a discussion of the power dynamics which face the researcher when ‘studying up’. The chapter is then divided into three parts. The first focuses on the initial stages of the project concerning how I mapped my sample and secured the interviews, and how the use of preliminary interviews were useful in assisting with this. I then explore and evaluate the interview process itself, justifying my choice of method, how I prepared and used the interview schedule, and tried to manage each interview as a unique social interaction. Finally I explain my strategies of analysis and reflect on the ethical issues which arose during the course of my research. Throughout I use examples from my interviews to illustrate my points.

#### Power dynamics: “You can turn that thing off now” (Rhiannon Evan-Davies)<sup>9</sup>

The above quote was told to me (as opposed to being asked of me) at the end of one of my interviews. It was the end because the interviewee had decided that I had effectively got enough, and the other things that she wanted to say to me were to be ‘off record’ and not on tape. She dictated this to me. In the same way as she had decided the setting of the interview. She chose a bar in Cardiff city centre. This would not have been my first choice of venue (because of the amount of background noise, namely Christmas pop songs, which made transcription of the interview that much more challenging). She had slotted me in to her busy schedule, meeting with me on her day ‘off’ which she was otherwise spending doing her

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<sup>9</sup> All names are pseudonyms and a full explanation of this is given in the last part of this chapter.

Christmas shopping. I arrived at the interview dressed in my suit, carrying my best leather handbag, while she had a swathe of carrier bags, but she could do this because she is a member of the elite. She did not need props to make her important because she is important and in a position of power. She makes the rules. If indeed she does make the rules then what bearing will this have on the research process when I as researcher must exercise some degree of control over the interview if I am to get the quality of data that I require in order to draw valid conclusions? The issue of power plays out throughout the interview process, and I begin by introducing these ideas before critically applying them to the different stages of my project.

In the majority of social science research it is the researcher who is believed to be in the dominant position of power and so enjoys obvious advantages (Lipsig, 2006). It is, after all, the researcher who sets the agenda, writes the schedule and crucially analyses the data (Cochrane, 1998). This imbalance of power raises a number of practical and ethical issues for any project. Feminist researchers in particular have tried to readdress the balance in favour of those being studied, aiming for a relationship that is characterised by mutual respect and one which is devoid of any exploitation. The concerns seem to be different, however, when the group being studied are elites and this raises its own set of particular issues. Elites are different for a number of reasons, and it is these characteristics that make them of interest to me as the researcher. Elites are powerful because they can claim to be knowledgeable (McDowell, 1998) and intelligent (Stephens, 2007) and confident (Punch, 1986). They know they hold power and are familiar with being interviewed and so can control the amount and type of information that they give the researcher. They are, as Fitz and Halpin (1994) call them, 'professional communicators' (p.68) self-conscious enough to protect their own



reputation and that of their organisation, and often also equipped with media training to help them control the direction of conversation to one that suits them (Puwar, 1997).

Elites holding such power can place the researcher at a disadvantage and presents a unique set of challenges (Nader, 1972). Cochrane (1998) argues that the researcher can become 'dependent' on the respondents. If they challenge the role of researcher and are allowed to dictate the flow of information then they are the ones setting the agenda (Richards, 1996). Welch, Marschan-Piekkari, Penttinen and Tahvanainen, (2002, p.615) warn against this 'hostage syndrome' where researchers suspend their judgement and fail to challenge members of the elite. This will result in the researcher not gaining a true representation of their world, rather only a limited and partial view (Fitz and Halpin, 1994). However, it would be wrong to think that members of the elite have complete control over these interactions (Hunter, 1995) and power needs to be considered in more sophisticated terms than simply a dualistic notion of those with and those without (Smith, 2006). There is a status difference to negotiate, however, especially when the social scientist conducting the research is a young female researcher. The power differential cannot be erased. Studying up is different (England, 2002; Desmond, 2004) and the interactions will remain inevitably asymmetrical. I needed to be aware of this during the research and act to minimise it whenever possible because as a qualitative piece of research it required me to have positive relationships with my interviewees (Kvale, 1996).

## **Part I: Initial Stages**

### **Mapping the sample**

The research project did not follow a neat linear process of deciding on a sample, preparing for the interviews, conducting them and then analysing the data. Rather, all these things

occurred simultaneously. As I carried out background research on who I could interview this also provided me with information that helped me construct the interview schedules. As I conducted my preliminary, or pilot, interviews I was also finding out who were key figures in the cultural domain in order to develop my sample further. As McDowell (1998) argues the research process is a lot ‘messier’ than what actually gets written up and this is particularly true for research on elite groups. It is not just about deciding on a sample because this is tied up with issues of gaining access to the group and for this there is no ‘magic formula’ (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002, p.303). Although very early on in the project I knew a few key figures that were crucial to my project in reality I could only ever see a couple of interviews ahead and I certainly did not have my sample perfectly mapped out.

During the early stages of my research and before I started conducting any interviews I needed to decide the type of person that I was interested in talking to. As Goldstein (2002) phrases it the researcher must identify ‘which doors you need to get in and why?’ (p.670). The category of elites is difficult to define and is often changed in order to fit the purposes of the study. In relation to the corporate world elites are traditionally located in the top positions of firms (Giddens, 1972) but in reality power and influence can be much more complex than this and are not just found at senior management level (Welch *et al.*, 2002). Problems with definition is compounded by the fact that the power people can hold is complicated and transitory, especially as a characteristic of elite actors is that they are often involved in more than one network at any time so they become ‘multiple and overlapping elites’ (Cochrane, 1998, p.2130).

The first thing that I needed to do was to decide on the organisations that I wanted represented. These had to contribute to the cultural landscape of Wales and some were

immediately very obvious, including The Arts Council of Wales and Welsh National Opera. It helped that many of them are Cardiff based, with their head offices in the capital city, even if they also have other offices elsewhere in Wales. A very valuable resource at this preliminary stage of my research was *The Wales Yearbook* which is updated every year and lists all of the key organisations in Wales, including ones relating to the arts. It provides the names of the people on the senior management team and on the board which allowed me to immediately start to cross reference membership of these and locate people who hold more than one role, highlighting them as key players who would be useful to talk to. I decided that as far as possible I would try to speak to two people in the most high profile and well known organisations, one being a paid employee and the other being someone who sat on the board, who was involved in the decision-making of the organisation but not its day-to-day running. Having these two viewpoints was seen as potentially interesting because of the possibility of them having differing reasons and motivations for their involvement.

Organisations that were researched related to many different strands of culture (see Appendix A for a list of the main organisations represented in this project) including opera (Welsh National Opera), the visual arts (Artes Mundi), literature (Academi<sup>10</sup>), theatre (National Theatre of Wales), broadcasting (BBC, S4C), the Welsh language (The National Eisteddfod), education (Cardiff University) and sport (Sport Wales). *The Wales Yearbook* was a useful starting place but it was important to do much more detailed research about each organisation. The internet was fundamental in helping to achieve this, as they all have their own websites containing up-to-date information about management structure and board membership. Another source of information came from newspaper articles (Klatch, 1998), for

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<sup>10</sup> This organisation has since been rebranded as *Literature Wales* but was called Academi at the time of data collection.

example in the later stages of my project an article called ‘The A-Z of networkers in Wales’<sup>11</sup> was a useful checking device for me to ensure that those named on the list who were involved in the cultural domain were represented in my sample. As my research progressed it became increasingly obvious to me how closely the world of culture and business are linked. Firstly because when I asked interviewees who else they thought it was important for me to speak to (in other words other key players in the network) they frequently gave me names of people who sat on arts boards but who had built their professional reputation in the business world and secondly because of the frequency with which Cardiff Business Club was mentioned as an arena for networking. As a result of this I decided to represent some key figures from the world of business in my sample, in order to reflect this. I could not have foreseen this at the start of the process and shows how the sample changed and developed as I became more knowledgeable about the nature of Welsh elites.

When deciding who it was I wanted to interview I also had to consider their positioning in the landscape and how long they had been part of the cultural scene in Wales. People who are new to organisations can be perfectly placed to make comparisons between their current role and their previous one (Dexter, 1970). My sample included people who were relatively new to their current position, for example coming up to a year in the job, and those who had been with the same organisation for twenty years, and those whose fixed term of office, for example four years, was just drawing to a close. One characteristic of board members is that they are often retired or semi-retired. It can be very useful to talk to retired people, or ‘ex-elites’ (Moyser, 1998) and they have more time available to speak to the researcher, so negotiating access becomes easier. They also can give a historical perspective and may feel more at liberty to speak their mind, while still retaining their ‘institutional memory’

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<sup>11</sup> ‘A to Z of the best networkers in Wales’ (2011) *Wales Online*, accessed on May 18<sup>th</sup> 2011.

(Peabody, Hammond, Torcom, Brown, Thompson and Kolodny, 1990). A practical problem of trying to speak with retired people is that they are not as easy to contact as those still involved in public life (Lilleker, 2003) but again a range of people were included in my sample. A total of twenty interviews were conducted and details about the participants are shown in Table 1.

### **Preliminary interviews**

Before I started approaching a number of different individuals from a variety of organisations I wanted to begin with some initial or preliminary interviews, or what could be called ‘pilots’. Making decisions about the people to include at this stage was largely informed by my supervisors. They were chosen in order to represent a variety of organisations, positions and perspectives at a range of different points in their career (see participants 1-4 in Table 1). My supervisors also made the initial approach for me which ensured that I was given access, achieved via their personal sponsorship (Winkler, 1987). It was originally anticipated that six pilot interviews would be conducted; three with male respondents and three with female respondents. However, in reality only four took place, one with a male and the rest with females. I felt that my competence had already been successfully tested and that the pilots had served their purpose and had adequately benefited the research process. Also, through talking to the respondents opportunities had developed organically for future interviews to take place with other members of the cultural elite and it was felt that these leads should be promptly pursued.

These interviews were carried out for numerous reasons, firstly they acted as training for me as a young researcher new to interviewing members of an elite group. Doing the pilot interviews raised a number of methodological issues that were likely to be encountered in the

**Table 1 – Summary of Interviewees**

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Employment status	Number of current board memberships	Honours	Nationality	Welsh speaking?
1	Kathryn Jones	Female	Full-time paid employment	5	CBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	Yes
2	Christine Wall	Female	Semi-retired	6	CBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	No
3	Phillip Smith	Male	Semi-retired	3	CBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	No
4	Susan Hodson	Female	Full-time paid employment	2	X	English	No
5	Bethan Price	Female	Full-time paid employment	2	X	Welsh	Yes
6	Stephen Owen	Male	Full-time paid employment	3	CBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	Yes
7	Rhiannon Evans-Davies	Female	Semi-retired	3	CBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	Yes
8	Annette Cook	Female	Full-time paid employment	4	X	Welsh	Yes
9	Matthew Hughes	Male	Semi-retired	3	CBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	Yes
10	Gareth Morris	Male	Full-time paid employment	2	X	Welsh	Yes

**Table 1 – Summary of Interviewees (cont.)**

#	Pseudonym	Gender	Employment status	Number of current board memberships	Honours	Nationality	Welsh speaking?
11	Mark West	Male	Semi-retired	1	X	English	No
12	Bronwyn Powell	Female	Semi-retired	3	Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	No
13	Martin Sweet	Male	Full-time paid employment	1	Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	Yes
14	Aled Parry	Male	Full-time paid employment	6	X	Welsh	Yes
15	Colin Wilson	Male	Semi-retired	3	Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	No
16	Glyn Edwards	Male	Self-employed	4	X	Welsh	Yes
17	Iwan Williams	Male	Semi-retired	5	X	Welsh	No
18	Gwen Griffiths	Female	Semi-retired	3	CBE	Welsh	Yes
19	Graham Johnson	Male	Full-time paid employment	5	X	Welsh	No
20	Andrew Band	Male	Semi-retired	2	OBE Hon. Fellowships	Welsh	No

main study. Having experience of these, any problems and likely pitfalls, allowed me to anticipate them in the future and develop appropriate strategies to enable me to avoid them or to deal with them as effectively as possible if they then did arise. This meant that any mistakes could be learnt from early on and be contained so that they did not negatively impact on the whole project. Actually practicing my interview technique was better than me just simply reading about it, especially as interviewing is a skill that is honed through experience (Peabody *et al.*, 1990) and so this helped to increase my confidence.

The initial interviews also served other practical functions. They allowed me to judge the usefulness and appropriateness of the schedule, and the ordering of questions. I did learn some important lessons such as the value of giving the schedule to the interviewees in advance. In the first interview I did not do this and although I do not believe that this had a detrimental effect on the interview having then done so for the other three pilots I can see that it had some clear advantages. Another lesson that conducting the pilot interviews taught me was that business cards are an invaluable tool with which to provide people with all of my contact details in a professional manner, whilst also demonstrating my affiliation to Cardiff University and my academic credentials. Unfortunately I did not have these at my disposal during the pilot stage of my research. Odendahl and Shaw (2002) believe that handing over a business card at the beginning of an elite interview helps the researcher to establish authority over the proceeding interaction and so can reduce the 'power gap' (Yeung 1995, p.333). They are a currency that interviewees are familiar with exchanging and being given a card by someone is a useful sign to a researcher that they have permission to contact them in the future and ask for formal participation in the study. The data transcribed from these interviews also allowed me to do some preliminary analysis and identify 'foreshadowed problems' (Delamont, 2002) which directed future interviews and lines of questioning such



as how they explain their positioning in the network and how they describe the skills and attributes needed for their roles.

The pilot interviews were also used to help me understand the cultural landscape better and to locate future participants so that I could define my sample more tightly. One interviewee, for example, told that she did not consider herself to be a cultural leader (the tendency for self-deprecation is a theme that runs across all three of the following empirical chapters) but that she “knew plenty of people who are” (Susan Hodson). In this way snowball sampling was used (Patton, 1990; Mason, 1996) so that the interview then involved asking for suggestions for who else they thought it was important for me to talk to as well as requesting whether it was possible for introductions to be made on my behalf. This technique became inbuilt into the end of every interview that I conducted and was an invaluable way of shaping my sample and helping me to secure access.

Some respondents, therefore, acted as gatekeepers, so that I used their expertise to guide me and select further people to talk to (Hunter, 1995). As insiders they have privileged knowledge which I could utilise. This is particularly important for elite research where the networks are complex and so may be difficult for an outsider to understand. An insider will know them better because ‘who knows whom matters’ (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002, p.307). It was useful to develop rapport with, and gain the trust of, an individual willing to familiarise me with the elite landscape and this helped me to establish my reputation. Goldstein (2002) recommends ‘do not be shy about enlisting their help in getting in the door with others on the sample list’ (p.671). In this way as a researcher I was able to use ‘networking’ to enhance my credibility, so I was able to answer with confidence the question ‘How did you get my name?’ (Herod, 1999). In my first pilot interview the interviewee identified a number of key

figures that she thought it would be useful for me to talk to, and using her name was a very successful strategy I employed when making initial contact with possible interviewees. It became my 'magic key' which opened many elite doors but that does not mean that full or true access was granted, rather it needed to be continually negotiated and renegotiated (Burgess, 1991; Lee, 1995).

My sample, therefore, consisted of the four preliminary interviews which were with people identified for me by my supervisors and who were initially contacted by them on my behalf. Of these four one helped me locate a further two people to interview and another one was my 'magic key' who provided me with a further five interviewees by suggesting their names to me during our interview and then giving me permission to use her name and mention the fact that I had already spoken to her in my initial contact letter to them. Of these five three of them provided me with a further two interviewees each (a running total of seventeen) which was again by giving me their names, contact details and permission to say I had already spoken to them (rather than them actually make the approach for me). Another respondent was directly approached by me because of a slight personal connection which I exploited (I did not know him but I knew somebody who did) and he in turn directed me to the final two people in the sample. I also directly contacted an additional four potential interviewees, two of which did not respond to my letter or telephone messages (with hindsight I think this was related to timing, as unbeknown to me at that point, they were then to both leave their posts very shortly afterwards to take up new ones) and while the other two initially expressed interest in taking part in the study it was not possible to schedule an interview with them as I was continually rescheduled and then ignored. Despite this I am confident that although my sample is small in size it is representative of the cultural elite of Wales / Cardiff. This is for two main reasons, firstly because when asking people to name other important people in the

network, the interviewees began to name the same people, and not only that but the same people who I had already interviewed. Secondly because with the increasing number of interviews that I conducted I began to recognise similar themes and patterns in their answers. It became obvious to me that they were constructing ideas about Wales in parallel ways and using the same devices to help them explain their actions and behaviour. I had reached a natural saturation point and I judged that carrying out further interviews would not be necessary in order for me to answer my research questions.

### **Gaining Access**

There is a perceived difficulty with gaining access to members of an elite group (Cormode and Hughes, 1999; Goldstein, 2002; Thueson, 2011; Aguiar, 2012), this is a crucial issue to consider because without it there can obviously be no research project (Cochrane, 1998). The fact that they are members of an elite group means that they are set apart from the rest of society (Scott, 1984) and they are aware of their position of prestige so are less likely to let researchers in (Richards, 1996). This led Wax (1971) to argue that for the researcher wishing to study them that most doors are firmly closed in their face. This relates to the inherent imbalance of power in the relationship and so because of their status they are confident enough to refuse to participate.

Gaining access may not always be that difficult. Ostrander (1993) believes that the problem is often exaggerated and used as an excuse not to attempt elite research, but it should not deter people. Dexter (1970) shares the same sentiments, making the point that the researcher will succeed in getting the interview more times than they will fail. It is the researcher, who is often unwilling to try, rather than the elite respondents refusing to participate (Gilding, 2010). What became quickly apparent in my project is that cultural elites like to talk about culture

and their organisations because these are things which they feel passionately about and so inviting them to do this, in an informal interview situation, was actually quite appealing to them and many responded to my request very positively and enthusiastically i.e. “the project sounds really interesting!” (Annette Cook) and “I would be delighted to try to help” (Martin Sweet). Despite this general enthusiasm I still needed to consider the process carefully in order to maximise my chances of success, this depended on, as Odendahl and Shaw (2002) phrase it ‘a mixture of ingenuity, social skills, contacts, careful negotiations, and circumstance’ (p.305).

It was important that I used my social connections. Having my supervisors vouch for me allowed me to have personal sponsorship as well as institutional sponsorship (Winkler, 1987) because they are well-known and respected researchers at Cardiff University. However, some contacts must be used carefully depending on the respondent, as the same contact can open some doors but close others depending on factors such as their personal history (Medhurst and Moyser, 1987). As well as using all possible networks it was also important to be in the types of places where members of my sample were, for example by attending elite events, which could be used for developing contacts and observing group dynamics (Hunter, 1995; Goldstein, 2002). Attending conferences (for example organised by The Institute of Welsh Affairs) gave me credibility (Herod, 1999; Puwar, 1997) and were useful to mention in the initial access letter or during the interview to ingratiate myself with an interviewee. Networking can also extend to developing positive relationships with their personal gatekeepers, such as secretaries, because this can help achieve access (Fitz and Halpin, 1994).

Luck does have a role to play in this process (Woliver, 2002; McDowell, 1998) because as Goldstein (2002) argues:

‘there are no silver bullet solutions, and scheduling and completing elite interviews takes a fair bit of luck. Still there are things you can do to create your own luck.’  
(p.671)

But the researcher cannot depend on chance alone (England, 2002), rather it was more important for me to be pragmatic and opportunistic (Yeung, 1995). Access will depend on the timing of the interviews which is often out of the control of the researcher. At a time of upheaval or controversy elite members may feel uneasy talking to a researcher, or conversely more willing to ‘unburden’ themselves to an outsider (Dexter, 1970). Elite interviewees may enjoy the opportunity to reflect on past events, now at a relative distance (Phillips, 1998) and this was certainly the case for one of my interviewees who commented at length on “an almighty crisis” (Mark West) that had happened in his organisation a few years previously.

The initial contact was mainly done by letter and a general template was used for each one (Appendix B). I also included copies of the information sheet (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D) because I felt these were necessary for me to convey what my project was about and what involvement would entail, and the inclusion of these helped to achieve this. A number of pieces of advice from the literature on researching elites were followed to help to ensure that I would be granted an interview. It was important to consider this stage carefully and execute it well because ‘first impressions last’ (Lilleker, 2003, p.209). I sent the letters on official stationary using Cardiff University headed paper. I made sure that the correspondence was relatively brief and succinct as recommended by Kincaid and Bright (1957). Elites are busy people and often reply in very short correspondence so this is clearly favoured by them (Zuckerman, 1996). This was seen in one email response to my request for an interview where all that was said was “Alice very happy to talk to you and assist. WR” (Glyn Edwards). Emails were also used effectively for making the initial contact, for when the respondents had already indicated to me or my supervisors that this was the preferred means

of communication. Email is particularly useful when contacting elites because it allows for the quick and brief communication that they favour because of their busy schedules (Mikecz, 2012) and it also means that they can access it and respond to it when they are away from their desks (Stephens, 2007). One interviewee replied to my email by saying “We are in London this week, but I am picking up emails on my Blackberry” (Phillip Smith). Technology is very valuable when researching and locating elite members, especially their contact details, but I was aware that a formal approach is more suitable in the main.

In the correspondence I did not have to worry about avoiding potentially complicated terminology, rather professional language was used to help me demonstrate my competence (Welch *et al.*, 2002). Within a limited amount of space key pieces of information needed to be clearly expressed. The inclusion of my institution, and my sponsors, helped to give me status and meant that a ‘refusal or a dodge’ (Kincaid and Bright, 1957, p.305) was less likely. I also needed to consider how they were going to initially perceive me and I needed to cultivate a non-threatening image right from the outset (Klatch, 1998). Members of an elite may be wary of outsiders and the possibility of being portrayed in a negative and distorted fashion. I deliberately avoided the use of the term ‘elite’ at all times because of its potential to be viewed as a loaded and negative word with connotations of ‘elitist and ‘elitism’. I phrased the research in broad terms, rather than being too specific or precise, as this can also help to facilitate access (Dexter, 1970). I stressed that what was important was their personal perspectives. Stating that it is their unique viewpoint that is of interest is also a form of flattery, or a way of ‘buttering them up’ (Lilleker, 2003, p.209).

Members of the elite will ask questions of the researcher and I had to be prepared for this, for example one interviewee emailed me writing:

Yes I would be happy to chat to you about the issues set out in your paper. On one condition: you tell me why you chose to do a PhD and where you see yourself going!  
(Gareth Morris)

They are likely to ask gatekeeping questions as they have often gained their positions and status from being in possession of expert knowledge and so they will expect the researcher to be able to justify their research aim and methodology competently (Cassell, 1988), as well as provide personal credentials and an explanation of the purpose and benefits of the research (Ostrander, 1993). I made sure that I had a 'good spiel ready' (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002, p.674) and found it useful to highlight parts of my own biography that would appeal to each individual (Gallaher, 2012).

An important factor in achieving access concerns the amount of time that is requested from the interviewees. This needs to be stated in the initial contact letter (Ryan and Lewer, 2012) because they are under time constraints because of their full schedules. I requested forty-five minutes of their time, hoping that in reality they would actually give me an hour, although one interviewee responded by emailing with "I suggest we set aside two hours as on past experience I know these things can run" (Phillip Smith) which illustrates how accommodating they can be. When it came to actually scheduling the interviews I did have to compensate for their lack of flexibility by being completely flexible myself, in relation to date, time and place of the interview (Morrissey, 1970). A couple of interviews were cancelled by the participants at short notice but these were then successfully rearranged. It is the case that the powerful can make the researcher wait but this might make them feel a greater sense of obligation to take part in the long term (Fitz and Halpin, 1994). I was prepared for this and tried to stay positive at all times, recognising that I needed to be in possession of 'persistence and patience; as well as a strong ego' (Peabody *et al.*, 1990, p.453).

## **Part II: The interviews**

### **Justifying the method**

Before embarking on any research project it is important to think carefully about what method to use. It is not simply about which one appears appropriate but on the type of insight which is being sought (Moyser, 1998). I wanted to understand my elites and their positions from their own unique personal viewpoints. It is possible, and straightforward, to construct life histories from using biographical evidence in libraries (Crewe, 1974) however, these are a poor guide to their ideology and behaviour and do not show the links that they have with other members of the network (Edinger and Searing, 1967). Another technique which has been used is looking at their officially recorded behaviour, for example their voting patterns (Sinclair and Brady, 1987). It is also possible to use participation observation and be a ‘fly on the wall’ (Winkler, 1987; Ho, 2009) but this is very rare because of the issues of gaining access and problems of overcoming insider status.

The most frequently used method is face-to-face interviewing either as the main or sole way to gather the data (Putnam, 1973). It is acknowledged that the best way to access their world and find out their views is to talk to them (Crewe, 1974). Gaining an understanding of the micro-politics of personal relationships can then be related to wider analyses of power (Phillips, 1998). Interviews ‘yield rich insights into people’s biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, attitudes and feelings’ (May, 2001, p.120) although they do not necessarily guarantee obtaining the truth, especially as elite interviewees are capable of controlling the interaction. I had to remember that interviewing elite members is different from speaking to non-elites (Welch *et al.*, 2002). As Cochrane (1998) suggests by posing the question:



‘but is it enough simply to buy a tape recorder, invest in a suit and tie or a smart dress, write some letters, prepare a semi-structured questionnaire, and seek out some research subjects?’ (p.2123)

Indeed there is a lot more to consider than just this.

All of the interviews used in this study are in-depth, qualitative and semi-structured. Stephens (2007) justifies his use of the semi-structured interview with his elite participants as being because ‘they provide the opportunity to gain an account of the values and experiences of the respondent in terms meaningful to them’ (p.205). Interviews of this nature have been described as an ‘extended face-to-face exchange’ (Fontana and Frey, 1994) used in order to elicit specifically subjective perceptions (Kezar, 2003). I wanted to be able to hear the detailed biographies of each individual in their own words in the style of a life history interview but with some direction imposed by me as the researcher. Whereas elite interviews are often perceived about obtaining facts about policy (Herod, 1999) oral histories are asking about individual’s life story, and it was certainly the latter that I was interested in. The semi-structured interview meant that I had my own agenda as a researcher (to ensure that all the necessary topic areas were covered) as well as allowing for the interviewee to introduce any additional issues that they saw as important.

Ultimately each interview was a balancing act between giving them enough freedom to express themselves in ways meaningful to them about topics which they deemed important while I maintained overall control over the direction and shape of the interview as a whole. The ‘issue of control is fundamental to the elite interview’ (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002, p.310). Elites are not a marginalised group in society and so they are used to being asked for their opinion, having an audience and being recorded. They are skilled communicators and can express themselves effectively so that they:

‘are used to being in charge and they are used to having others defer to them. They are also used to being asked what they think and having what they think matter in other peoples’ lives’ (Ostrander, 1993, p.19).

They frequently talk to a range of audiences using elaborate and persuasive arguments. This can be a benefit for the researcher because ideas are considered and forthcoming but because the interview is a social situation the status discrepancy inherent in elite research means that the researcher must be aware of these power dynamics in order to be able to get insightful data (Zuckerman, 1996).

The method employed, therefore, should be fit for purpose. A semi-structured interview, which resembled a conversation, allowed for the elite interviewees to organise their opinions in a way that made sense to them and to express themselves freely in their own words in order to provide real insight into their attitudes and values. In this way I took a collaborative approach to interviewing (Dexter, 1970) or what Schoenberger (1991) calls the ‘qualitative corporate interview’. This consists of open-ended questions and has some structure and direction imposed by the interviewer but is not ‘inflexible or passive’ rather it is more of a ‘discussion and dialogue’ (p.187) which the respondent is actively engaged in shaping. As highly-educated people my interviewees did not want to be put in ‘a strait-jacket’ (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002) created by having a tight schedule and close-ended questions, nor would they have appreciated a steady flow of questions or a ‘rat-a-tat-tat’ questioning style (Dexter, 1964, p.56). Rather they prefer an intellectual discussion (Rice, 2009) or a scholarly exchange especially if they are from an academic background (Medhurst and Moyser, 1987). While this may have resulted in some long monologues, these are often useful, and ensures that the interviewee enjoys the interview experience (Marshall, 1984). My interviews did often mirror a conversation. I tried to not be too explicit or precise with my questioning and my interviewees appreciated the chance to talk freely. One interviewee even apologised at the

end of her interview saying “Sorry. This is a great sort of splurge isn’t it?” (Gwen Griffiths). Her ‘splurge’ as she calls it had simultaneously (and thankfully) covered all the points on my interview schedule.

The interactions do need to be properly managed, especially if the interviewees are talking at length. There is a danger that if the interviewees talk without any guidance from the researcher this will have a detrimental impact on the quality of the data. Ostrander (1993) argues that they may have ‘inclinations to ‘just talk’- easily, freely, and at length, but not necessarily to the issues in which the researcher is most interested’ (p.21). Elite interviewees are used to taking lead roles in conversations and can control the direction and style of the interaction (Stephens 2007), as one of my interviewees confidently told me “I’ll digress a little bit for a moment” (Phillip Smith). They are self-conscious and armed with the necessary skills which are needed in order to protect their reputation (Punch, 1986). They are capable of presenting things in a certain way and can avoid questions or omit details that they do not want to disclose (Gerwirtz and Ozga, 1994), are very good at fielding questions (Thomas, 1993) and can deal with demanding and probing questions (Czudnowski, 1987). They may try to use the interview to further the agenda of their institution and present the ‘party line’ of their organisation (Briggs, 2002) or even launch into past speeches (Thomas, 1993). Politicians are especially proficient and many have had media training in order to cultivate their skills and techniques (Puwar, 1997). This was the case for several of my interviewees and one interviewee reflected upon this during our interview and the number of “these types of things” that she had done before:

I did one which was a video archive thing for some people who wanted, who have done an archive of people in Wales who were in senior positions, and then every time I get appointed to a presidency or something like that I have to give an interview. I was actually media trained at one point because I used to do a lot of television work. (Christine Wall)

There are also practical issues if they talk a lot. The interviewer will very quickly run out of time and this will be limited and precious because members of the elite are busy people. Table 2 shows the varying length of the interviews conducted in this study, with the average interview lasting for one hour, although a few lasted considerably longer. One useful piece of advice I followed was to ensure important questions were asked fairly early on in the interview, to ensure that they would get answered (Fitz and Halpin, 1994). If the interviewees talk a lot then this obviously means a lot of data is collected which means transcription and analysis also takes a long time.

**Table 2 – Interview Setting and Length**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Length (minutes)</b>
Kathryn Jones	Meeting room at their place of work	46
Christine Wall	Sitting room in their own home	74
Phillip Smith	Meeting room at Cardiff University	108
Susan Hodson	Kitchen in their own home	85
Bethan Price	Coffee shop at Chapter Arts Centre	40
Stephen Owen	Their office at their place of work	57
Rhiannon Evans-Davies	Bar in Cardiff city centre	42
Annette Cook	Their office at their place of work	69
Matthew Hughes	Sitting room in their own home	80
Gareth Morris	Their office at their place of work	56
Mark West	Meeting room at their organisation's head office	55
Bronwyn Powell	Meeting room at their organisation's head office	75
Martin Sweet	Their office at their place of work	56
Aled Parry	Their office at their place of work	71
Colin Wilson	Their office at their place of work	51
Glyn Edwards	Sitting room in their own home	43
Iwan Williams	Bar at St David's Hotel and Spa	60
Gwen Griffiths	Meeting room at their organisation's head office	67
Graham Johnson	Coffee shop at their place of work	93
Andrew Band	Meeting room at their place of work	58

In order for the research to be really useful, therefore, I needed to bring to each interaction a set of focused aims so that I had a role in setting the agenda and structuring the interview so that it was a shared product between myself and the interviewee. I had to be prepared to not simply sit back and listen (which may well have been interesting) but to interrupt and interject (Puwar, 1997) and express my 'right to know' (Gorden, 1969). Ultimately I acted to ensure that I was the one in the driving seat who could 'steer the interview on to the desired course' Lilleker (2003, p.210). While in each interview I did not want mine to be the dominant voice I also did not want to be subjugated by the interviewee's own agenda (Ezzy, 2010). In order to achieve this I employed a number of practical techniques in order to help me navigate the intrinsic status differential (McDowell, 1992; Sabot, 1999), and these will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Preparing and constructing the schedule**

Thorough and accurate preparation of my schedule helped me to gain access to the participants in order to carry out the interviews in the first place. It served to legitimise my demands on their time and showed them that I was serious and that they could actually be of help (Goldstein, 2002). I hoped that this positive impression would then carry through to the interview site and give me status in the subsequent interaction. Doing my homework (Hunter, 1995; Stephens, 2007) in this way helped me to present myself as competent and professional especially as elite interviewees will expect the researcher to be well-informed (Kincaid and Bright, 1957). One interviewee remarked to me "You have done your research. Well done. That's deep research" (Graham Johnson). This obviously served to increase my self-esteem which then had a positive impact on the rest of the interview. Being well-informed increases the likelihood that the interviewees will give open and detailed responses (Schoenberger, 1992) and helps to build rapport and avoid superficial or bland responses (Moyser, 1998). I

was also prepared for the likely questions that would be asked of me regarding my project and my background (Ostrander, 1993; Cassell, 1988; Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). My thorough preparation, therefore, helped me to have confidence in each interview and this was especially important because the power balance was skewed in favour of my elite respondents.

The background research also helped to me to extrapolate the key issues and define my questions. These could then be made prominent for discussion during the interview which meant time, often a scarce resource, was used to the maximum effect (Peabody *et al.*, 1990). Preparation meant that I did not waste time in the interview asking questions that I should have already known the answers to (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). My background research meant that I could produce an accurate schedule. This also gave me an extra level of insight into their responses during the interview, allowing me to check for any inconsistencies in their accounts (Mikecz, 2012). I made sure that I was familiar with each individual's career path and the different organisations that they had worked for, especially any formal links it had with other bodies, which provided an important context for understanding any personal connections that there might be. The internet was an invaluable resource which allowed me to do this. I built up profiles of each person and cross referenced these with other biographies (as not all were comprehensive or totally up-to-date). This produced interesting leads to follow which in turn contributed more generally to my understanding of the contemporary cultural landscape of Wales. During my preparation of each individual schedule I gathered primary and secondary data such as speeches, lectures, academic publications, and articles in the media. This not only provided context (Goldstein, 2002) but also meant that I could use key quotes as stimulus material and demonstrate my prior knowledge by asking specific questions about things that otherwise I would not have known to ask.

For each interview I produced a career timeline with accompanying dates (although there was often significant overlap as one of the characteristics of members of an elite is that they hold multiple roles at any one time). This enabled me to structure the schedule around their life history and meant that each one was specific and personal to the individual (Atkinson, 2002). As a qualitative piece of research no attempt at standardisation was made. This preparation which resulted in an accurate schedule served to boost my confidence, both by reading it through several times just before the interview took place (Zuckerman, 1996) and as a useful aide memoire during the interview itself (Phillips, 1998). It also allowed me to generate network diagrams, importantly supplemented with the interview data, which reflected the links between organisations over a course of a career and the personal links people have, and this will be presented and discussed at greater length in Chapter Four.

### **Using the schedule**

It was decided that it was important to give the schedule to all of the respondents in advance of the interview so the interviewees were prepared to speak on the topics (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). This could have encouraged their participation when they realised that they were being asked to talk about things that they clearly knew a lot about and it acted as an early sign to them that I was serious about the research. It was beneficial to give them time for familiarisation and consideration of the topics and they could clarify events in their mind and recall things from memory (Fitz and Haplin, 1994). During each interview I had the schedule in front of me so I could refer back to it, and often the interviewee used this (or their own copy) for themselves in order to direct their thinking (Appendix E is an example of the type of form and shape of each schedule).

There is differing advice in the literature regarding the direction interviews should follow. Often life history interviews start in the present and then work backwards (Dex, 1991) whereas other researchers have found it beneficial to start at the beginning and then work forwards (McDowell, 1998). I left it to the respondent to choose the course that they wanted the discussion to take, and would make this clear to them at the beginning of the interview by saying something like:

What I find works really well is if people talk through their life history, their career path. So whether you want to start from the present and work backwards or whether you want to start from the past and come forwards is entirely up to you or we can pick a point in the middle and work either way, but what happens then is you are talking about issues that I'm interested in anyway so then I can ask you questions which come organically from what you're saying rather than me just firing a list of questions at you. So it's very much led by you. So you start wherever you want to start.

In this way I clearly handed power over to the interviewees, but I believe this initial 'giving of freedom' on my part, actually benefited the process, making them more likely to be open and it also allowed me to question them more directly later on. It obviously meant that no interview was the same but a standard pattern of questions would be inappropriate for my research aims and likely to adversely affect rapport, as elite members generally enjoy leading conversation rather than following it (Aldridge, 1993). The interviews typically began with talking about concrete and factual events but this then led to discussions about more abstract, interpretive and judgemental issues and opinions; the things that I was really interested in (Peabody *et al.*, 1990).

Questions were asked naturally from what the interviewees had already said and it was important that I was flexible in my approach to questioning. My aim was for each interview to be 'fluid and organic' (Lilleker, 2003, p.210) so that the interview schedule did not 'tie me down' (Woliver, 2002, p.678). Instead I tried to be as open as possible to new lines of enquiry. Elite interviewees have sophisticated viewpoints and unique experiences so I needed



a flexible outlook which was sensitive to this (Moyser, 1998). I used open-ended questioning, which as Berry (2002) argues, can be a risky strategy which required me ‘to know when to prod and how to formulate follow up questions on the fly. It’s a high wire act’ (p.679). The questions themselves were tailored to each individual. There were no fixed questions and the wording was adapted according to the situation. I tried to focus on specific events and examples, while asking them about what they thought and felt, as it was their personal stories and unique perspectives that were being sought (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002). I also prodded for more information, with a look or a verbal prompt and tried to look encouraging and interested at all times by nodding and smiling (Marshall, 1984). I believe that the interviews benefited from being digitally recorded because it meant I could concentrate on the interviewee rather than be concerned with writing copious notes.

In order for me to still successfully manage the interviews I had to know the schedule literally inside-out and back-to-front in order to make smooth transitions between topics and to ensure that everything was covered. Interviewers need to be able to multi-task so that they can listen to what is currently being said while at the same time looking over the schedule and making decisions about where to direct the conversation to next. Elite interviewees are likely to jump from topic to topic (Dexter, 1970) so I needed to be clear about what was going on, and on several occasions my interviewees asked me questions like “I forget where we were now. Why did I go down that track?” (Aled Parry) and “How did we get on to this subject?” (Colin Wilson). It was very important that I could answer these questions, to prove that I was listening and understanding their arguments. It was another test which I needed to pass. During some interviews I made a few short notes on the schedule as we went along in order to remind me of things that I wanted to ask that arose from what they had already said so that I did not forget them. At all times I had to closely monitor the coverage of the schedule and

keep an eye on the time. I found that a very useful question to ask at the end of the interview was 'Is there anything you would like to tell me about which I haven't thought to ask you?' (Woliver, 2002, p.678) because this usually provided me with a final thought, or conclusion which revealed what they thought was the most important thing that I needed to know. The final question that I always asked was 'Who else do you think it would be useful for me to speak to?' and this was used as a form of snowball sampling, and usually meant not only did they give me names but facilitated access in the form of email addresses and telephone numbers.

### **Managing the social interaction**

Each interview is a unique social interaction, it is an exchange of information in both directions, and a 'communicative event' (Yeung, 1995, p.322). The best way to approach each one will vary depending on the attitude and demeanour of the interviewee. I had to use my skills as a researcher and consider how they were defining the situation and be flexible enough to adapt my personality and approach accordingly (Dexter, 1970) and this required me to 'think on my feet' (McDowell, 1998). The social aspect of the interview situation can make them unpredictable. People are complex, and the same person can change their behaviour or attitude during the course of a single interview (Puwar, 1997). I needed to build some sort of relationship with my interviewees and be aware of my role in influencing what was being said. As a young female researcher I was at a status disadvantage compared with my elite interviewees and so this made the social aspects of each interview even more salient. I found keeping a research diary in which I recorded my immediate reactions about each interview was a very useful tool which helped me to consider the interview as social exchange (Moyser, 1998) and gave me an opportunity to assess how factors like the setting, my physical appearance and my general demeanour may have affected this.

*Setting: “Do you want to meet in my kitchen at say 2pm?” (Susan Hodson)*

It is important when interviewing members of the elite to let them choose the location and this is ‘more than just a matter of courtesy’ (Thomas, 1993, p.87) because it increases the likelihood that they will participate in the project. I was prepared to conduct my interviews anywhere at any time (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). Most elite participants (and my sample were no exception) choose to be interviewed in their own offices as many are unwilling to travel (Stephens, 2007). This can be seen as an advantage because their offices are typically a private and quiet place whereas some groups in society (such as teenagers) often do not have access to a similarly protected space. This type of setting is generally conducive for the interview and helps to give it a professional tone (Mikecz, 2012). However, it is not without its disadvantages, as it can serve to favour the interviewee and disempower the researcher because it is clearly the ‘territory’ of the interviewee (Rice, 2009, p.73) and one in which they are positioned as the expert (Elwood and Martin, 2000). This is especially the case if they are sat behind a desk (Conti and O’Neil, 2007), and although I experienced this once, usually the interviews that took place in their offices involved us sitting around a circular meeting table, which helped me to feel more at ease.

The setting did influence the style of interaction. What people say should not be separated from the context that it is said in (Cresswell, 2007) and each interview could also be used as a form of participant observation (Oberhauser, 1997). This is why it was so important for me to make fieldnotes about each interview and Table 2 shows the location of each of the twenty interviews. The performance of my interviewees in their place of work provided me with further insights into their lives and their relationships with others, for example one interviewee proudly gave me a tour of the building of his organisation, saying “I’ll give you a quick spin” (Graham Johnson). During another interview the interviewee received a call from

someone at the Assembly, and I got to witness firsthand the type of conversations that go on behind closed doors, not having a clue what it was really all about, meant that I was allowed to listen in, and this probably says a lot about how the interviewee perceived me, as a non-threatening outsider. Another interviewee received a phone call (which he took, without asking or apologising for this, so demonstrating his superior position to me) in which he was arranging a function for all the ‘movers and shakers’ in the network. He told his secretary “They’ll owe you a favour if you do fit them on” (Iwan Williams). This reveals not only the prestigious nature of these types of events, because there is a waiting list for them with people eagerly hoping for last minute cancellations so that they can attend, but also the use of favours and the reciprocal nature of the way in which the network functions. It was also useful to look at ‘artefacts’ in the room that gave clues about their lives (Elwood and Martin, 2000) and I found a good strategy was to comment on these (often pieces of art) either as an icebreaker or as a way of eliciting some interesting data that would have otherwise not have been discussed (Dexter, 1970). Not all of my interviews took place in the offices of my interviewees, others happened in public places and some in their homes. This can be advantageous because people will feel relaxed and secure and so are more likely to disclose more sensitive data (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002) and it provides clues to their type of lifestyle. During the interview that took place in the kitchen I met the interviewee’s teenager children, while making me a cup of tea, Susan Hodson spoke to her son about going to see a play at the weekend (I learn he is being socialised to have lots of cultural capital) but also that a man would be there who “you might want a job with someday” so already he is being told about how the network works. Knowing people matters, and from an early age he is in the position to be able to acquire his own social capital as a direct consequence of his mother’s prominent place in the network.

*Appearance and demeanour: “Certainly don’t wear good shoes” (Colin Wilson)*

This was said to me on the telephone by one interviewee as he gave me directions to his office, as I was going to need to traverse a muddy lane he advised me to think carefully about my footwear. Needless to say I did not arrive in my wellington boots. I listened not one bit, opting instead for my low-heeled, pointy, and shiny ‘interview shoes’. Practicality had to give way to cultivating the right interview image, not simply for how I would appear to him, but for how I felt, looking professional in my ‘interview outfit’ (Odendahl, 1990) which consisted of a black suit, a leather handbag and a clear folder, was important. Props help to build confidence (Stephens, 2007) and I presented myself in the same way in all my interviews in order to help with this. How I physically presented myself was not just about my clothes or shoes, but also about how I came across in my attitude and manner. Lilleker (2003) advises researchers to ‘try to project the right image: in other words be confident, knowledgeable and professional’ (p.214). I aimed to be well-mannered and polite as courtesy and professionalism are traits that are particularly valued by members of elite groups (Aldrich, 1998).

*Age, gender and nationality: “I always used to tell my students to start writing early on” (Phillip Smith)*

There are obviously certain things about myself and how I presented myself that were out of my control, including my age and my gender. These can be double-edged swords because they can both help and hinder the researcher (Welch *et al.*, 2002). It can be an advantage to be young because it means that you are perceived as less threatening (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002) but it can be problematic if the interviewees are a lot older than the researcher as they may adopt a paternal role or the interviews might mirror a meeting between a student and teacher / supervisor (Stephens, 2007). This was the case in one of my interviews when at the end I was given some advice on writing the thesis. While this might have actually meant that

any big age differences did not inhibit talk (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002) it was something that I needed to be aware of because the purpose of the interviews was not for them to teach or advise me but for me to access their personal understandings and reflections. The influence that my gender had on the research process also needed to be considered. This could have affected the interviews in different ways depending on whether they were with male or female participants. In some ways being female could have been an advantage because I might have appeared as 'less threatening, more intriguing' to male participants (Schoenberger, 1992, p.217) but also raises issues of possible paternalism, subordination and flirting (McDowell, 1998; Desmond, 2004; Pacholok, 2012).

Interviewing elite women as a female myself was interesting. While a couple were brusque and 'clearly had little time or desire for sisterly exchange of views' (McDowell, 1998, p.2137) the majority made me feel at ease, one interviewee in particular greeted me as if I were a long lost friend. Her warmth and friendliness, while initially surprising to me, made for a very positive and insightful interview and I think that being female gave me access to data concerning patriarchal relations, that if I had been a male researcher I would not have been privy to (Puwar, 1997). The issue of nationality is also an interesting one. I am English and came to live in Cardiff as an undergraduate at the university in 2001. I never openly declared myself as anything, and hoped that the interviewees might make the assumption that I was Welsh considering that I had chosen to study Wales. The fact that I do not sound 'Welsh' was something that I chose not to dwell on, as neither did all of my interviewees. Sometimes I felt like my not being Welsh was a bit of an 'elephant in the room', but in the main I do not think this had a detrimental effect on the data gathered. Even if I was Welsh then that would not necessarily make me Welsh-speaking and so I would still be different from many of the people in my sample. I was only directly asked 'Are you Welsh?' by one

interviewee, who herself was English. By being able to declare myself as English (something that I usually avoided) actually meant that she shared her feelings with me about being an English person living and working in Wales, which I do not think she would have done if I were Welsh. As with all these factors, they can work both for and against the researcher, depending on the situation.

*Positioning: “Social scientists aren’t doing the country much good” (Colin Wilson)*

In more abstract ways I had to think about how I was going to position myself, while recognising that this was never going to be static. It would change between interviews and over the course of each one, being influenced by the behaviour and responses of my interviewees. This positioning related to my attempts to cultivate a ‘non-threatening image’ (Klatch, 1998) and appear ‘perfectly harmless’ (Gerwitz and Olga, 1994). This was obviously assisted by my age and gender. I wanted to appear as someone who was respectful of their viewpoints and who ‘works within the system’ rather than outside of it (Marshall, 1988, p.241). At times I adopted ‘a different skin’ (Cochrane, 1998, p.2123) so even if I was critical of their ideas I did not let this show, rather I demonstrated ‘sympathetic understanding’ Dexter (1970, p.25). Simultaneously I did not want to be so non-threatening that I actually became powerless in the interaction. I needed to be able to assert myself in the process, because too much of a status difference could have meant that I was not taken seriously (Stephens, 2007). It was a continual balancing act, therefore, and I tried to use my status as researcher, my background characteristics (Okumus, Altinay and Roper, 2007) and good questioning techniques so that I was neither too deferential or combative (Parry, 1998) in order to help bridge the gap and build rapport (Aldridge, 1993).

Issues concerning my positioning also related to my status as an outsider (I am clearly not part of the social world of the interviewees) and while being an insider is generally seen as an advantage in the research process actually when interviewing members of an elite, outsider status can make the researcher appear as less of a threat (Sabot, 1999). It can help the researcher to maintain a 'critical distance' (Herod, 1999, p.325) and so be perceived as neutral or impartial, although status as insider or outsider is not fixed but constantly negotiated (Plesner, 2011). I also had to make decisions about how knowledgeable I appeared on the issues, whether I would be 'expert or ignoramus' McDowell (1998, p.2137). I tried to adopt the stance of an 'informed outsider' (Welch *et al.*, 2002, p.625) so while I demonstrated a knowledge of the current issues relating to culture in Wales and was able to ask sensible questions I was still very much a 'seeker of knowledge' (Klatch, 1998, p.78).

How I presented and positioned myself also changed in response to my respondents. The interviews were transactional in nature as we were both simultaneously creating and influencing the process (Dexter, 1970). They too were putting on a performance, while some were very open, like 'pussycats' others were more evasive and were like 'ostriches' (Marshall, 1988, p.236). A couple took telephone calls during the interview and some directly questioned or challenged me, one interviewee specifically questioned the use and purpose of social scientists generally (and, therefore, me and my being there). At all times I was not simply trying to reduce the inherent power gap in these interactions, rather I was trying to 'work the gap' using an 'elasticity of positionality' (Rice, 2009) to continually change my positioning across a 'sliding scale of intimacy' (Herod, 1999, p.326). I recognised that being a young, female outsider could at times actually be beneficial to the data collection, at other points it was necessary to move closer towards them by using my status as an academic researcher and sharing their viewpoints, which helped to develop rapport. I believe that an



imbalance in power is inevitable when conducting elite interviews (Desmond, 2004) but also that power is not simplistic (Smith, 2006) and so it was necessary for me to be reflexive and to use the experience that I had gained from conducting previous interviews. I think I became increasingly competent as I gained insight into their social world, and this enabled me to perform confidently and ‘project a positive image in order to gain their respect’ (Harvey, 2011, p.434)

### **Part III: Ethical Considerations and Analysis**

#### **Analysis of the data: “Well it will be interesting to see what you come up with” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)**

Analysis consisted of transcribing the interviews and analysing the twenty transcripts. It also involved the cross-referencing of the data with other sources, or the ‘triangulation of analysis’ (Davies, 2001). Analysis of the interview data revealed different perceptions of the same event, and so corroboration with secondary sources helped to contextualise their viewpoints (Lilleker, 2003) as well as serve as a useful reminder that there is no one single reality. The secondary data that I had collected concerning the culture sector in Wales had largely been gathered in relation to each of my individual interviewees in order to enable me to construct accurate interview schedules. I had also read more widely about the cultural landscape in Wales using articles in the media and looked at key websites (for example [www.visitwales.com](http://www.visitwales.com) for how this depicts and markets Welsh culture).

I did not analyse this secondary data systematically, rather it was used to help give a wider context for each individual interview, and to the data set as a whole. It provided me with a broader basis for making informed overall judgements (Sinclair and Brady, 1987). An illustration of this point comes from one of my early interviews with Phillip Smith. He

brought his own piece of secondary data with him to the interview which I was invited to read afterwards. It was an unpublished report, written by an academic researcher. He had interviewed a number of key informants who had been involved in a big 'shake up' in an organisation in Wales. While this was interesting in order to learn about a specific episode in Phillip Smith's career, it also served a number of other purposes. It confirmed that Phillip Smith was an important person in the network (so validating my decision to include him in the sample) and showed me that he is familiar with talking to researchers. It was also useful to make a direct comparison with his account of the event in this report (based on an interview with another interviewer) to the verbal account that he gave me in our interview. This highlights the importance of examining how members of the elite construct their narratives and crucially how they perform them.

Although I have received training in using the CAQDAS package NVivo I chose to analyse the data 'manually' using a Microsoft Word processing package. This was partly due to the small size of my sample, which made this style of analysis possible and feasible, and also because of my own personal preference for being able to work with words that are on a page in front of me that I can easily make handwritten notes on. I, therefore, printed out each interview transcript and then highlighted passages using different coloured pens. In this way thematic coding was used, where I effectively gave 'labels' to the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Often passages were highlighted in more than one colour, and this reflects the complexity of the accounts of elite individuals and their intellectual ability to express more than one idea at any one time. I then returned to the computer and copied and pasted each colour into its own document, and gave it a title based on its general theme, and printed these out again. I worked through these, looking for further themes, points of similarity and overlap

as well as contradictions or disagreement and annotated them with the links that I could spot or the questions that they raised.

During the early stages of analysis it became apparent that thinking about the data in three broad categories would be useful and make the handling of the data that much more manageable. These were data relating to the network (and networking), the self, and to culture. This is broadly how the data has been written up in this thesis, but this was not without continual revision, so while it provided me with a useful framework I did not let it confine me. I was flexible and felt confident enough to make changes, for example when my interviewees spoke about their childhood, I originally put this data in 'the self' section as they were talking about their personal lives and early experiences, however as my understanding of the data increased I realised that this was actually telling me about culture, because what they were describing were their specifically (Welsh) cultural upbringings. Knowing that, if I effectively made such a mistake, it would not be difficult for me to undo it again on my Microsoft Word documents (as this is software I feel most competent with) confirmed that this was the most appropriate tool for me to have used in order to analyse the data.

During the process of analysis, I did multiple readings of each text, making sure that I looked not only for what was being said but also what was not said. What was absent or deliberately ambiguous is a critical part of the whole picture (Schoenberger, 1991). I also made sure that I kept returning to the original interviews and transcripts, either listening to them again or reading them through from start to finish, in order not to lose sight of the overall impact and tone of the interview. This needed to have a bearing on how I understood and interpreted the smaller chunks that I was working with and similarly my research diary was re-read to

remind me of the context of each interview. I was guided by the advice that ‘interpretation lies in the overall impact of a set of interviews rather than in each individual tape’ (McDowell, 1998, p.2143). So while the aim of each interview had been to uncover their own unique and personal standpoints the purpose of analysis was to find the commonalities and the connecting threads between them. Throughout I tried to read the data critically. I know that as intelligent and articulate members of the elite the interviewees use rhetorical discourse in order to present themselves in a favourable way (Futrell and Willard, 1994) but I do not see this as a weakness of the data, or as invalidating it, rather it is itself data, because it reveals the importance of self-presentation and performance in maintaining their roles and position in the network.

### **Ethics: “That’s not for quoting” (Matthew Hughes)**

The aim of the interviews was for the interviewees to talk freely and candidly but if this is achieved then the issue of confidentiality is raised. While promising confidentiality often means that members of the elite are happy to cooperate and speak openly (Healey and Rawlinson, 1993), in reality it is not always possible to hide the identity of the participants even if they are given pseudonyms. The fact they are high-profile, and have unique biographies means that they are particularly conspicuous to others in the network (Odendahl and Shaw, 2002) or within an organisation (Tolich, 2004). Some researchers argue that it is not necessary to be concerned about protecting elite interviewees as we pose no threat to them (Schoenberger, 1991). It, therefore, becomes acceptable to deceive them and not adhere by the usual ethical best practices (Spencer, 1982). I do not agree with this position. I do not think social scientists should have two ethical codes, one for studying up and one for studying down (Bradshaw, 2001). The fact that my interviewees are high-profile public figures means that their views are of interest to a wide audience (Moyser, 1998). Having their words fixed

on the page can make them feel vulnerable as they become open to criticism (McDowell, 1998). I acted to protect my interviewees at all times and adhered to Cardiff University's ethical guidelines. What follows is how these principles governed the different stages of my research, before, during and after I had conducted the interviews.

Good practice includes making everything clear at the beginning of the process. Elite interviewees will want to know things like where it will be published, will they be identifiable and whether they will get a chance to review it first (Marshall, 1984). I used the information sheet and consent form for the purpose of communicating all of this to them (see Appendices C and D) and these were sent with my introductory letter or email to make my intentions clear at the start. These set out the ground rules about how the information would be used and where it will appear, and it was important for me to maintain my right to publish the material (Bulmer, 1988). It also stated (rather than asking) that the interviews would be audio-recorded because this made refusal less likely (Gorden, 1969; Lilleker, 2003). No one in my sample raised issues with this or objected to it. As already discussed, I was less transparent about the specific aims of the study, choosing instead to couch my project in broad terms, because I felt that revealing too much about the agenda could damage the quality of the data gathered (Conti and O'Neil, 2007).

At the beginning of each interview I gave a standard introductory spiel which was well-rehearsed. An important part of this included producing the information sheet and consent form (often participants had these already printed out and on the desk in front of them and in some cases it was already signed). I emphasised confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms when the data was written up and that attempts would be made to anonymise their accounts as far as possible. I gave them the opportunity to ask me any questions that they might have about

this. A feature of elite interviews is that the participants understand their rights and have the confidence to exert these. They also understand journalistic rules and so I needed to be clear about these myself (Goldstein, 2002). Concepts such as ‘on record’ and ‘off record’ as different to ‘on background’ and ‘not for attribution’. These are terms that were used by some of my interviewees during the course of the interview “This would be interesting for you but this would be a matter I want to be off the record or not attributable” (Glyn Edwards). While this set out clear rules for how I could (or could not) use the information it also served to reassure me that the other things that they were saying could be written up. At some points during the interview they looked to me for reassurance that what they were saying was going to be treated in confidence, for example by making a joke out of this “I do hope this won’t appear in *The News of the World*” (Kathryn Jones). These were useful in helping me gauge how successful the interviews had been in terms of them being open and honest.

One ethical dilemma that I was faced with was whether I should tell them who else I had spoken to and this was a question that I was invariably asked. I was mindful that good ethical practice, is not simply about promising this to the participants but actually demonstrating it to them by showing myself as trustworthy and protecting my other sources (Zuckerman, 1996). In the main I felt this was appreciated, but one interviewee did not agree with this ‘secretive’ approach and openly challenged me on this. He was of the opinion that he “couldn’t care less how many people you tell that you’ve spoken to me about it” (Iwan Williams). As a core member of the cultural elite he is supremely confident in his position, and happy to express his opinions and stand by them. Despite this I still did not disclose any names to other interviewees unless I had their prior consent to do so (such as using their name to facilitate access).

I think it is also important to note that in the vast of the majority of interviews I felt that the interviewees were enjoying themselves and appreciated the opportunity to talk about culture, something which is very important in their lives and which they care deeply about. Feminists have advocated research that is characterised by reciprocity (Oakley, 1981) and I do think that in the main my elite interviewees got something out of the exchange, whether this was having the opportunity to reflect on their career:

I think it would be quite interesting to consider probably for the first time what has actually led me here. So I'm sixty-three now and I have had in the course of my career, in the course of the last twenty years a huge variety of different board memberships and chairs. (Gwen Griffiths)

or engaging themselves in thought about topics, they might not otherwise considered, while simultaneously having their ego flattered:

It's been a pleasure to meet you because you've made me think about things that I otherwise wouldn't have thought about ... It tickles your vanity and I've been tickled by some of the things that you've asked me this morning. (Iwan Williams)

The stage of writing up the research put me in a powerful position. I made 'the decision of what shall be heard and what is suppressed' (McDowell, 1998, p.2144). I did not want the information to be easily identifiable in the thesis or subsequent publications and the issue of naming people or not is a difficult one to reconcile (Guenther, 2009). I have used pseudonyms for the participants, and these have been deliberately chosen to show their nationality so that participants with Welsh names have been given pseudonyms which reflect this, as 'Welshness' (and performing 'Welshness') is an important aspect of the findings. I have been deliberately vague about the organisations that the individuals work for because, for example, saying someone is the Chairman of *Welsh National Opera*, can mean only one person and so the use of a pseudonym would serve no purpose in disguising their identity. While this ambiguity may be effective in concealing their identities to an outsider, an insider

to the network may still be able to recognise them, from what they have said, and importantly how they have said it, for example the phrasing that they use (Dexter, 1970). I considered using composites when writing up the data, so that people with a similar age and gender become a single person with a pseudonym (Odendahl, 1990) but my sample was not of significant size to do this. Ultimately I feel confident that the interviewees are happy with what they said to me to be used, and for those who requested it a copy of the data which appears in this thesis was sent to them so that they could check that these were accurate and were a fair representation of their views (Bulmer, 1988; Davies, 2001; Woliver, 2008). They could also see that I have not included quotes that were said to me ‘off the record’ or ‘just for background’, and so again I hope that I successfully demonstrated my commitment to ethical best practice.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the stages of the research process. I have focused my attention on the power dynamics involved when researching members of an elite group. I have considered how the interview, as a social interaction, will be influenced by the asymmetrical nature of the relationship of the interviewer and elite interviewee but have also argued that through the use of a variety of strategies I acted to minimise this status differential in pursuit of the highest quality data. Being prepared, persistent, positive and able to perform confidence (trying to project it at all times, even if this was not how I was really feeling inside) were all fundamental to the success of each interview. It allowed me to gain access, not just to the interview site, but beyond into their constructions of their social world. They also performed for me during the interviews, just as they act out their various roles in the network and the analysis of the data required me to read and decode these performances. In



the following three empirical chapters I explore what they said about the network which they inhabit, their explanations for their involvement, and their ideas about culture.

## **Chapter Four**

### **‘Movers’: Using the Network**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I outline the network that the interviewees identify themselves as belonging to. I argue that this is not a concept that I imposed on them, rather a term that they spontaneously used by themselves. How the network is characterised, as once overlapping but also fragmented in nature is discussed before I turn my attention to how the network is sustained through acts of networking, the different forms this takes and how this further constructs the network as one which has a core and a periphery. Finally I discuss how belonging to the network is an advantage to its members, how it assists them with the process of appointments and how they make their connections work for them.

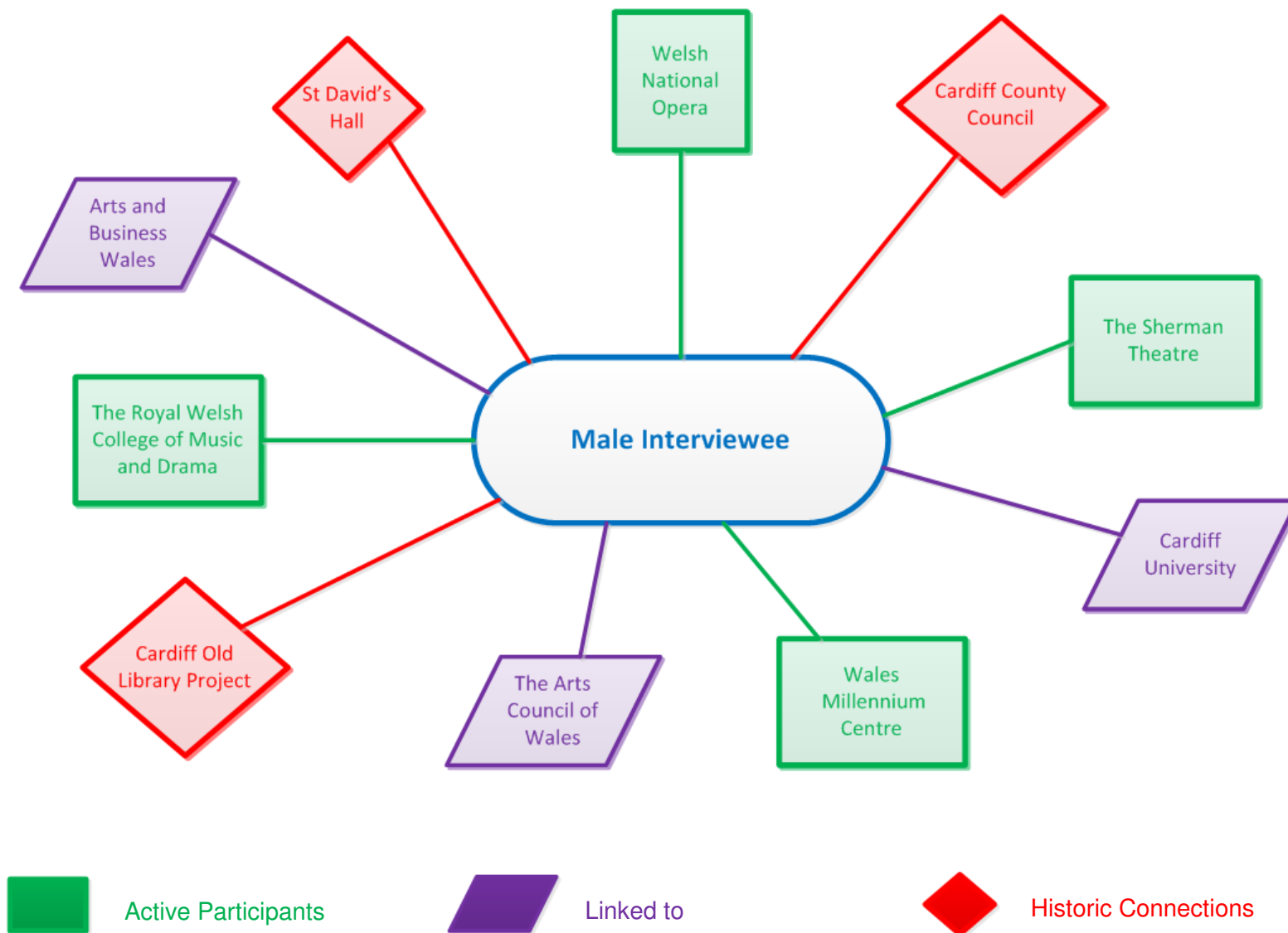
#### **Part I: Introducing the network**

My sample of interviewees belong to a network. As individuals they are involved in the cultural sector in Wales. This participation includes paid employment, board membership and being part of the audience, usually all of these for any one person at any one time. As a result they frequently come into contact with one another in the course of their professional lives, for example sitting on the same boards, and during their leisure time because of their shared love of high culture, for example at the opera. This literal coming together, in both formal and informal arenas, means that they form a group with shared interests and goals. Crucially it means that they are all well-known to one another so that this network of people then exists as a concept in their mind. This in turn is reinforced through their experiences of seeing the crossovers in their pursuits and utilising these links for themselves in the different roles that they hold. The consequence of this is that the network is tightened even further still.

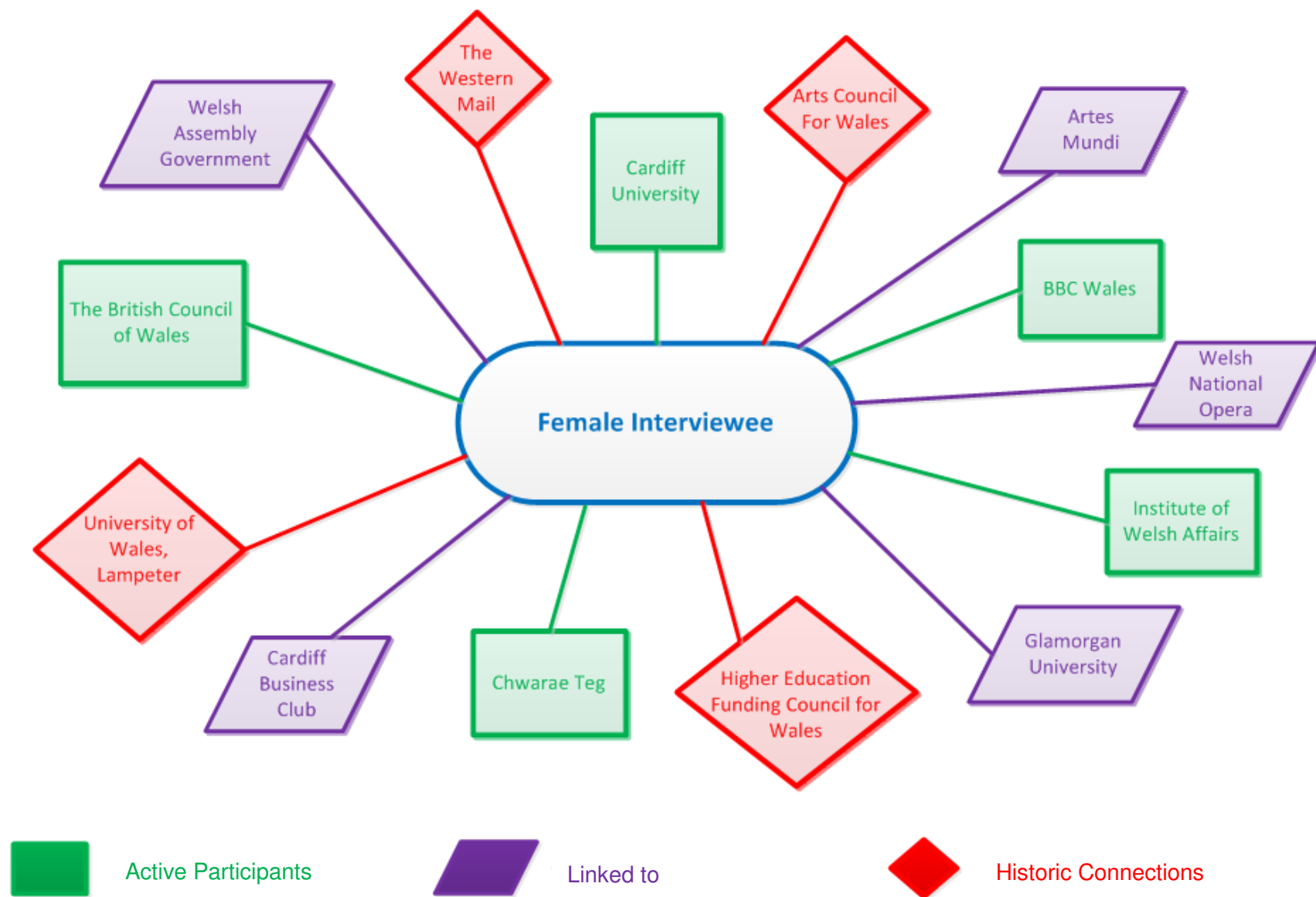
### **Visually representing the network**

The existence of a network was born out in my analysis of secondary sources which was undertaken in order to aid my understanding of the cultural landscape of Wales and to identify the main organisations within it. This also helped me to locate my sample and develop my interview schedules which were specific to each individual's biography. I deliberately chose my sample to include people who were involved with more than one organisation as this was taken as a measure of being heavily involved with and, therefore, important in the network so that they were in a well-placed position to be able to pass comment upon it. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate this point, using information from two of the interviewees' career biographies, they show how members of the cultural elite in Wales are involved in more than one organisation at any one time, and also how they are connected to others because of the positions that they have held in the past. Figure 3 is a visual representation of the involvement of all twenty interviewees (each colour represents a different person) with their various organisations over their careers. This was constructed from information acquired from secondary data and during the interviews themselves. This shows that they are likely to have involvement with some organisations more than others, and these are located at the centre of the diagram. The 'big five' are BBC Wales, Welsh National Opera, The Arts Council of Wales, Cardiff University and The Welsh Assembly Government. We can assume, therefore, that having involvement with these organisations will mean coming across other important people in the network and that involvement with these organisations carry some prestige, as my interviewees were high profile members of the culture sector in Wales. It also shows the importance of the political sector and how this overlaps with the world of culture, as does the business domain, represented specifically by Cardiff Business Club.

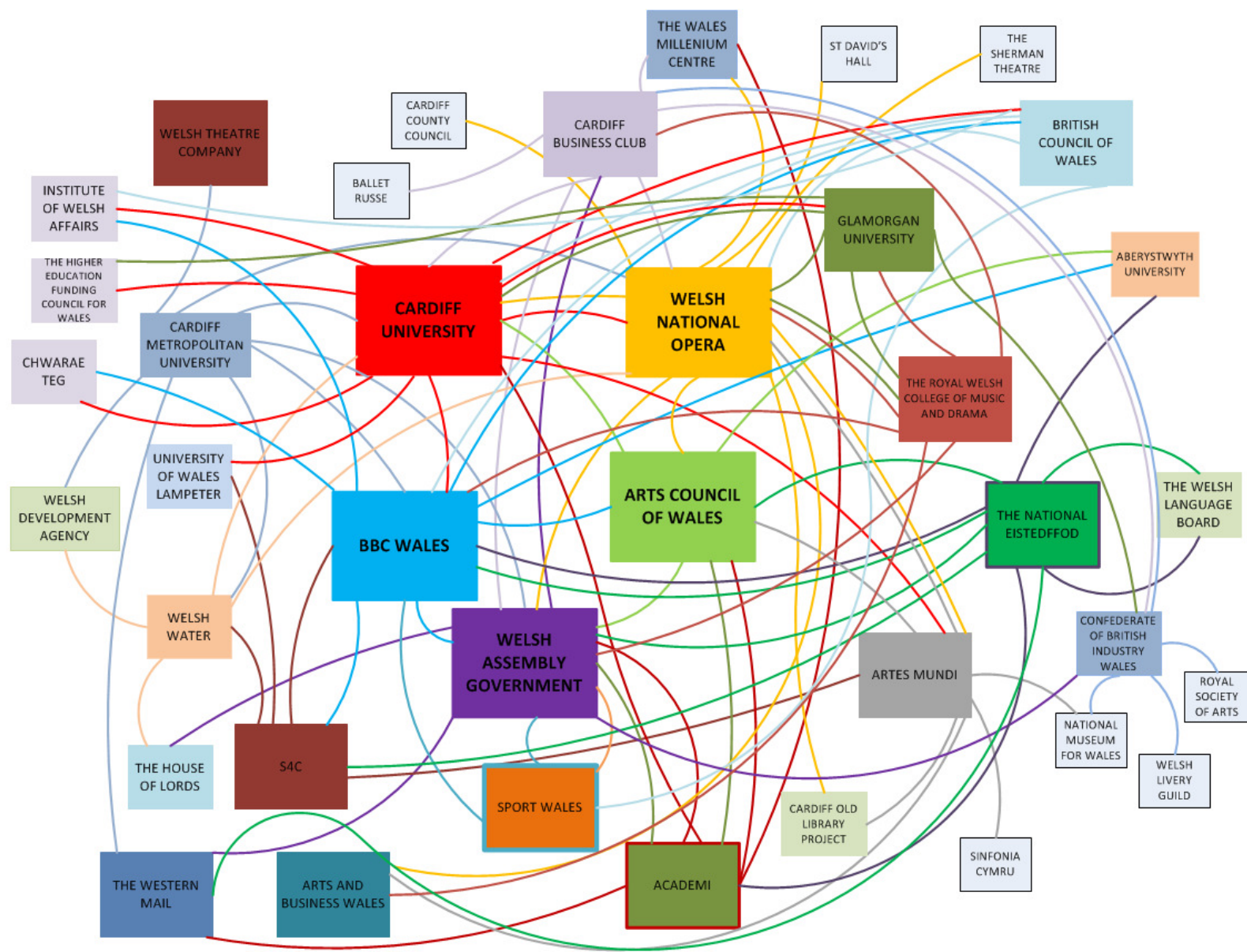
Figure 4 shows how each individual is connected to other people in the network. This is most commonly because of either being employed at the same organisation or because of sitting on the same boards as one another. This data was gathered by asking them during the interview for the names of people that they see a lot and have worked with frequently, as well as referring back to the secondary data on board composition. Having membership to multiple boards creates a number of points of intersection in the network which serves to strengthen it through personal connections. The everyday reality of this is that they know people in a variety of different contexts and roles. A particularly salient example of this is that Phillip Smith sat on a board which had Graham Johnson as its chair, but simultaneously himself was chair of another board on which Graham Johnson was a member. This reversal of roles is a phenomenon of board membership within a relatively small arena. The diagram shows that some people have more contacts and connections than others, and so are at the heart of the network. While I have made a distinction between male and female interviewees (blue circles are male interviewees and red are female) there is no pattern based on gender (i.e. more men at the core) this is because of the small size of the sample and the fact that I deliberately identified women to speak to who are very high profile. If connections of people in the whole of the network was mapped then, based on what was told to me during the interviews, I would expect there to be more men at the core, and the issue of gender is discussed later in this chapter. It is important to emphasise that these diagrams only give information about my interviewees and so the array of connections would no doubt increase, and become much more complex, if I added further people to the diagram that I did not interview but who are also part of the network.



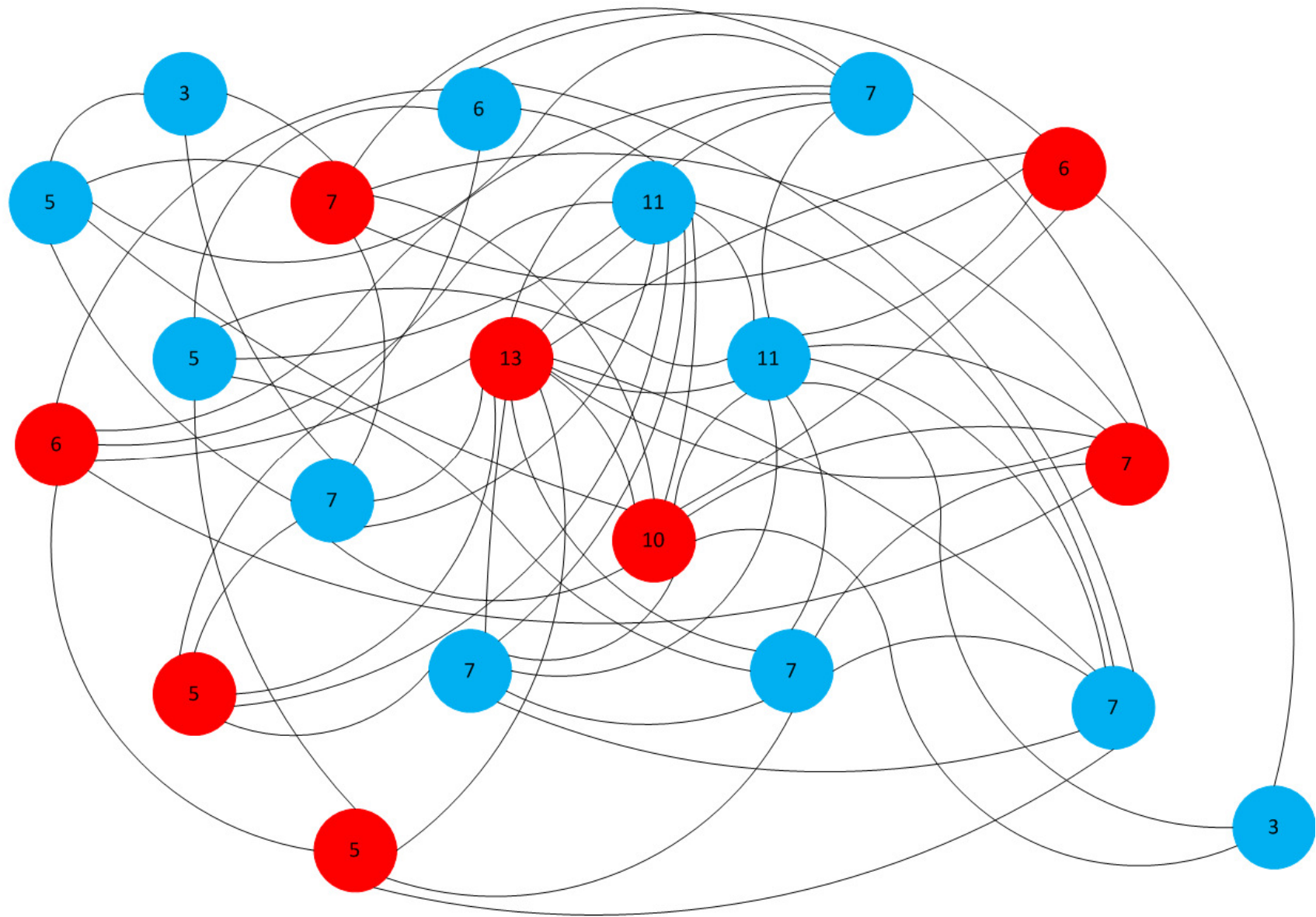
**Figure 1 – An example of a male interviewee's involvement with organisations in Wales**



**Figure 2 – An example of a female interviewee’s involvement with organisations in Wales**



**Figure 3 – Mapping memberships to Organisations**



**Figure 4: Mapping the personal connections (or ‘who knows who’)**



Social network analysis maps membership to networks in a much more rigorous and formal way than I have presented here. It is commonly used to show the large extent to which corporate board memberships interlock using the analysis of quantitative data taken from published directories (Useem, 1984; Palmer *et al.*, 1986; Bearden and Mintz, 1987). It has also been used to map membership of cultural quangos in England to see the extent to which the ‘old boy network’ is still in place (Griffiths *et al.* 2008). Social network analysis is extremely valuable for showing the extent to which people know one another, the number of points of overlap within a network, and where these are strongest and weakest. It has, however, as a method been criticised for failing to explain what effect these interlocks may have on the behaviour of people on boards, or indeed whether it has any impact at all (Pettigrew, 1992). It cannot provide insight in to the ways that elites may make use of their various positions or show who the actual beneficiaries of this are (Putnam, 1973). It is these personal understandings of the network and the ‘subjective meanings’ (Knoke, 1990:114) of its participants that will be presented in the following chapters. In the rest of this section I introduce my network of cultural elites and describe how it is characterised by my interviewees as being both small and closed in nature. Gaining membership to it is not straightforward. Being part of the network is dependent on a variety of factors and personal attributes so although ultimately a cohesive network, made up of a series of overlaps is created, there are also a number of subtle divisions within it.

### **A Goldfish bowl**

My interviewees identify that they belong to a network. The concept of a ‘network’ is not one that was imposed upon them, rather it is a term that was spontaneously used by them throughout the interviews, for example “I was also involved in that network” (Phillip Smith). The different organisations that they are involved with form part of a bigger picture in their

minds. The cultural landscape of Wales only exists because of its numerous component parts. Success for each individual body, and for Welsh culture in general, is seen as being dependent on them working together rather than in isolation. This is why the network is valued by them. It creates and sustains relationships so that “we have a clear connection with them” (Mark West). These links can be by formal arrangement i.e. financial sponsorship, or through informal associations, such as board members sitting on more than one board at any one time. Their different interests inevitably cross over so that their various roles in the network mean that people “find that they interlink” (Glyn Edwards).

One reason that they can so readily recognise belonging to a network is because they see the social world that they inhabit as being relatively small in size:

I think Cardiff is a small place in a way. So people that I would describe in that way are obvious and I think if you asked any one of them they would give you the same list. (Kathryn Jones)

The main members of the cultural elite are ‘obvious’ to anyone who has some experience of the network, and explaining it as a self-referencing one further reiterates its compact nature. This point about the size of the network is made repeatedly “it is a small world” (Iwan Williams) and “a very, very small world” (Susan Hodson). This is perceived as being true for the city of Cardiff, just as it is for Paris which was likened to a ‘village’ by the business elite who live, work and socialise there (Kadushin, 1995:210). It is also a reflection of the size of the nation as a whole because Wales is geographically a small country “Wales is small, Cardiff is tiny” (Colin Wilson) and Wales is described as a “goldfish bowl” (Phillip Smith). This carries possible negative connotations of everybody being able to see what everyone else is doing and magnifying issues out of proportion.

The beneficial consequence for the cultural elite of living in a small place is that it facilitates networking because there is a restricted number of people to meet with to begin with and because you are then seeing those same people all of the time at various different events so that “you would see exactly the same people almost every week at this dinner or that dinner” (Christine Wall). This then increases the chances of building productive personal and business relationships because “Wales is such a kind of small place there are lots of opportunities to have conversations really” (Annette Cook). The act of simply talking to others and having those ‘conversations’ with like-minded people who are interested and involved in the cultural sector is easier in a small place, and it is this dialogue which lays the foundations for further connections to be made in the network. The people who are most successful at this and, therefore, have a larger number of contacts, are typically older because they have had more time to build up these relationships. The result is that it would be very unlikely that they would find themselves somewhere:

Where I wouldn’t know a lot of people in the room and a lot of people wouldn’t know me. I suppose that’s just a factor of being in a small country as well. (Annette Cook)

Being well-known in the network is an obvious sign of being a true member of the cultural elite, although she then qualifies this achievement by attributing it to only being possible because of the size of Wales. Others are not so self-deprecating. By presenting their experience of Cardiff and Wales as one where “everybody knows everybody else” (Mark West) they are not only identifying that a network exists, but are positioning themselves as a key player within it.

Having numerous connections within this small world, while beneficial for its members, also can create socially awkward situations. One interviewee talked about applying for a prominent position and knowing all of the other candidates:

I was in competition with five other people, all of whom of course I knew. We saw each other going in and out so it was all very embarrassing. (Kathryn Jones)

She is using this story to exemplify what a small world it is that she inhabits but it also simultaneously serves to confirm her credentials to me as a true member of the elite, as although she was up against other high-profile candidates she was the one who was actually given the job. Another drawback of living and working in a physically small place is that they see people from their professional life in other settings, such as the supermarket:

From my first 'in a suit week' I seemed to, that weekend, bump into them all over again. I actually to this day rarely go out without make-up on. (Susan Hodson)

She had worked hard to present a professional image of herself and this had then been effectively undone. The outcome of this is that she is now careful to make sure that she looks a certain way at all times and as a woman her physical appearance is an important aspect of this.

### **Dead solidly in it**

The concept of the network exists, and is made more feasible, in their minds because of the small size of Cardiff and Wales but it is also importantly characterised as being a closed world. It is difficult to gain access to the network and there are a number of restrictions placed upon membership to it. The key requirement is to hold an important and high-profile position in an organisation within the cultural sector, for example being Chief Executive of The Arts Council for Wales would grant you access to it. A similarly prominent position in the business or political sector, coupled with a personal passion for high culture, would also serve as a pass into the network as there are significant overlaps between the different elite spheres. Being given these prestigious jobs in the first place requires possessing a certain set of characteristics which are understood as belonging to a 'traditional' candidate:

We're quite traditional in terms of how people become leaders in Wales and we're quite resistant to changing that ... We're just a little bit narrow in terms of how far we

cast the net really in terms of talent and I think we miss a lot of good people because we don't cast the net broadly enough but also because we use very traditional channels for recruitment. (Annette Cook)

The top positions are seen as being filled with people drawn from a very small group, who are located using old-fashioned and outdated modes of selection. The result being that the best people are not always chosen for the job, and are consequently denied access to the network, which remains unchanged, tight and closed.

This idea of traditional recruitment reverberates with much of what is written in the literature about acceptance in to the ranks of the elite depending upon having a particular type of pedigree, the right type of family and educational background, and fundamentally being a white male (Annan, 1990). This has been particularly the case in acceptance to the British Senior Civil Service (Glass, 1954; Kelsall, 1955; Chapman, 1970). What is being described here is the use of what is popularly known as the 'old boy network'. Having membership to this often results in further jobs and so ultimately serves to consolidate their position within the network. While membership is determined by background this fails to explain how newcomers to the network can gain access to it, and this has interested many researchers (e.g. Harvey and Maclean, 2008). As elite theorists, such as Pareto (1901) Mosca (1939) have argued people from outside the class or network can be elevated to the ranks of the elite, if they are in possession of skills that are required by the elite at that time. I will argue that the construction of a network which consists of inner and outer rings allows for, and facilitates, this process as the periphery is used to 'try people out' before they are fully accepted into the network.

The network is not described, understood and experienced by my interviewees in a simplistic way. It is not the case that you are either in the network or you are not, rather it is made up of

a complex array of relationships which creates a multitude of distinct groups within the wider network. These “overlapping circles” (Kathryn Jones) co-exist with one another and frequently intersect, as people can then connect up different segments by simultaneously belonging to different parts. There are certain sections of this network that are harder to gain access to than others and so there are ideas of a “clique” (Kathryn Jones) a “certain crowd” (Aled Parry) and “quite a tight group” (Susan Hosdon) expressed. These are harder to penetrate and so form the inner core of the network:

I think there are people who are dead solidly in it ... people who were, I would say actually at the core of all of this and then there are kind of people around the periphery. (Kathryn Jones)

The cultural elite who have really secured their position within the centre of the network have the greatest amount of influence, but importantly a ‘periphery’ is also being identified. The core only exists because other people remain around the edges of the network and they have a fundamental role in maintaining it, even if they do not control it. The presence of a core or an ‘elite within an elite’ (Dye, 1986) can be seen using the technique of social network analysis. The source of power is at the heart of the network where there are the most overlaps and the strongest relationships. In studies of business elites this small core, which typically consists of people who have membership of two, three or more corporate boards, are described as the ‘inner-circle’ (Useem, 1984; Swartz, 1985; Kadushin, 1995). If positions in the network are only filled by people who are already in the network this serves to keep the network tight. The phenomenon of the cultural elite being members of multiple boards, therefore, sustains the network as closed and self-recruiting (Odendahl, 1990).

### **The centre of gravity**

For the Welsh cultural elite access to the core of the network is facilitated and made easier if they live in Cardiff, are a Welsh speaker and are male. The centre of the network physically

exists in Cardiff. This is not surprising considering that it is the capital of Wales and so the cultural organisations have their headquarters there, even if they have offices in other parts of the country as well. Many of these can be found in The Bay. The redevelopment of which means that it is now home to the Assembly and cultural flagships including The Wales Millennium Centre, which has helped to boost the confidence of the capital (Morris, 2000; Hannan, 2002). It is fair to say, therefore, that my sample of Welsh cultural elite are a Cardiff cultural elite, and it is this group, and its influence which is of particular interest to Day (2002). Cardiff is talked about by them as being at the heart of things “the centre of gravity of meetings is always here” (Gwen Griffiths). It is where the important decisions are made about Wales because this is where the majority of people who are in a position to make these decisions are, and they are referred to as the critical mass. This is seen as being made up of “civil servants, AMs, heads of institutions and heads of other bodies” (Phillip Smith). Many of these live and work in South Wales and so it has become “inevitable that once you’ve got a critical mass that things do gravitate towards it” (Rhianon Evans-Davies). Gravity carries associations of importance and is a force that cannot be resisted. The pull is towards Cardiff as the powerhouse of Wales.

The advantage of being in South Wales is that being physically closer to the perceived source of power makes it easier to have visibility and prominence within the network. It means that as they meeting with the decision-makers and heads of organisations more frequently they can develop more productive and personal relationships with them. Conversely holding events or meetings in the North is seen as being problematic because “you lose an awful lot of the networking that you can get out of these meetings” (Glyn Edwards). One of my interviewees does live in North Wales and she viewed the frequent travelling to Cardiff with her job as the only downside of it:

I think organisations are quite old-fashioned. They think that unless they're meeting a minister face-to-face, even if it's only every three weeks or something, they have to be in the same city. There is an element of truth in that but it is a self-perpetuating truth. (Gwen Griffiths)

She does recognise the value of speaking to someone in person and being tangibly close to the politicians but she sees that there are other ways of doing business that do not rely on these more traditional and out-dated forms of networking. One solution is through the use of technology, so that people can see each other 'face-to-face' without actually being in the same physical location, but there are also reservations about this expressed:

It's all very well to say you can video conference but you feel like a poor relation at the end of it. Video conferencing is fine for committees and that sort of thing but for public events it doesn't really work. (Phillip Smith)

There is a sense that 'real' networking, which works and which helps to build and sustain the network, needs to take place in informal arenas, and this can only be achieved if you are living in the same geographical space as other people in the network. It also highlights the issue that people in North Wales can feel like the 'poor relation' because inevitably "institutions north of the Brecon Beacons sometimes feel left out" (Phillip Smith). The North / South divide is one way in which Wales has been typically characterised throughout history. It is a country of dichotomies and two polar parts (Dunkerley, 1999). This sense of difference and otherness can manifest itself in hostility:

There is always suspicion by people far away from what they perceive as the source of power of that source of power. Part of it is derived, I think, from the fact that they've chosen to live where they do choose to live. If you want to get involved in the world of things then you go and move and live in the middle of it. If you don't want to then you live at a distance and sneer at it perhaps, or accept what it gives you. (Martin Sweet)

This reveals very firmly where the 'source of power' is. Cardiff is positioned as central. It is where everything happens and where the decisions are made that affect the whole of the country. In this statement he is clearly revealing his belief that, this is not only the way things



are, but that this is not going to change. If people want to have an impact, as he himself does, then they too need to be in Cardiff which is where the core of the network can be found.

### **All the notes are in Welsh**

A further factor which is seen as both forming and dividing parts of the network is language. Welsh-speakers are over-represented in South Wales because this is home to the government and the public and cultural sectors (Williams, 1985). There are sections of the network where membership requires a person to speak Welsh. This serves to create and mark out a distinct sphere inside it “there’s a Welsh-speaking circle within it that’s probably slightly different in character” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). For people who live in Cardiff and speak the language it has the effect of making an already small world even smaller. When they attend Welsh language medium cultural events the other members of the audience are likely to be known to them because of the limited size of this community:

I went to see a new theatre piece last week and it was, I knew the majority of people in that room ... and I think that is very true of the Welsh language stuff. (Bethan Price)

The Welsh-speaking ruling cultural elite is popularly described using the Welsh term ‘crachach’. This is not only identified as existing “there is an element of the crachach here’ (Gareth Morris) but also as being central to the network “the core of Cardiff Welsh crachach society” (Kathryn Jones). It is this group which is seen as monopolising and controlling Welsh affairs.

Speaking Welsh, therefore, is generally seen as a benefit for belonging in the network because “there are obviously certain areas where the ability to speak Welsh is necessary or a big advantage” (Phillip Smith). Certain jobs or roles in the cultural sector, such as in the area of broadcasting, cannot be accessed without it “It’s essential. I mean all the meetings are in

Welsh. All the notes are in Welsh” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). There is also a more general feeling expressed that it can “open doors and opportunities” (Annette Cook) because it makes it easier to have conversations, to network and build relationships. But, the language has more than practical applications. It is used as a symbol of Welsh identity (Aitchison and Carter, 1998) or the ‘badge’ which allows for access into its inner world (Morris, 2000:171). Speaking the language signifies true Welshness and so is an important part of belonging to the Welsh cultural elite, however, access is not solely dependent upon this and does not guarantee a place within it (Trosset, 1993).

It is also not the case that all of my interviewees spoke Welsh (see Table 1) and how proficient they were varied considerably. Not speaking the language was identified as a drawback in some of the roles that they have held:

A large amount of the thing was actually in Welsh with simultaneous translation. It’s quite difficult to chair a meeting when you don’t understand both languages.  
(Christine Wall)

Conversely, the first language Welsh-speakers said that some roles in the cultural sector were effectively off-limits to them because it would require them to do business in English and they are much more at ease when using their native language “It’s the language through which I think, through which I can express myself better than I can in English” (Matthew Hughes) and:

I think I’d have to be Chief Exec of a Welsh language medium organisation because English is my second language and I’m very aware it’s my second language and I’m far more confident in the medium of Welsh so hence why, although I can speak English, I’m not that eloquent. (Bethan Price)

This exemplifies the complex nature of the network. While those traditionally perceived as the crachach speak Welsh and are positioned at the centre of the network, the language also serves to divide up the wider network and place restrictions on where people can position themselves within it.

### **It is much easier to get on if you're a man**

Another way in which the network is divided, which further highlights differences between the core and periphery, is by gender. Although the network includes both male and female members there are a larger number of men in it. This is similar to findings of the English cultural elite which consists mainly of older men who hold more board positions on cultural quangos than women do (Griffiths *et al.*, 2008). The consequences of this for my female interviewees are that they “stand out quite a bit because there aren’t that many woman about” (Kathryn Jones) and that they have become accustomed to working in environments where, as a woman, they are marginalised:

I’ve spent most of my working life in committees and meetings where every other member has been male and the only other female has perhaps been a secretary.  
(Christine Wall)

Usually when women are found in these settings they are there in administrative roles, and are not involved in the actual decision-making, as this is the business of men. She is using this archetype in order to proudly present herself as an atypical woman who has successfully accessed positions of influence.

My female interviewees perceive the network as one which generally favours men. It is “male-dominated” (Annette Cook) to the extent that it is not simply that there is more of them, but that the men hold the majority of the most important and prominent positions within it. One very high-profile body is described as being a “very male organisation” (Kathryn Jones). This means that, even if there are more women in the network than previously, they exist on the periphery as the core is still the reserve of the traditional male elite (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 1988). My male interviewees also acknowledge this and as one explains:

It is much more difficult for women to get on generally ... I don't think there's any doubt at all that it is much easier to get on if you're a man than if you're a woman.  
(Gareth Morris)

The expression 'to get on' echoes the concept of having to work at progressing up the ranks or moving inwards to the core of the network. For men this is seen as a much more straightforward process as there are a wider range of available channels for them to utilise. Men benefit from being able to use male-only arenas which do not let women in, for example Cardiff County Club which only allows men to be members. Excluding women so that they cannot be "part of the golf club ... or the masons, or whatever else, smoke filled rooms or Cardiff County Club" (Gwen Griffiths) means that women do not have the same networking opportunities as their male counterparts (Coe, 1992; Rees, 1999). Although a somewhat clichéd and out-dated picture of traditional 'old boy' networking is painted here, she is using this to reiterate how absurd she thinks it is that old-fashioned customs and restrictions should still be affecting women today. The result is that females "don't have the networks that men do" (Annette Cook). This ultimately compromises their place within the network, and for those who have made it means that once there, they find themselves very much in the minority.

The network that is identified and constructed by the cultural elite is small, closed to outsiders and complicated by a number of divisive factors. At its core are those who are perceived as the true elite. They are the "good eggs, fixers and movers" (Kathryn Jones).

These people are characterised as:

I have heard people say in the Assembly sometimes so and so is a friend of the Assembly and not a friend of The Assembly. Now that doesn't mean somebody who just kind of kowtows but it is someone who they feel they can trust so it is a bit about that. It's a bit about being around quite a long time. It's about people who kind of are involved in a range of different things and therefore know what's going on. They are well-connected, well-informed and can fix things. (Kathryn Jones)

Successfully securing a place at the centre of the network, therefore, is reliant on having the right background, attitudes and opinions (being a ‘good egg’) and being able to make worthwhile and useful contributions to a range of cultural organisations (a ‘fixer’). It is also necessary to be a ‘mover’ someone who can use their connections from their social world in order to benefit their interests, by using their insights about the network and having an understanding of how it really works. In the following section I will explore this idea of what it requires to be an adept ‘mover’ and what it actually means to do effective networking. I will argue that this is a necessary skill for gaining access to the network. In other words, in order to get in, stay in and move inwards. How this is talked about further highlights the existence of a core and periphery of the network, and illustrates how this helps the network to operate and survive.

## **Part II: The Act and Art of Networking**

The network that has been described does not just simply exist or come in to being. It is created and sustained through acts of networking. Without this networking there would be no network. In order for a person to qualify for membership they must be successful and skilled networkers. This is seen as being particularly true for people in Britain, where the structure of the network is not as tight as it is in other countries like France so the onus is much more on the individual to form their own connections (Granovetter, 1973). My elite interviewees describe the process of networking in two distinct ways. It can be obvious, mirroring networking strategies that are used in the business sector, or subtle which takes place informally during attendance at high culture events. The different methods are used in order to draw a distinction between the core and the periphery of the network and to show how things change as a person moves inwards. They then use this contrast in order to stress their credentials as a true cultural elite.

## **Where business cards get swapped**

Networking is characterised in two distinct ways by the cultural elite. One type of networking that is discussed draws on popular notions of going to networking events. These are purposely held in order for people to meet with others who are involved in different organisations and sectors. The type of networking that takes place at these events is approached in a business-like manner so that people “go to an event with an agenda” (Glyn Edwards) and are focused and calculating about what they want to achieve there and: “understand who we should get close to” (Graham Johnson). Attendance is viewed as a compulsory extension of the day job:

I do work the room at some events. I know that I'll be at an event and I think, I need to speak to this range of people and get business done and you do that. Our own events, when we put events on, there's an awful lot of working the room at those.  
(Martin Sweet)

He draws upon traditional ideas of networking including ‘working the room’ to demonstrate how he can take advantage of these settings in order to help him build and sustain his contacts. The handing out of business cards is used in a similar way by another interviewee:

I am a serial networker really, and my wife is often heard saying that I would turn up for the opening of an envelope. So the early networking before the dinner, and then whoever's on the table, exchanging business cards, then going to see them ... A lot of my handing out of cards has to do with finding out who the other person is who I'm talking to quite often. But then of course, quite often, it becomes quite helpful and useful ... because I'm doing so many different things, and I can then chase them up, when I get around to it. (Aled Parry)

It was at this point in the interview that he showed me a very sizeable stack of business cards which he said that he needed to follow up. This was used to signal to me his importance in the network by demonstrating how many people wanted to talk to him. He is involved in a wide range of activities, which is a key characteristic of being an elite, and so he is too busy to have done anything with them, which again stresses his standing in the network as he does not need to pursue them because he already has secured his position at its core. He uses the cliché and joke about being so keen to network that he would attend the opening of an

envelope to show how much he enjoys and relishes his role as a very active member of society. He likes being a highly visible character within it. People know who he is, but he does not always know who they are (hence why he uses the cards to find this out) as they only exist on the outskirts of his social world on the periphery of the network.

The methods of networking taken from the world of business of having an agenda, working the room and passing business cards is what I will call 'obvious' networking as it is distinct from the more subtle forms of networking that is predominantly talked about by the cultural elite. Obvious networking is aligned with what people do on the periphery of the network:

Where do business cards get swapped? Well, they mainly get swapped by people who are up and coming who are needing to build that network. But people at the top, the so called cultural elite, have already got up there, they don't need to do that quite so much, it's really the thirty year olds and forty year olds that really need to do that ... The senior people they don't actually go around swapping business cards ... because the senior gang all know each other by name and they'll ring each other because they'll have each others direct dial phone numbers. (Iwan Williams)

A clear contrast is made with people on the edges of the network who tend to be younger so have not been involved in it for as long. They need to consciously work at establishing themselves and so rely on traditional forms of networking, such as business cards, as a currency to help them increase their connections. They must 'build' a reputation and a presence within it which requires time and effort. Those at the centre, or the 'senior gang' with its connotations of secrecy and exclusivity, already have these bonds which surpass business acquaintances. They have personal relationships with one another. Their conversations do not have to pass through formal channels, instead they can be immediate, private and relaxed.

How the different types of networking are described exemplifies how the network is constructed in terms of a core and a periphery. One device, therefore, that is used by my

interviewees in order to signal that they are a real member of the cultural elite is to object to the idea of networking in its more obvious forms “I turn against the idea of networking” (Glyn Edwards) and “I loathe the concept of networking ... the word networking makes my toes curl” (Graham Johnson). While some people object to it in principle, others dislike it because it is seen as a chore “It is something that I have to consciously think that I need to do rather than want to do” (Gareth Morris) and:

I’m not a great networker, you know, in the conventional sense. I’m not somebody who seeks out networking opportunities ... I certainly wouldn’t seek out opportunities to go to drinks receptions and dinners. (Annette Cook)

She does not need to ‘seek out’ these type of events because she no longer needs to work at increasing her network. She sees that there are better ways for her to be spending her time rather than being seen to be at certain events socialising. This difference between how members of the core and periphery use networking is also revealed when people talk about the networking that they did in the past:

I used to do a lot of networking ... but now because I’ve been in the job for so many years I tend to pick and choose now. If I feel there’s no point in me going somewhere and if there’s no obligation for me to go or there’s no advantage for me to go, sometimes I’ll say no. (Stephen Owen)

Now that he has secured his place in the network he is confident enough to decline invitations knowing that this will not ultimately jeopardise his position. One interviewee talked about how his attitude to attending these types of events has changed over time:

At some points in my career, earlier on, I would go to things feeling a slight sense of honour that I was there. By now I feel no sense of honour at all. It’s always a sense of obligation. (Martin Sweet)

He is portraying himself as being a true member of the elite. He only attends out of a sense of duty and responsibility. As he has travelled inwards in the network being amongst other high-profile people has become the mundane.

**We always sit in the same seats**



Expressing a dislike of ‘obvious’ networking is used as an indicator of being a core member of the cultural elite, however, this does not mean that they do not do networking. Rather, they talk about doing networking that is much more subtle and restrained and which takes place in informal settings during their leisure time, for example when they are spectators at high-profile sporting events, particularly rugby internationals. Playing golf and belonging to a golf club was mentioned frequently. While this is a popular cliché of how the world of business functions, with deals being done on the golf course, it is an important component of how the network operates:

Golf for me, then, became a huge way of meeting other people because I was invited to various golf days. Through those golf days, I’d meet various people ... My network has actually improved a lot through those linkages with golf and golf societies ... I get invited to rugby matches, rugby internationals, and London Welsh Rugby. It’s a fantastic opportunity to actually meet people from similar backgrounds. (Aled Parry)

His involvement with sport has increased the number of contacts that he has and has allowed him to meet people with ‘similar backgrounds’. Once again, this shows the network to be a closed one. It recruits those with a traditional profile so that being Welsh and male facilitates access to it. Harvey and Maclean (2008) in their study of business elites found that a large number of directors of corporate firms in England belonged to golf clubs and attended high-profile sporting events and that these increased ‘social bonding’ (p.115). The golf course also operates as a private space where informal discussions can take place:

I have heard one or two people say ‘Oh we really need XY or Z to happen, well I’m playing golf with so-and-so on Thursday so I’ll just mention it there’ (Kathryn Jones)

The casual ‘mentioning’ of things means that this is where the real decisions are being made. This illustrates how important it is to be involved in these conversations, but this is difficult when membership to golf clubs is restricted and this specifically excludes women from many of these exchanges and so reinforces the gender divisions within the network.

As members of the cultural elite it is unsurprising that their recreation time is largely spent at high culture events, namely at the opera, theatre and art galleries and it is here that they are most likely to informally come into contact with one another. These are places where they will see other people that are known to them and that they identify as existing in the network “They pour some white wine and invite people along and you tend to get the same lovers of the visual arts at that” (Iwan Williams). As Cardiff is seen as a small world, there is a limited audience for these events and so it inevitable that it will always be the same people attending them. Similarly this happens at the opera “You would see them, if I go to the opera or something, you’d expect to see them there as well” (Kathryn Jones) so there is a sense that people go to events anticipating who else will be there. This is particularly true if:

We always sit in the same seats and usually the people in front of us have the same seats ... behind us are the raised stalls where the WNO people, a lot of them sit so I know quite a few of those. (Andrew Band)

Always sitting in the same place ensures that he is highly visible to anyone who wishes to speak to him. He has become a regular fixture as a member of the audience and has strategically positioned himself so that he will come into contact with people involved with the opera company. As Ostrower (1998) argues this type of involvement is a ‘way of being part of Society’ (p.6). It is a method of being seen and simultaneously allows people to demonstrate their cultural capital while securing their place in the network by also extending their social capital (Erickson, 1996). In order to be a true member of the cultural elite they need to signal a real and deep investment in culture which supersedes simply being a member of the audience. One way to demonstrate this commitment is to be a ‘friend’ of the opera company or institution:

The friends events there are very well attended and of course I know a lot of those people. I see the same people going to those events all the time. (Glyn Edwards)

Entry to these is dependent upon being financially affluent and so it serves to create a smaller, tighter and more exclusive group within the wider audience and network.

The network that is constructed by them involves judging themselves and other people in terms of their cultural capital and then placing themselves within it accordingly. Going to the opera is used as the real emblem of membership to this elite group and so attendance there is an important part of belonging to the network:

I'm not a huge opera fan, or buff but I do go. I do go, not out of a sense of duty but because they are a very, very good company. (Matthew Hughes)

He positions himself not as an expert but he does know enough to appreciate the quality of the WNO productions. He says that he does not attend out of duty, meaning the obligations that he may have that come with his high-profile role as well as his responsibility to Wales to support and help to sustain Welsh culture. Several of my interviewees confess to not being a true 'buff' or real fanatic of the opera "I'm not one of these people who are there at the opening night of everything" (Aled Parry) and:

A lot of people that I go to the opera with in Cardiff are actually very knowledgeable. Much more knowledgeable than me. (Iwan Williams)

People who possess a true and detailed understanding of opera are admired. Even if they themselves do not have this depth of knowledge they are keen to demonstrate their passion for it:

I love the opera but I can't remember the names of all the parts and I can't remember, I can tell you *Carmen* but if you got down to one of the lesser operas and you played me an exert I couldn't tell you what it was but I do love it. (Graham Johnson)

The network that is created is, therefore, hierarchical in nature. They may identify themselves as "not a great opera buff" but rather "a low level enthusiast but perhaps that's better than being a bottom level enthusiast" (Iwan Williams) by placing himself above others in this way different strata within the network are created. Knowledge is very important but as is a genuine liking and appreciation for this form of high culture, and so displaying this in the network allows access to its inner circles.

The network is further divided by the type of experience people have of culture. A person's credentials are enhanced if they themselves are involved in creating art rather than just being a member of the audience "A lot of people like me are pretend, you know, we like the arts but he really is a performer" (Iwan Williams). He is self-deprecating about his own involvement, he, like many others in the network only 'pretend', with connotations of putting on a display for the benefit of others. Actually creating art is a sign of true commitment to culture and it is another factor that advantages someone in the network and assists them in guaranteeing themselves a place at its core:

It helps give authority to things that I say and it also helps, it then helps Arts Council Chairs to have a relationship with me that might be slightly different from somebody who is just an administrator inside an organisation who didn't have the extra dimension. (Martin Sweet)

He has benefitted from being an artist in his own right. He believes that this has given him more authority and standing in his role as chief executive because it enhances the level of his insight and expertise, just as Ostrower (1998) found in her study of trustees of arts institutions, that although they claimed to really love culture they did not see themselves as specialists but believed the professionals involved in the day to day running of the organisations ought to be.

### **Not what we do, dear**

In order to do true networking and to be part of the network a person needs to be seen at high culture events and it is here that more subtle forms of networking take place. These are not appropriate settings for obvious strategies, such as business cards, to be used:

At the opera or ballet or theatre although you wouldn't swap business cards you might renew business acquaintances and that might encourage you to catch up. (Glyn Edwards)

Attendance gives people visibility in the network and an opportunity to talk to people that they may not have seen for a while. The conversations that take place are informal in nature as it is not socially acceptable to actually ‘talk business’ on these occasions:

Very often you do bump into friends who have that shared interest in music or ballet or opera but the last thing you do is talk business there. I think you carry your connections through. I think it might, and it does to an extent, bring people of a like mind together. (Iwan Williams)

It creates a space where people with similar backgrounds, attitudes and appreciation of culture can meet which can then increase a person’s circle of friends and contacts. Simply the act of sitting with others allows people to gather useful information about the current business or political landscape (Useem, 1982). This can then be useful to them in their different roles and may facilitate business being done in the future:

If I go to a talk, or go to the opera, or go to the New Theatre, I will meet up with people. I mean it’s nice. It would be wrong to think that an awful lot of business is done there. You’re more likely to be reminiscing or talking about how people are, or how their wives are or what they’re up to these days, that sort of thing, than really doing business but it does help on occasions if you want to pick up threads. (Phillip Smith)

This highlights the importance of holding these connections over time. Shared memories with others in the network about the network serves to strengthen these bonds further, so that they become personal connections. These informal relationships can benefit them in their different roles so that they can then ‘pick up threads’ to literally tie their interests together.

Success at networking depends on understanding the social etiquette of the network and knowing the correct way to behave in these type of situations. People need to appreciate that the opening night of an exhibition, for example, is not the time or place for obvious forms of networking to be used:

It would be considered very anti-social and uncultured to pass business cards at that sort of event, it’s just ‘not what we do, dear’ you know. (Iwan Williams)

The cultural elite characterise it as something which is much more subtle in nature. This can be so understated that it becomes simply about being somewhere and being seen by others in the network to be there “It’s very much, turn up. Make sure they know my face. Make sure my organisation is represented there” (Gareth Morris) and “I think it is important that my organisation is seen to be at some of these things” (Stephen Owen). Both of these interviewees are chief executives and this reveals that they see themselves as an individual who is the embodiment of their organisation. They represent it and this gives them an identity and presence within the network which in turn also increases their confidence within it, so that “I am much much shyer without my organisation in front of me” (Susan Hodson). They are able to use their roles to enhance their social standing, hence why the more roles a person has the increased status they have in the network. Another chief executive describes the type of networking that he does as being about ‘flying the flag’:

You go to some things because you need to fly the flag. Flying the flag is important. Flying the flag is letting the world know that your organisation and the things you stand for exists so being, just the simple act of being there and saying ‘Hello’ is enough quite often ... People will then say ‘I talked to so and so and so and so’ and you become part, your organisation, national organisation don’t forget, becomes part of a strata. If you don’t turn out to these things then you kind of get, you slip away.’ (Martin Sweet)

Visibility in the network is important but this is described as something which is very easy and straightforward to achieve. It is just about attending events and saying hello to people. This, however, is seen as a crucial act because the network which is outlined here is not a static one so if networking is not worked at, then your position within it cannot be maintained and you will ‘slip away’ to the outer parts where you will have fewer connections and crucially less influence.

My interviewees subscribe to practicing a subtle and simple form of networking which relies on just being seen, but the reality is that it actually much more complex than this. Mastering

the art of subtlety actually requires a great deal of skill. They need to be able to strike the correct balance between acting with restraint but still making their presence felt. This influencing over the thinking of others can be so subtle it is seen as “subliminal messaging” (Graham Johnson) and importantly it is gradual and accumulates over time “it’s a drip, drip, drip and it’s happening all the time” (Susan Hodson). This is valued much more than being brash and forceful “You don’t know how far you can push and you’ve got to be careful not to impose yourself on people” (Gareth Morris). In order to effectively strike this balance excellent social and communication skills are required because “what it all really depends on is human relations” (Colin Wilson). The possession of good interpersonal skills are similarly crucial for the political elite who need to have ‘the ability to charm, cajole, conciliate and coordinate people’ (Putnam, 1976:58), so they:

Always try and deal with people the way that I would like to be dealt with by other people. So I try to be courteous. I try to listen to people. I try to remember people and hopefully one day I might come across them again and they might be able to help me in some way. (Stephen Owen)

Again, this emphasises the importance of carrying connections over time and this means that remembering who other people in the network are is a very fundamental part of this.

One technique that my interviewees use in order to demonstrate that they are adept networkers is to outline scenarios when things could have gone wrong, if their social skills had not been so finely honed “It’s always awkward when you come up against people saying ‘Hello, how are you?’ and you’ve no idea who they are” (Matthew Hughes) and:

I see a lot of people at these events and because of my position, how as I say of becoming very well-known, I have so many people coming up and talking to me and saying ‘Hello. How are things going?’ and I haven’t got a clue who they are. (Aled Parry)

This also serves to re-emphasise their importance and prominence at the core of the network, everybody knows who they are but they do not necessarily know people who exist on the periphery. They have developed successful strategies in order to deal with this:

Somebody else will come up, that's the real killer, and you don't know who they are ... I just say 'Now do introduce yourselves to each other' (*laughs*) I find that works a treat. (Kathryn Jones)

This enables them to avoid socially embarrassing situations and also protects their reputation. It is important to be seen to possess knowledge about the component parts of the network and to be able to remember all of the people within it. They see these abilities as increasing and developing over time:

You eventually become well-versed in sort of talking and leaving. That's the key thing of course, the leaving is more difficult to pull off than the starting up and you've got to, you've just got to get those sort of skills off. I think golf has certainly helped with that. (Aled Parry)

Being part of this social scene provides people with the opportunity to practise their interpersonal skills as well as providing them with role-models in the form of other successful networkers. They can witness and experience firsthand their strategies and assimilate these for themselves. The periphery of the network, therefore, functions as a training ground, and as with political elites, the process of competing for further positions within the network actually serves to increase their abilities further (Easton, 1965).

The act of networking requires a high degree of skill so that there is an art to it. It is a performance. The other people in the network are the audience and they are judging the success of this "You've got to get yourself around and you've got to get yourself around in part to be seen to be doing that" (Martin Sweet). It is about putting on a show and this can require preparation in order for them to be convincing in their role:

I mean I always try to do a little bit of reading up before I go. I think, don't we all? In the old days I used to photocopy synopses and now I just go on the internet and Google it and print off the synopsis and sit at home and read it over a cup of coffee, I



think it's important that one knows what one's going to see. But at least when people say, perhaps in the evening 'Do you know anything about this?' Well I know the story and I know who wrote it and I know when it was first produced. That sort of thing.  
(Iwan Williams)

In order to ensure that he successfully passes in this role as somebody who really appreciates opera he needs to demonstrate knowledge of this and exhibit his cultural capital. He anticipates that he may be tested on this, and so learns his lines beforehand. This, however, is not always possible and often it is more a case of having to improvise "when you meet someone who might be interested in supporting your organisation it's like a piece of improvisation for you" (Susan Hodson). Being able to respond appropriately to the other person in this type of social situation requires a great deal of skill.

In order to be an instrumental member of the network people need to be highly visible within it. Cultivating contacts and increasing their profile requires a person to be a successful networker. They must perfect the art of networking so that they always give a convincing performance. It is something that needs to be worked at and so ultimately without this work being put into networking there would be no network. While my interviewees stress the subtlety of these performances, they are simultaneously stating their caliber as a true member of the elite, as they have mastered these. The periphery of the network exists so that people can learn and practise the skills which they will need if they want to move to the inner core. A consequence of this is that the network is kept tight. People who are completely outside of the network have no opportunity to learn the etiquette of subtle networking and so cannot become proficient in it. Without this skill they cannot access or function in the network so it remains closed to them.

### **Part III: The Process of Appointments**

The act of networking which sustains the network requires a great deal of time, effort and energy on the part of the individual. One of the perceived outcomes and benefits of this is that it ensures their place within society. This is formalised through appointments to a variety of committees, panels and boards. How the process of getting these positions is explained highlights how visibility and connections within the network have a crucial role to play in this. However, my interviewees are uncomfortable with the notion of a biased system which favours certain individuals so they set it up in direct contrast with how things were done in the past in order to try and portray the current system as being a much fairer and open one.

#### **Out of the blue**

The process of acquiring jobs is set up as something that is distinct from how things were done in the past. My interviewees stress that the network operates differently to how it did during the earlier parts of their career. As people who are typically older who have been involved in the cultural scene for quite a long time, they are well placed to comment on any changes in the system that have occurred. They do perceive that there has been a shift “It’s changed over time actually” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies) so that there has been “changes in the way in which things were arrived at stroke designed ... I think there’s been a fair degree of distinction” (Phillip Smith). Then and now are treated as two very separate entities. It is seen to be the case that decisions were once ‘designed’ so that those already in positions of power and influence were engineering who would occupy other key roles in the network. This manipulation of the network, by those in positions already within it, was made possible because this was during a time when people did not go through a formal appointment process. People did not have to apply to be on boards or committees “at the time when I was appointed to a number of these committees no one applied for any of them” (Glyn Edwards).

There is a sense that this is just the way things were. This is how the world worked and everybody in the network understood and accepted this. Decisions were made in private by a select and restricted few:

That was at the time when an appointment was made just by a small number of people getting together and saying ‘Who do we think should be appointed?’ (Christine Wall)

This makes a person’s ability to network in order to secure and enhance their reputation over time fundamental to success because this is what they were being solely judged upon. This extends to how the government operated:

They invited me, as the old Welsh Office, before the Assembly, I was invited to become a member, it wasn’t an interview process in the early days. (Bronwyn Powell)

When an interview did take place it was “not against any criteria so we didn’t, you know, it was more or less are you a good egg” (Kathryn Jones). People were awarded positions if they had the right profile, background and attitudes and this served to keep the network a tight one, favouring traditional candidates.

The network of the past is set up as operating in a closed and secretive way. One that was seen by outsiders and the general public as being unfair and as being based predominantly on who knew who:

There was a general feeling that a lot of the quangos had been filled by a sort of stage army of people ... and to some extent there was a degree of truth in that because of the way they were filled. It was civil servants asking other people whether they were interested or could they suggest any names and the Welsh Office itself keeping a list of whom they thought might be suitable to go on working groups or working parties or committees or councils or whatever and so there was enormous patronage in the Secretary of State at the time because among other things he made appointments to the Council of the University of Wales, to The National Library and The National Museum. (Phillip Smith)

People were chosen for these high profile positions within the cultural sector from a small pool or ‘stage army’ who were well-placed within the network. Appointments were made based on reputation and personal relations with the politicians and civil servants.

The typical way through which people achieved these positions was following a telephone conversation which they often report as being unexpected or as coming “out of the blue” (Phillip Smith) so that “they picked up the phone and said ‘Can you help out?’ Lots of things happened just like that” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). This illustrates the sense of informality of these appointments with the idea that they are doing a favour for a friend rather than being given an official job. One interviewee made a joke about being receiving a telephone call from the minister “I thought what does he want? (*laughs*) But he rang and said he wanted me to become chair” (Colin Wilson). Again this stresses the relaxed nature of this process which was facilitated by the personal relationships that these people already had with one another. It also shows how it is a private world in which conversations take place behind closed doors. Often my interviewees use the device of saying that they do not remember or even know how they got certain appointments “I can’t remember the exact sequence but I had been asked to allow my name to go forward” (Christine Wall) and:

If you said to me how did you become chair? The honest answer is I haven’t a clue. I just had a letter from, oh what was his name? The Home Secretary at the time. (Phillip Smith)

This is used as a way to distance themselves from the system, so while they may have personally benefited from it through their careers as they have moved inwards in the network, they are saying that they were not instrumental in its design and so any injustice inherent within it was not their fault.

### **Not so much the old gang**

My interviewees express some discomfort with how appointments were made in the past and they signal this by setting up the current system as being a much better and fairer one. They argue that there has been a big change and shift “I think from ’97 with the advent of the Labour government then under Blair, public appointments changed dramatically” (Gwen

Griffiths). The result of this for them has been “In Wales they took the view that they would advertise and they would only appoint people who responded to advertisements” (Phillip Smith). Jobs must be advertised and only people who formally apply for these will be considered “These days with things like the BBC the only way to do it is to apply” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). Then candidates must be properly interviewed “It is different now because the Assembly came in and they have interviews and they do skills sets and competencies and so on” (Bronwyn Powell). This is all outlined in direct contrast with the past in order to emphasise the scale of the improvement so that a much more unbiased system operates today. The result of this has been that a wider range of people are now recruited to these positions:

It's a bit more disparate I think because the mechanisms for getting on these bodies are a bit more rigorous. It's not so much the old gang in a sense. I think it is fairer and better, more transparent and more quality and evidence-based. (Kathryn Jones)

She believes that there is less of an advantage of being part of the ‘old gang’ as appointments no longer rely on connections or simply being a member of the ‘old boy network’. Women in particular are seen as having benefited from this:

It took a long time for some people to appreciate because they had been so used to being tapped on the shoulder, and said, you know, good *man* (*her emphasis*), usually, will you do it? (Gwen Griffiths)

This suggests that these changes may have been resented by traditional male candidates who had been favoured by the old system but that it has resulted in the process of appointments being a more public and open affair.

### **A big charade**

While my interviewees are keen to stress the positive changes that have occurred in the system to make it a fairer one, the reality is that it is still an advantage to be part of the network. The appointment process which operates today has not been experienced by them in

such a straightforward manner as they themselves have described and advocated. One interviewee expressed very clear views about this:

I'm not a great believer in the idea of so called 'equal opportunities' because usually it's only a pretence anyway. In reality you nearly always find out, like public appointments, they advertise and they interview and all the rest of it, but in the end the minister decides who he wants or she wants and the people know who he or she wants so they make sure that that person gets through anyway and all the rest of it is a big charade. (Colin Wilson)

He is suggesting that the procedure of advertising a post and interviewing candidates is an elaborate performance. It is a pretence and a charade. Decisions are made in exactly the same way that they always have been by the politicians but this is then masked for outsiders so that criticisms about bias and favouritism that are inherent in the network become much more difficult to level at it.

There are stories of appointments that have taken place in recent times in the era of the Assembly and equal opportunities that corroborate this. People have been handed positions only to then be part of such a charade. One interviewee was "tapped on the shoulder" as she phrases it, meaning she was simply approached and asked to take on a high-profile role but then:

After I said yes and I was ready to go, they suddenly got cold feet and said 'Oh perhaps we ought to advertise it.' So they did advertise it and then they gave it to me ... they did that after the event as it were, to make themselves feel better about it. (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

The civil servants realised that this is not how things should be seen to be done so they advertised it even though the job was already hers. Another interviewee applied to be on a panel but then had a telephone call, saying that the minister:

Saw your name on the list and he remembers meeting you in Cardiff. He's decided that you'd be the ideal person to be chair and he's going to ring you this evening at home. (Christine Wall)

This reverts back to the old system of simply being telephoned by the minister and being asked to take on positions, or as it was put to her to “do us a favour”, this despite the fact that she did not meet the original job specification. Rules are bent because she had made such a good impression when she had met him in person. Already being part of the network meant that she had been in a position where she could showcase herself and her talents. She did, however, have to go through the process, and performance of being re-interviewed for the position of chair, even though she had already informally been given the job.

These examples are blatant charades but often the process that is reported is one in which they are telephoned and asked to apply for positions, so whereas in the past they were handed positions now they are encouraged to apply for them. They then must go through the public process of application and interview:

The process is you get a phone call which says just to let you know that we’re looking for people to populate these panels and a number of people including the minister would be very happy if you applied. So you get encouraged to apply. But for this appointment because it was paid you have to go through what is called a Nolan compliant process. I had to fill in an application form, and then had to go to an interview and then you wait and you get a letter. And it’s a balance between, there is a massive amount of influencing which goes on. (Graham Johnson)

This reveals that the appointment process is not a straightforward one and that there are two elements or layers to it. On the surface is the performance of the official appointment process but underneath this the direct and private phone conversations behind closed doors still take place. He, therefore, struggles with describing the system. He recognises that ‘influencing’ occurs, so reputation and standing in the network is important, but he sees it as being more complex than this:

It’s a mix. It’s not formal application and it’s not old boys’ network. I don’t know what it is. I actually think it’s a pretty public process really. I mean you’re, you’re identifying talent, you’re encouraging people and then you’re saying to people ‘Can you check that I’m not making a mistake here?’ (Graham Johnson)

He presents himself as not being really sure about how it operates. This is very similar to how they talk about the appointment process of the past. Claiming that they do not really understand it serves to distance themselves from it and therefore avoid any blame about it being unfair. He describes it as not formal application (which it ought to be) but also not 'old boys network' rather he sees it as a public process. Public in this sense does not mean open for the wider public to see, it means public to those already in the network. It is the people at its core, in the positions of power and influence, who are checking whether people are suitable candidates, and this is why having a good name and reputation in the network is so important.

The occurrence of being asked to apply for positions was mentioned frequently. This was typically described using the word 'encouraged':

I was encouraged to apply, let's say, but again no guarantees. I know the minister was pleased that I applied but again that doesn't offer any guarantees. He's not involved in the process of application and interview. (Annette Cook)

There are clear contradictions here. She knew that the minister was keen for her to get the position but she presents this as something that is completely separate from the official appointment process. She, unlike some others in my sample, is unwilling to declare it as a charade. Being encouraged to apply has the effect of making a person confident that they will get the position, otherwise why would people take the time and effort to encourage them to apply in the first place? This is even more likely to be the case if people have to be 'persuaded' to put in an application:

I was persuaded to apply ... they rung me up and said we'd very much like you to do this so I applied and I was appointed. It's a very formal appointment. (Christine Wall)

Saying that they had to be persuaded is another device which signals their importance in the network as their skills are perceived as so invaluable that people will go to great lengths to ensure that they come and work for their organisation. This, once again, shows the



incongruity of the system. She says that they wanted her for the job but she then describes the process as a 'formal' one. It is a formal charade. Many of the interviewees subscribe to the ideal of a current system as a fair one, even when they are actually revealing it to be one based on personal connections and private conversations "The existing chair had asked me to apply for it but, you know, it was an open competition" (Annette Cook) and:

I was privately asked if I would mind applying and it was with the clear understanding that I wouldn't necessarily be appointed, you know it was a straight application. (Phillip Smith)

They may wish to present the process as being one that is devoid of bias but their own personal experiences of obtaining positions in the network reveal the inherent contradictions within this.

While some interviewees wish to represent the system as a fair one, others admit to being handed certain positions in a similar way to how this occurred in the past, so they are "just approached and asked if I would like to do that" (Iwan Williams). This can happen through telephone calls from headhunters:

'Your name has been given to us. We'd be really interested if you'd come and have a discussion with the Chief Exec. You don't have to go through the interview process' ... I asked how they got my name and they said they'd asked around in the Assembly. (Bethan Price)

This reveals the informality of the process so that they have a 'discussion' rather than an interview and it shows how people already well-positioned in the network make decisions about who should be given appointments. Personal connections and private telephone calls still have an important role to play in all of this:

The new chair wanted a very different type of board so he phoned me up and said would I be interested in doing it and helping him ... It's something that they've asked me to do rather than I've applied to do. (Gareth Morris)

The idea of 'helping him' illustrates the personal nature of these relationships, so by saying yes he will be doing a favour for a friend. Some interviewees express some discomfort with

this reality “Well, that’s not, I’m sorry, that is not through this open and transparent system”

(Gwen Griffiths) and:

I suppose strictly speaking there wasn’t an interview process really and sometimes I think about that and I wonder if as a publicly funded organisation they were really allowed to do that. (Susan Hodson)

They recognise that their own experiences do not match up to the ideal system that they have previously advocated.

Members of the cultural elite try to set up the current system of appointments as being a fair one by contrasting it with the way that things operated in the past in order to show the amount of change that has occurred. The reality is, however, much more complex and this is revealed when they talk about how they themselves achieved certain jobs and roles during recent times. People still have certain positions handed to them. For others getting appointments has depended on the influencing of others and the encouraging that takes place during private conversations. The consequence of this is that the formal appointment process becomes a charade, as the decisions have already been made before any official interviews take place. Some interviewees were uncomfortable with this and so tried to distance themselves away from the system by professing they do not really understand how it works, and so they cannot be held accountable for it. Clearly what is important in this process is the individual’s social standing and reputation in the network. It is this which helps a person to achieve more positions within the network which ultimately serves to strengthen and secure their place within it.

## **Part IV: The benefit of belonging**

In the previous sections of this chapter I argued that being in the network requires a person to perform the act of networking and that this is a skill which takes time and effort to perfect. This is seen as being worthwhile because successful networking helps to secure a place within the network and assists with the process of getting jobs. This was the case in the past, prior to the introduction of a formal appointment system, when people were simply handed positions, but it is still true today, as people are now encouraged to apply for things. Studies using the method of social network analysis work on the assumption that the more connections that an individual has then the more of an advantage they will have in the network. Asserting that having connections in the network is a benefit in the appointment process is a patently obvious statement, however, little is said about why this is the case and how these connections are used (Knoke, 1990). In this final section of this chapter I explore why being well-connected in the network is beneficial to its members and in what ways these connections are put to use. As the interviewees talk about how they make use of their contacts, in order to help them get jobs as well as benefiting them when it comes to actually performing their various roles, they simultaneously reveal how they see the network as operating, how it functions in order to keep itself closed, and what true membership relies upon.

### **The one in front of their face**

Being a member of the network assists people to achieve further roles and jobs within it. It is the case, as frequently expressed, that doing one thing leads to being asked to do something else “It’s true that the more you do, the more you get asked to do” (Christine Wall) and there are numerous examples of this:

Those three years came to an end and I had attended all the meetings during my three years as chairman and then there was a vacancy about a year later. A trustee had

retired or passed on even, and I was invited back and I've been there as an ordinary trustee as it were ever since, that's how that involvement began. (Matthew Hughes)

As somebody already known to them, through his involvement in the capacity of chairman of another organisation, he became an obvious choice for them when a place on the board became available. This was preferred rather than the alternative of recruiting somebody new who they did not know. This type of narrow recruitment serves to keep the network tight and closed. Members of the cultural elite report the value of being highly visible in the network and they see their visibility as being a benefit to them when it comes to getting jobs. They are seen by other heads of organisations at social or networking events "I ended up sitting on the same table as him at various functions" (Aled Parry). This enabled him to build up a positive and friendly relationship which resulted in him being offered a job. Visibility on a larger scale involves cultivating a respected profile and reputation across the whole of the network and already holding one or more high status positions helps them to achieve this:

Leading an organisation gives you a certain degree of profile ... you're constantly asked to comment, be photographed and interviewed and all that sort of thing.  
(Graham Johnson)

People already know about him even if they do not yet know him personally. It also means that for any organisation that recruits him, their status and visibility will increase in the network, as the media gaze will inevitably follow him wherever he goes. It is particularly important to secure a tangible presence with the people with power and influence in the Assembly as they are the decision-makers. Being highly visible to them, through networking and holding other positions, puts a person at the forefront of their mind when a job does become available:

I went in to the government a couple of times to give them lectures and talks ... and we had interesting discussions and I think it was because I did that ... I happened to be the one in front of their face when the thing came around. (Graham Johnson)

He was already known to them and this previous contact had served as an interview process. By saying he was chosen simply because he was the one in their sights at the time he is being

self-deprecating, implying, therefore, that it was not because of any skills or expertise that he might have.

My interviewees suggest that the benefit of belonging to the network is that it means that theirs is a familiar face to other people in the network, and that this is important. However, how the network operates is more complex than this and this is rhetoric, similar to how they claim that networking is just about being seen somewhere. It relies on more than this. It is not enough, therefore, to simply be visible, rather they must be able to noticeably demonstrate their skills. The most effective way of doing this is to make useful contributions to the boards that they are already members of, and this helps to explain the phenomenon of elites sitting concurrently on multiple boards. Once they have been identified as someone who is a beneficial asset to a board, they are invited to sit on another in the hope that they will make similarly useful contributions there:

He (*the minister*) knew me from a previous board where I'd fixed a problem so, therefore, I think he thought I might be able to do something ... I was invited to come to the second meeting and I obviously talked too much and so I was asked to become chairman. (Colin Wilson)

He jokes about his appointment to the position of chair being because he spoke too much at the meeting. He is signalling that he is an active, rather than a passive, member of a board, which is something which is valued by the cultural elite (in the next chapter I discuss the characteristics of what constitutes their concept of a 'good' board member at length) and that this has made him stand out and be noticed. The joke is a self-deprecating one, his appointment was not made simply on the fact that he talked a lot because if he had been talking a lot of nonsense then they would not have wanted him in charge. The implication is that his contributions were also of some quality. Saying something of value during a board meeting can make a person stand out, even if what is said "was all obvious but it was something that hadn't been thought about" (Phillip Smith). This serves to play down the

contribution that he made because it was an ‘obvious’ thing to say but it simultaneously enhances him in stature, because despite its obviousness, other people had not thought to raise it. This resulted in a conversation with the minister who was also present:

We ended up speaking to each other afterwards and he thanked me for my contribution. I didn’t know him. I knew of him, but I didn’t know him personally. And then out of the blue, a month or two later I suppose, I had a letter asking if I would take on the chairmanship ... I was known as somebody who could contribute at least to a committee. (Phillip Smith)

He had effectively used this meeting as an opportunity to make himself visible to the minister, as a way of showcasing his ability and talents and then to use his skills of networking to informally chat to him afterwards. As this happened in the period before the formal appointment process he was rewarded by being handed the position of chair.

Already existing in the network and holding positions within it helps people achieve further jobs because belonging in this way serves as one long interview process. This could help to explain why people were given appointments in the past without a formal interview, as in a sense it was seen to be the case that they already passed this stage and so it was deemed unnecessary. Even in the era of equal opportunities and formal appointments, it was reported that “It was only about an hour interview I suppose, because I was pretty well-known to all the people who were interviewing me” (Christine Wall). She knew the people on the interview panel, emphasising the importance of having personal relationships in the network, and this meant that they knew all her credentials so they had effectively made the decision that the job was already hers. The network allows for people to learn about others and to collect information about them from other people in the network:

It’s much better knowing people and knowing about them through somebody you trust, having a real record, than it is on paper ... If you interview people for a job it tells you absolutely nothing about how they are going to do. You want peoples’ actual record ... how they’ve actually performed and what you actually think, whether you could work with them and so on. (Colin Wilson)

The network is described as a checking system. Even if a person does not have direct experience of what a candidate is like then they can turn to other members of the network, people that they ‘trust’ in order to help them make their decisions. This is why holding a positive reputation across the network is important and highlights once again the personal nature of the relationships that exist within it, as they can ring people up to ask for their opinion, or bring it up as a topic of conversation on the golf course. This will result in them obtaining their ‘actual record’ what they have really contributed, rather than what they themselves say that they have done. This quote also reveals that another important element of this is ‘whether you could work with them’ so it is about recruiting people to these positions who share similar attitudes and opinions to the decision-makers so that they can maintain the status-quo, and explains how the network is kept traditional. Ultimately the best way to know whether they can work well with someone is if they have worked with them before, on a previous board or in another organisation, using this as gauge narrows recruitment even further, as they turn to the same small pool of people that are already personally known to them. The network also operates as a vetting system so that:

I think people do learn if you’re no good at something. So maybe if you’ve done a bad job somewhere I think the word would be out there... I’m part of the grapevine. Headhunters use me. They ring me up and say ‘Any ideas about candidates for this job?’ That’s the way the world works isn’t it? (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

She describes how the network functions and uses this to simultaneously present herself as a core and important part of it. As someone who has successfully built up a positive reputation in the network she is involved in the decisions about who should be considered for jobs. This is why having good relationships with members of the inner core for those at the periphery of the network can advantage them, as it is those at the centre who ultimately decide the shape of the network. Personal recommendation from within the network is just as important for recruitment today, as it was in the past.

### **Same people different hats on**

If being in the network equates to one long interview process then existing as part of the network for a lengthy period of time is an advantage because it provides people with a greater number of opportunities to showcase their abilities. My interviewees identify this as being important and so see themselves as core members “just from being around a long time” (Kathryn Jones). This again is a self-deprecating over-simplification, she is suggesting that she is well-positioned in the network because she is familiar to people, rather than because of her skills and expertise. But it is only over time that a person can secure a real presence in the network as they gather acquaintances and build up their connections, as Annan (1990) argues acceptance into the cultural elite requires ‘knowing somebody’ (p.9). The connections that they have exist across their career and over time:

It’s interesting that two of the Assembly ministers, Jane Hutt and Jane Davidson, I knew in another life years and years ago when Jane Hutt was running the Cardiff Women’s Aid and Jane Davidson was running the Welsh Local Government Association. So you do actually collect acquaintances. People who you are then dealing with many years later in a different capacity, you do see, you do see the same people with different hats on. (Christine Wall)

People effectively ‘collect acquaintances’ as they see people in different roles as they move around the network occupying various positions within it themselves. This collection results in the network becoming a self-referencing one and provides overlaps between the different sections. This overlap also exemplifies how Wales is a small country, with a limited number of people available to fill these roles. Connections, therefore, span a life time, there is a sense that the network does not forget, even if the relationships existed in a ‘different life’, by which she means her professional career, during the time before she became an ‘officially’ retired person. This was frequently also the experience of other interviewees. One chair knew another chair of an organisation in this way and saw it as an advantage “It helps of course that the present chair used to be a colleague of mine” (Mark West). In their previous ‘day jobs’ they had a relationship as colleagues, and now they are both retired from this their



relationship has continued, albeit in a different capacity. He recognises that this sense of a shared past benefits how they can now relate to each other and therefore do business, which ultimately aids his organisation. These types of long-standing connections are important:

One of the things which was a good advantage which I would have seen as running through, would have been the links that I had built up ... You can go on to a new body, or go to a meeting and there's somebody you last saw four or five years ago but really knew well. (Phillip Smith)

Even if these relationships lie dormant they do not disappear, and they can be reactivated when required. Building up this variety of connections to begin with is important because it is these social contacts in the network which cultivate a sense of belonging to the network that are fundamental to long-term success within it (Laird, 2006; Finkelstein *et al.*, 2007).

Having multiple connections in the network can benefit a person when it comes to getting a job or an appointment because it increases the likelihood that the decision-makers will know all about them, and their past achievements. Being well-connected also serves as the additional benefit that it makes a person a more desirable candidate because they have a greater understanding of the cultural sector because of already being well-positioned within it "I think ultimately that's why they approached me. There was a sense that I knew everybody" (Martin Sweet). Having a high profile and knowing a lot of people will make it easier for them to do business on behalf of their organisation in the network. It also means that they will bring their existing contacts to their next appointment "I was really in the fortunate position of being quite a catch for any arts organisation because I obviously had an incredible address book" (Susan Hodson). She recognises that this has been a tangible benefit to her in her career trajectory.

The contacts and connections that they have do not just fall within the cultural domain. There is significant overlap between the different sectors and this serves to integrate the elite further

(Mills, 1956) and facilitates the movement which occurs between the different spheres (Stanworth and Giddens, 1974). Contacts in the business and political world are, therefore, important for the cultural elite and are identified as one of the factors that have helped them to achieve certain positions:

I was appointed a year ago, probably because I'm known to have a wide connection of business contacts as well as good contacts in the Assembly. (Iwan Williams)

These type of relationships are also identified as helping them to perform effectively in the current roles that they hold:

Obviously I've got quite a lot of contacts in the political arena so I've been able to bring that to my work here which I think has been quite useful for us. (Annette Cook)

There is a sense that connections are taken with them, and carried across institutions. This serves to unite and tighten the network further, while it simultaneously benefits her current organisation because as a high profile member of the network her association with it helps to increase its prominence as well. The connections that they have with the political sphere are characterised as, and likened to, personal friendships:

The first ministers know me by name. I don't see them on a regular basis but we stop and have a chat. I mean I saw Rhodri Morgan in the National Library last week ... so there's that kind of, with quite a number of AMs, there's that kind of relationship. (Martin Sweet)

This suggests that they enjoy an informal and relaxed relationship, so it is the subtle form of networking that is again being deployed by the cultural elite. This is seen as benefiting their organisation:

I've got a very good relationship with the minister which I think culturally is important in an organisation ... I know a lot of the politicians personally. I mean, when I say personally I don't mean that they are personal friends but, well some of them are (*laughs*) most of them are not but I know them so if I bump into them in the Assembly I can say 'Hello' and chat. (Bronwyn Powell)

She makes a joke about the fact that she does actually have personal friends in the Assembly, and then she identifies a similarly casual relationship existing with the AMs as described by the previous interviewee. It is one which involves bumping into people and chatting, and it is

these type of informal meetings that can facilitate the sharing of key information which helps business to get done (Useem, 1992).

Having positive links with the Assembly is very important, but so is cultivating other political relationships, namely those with the Local Authorities and Councils. These are particularly valued by the network, because of the perceived distance that exists between them and the leaders of the cultural organisations in Wales. People who have these connections are, therefore, positioned at an advantage in the network “They particularly wanted me to stay on the board (*of WNO*) because of my connections with the Cardiff Council. I was able to help a lot” (Andrew Band). In an area of the network where there are not so many connections it makes any links that do exist even more important (Carroll, 2008). This resembles Burt’s (1992) concept of ‘structural holes’, a thinning out of networks means that individuals who can occupy the gaps have more strategic power as they can unite areas that would otherwise be distinct. Another valuable set of connections to have is London contacts. Several of the interviewees have worked in London at some point in their career, some have second homes there, while others “stay at my club when I’m doing work down in London” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies), showing how membership to exclusive clubs has an important role in their social lives. They profess to knowing people in positions of power in London “Of course I know people in Whitehall, and I have friends in the House of Lords” (Glyn Edwards) and this is used to clearly denote his status as a core member of the Welsh elite, that his influence is such that it extends over the border and in to England. However, there is a sense that this is a different network that exists, a distinctly English one, but one which it is a benefit to be connected to:

I also had the advantage that I had been on quite a number of Westminster committees and had contacts there so that I knew the way things worked there and I could bring ideas in to Wales and also meet with people who I already knew. (Phillip Smith)

By being able to belong to both the Welsh and English network, he can use his Westminster experiences, credentials and contacts to reinforce his status in the Welsh network, and then utilise his connections to benefit his work in, and for, Wales.

### **Knowing somebody gets you through**

Another way in which being well-connected in the network is seen as benefitting its members to exist and work within it is that it opens up the lines of communication and makes it possible to talk to other prominent people in the network:

I'm quite a well-known name and people at least, I wouldn't say they do what I want, but at least they answer the telephone if I ring them ...they're probably more prepared to meet you and talk business. (Iwan Williams)

People at the core of the network can be difficult to access as they can hold themselves at a distance. Possessing a similarly high profile in the network as a 'well-known' figure is a way of ensuring that they will enter into a dialogue with you, as is having some sort of relationship with them which has grown through the use of subtle networking:

They're more likely to speak to you to start with. I mean that's the big advantage if you know somebody then you can speak to them. If you don't know them then it's much harder ... knowing somebody gets you through. It gets you through the barrier. (Martin Sweet)

This reiterates the sense of there being a 'barrier' in place between the inner circle and the rest of the network which makes them hard to penetrate and access. Already knowing them to speak to them on a social level, for example chatting to them informally at the opera or sharing the same tastes in visual art, helps to break down these barriers. This can then be used to facilitate them doing business with one another:

It makes things easier because if I want something to happen for my organisation it's very easy for me to pick up the phone to someone and I'm halfway there because they kind of know me and they know the sorts of things that I would support, do you see what I mean? It's not like cold calling. (Kathryn Jones)

Knowing somebody, their views, attitudes and prejudices, reduces the perceived distance between people so that they are effectively already ‘halfway there’ when it comes to proposing an idea or asking for something. As another interviewee expresses it, having multiple connections and a presence established gives the individual:

A salience, so that they know who you are, what you do and why you are asking for something, rather than something which comes off the cuff. (Mark West)

The links between the different interests in the network are constantly being worked at and it is these informal relationships that already exist in the network that can then be formalised through official agreements, sponsorships or partnerships between the organisations within the cultural and business sectors.

Knowing people firstly serves to open up the channels of communication but it is also then seen as benefiting the types of conversation that they can then have with one another. These, as previously mentioned, are characterised as being informal and friendly, and so allow for the use of favours (just as in the previous section when the interviewees were explaining how they were simply approached and asked to take on appointments in the past, this was likened to them doing a favour for a friend). As the cultural elite identify that they belong to a group this means that its members can come together in order to create its own system of promises and in order to negotiate compromises (Higley *et al.*, 1991). Securing a place at the core depends on individuals keeping to their word and helping other people that are positioned around them in the network. By the nature of these relationships spanning a long period of time it means that favours do not have to be immediately repaid, but that a sense of obligation can remain over time. Crucially this can be to the network itself, and not just the individuals within it, so that it is maintained and survives.

The use of corporate hospitality, adopted from the world of business, is one way in which the network can exchange an enjoyable experience at a high cultural event for some reward or benefit to themselves or the organisation that they represent:

When people have been given something that is slightly precious and interesting, such as going to a rare opera and having a good seat there, they feel a little bit indebted or at least more friendly towards you. (Iwan Williams)

The consequence of this is that people will be 'more friendly' so even if it does not directly result in a tangible reward, such as a sponsorship deal, they will have a more favourable attitude towards the individual on a personal level, or hold the organisation in higher esteem. This is important because this can then benefit the type of relationship that they will have in the future. There is already a connection in place, a sense of owing them something cemented by a shared memory of the event.

In order for a system of favours and compromises to successfully operate it is dependent on the network being reciprocal in nature:

I would say that most of the stuff I have done has been useful. I've tried to be useful to them but they have been useful to me too ... So there is always a kind of, there's a symbiotic relationship ... Just making the links really, some of which have brought financial benefits, some of which bring benefit in kind, you know, people turning in. (Gwen Griffiths)

Being well-connected in the network means that people will ask things of them, but it also then makes it easier for them to ask things of other people. The small nature of the cultural sphere facilitates this as it increases the amounts of possible overlaps and this makes the system of favours and promises easier to oversee:

If I've had a successful association with a sponsor and if a sponsor asks me to attend a concert or whatever I will do so because I owe the sponsor something. So it works both ways. You can't expect to take all the time you have to give something back and sometimes sponsors expect you to attend things they organise so I have an obligation to do that. (Stephen Owen)

The relationship is characterised as being about both giving something back, and not simply taking money from other organisations. He repays them by attending events that they invite him to because, as a high profile member of the cultural elite, his presence adds kudos to these occasions. The network, therefore, relies on the contribution of all of its members and this is regulated using the moral code of obligation.

The system of favours, promises and compromises that operates is reliant on a sense of obligation to other individuals in the network and to the network itself, but it is also dependent on trust. How trust is monitored and managed within a cohesive network has been described as ‘enforceable trust’ (Porter and Sensenbrenner, 1993) and for each individual member their level of trustworthiness increases over time. It is a crucial asset for business elites to have, as they rely on cultivating an image of integrity (Mintz and Schwartz, 1988) which is needed when financial deals are constantly being negotiated (Kadushin, 1995). It is also identified as being important by the interviewees “You have to sell yourself first and then once they get to know you and trust you then it becomes easier” (Stephen Owen). This resonates with the idea of the act of networking as a performance, to successfully ‘sell yourself’ at the outset but that as relationships develop the connections become ones characterised by trust. This will then facilitate business being done and without it people will find it difficult to function in the network, as:

There are two things. One is trust and the other one is respect. If you haven’t got that, everything else is a complete and utter waste of time. (Gareth Morris)

Building a sound reputation requires time, but it brings its own rewards, especially if this is with the people in the Assembly:

I think I’ve got their trust, and I would hope their respect, which puts you in a position where you can influence more easily than an outsider. (Annette Cook)

She places herself at the centre of the network and it is from this position that she can have an impact on the decision-makers. She is only able to do this because she is a trusted insider who has already proven her calibre to the network by belonging to it for a long period of time.

### **A finger in a few pies**

The network that the cultural elite identify themselves as belonging to is an interconnected world. They themselves connect up parts of it by their involvement with a range of organisations at any one time. They see that these different roles do link up with one another “I think when you look at it I can’t find lots of things which are disparate” (Gwen Griffiths) and “I also see a lot of these things joining up in a way. There are lots of overlaps between these different interests” (Kathryn Jones) which also serves to strengthen the network. Their own understanding of it also benefits from the experiences that they have had of having a variety of jobs over the course of a career:

I was pleased when I was invited to go on the council because it meant that I could see in a sense some of the things we’d been doing from the other side. (Phillip Smith)

In his retirement he is able to sit on the council and see the organisation from the inside whereas in his professional life he was outside of it but making decisions that would impact upon it. These multiple perspectives are made possible because of the longevity of their careers and their continued involvement during their ‘official’ retirement. This also means that they often have held different roles “I learned a lot about being a good chairman from being a chief executive” (Phillip Smith). He has experienced the board room from two perspectives and this has benefited him in performing his duties as chair. Being part of the network is a learning process, just as they must learn to be an effective (read subtle) networker they must learn how to manage their connections and then use them to their advantage:



There are all sorts of little links which are, which you understand something much better because of something that you've learnt somewhere else. (Christine Wall)

The fundamental lesson that is learnt is about the connected nature of the network so that nothing is seen as being distinct and separate "Sometimes you're looking at problem A and you're thinking, I know this from over here and you don't know that I know this" (Graham Johnson). Holding numerous positions increases the number of connections a person has, but also allows them to understand how the network is constructed, and so makes them a more effective and instrumental member of it.

Having numerous connections is clearly seen then as being advantageous to the cultural elite and it assists with recruitment and helps them to perform their various roles more effectively. However, this sense of belonging to a small, interconnected and overlapping world is also seen as having a drawback, in that it can at times makes the terrain a difficult one to navigate. Having informal relationships with people in power needs to be monitored and managed carefully by them:

I guess you've got to be careful with it though. You can't be seen to be, well obviously favouring one of the political groupings above another. That would be suicidal for us and you can't be seen to be favouring the ones, the AMs, that you know really well. (Annette Cook)

Her personal connections with the political sphere need to be handled with skill, in order to avoid accusations of bias and so as not to alienate herself from other people in the network. Another interviewee discussed how she felt uncomfortable with the idea that she might have been abusing her position:

But it did mean, I did deliberately as a trustee hold myself quite aloof in Wales at the time because I did, I don't necessarily think that a person in that position should be cosy with anyone, whether or not they're flying any particular flag if you know what I mean. (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

Her response was to make a concerted effort to keep herself at a distance so she could not be accused of having any prejudice and so this impacted on how she behaved in the network

during the time that she held that role. Just as the act of networking requires putting on an outward show or performance this approach needs to be utilised in the network as a whole, so that they are seen to be at least trying to please everybody. The fact that this requires skill, is another accolade for those at the core of the network, the inference is that they must have successfully managed this and so rightly deserve to be there.

Another issue with the nature of the network being densely connected is that it can create the problem of competing interests, and this was mentioned frequently “there would have been a clash of interests” (Andrew Band). This is seen as being particularly a problem in Wales because it is such a small arena with a limited number of cultural organisations:

I’ve actually got a finger in a few pies and I have to be careful definitely ... I think I definitely have a huge amount to offer any arts board but because it’s a small, because Wales is a small pond I actually have to be careful. (Susan Hodson)

She is already involved with a range of arts organisations but she needs to be vigilant that they do not interfere with one another. This can result in having to decline certain positions that are offered to them:

I said well great honour etc. etc. but I’m at the moment chairing ... and there could be a conflict of interest so thanks very much but no thanks. (Christine Wall)

This can then have the detrimental impact of limiting what other positions they can occupy in the network “There’s an awful lot else that you can’t do because of the issues of impartiality, neutrality and so on, it really does sterilise the ground” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). While discussing competing interests as a drawback to the multiple positions that they hold in the network, they are also using it to emphasise their prominence and importance within it. Not only are they involved with a range of organisations but they are constantly being asked to do more (and they are always looking to do more). Competing interests may result in them having to decline some things, but they do so confident in the knowledge that they will

continue to be asked to do other things in the future, such is the experience of a core member of the network.

## **Conclusion**

In order to achieve full membership to the network a person needs to act to, and be seen to, enhance their profile within it, namely by achieving more roles and positions. Making themselves visible in the network is an important part of this, for example by sitting on a variety of boards, as this provides them with a platform on which to showcase their talents. Belonging to the network is one long interview process and it is peoples' connections that assist them when it comes to getting jobs, not only because they are known to the people making the appointments but because they are a more desirable candidate because they will take their connections with them to their new organisation. Being able to link up otherwise unconnected parts is seen as being a particular advantage, as is having links with the political sphere, both in The Assembly and in Westminster. Connections also benefit people when it comes to performing their roles and doing business because it opens up the lines of communication and crucially allows for a system of favours and promises to operate based on a mutual sense of obligation and trust, although this must be managed carefully so to avoid any accusations of abuse of power and competing interests.

It is the fact that members of the cultural elite have held numerous positions throughout their career and that they typically perform several roles at once which allows them to have a wide range of connections that span across the network. They have experience of it from multiple perspectives and this is crucial because it allows them to understand the network from a number of different vantage points and means that they can exert their influence over a variety of its sections. As their involvement deepens so does their understanding, and so a

core member comprehends it in a way that an outsider cannot. It is, therefore, a catch-22 situation, a person cannot be a true part of the network without first being part of the network. But how does a person become part of the network without first having experience of it? This is why the periphery of the network is so important, it is a place where people can hone their skills, build their reputation and be tried out by the real elite, all without de-stabilising the core of the network (Mosca, 1939). As Bourdieu (1990) argues it is extremely difficult to be accepted by the elite as a newcomer and so it can only happen 'by birth or by a slow process of co-option and initiates which is equivalent to a second birth' (pp.67-8). Acceptance to the core, therefore, is a lengthy process which helps to explain why the true elite are typically of the older generation and shows how the network is able to remain tight and closed. In the next chapter I explore the characteristics, skills, qualities and attributes that are valued by members of the core of the network, and so being seen to be in possession of these helps to facilitate access to it.

## **Chapter Five**

### **‘Fixers’: Having the Skills**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I described the network, and explained how belonging to it advantages its members because it assists them with carrying out their roles and helps them to achieve further appointments. I argued that the network is sustained through acts of networking and so being part of it requires people to be effective networkers who know how to behave in social situations and who can successfully demonstrate their cultural capital at high culture events. However, the credentials required to be a cultural elite are not as simple and straightforward as being proficient at networking and there is more to their overall performance than this. They must be able to build up a positive reputation in the network (which they can then use to their advantage) which mirrors the ideal and admired personal qualities that the network holds in high esteem. As I argued previously one way to do this is to make themselves highly visible within the network, sitting on multiple boards etc., so that they have a stage on which to show off their abilities, but what are the qualities, skills and attributes valued by the cultural elite? In this chapter I address this question. As the cultural elite outline their own talents and achievements they simultaneously reveal what characteristics are valued by the network as a whole. They also construct the ideal of a board member and directly contrast this with the negative stereotype of one, they reject this notion of a bad board member and identify themselves in a totally different vein and in doing so create the dialogue of a fixer. A fixer is a confident leader, who is useful, instrumental and beneficial to their organisations. They dedicate themselves to their roles to heroic proportions, all because they genuinely care.

## **Part I: The ‘bad’ board member: People can become caricatures**

The cultural elite construct the concept of a ‘bad’ board member. This is a person who has a traditional profile, is motivated to take these positions for the wrong reasons and who also lacks the necessary skills and attributes to fill these roles effectively. Whether or not this stereotype exists in reality is not the issue being addressed here. Importantly it is present in the mind of the interviewees and it reveals what characteristics are prized by them, and by the network, by exemplifying in the extreme what is not valued. They then use it as device to present themselves in direct contrast with it which serves to further emphasise their worth, credentials and contributions. The stereotype draws upon commonly held notions of a bad board member that exist in wider society. The cultural elite distance themselves from any possible accusations that they are like this by maligning people who are. As they are making criticisms of other people they are simultaneously declaring that they are not like this, otherwise they would not be able or willing to detect and berate these faults in others. This can then be used as further justification by them for their occupation of their privileged positions, they unlike some unspecified others, deserve to be there.

The typical board member is described as being an older retired male:

Traditional in this sense it means men between fifty and seventy who are semi or fully retired, you know, that's the norm without a shadow of a doubt. (Annette Cook)

They are also seen as people who occupy the same roles for years. They do not step down, move on or retire and this can be a problem “I think you can go on too long. People can become caricatures” (Christine Wall). The result of such continued involvement is that they lose respect within the network. The bad board member is also portrayed as being motivated by the wrong and selfish reasons:

I’m not an individual who will go along and just sort of, you know, collect board memberships just for the sake of being seen to be on certain things. (Gareth Morris)

Holding these positions is a way of being part of society (Ostrower, 1998) and so they are interested in the social status and standing in the network that they will gain from occupying these roles. The other element of this is that chair and vice-chair positions are typically accompanied by a salary, and although this can be seen as actually encouraging wider participation, it also has perceived drawbacks:

If you don't pay it can be classified as divisive as some people can afford to give their time for free whereas others can't and so it might encourage you to apply if you're paid for it. The downside of course is that it can then be seen as a bit of a gravy train which I think is unfortunate. (Phillip Smith)

Bad board members, therefore, are motivated by the financial aspect of these roles and will only take these types of positions if they receive a salary for them "A lot of people don't take chairs unless they get paid" (Bronwyn Powell).

The result of this is that people will apply for positions because of the money and not because they are interested or skilled in this area "You see so many people applying for public appointments with no experience, expertise, knowledge because it's a paid appointment" (Annette Cook). This is the final element to the stereotype; the bad board member does not have the necessary knowledge. This was experienced by one interviewee when she went on a commission which was looking at gender equality:

I felt with some of them it could have been a meat and livestock commission, it was a public appointment you know, and that completely gobsmacked me I thought, you know, you must be obsessed with and thereby know a bit about it to be on it ... They were largely quite wealthy women who sat on committees, you know, that was what they did. They tried very hard and so on but in my own view didn't get it really. (Kathryn Jones)

These women sit on committees because it is simply what they do. It is part of their lifestyle and a way in which they fill their time because being well-off means they do not need to work in paid employment. The consequence of this is that they lack the necessary specific knowledge that she herself has. Some of the interviewees acknowledge that, whereas

previously specific knowledge and expertise were not necessarily needed to run organisations, it is now:

No longer the pursuit of gentlemen or academics and so on it really requires quite significant amount of decision-taking which is not easy. (Phillip Smith)

In the past being an intellectual was qualification enough (Bauman, 1989) but now a new breed of expert is needed (Rose, 1999) somebody with the right qualifications, rather than simply being a traditional candidate and this shift has been witnessed in the British Senior Civil Service (Du Gay, 2008). This means that being a board member is seen as being difficult and complex “It’s not at all easy being a trustee” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies) and as a role which entails more skill than it would first appear “I do think that active good committee membership is much more than kind of talking heads around the table” (Gwen Griffiths). The bad board member lacks the necessary abilities, expertise and knowledge, and does not dedicate the mental energy to it that it requires:

I wouldn’t call it in any way a sinecure or something you do on the wing. It demands considerable attention and dedication to the interests of the organisation. You can’t do that sleepwalking. (Mark West)

To an outsider, these types of positions may appear simple and straightforward, as being little more than turning up for a board meeting once a month, but the cultural elite, using this stereotype as reference point, go to great lengths to argue that there is much more to it than this and a person can only be effective in these types of roles if they have the right motivations and credentials, which they themselves possess.

## **Part II: Profile**

### **I never really retired**

The perceived stereotype of a board member is somebody who is semi or fully retired and for many of my sample, who were older, this was the case (as shown in Table 1) because this is



an element to the profile of a bad board member the interviewees for whom this applies work hard to justify this and to set themselves out as different from a typical retired person, who is seen as just seeking something to do in order to occupy their time. One way in which they do this is to claim that they were actually intending to retire, but then as the time approached other roles were unexpectedly offered to them, so a job offer “came a little quicker than I anticipated and so I never really retired” (Matthew Hughes) and “other things have intervened. That’s how life goes” (Mark West) and:

I hadn’t really planned it and so I had looked forward to being a kind of retired person ... but now I am doing that job on top of everything else. (Gwen Griffiths)

They state that their intentions were to stop, that they were even looking forward to this, but actually now they are even busier than before but that they cannot be held responsible for this as it even took themselves by surprise. The result is that many are still working, often in more than one role, past the official retirement age for their generation (sixty-five for men and sixty for women) “Which took me to seventy and then I was asked to do another year” (Phillip Smith) and:

I did say that I was going to completely reduce my commitments outside Wales by the time I was seventy ... but I’m now seventy-one and I will, by the time I’m seventy-five, I’m determined that I will have dropped pretty well everything. (Christine Wall)

She asserts that she was planning to reduce her commitments (note not to stop completely) but as this has been unsuccessful she has set a new target for herself to end her involvement with most things, but once again not everything. Her participation will continue in some capacity which will enable her to remain in the network as an influential member. It is the case that the cultural elite are unwilling to retire (and this and the reasons for this are discussed further in the following chapter).

Holding positions in retirement is further legitimised by them with the argument that it was only in retirement that they were able to take on these various roles, as it was not possible for

them to do so before if they had a very demanding day job or because of the possibility of competing interests:

I wanted to retire so I could do other things ... at my time of life I really needed the opportunity to do other things while there was still some time. (Phillip Smith)

Retirement is viewed as being the beginning of a new career as a professional board member. It is not a time to take it easy and relax, rather an opportunity for them to utilise their skills and knowledge that they have accumulated in their previous working life. They are still highly capable, interested and motivated and so want to channel this to help other organisations in the cultural sector. Retirement, therefore, is talked about as the start of something, rather than the end of a career. This is accompanied with the sense that it involves a new method of working, one which requires even greater effort and commitment on their part:

I had to teach myself when I retired to do emails and to actually, to do all my own word processing, write my own lectures, and all of that. All of which had been done for me. So it's a very different way of working ... you feel very much more in control. (Christine Wall)

She is now solely responsible for her work and so in 'official' retirement she has developed her skills and learnt new things. Rather than using this time in life to slow her output she reports actually enjoying the challenge of doing more, and as she has been successful at this, her continued involvement in retirement is justified. She makes use of modern information technology, as does Phillip Smith:

I did start tinkering with email and everything but in retirement you have to do lots of things like that. It's good for you, at least that's what they tell me' (*laughs*) (Phillip Smith)

He makes a joke out of this and the idea that as a member of the older generation he now needs to adapt to different ways of working which includes sending emails (he also uses a Blackberry mobile phone). Although he plays this down by describing it as 'tinkering' he is presenting himself as being flexible and capable.

## **A fresh pair of eyes**

Another aspect of the stereotype of a board member is that they hold the same position for too long and do not move on. They want to do the maximum time possible within the same organisation:

I guess a lot of them come in hoping that they'll do two terms plus an extension. Whereas I came in very clearly and spoke to the CEO and the staff and said look I'm going to do three years, which is my term and if we can make real progress in three years who knows? That might be it. If I feel I've done as much as I can I'll happily stand down. (Annette Cook)

She is directly comparing herself with 'a lot of them' meaning bad board members who want to hold these chair positions for as long as they can, whereas she says she only wants to continue her involvement if she is still being useful and beneficial to the organisation. The contrast is also made with how things functioned in the past, this is similar to the way that they discuss how appointments were previously made, using the notion that the system is an improvement. It is better and fairer because it operates on clearer and shorter fixed terms:

You do two years and then you get another two years for good behaviour and then you're off. So that sounds good to me. It used not to be like that. We've just said goodbye to someone who's been on it for fifteen years or something. So this is a new radical system. (Kathryn Jones)

In the past people were able to hold the same board positions for as long as they wanted but now they are expected to move on after a specified amount of time. She presents herself as being in favour of this new system and liking the fact she will be on the board for a fixed time, although this can be extended, but only up to a point. This strategy of reporting that they like fixed terms is used frequently. They say that they are happy to stand down from their positions when their time is due "That was my term. It's finished. It's quite long enough to be doing a job" (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). Having done four years as a trustee she sees it as correct that she should move on, but this is unsurprising considering the fact that she did not have a choice in the matter. One interviewee was asked to continue his role as chair of an arts board for another term:

They asked me to continue my chairmanship, I did four years, for another three years because seven is the maximum and I told them that I wasn't going to do that ... in appointing me as chairman again they lacked ambition. (Graham Johnson)

He does not only subscribe to short terms in principle but demonstrates this commitment in practice by declining the offer of an extension, while signaling that he was effective in this role otherwise they would not have wanted him to continue in it. He is presenting himself as a person who is not acting for his own self-interest but one who unselfishly puts the welfare of the organisation first. He believes that it should change, grow and develop.

The cultural elite support the principle of fixed terms by arguing that it is important for the health of the organisation to have different people or “new blood” (Kathryn Jones) involved because:

There's a danger that if you've got the same hand on the till with all the same prejudices and vices and all the rest of it that, you know, you're stuck. You need a change. (Phillip Smith)

In order for an organisation to evolve then the leadership team needs to keep changing so that it does not stagnate. This is used to justify why they liked fixed terms:

You have to give way for new people to come in. I think people should move on and you need new people because however good your ideas might be when you initially get on to something new after a while you get in to a routine and you don't produce the sort of new stuff that you should, that people on boards should produce, and I think your contribution tends to slow. (Andrew Band)

He portrays board members as people who should make worthwhile and meaningful contributions this, therefore, requires a lot of thought, commitment and dedication on their part but he also argues that people on the boards should keep changing so that the organisation is frequently being injected with new ideas and perspectives.

It is seen as particularly important to have a new board when a new organisation is set up, rather than having one that is left over from its predecessor:

They need a fresh pair of eyes. I think, when you start a new body, I think it's important that you actually have new people. If you have the old guard on the new body they're going to have the same perspectives invariably of the old organisation and they're going to want to bring those perspectives into that new organisation. I don't think that's healthy. (Gareth Morris)

In a similar way to Graham Johnson he is demonstrating his commitment to fixed terms by standing down when the board of an organisation that he was on merged with another to create a new one. The health and welfare of the organisation is his priority so new input is valued over the contributions of the 'old guard'. This argument is reiterated from the other perspective of describing the advantage of becoming a new member of an already existing board:

I had just joined then and I was as it were a fresh boy on the block and I could see perhaps a little more clearly than those who were currently involved in the organisation's activities what needed to be done. And it's easier if you're standing on the sidelines, if you like, and then coming onto the field, to give renewed energy to the task, so I drove that. (Mark West)

Being a new member of a board is described in positive terms and echoes the previous sentiments of freshness. It allowed him not only a greater clarity of thinking but meant that he himself could be a force for change. This is used to explain how he was able to take control and be the one in the driving seat in order to help secure the future of his organisation.

The cultural elite subscribe to a system of fixed terms, just as they support the idea of appointments being made through a fair and transparent system, but their own experiences are often rather different from this. Numerous positions that they either currently hold or have held in the past have been for a long period of time and this has been made possible because board memberships can be renewed or extended. This has benefited them so "Luckily I did ten years but I kept getting extended" (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). This means that they are still able to occupy the same role for a significant amount of time "The initial appointment was over a period of seven years. That's expired and they've asked me to stand in for another

seven” (Matthew Hughes). The fact that boards want to keep them as members serves to show their value and importance to the organisations, otherwise they would not keep getting extended “I’d been renewed on the board three times, because normally people did three years and I’d done eleven years” (Andrew Band). This directly contradicts the philosophy of only staying somewhere for a short time as being in the best interests of the organisation.

The interviewees explain and justify their continued involvement with the same organisation by saying that they have tried to leave, but they have actually ended up staying for the sake of the organisation (not for themselves). This also serves to reiterate that the contributions that they make are valued and important ones. So while they say that they have tried to step down “I’ve offered to go many times” (Mark West) their involvement continues. Similarly Kathryn Jones says:

I tried to resign (*laughs*) last year when the chair was leaving. I thought I would whip out in his slipstream but the new person that was going to be the new chair had to delay taking it on so I still seem to be there. (Kathryn Jones)

She tried to leave but due to circumstances outside of her control she has not been able to. The inference is that without her leadership during this time of upheaval the organisation would have floundered, but as she is still there this suggests that she is not really fully committed to going. She also talks about another board which she has actually managed to leave:

I’ve just come off it because I seemed to be on it for years and years and there didn’t seem to be a way of coming off it so I resigned in the end. I would say I started off just as an individual being involved in these things and some of them it’s been quite difficult to escape from (*laughs*) having got signed up. (Kathryn Jones)

This type of position is a throwback to the old system, one in which there were no fixed terms. She describes her involvement in these type of roles as being something that just happened and she is not quite sure how. While this is being self-deprecating about the level of expertise that she has to offer, and shows how recruitment can be informal in nature, it also

further re-emphasises her position as a core member of the elite because she does not have to exert great effort in order to achieve these positions, it is in fact harder for her to get off them. Their experiences of being asked to stay mirror how they talk about being asked to take on certain jobs (discussed in the previous chapter) using the language of being ‘persuaded’ to do things, with its connotations of being so important that other people will put large amounts of effort in to trying to prevent them from leaving:

When I came to sixty-five and retirement the pressure was on to carry on ... The chair said he wouldn’t carry on if I didn’t carry on (*laughs*). Nobody threatened to punch me on the nose but there were strong words, even at my farewell do ... the Assembly Members said there’s still time to change your mind and my successor was actually there. It wasn’t entirely comfortable. (*laughs*) (Phillip Smith)

He enjoys telling this story, one which serves to exemplify how much he was valued, because the chair of the organisation and the AMs wanted him to continue as chief executive, even when his successor had been appointed. While this might suggest that official appointment processes can be negotiated to suit those in power, it also shows how relationships are maintained in the network, as this could have easily just been rhetoric. This level of flattery will then facilitate any future involvement that they may have with one another, which is itself likely because even though he retired from this job, he certainly did not retire from the network.

When the cultural elite do eventually step down from positions that they hold this does not mean the end of their relationship with their organisations. They often continue their involvement in some other capacity. This can either take the form of being given an official title. One interviewee describes how she stopped being chair but instead took on the role of president of that organisation:

I was getting to the stage when, again, succession, somebody younger needed to take over and it was suggested that I become, someone asked me if they could nominate me as president so I became president ... the president is not a member of the board but attends the board and doesn’t have a vote. (Bronwyn Powell)

Her role has changed and she no longer has a vote on the board but she still attends the meetings, in the same way that she always has. Although she recognises that there needed to be a change for the benefit of the organisation, her continued involvement with them is also an asset because of her years of experience and her kudos. Sustained participation can also take place through much more informal channels, so that a relationship continues which is characterised as being:

An arms-length relationship with them. Arms-length from my point of view not from theirs at all because often the chief executive will ring me and say put your chair's hat back on for a moment and think how you'd cope with this. What would your advice be? ... It keeps you in touch as it were while you've handed on the reins to other people to carry on the work. (Matthew Hughes)

He is at a relative distance away but his knowledge and expertise are still required and called upon. This is made possible because of the personal connections that exist in the network and the use of the private phone call which facilitates the secret sharing of advice.

Involvement, in various forms, can continue with their past organisations but even when elites do actually vacate a position they frequently do so having another one already lined up to go to and often there is some degree of overlap in the timing of these. This adds to the explanation for why they hold multiple positions concurrently:

I stopped being president and then I was immediately asked to chair another board. I've only just got rid of that and I was just getting rid of that when I was asked to do another presidency. (Christine Wall)

She presents herself as somebody who is in constant demand and this is phrased almost as an inconvenience, something to be 'got rid of' but despite this she is obviously willing to take on more and so this suggests that she does enjoy occupying these high profile positions. The bad board member stays with the same organisation for too long and the cultural elite position themselves as opposed to this, stressing the need to move on for the health of the organisation. In reality they do tend to occupy the same roles for lengthy periods of time and



so they justify this by saying they are really needed and are of actual benefit. Valuing the change that is brought about by fixed terms means that the network is portrayed as a dynamic one and one in which people do move on from organisations. However, they move on to other positions within the network and this helps to explain the characteristic of the cultural elite as people who have held multiple positions within the network and why the network itself is dense and overlapping. Having new people sit on boards, does not mean new people from outside the network, rather it means people who already hold other positions within it.

### **No ideas of pulling the ladder**

Board members are typically male and it is the case that women are in the minority on these arts boards. The reason given by the female interviewees for the gender imbalance is the discrimination that women face. They identify this as being the reason why they have not achieved certain positions. One interviewee recalls a job interview where the only other candidate was a male. He was given the job over her despite her belief that she was the better candidate and she felt very angry about this:

I was very cross about that. I remember the clerk to the committee running down Edward VII Avenue after me saying 'I hope you're not too disappointed, they loved you, they thought you were wonderful' and I said 'I didn't want them to love me, I wanted them to appoint me.' But I think that that was the last time I ever experienced any discrimination against me because I was female. (Christine Wall)

Although this affected her progression at this point in time, which was early on in her career, this incident did not have a detrimental impact overall on the success that she would later enjoy and she sees her gender as no longer being an issue for her. Other women still perceive that their gender can negatively impact on how quickly they are able to develop their career:

I saw some other, mainly men, being promoted and I thought hang on I'm not happy about this because I know that my work is as good as theirs. (Annette Cook)

Men are seen to have an advantage and benefit from being able to move up the career ladder quicker and easier, even though their work is of the same standard.

Being female can not only disadvantage candidates when it comes to achieving appointments but can also negatively impact on their experiences of sitting on boards. Being in the minority can result in having to deal with the sexist attitudes and behaviour of male members. One interviewee, the only female on the board, had to endure offensive comments such as:

He once said that he thinks it's disgusting that women should be on the board because how can they give up time to come to meetings all over Wales when they have children? (Bethan Price)

The use of the word 'disgusting' is a particularly strong one, showing the scale of his contempt for women being in these positions of power. The implication being that it is a woman's role to look after any children that they might have, and that all women will be at a disadvantage by this, which ignores the fact that some women choose not to have children. She was also told:

I remember my boss once told me 'You're second in command but I can't give you that title because you're a woman' ... tongue in cheek but it was correct ... because when I was preparing reports and everything for the executive board they would always thank the chief exec even though my name was on it, it was like 'She typed it up for him' and I always felt like 'You're not taking this seriously' and if I'd been a man then they wouldn't have thought I'd just typed the thing up. (Bethan Price)

As a female she is automatically placed in an administrative position only capable of typing something up, rather than possessing the expertise and knowledge which has enabled her to actually write it herself. It is attributed to the chief executive, who is male, and so he receives the praise that should rightly be hers. Not only is this frustrating and upsetting but it has also affected her career progression, as she cannot be given the title of the role that she is actually competently fulfilling and yet the chief executive feels that it is acceptable to joke about this with her. He is, therefore, acknowledging that the organisation is a sexist one while showing that he will not act to change it in order to benefit her and the other women within it.

For the women in my sample their involvement on boards is one where they are in the definite minority and this makes their experiences different to their male counterparts. One interviewee is, once again, the only female on an otherwise male board:

It's very male dominated but I've got as much influence there as any of them, if not more on occasions, and so I don't get hung up about things like that. Sometimes being initially the token woman you can turn to your advantage really and sometimes we can be too kind of precious about opportunities because we see them as being tokenistic, whereas it's better to get your feet under the table and try and change things from within than it is to moan from the sidelines. (Annette Cook)

She identifies herself as the token woman but she sees this as a position that she can use to her advantage, and for the benefit of women generally, in order to change the organisation from within, especially as being the only female can be sometimes used to her advantage. According to her, women should use these positions to drive change. This is born out by the experience of another female interviewee:

I was the token woman for about eighteen years, until I nagged and nagged, and said we must have more women. So now we've got three more, which is great but I notice the thing has grown in size as well, so they're still in a very small minority but it's very good to have more women on it. (Kathryn Jones)

She also sees herself as being the token woman and so she is there in order for the organisation to be seen to have a female on its board. She reports how she has used this to help open up membership of the board to more woman and she sees this very much as her own personal achievement. She describes achieving this by 'nagging', while this suggests both confidence and persistence on her part, it falls back on stereotypes of what women supposedly do. She is not satisfied, however, and sees a need for more women to be involved as equality is still a long way off.

Being the token woman on a board, therefore, can also be seen as an advantageous position to be in. One interviewee believes being female "was marginally an advantage because you were unusual ... It's helped. I'm sure it has" (Christine Wall). In an otherwise male arena

being a woman has served to distinguish her. This is acknowledged by other female interviewees and is used to add another dimension to their concept of a 'bad' board member. While this is portrayed as a sexist male, or at least a male who does nothing to change the institutional sexism of their organisation, they also create the image of a bad female board member. This is an elite woman who does not use her power and influence to benefit other women. The interviewees present themselves in direct contrast with this so that they have:

No ideas of pulling the ladder behind me. I think some women, when they get more experienced, quite like men around them because they can be the one and only woman which is an advantageous place to be sometimes. I have no interests in that.  
(Gwen Griffiths)

The bad female board member, having secured a top position, then helps to prevent other women getting where they are because they enjoy being 'unique' as this can be personally profitable. Being the sole female is identified as only being enjoyed when women have experience, suggesting that things are very different for those women at the core of the network compared to those on the periphery. Once women have succeeded in the network and exist at its core, their gender becomes less of an issue for them because "By now I'm too old, I've done too much. Nobody asks the question anymore. It's easy. But it's been there" (Gwen Griffiths). While she acknowledges that discrimination and sexism were something she had to endure when she was younger, and on the periphery, over time she has built up a reputation as a competent and trusted member of the network and so this ceases to be as relevant for her personally. Again, this shows the advantage of being in the network for a long period of time. Once at the core they see themselves as using their roles to help transform organisations, and consequently society:

I think once any of us get a senior role, whatever that role is, we've got a responsibility to actually challenge the elite, the conventional groups and say 'Look what are you doing about this?' and speak out because we're in a fairly protected position as people who hold responsibilities and we've got status that comes with it, so you've got to use it to the advantage of other people not just use it for yourself. I actually would be critical of women in these roles as well. A lot of women who have been promoted to senior roles who then don't kind of see a responsibility to other

younger women who come in behind them. (Annette Cook)

Elite women are seen as having a duty to other women and to challenge any biases in the system. This requires them to be confident and unafraid to speak out in order to use their position of advantage to help to benefit others, revealing the altruistic element of being a member of the cultural elite (which will become a reoccurring theme throughout the rest of this thesis). It also illustrates once again how the network functions, the senior people at the core and those at the periphery 'who come in behind'. The good board member should assist women on the periphery to make it to the core.

For women, therefore, the concept of a bad board member is complex. They are keen to distance themselves from the image of a woman who does not act to benefit other women. They provide numerous examples to confirm that this is not how they behave and to show that they assist other women in the network. One way they report to doing this is by acting as role models for other women so the fact that they have achieved these high status positions, and in some cases have been the first women to do so, means that other women can see that it is possible for them to do this and so can aspire to this for themselves:

I was the first woman ever to take sort of any role in that and I was delighted ...it was quite an event because we'd never been there before. It broke the ceiling ... I think it's right that women are seen to be in a place where there's some decisions being made and there's some influence. (Bronwyn Powell)

This also means that once in these positions they can make sure that the views of women are always considered, so during board meetings they can represent the rest of their sex:

All the time I could make sure that women were on the agenda ... I did feel that I could be a voice for women and I hope that I actually achieved something like that because I was never afraid to speak up and to say what I felt. (Bronwyn Powell)

This required her to be confident in order to speak out in these male-dominated environments, but she identifies this as her role. Making these contributions was her duty as an elite female.

One clearly visible and measurable way that women can act to help other women in the network is to appoint other women to positions within their organisations. One female chair was reporting doing this “The chief executive that I was able to appoint seven years later was a woman, the finance director was a woman, the head of operations was a woman” (Gwen Griffiths). This is actively promoting other women, but this can be met with hostility from men in the network:

They said ‘Oh the women are taking over’ ... I did make quite a lot of female appointments ... in fact at one point people used to start making reference to the sisterhood and I became called the mother superior. But in fact, if they were as good as the men, or better than the men, certainly they would be appointed. (Christine Wall)

She stresses that she was not appointing them solely because they were women but because of their talent. While this was made light of and turned into a joke, having women in these type of positions usually reserved for men is threatening to the status quo and to the traditional candidate. She firmly places herself at the head of this, she is the ‘mother superior’ once again reiterating her status in the network. The same interviewee also tells a story of an incident that happened when she was sitting on a committee that was making a very high profile appointment. One of the candidates was a female with young children:

This other woman on the committee said ‘Well chairman can I make it plain straight away that I wouldn’t appoint that woman’ she said ‘I’ve got small children and I couldn’t do that job’ and I said ‘Chairman, unless you totally disregard those remarks I will have to leave.’ Anyway we appointed her. (Christine Wall)

This anecdote is used to confirm that she is a female who will act on behalf of other women and to show that she is an extremely confident individual, as she spoke her mind and actually threatened to leave. It simultaneously presents an example of a bad female board member, one who can prevent women rising through the ranks, as they themselves have done. She enjoys the punch line of this story, not only did she defend the female candidate’s honour but they actually appointed her to the position.

### **Part III: Motivations**

#### **An area which I care about**

Members of the cultural elite claim that they are motivated by the morally right reasons as opposed to selfishly wanting to better their own position, both socially and financially, as bad board members do. They turn away from what they describe as “just hobnobbing” (Bronwyn Powell) and say that they are “not in to drink and socialising. I’d rather be doing things” (Colin Wilson). They are reporting to not being interested in simply enjoying the social elements of the network, rather they prefer to be seen as an effective and instrumental member within it. They also stress that they are not motivated by money. One interviewee says that she will not do consultancy work, even though:

They’ll pay so much for it and I think, I just have more integrity than an awful lot of my colleagues ... I’m not ever going to make much money but that’s not, that’s fine.  
(Susan Hodson)

She recognises that for other people their motivation is the wage that they receive but she positions herself as much more morally upright than this, at a financial cost to herself. These sentiments were expressed by a male interviewee “If like me, you’re interested in doing things that don’t make you money, but are interesting” (Graham Johnson). The interviewees are keen to provide concrete examples of their altruism. One interviewee talked about how she had taken on the position of chair of one board even though it is unpaid:

That’s something that I do in a voluntary role ... it’s just ridiculous for me to think, I’ve just got to chair a meeting, it’s down the road from me, to do a little bit of work with them that I should be paid because I love it. (Bronwyn Powell)

Her motivation is the enjoyment that she gets from doing this. She also demeans her contribution so it is easy because she lives in close proximity, it is only ‘a little bit of work’ and it is ‘just’ chairing a meeting. This simultaneously serves to present herself as a true elite as she has been the chair of so many organisations, some of which are international bodies,

that chairing meetings has become the mundane and something which is well within her capabilities and so it would be ‘ridiculous’ for her to be asked to be paid for doing this.

Another way in which they present their motivations as not being financial in nature is by justifying the positions that they have taken which have actually commanded a very good salary. They do this by claiming that they did not realise that this was the case until after they had accepted the position, so making it impossible that the wage could have been the incentive. One interviewee talked about she had taken a very long time to decide whether she wanted one particular position that had been offered to her, much to the surprise of the other people on the board:

They were all very amused because I’d taken so long. What I hadn’t realised was that it actually pays very very well indeed ... and I hadn’t realised that this, this job would pay me quite handsomely compared to anything else I’d ever had. (Christine Wall)

She claims to have taken so long to accept the position because she was deciding whether it was an ethical and worthwhile venture to support, so clearly presenting herself as not a self-serving individual. This is emphasised by her also stating that the other things that she has done in her career have not been so well-paid implying that her motivations over her lifetime have never been of the financial kind. Similarly a male interviewee explains how he negotiated his salary as chairman in one of his previous roles:

Somewhat to my surprise in fact when I became chairman ... I was asked how many days I thought it would take and they suggested it would take two days a week and that I should be paid £300 a day, now, work that out, something like £30,000 or more a year. I was completely taken aback by this and I said in fact I didn’t think it would take two days a week anyway and I thought £300 was too much, I mean bit silly, but in the end I said make it £250 and only for the days that I work. (Phillip Smith)

He describes how he accepted the position without first knowing the salary and when a large amount was suggested to him it was ‘to his surprise’ and he was ‘taken aback’ by this. Money could not, therefore, be his motivation and this is confirmed in the anecdote when he opts for



a lower rate of pay, one which he made sure that he only received for the actual time that he worked, as this is the morally right thing to do.

Members of the cultural elite are keen to emphasise that they, unlike bad board members, do not pursue roles for the money or kudos that they can bring them. Instead they present themselves as being motivated by purely unselfish reasons because they genuinely care about the organisations and working to sustain and grow the cultural sector in Wales. The word 'care' is frequently employed "A project that I care about has got me on the case still" (Susan Hodson). They, therefore, take positions which are unpaid for this very reason "That was unpaid but it linked to all the things that I'd been, that I'd cared about in my life" (Gwen Griffiths) and it helps them decide which organisations that they will get involved with "That's the only kind of role I would be interested in. Something where I feel it's important, you know, an area which I care about" (Annette Cook). They care because culture is important to them as individuals and the role and value culture has in their lives is discussed further in the next chapter.

### **I love going in and fixing things**

As the interviewees talk about what motivates them to get involved with projects that they feel personally connected to they create an image of a good board member, and reveal what they think involvement with organisations should be based upon. A good board member is a fixer. They are motivated by the correct altruistic reasons and want to be involved with things that they can actually be of help and benefit to. This is constructed in direct contrast with the idea of the bad board member, who pursues roles just for the sake of being seen to have another board membership:

I want to see, you always want some improvement, building something, creating something. I think that's what makes life interesting whereas just coming to the office

and making a bit more money and then going off to a golf club or something I don't find very appealing ... I have absolutely no ambition to be on lots of committees doing nothing. (Colin Wilson)

He is declaring that for him it is not about the money or the social aspects and coasting along easily through life. He wants to be doing things, achieving things, having an impact and being of value to any organisation that he works with. Similar to the explanation of the involvement of American philanthropists, one who saw her motivation being because 'I cannot stand inefficiency. I like things to work' (Odendahl, 1990, p.110). These are the motivations and attributes which characterise a fixer.

The image of a fixer is someone who actually cares about the organisations and ventures that they are part of and they only want to be involved if they can see that they can be of some benefit so they claim that "I wouldn't be here if I didn't think I was helping" (Mark West). This is why it is important that fixers have skills and expertise so that they are equipped to be of real use. This concept of being somebody who can actually make a significant difference is seen as being a key component to being a fixer "It's a case of whether I can actually help and make a difference" (Gareth Morris). They do not want to help to simply maintain the status quo rather they want to make a big impression upon the cultural landscape. One interviewee talks about how she was described by someone else in the network as being:

'Someone who makes things happen' and I thought that's very nice. Thank you. That will do me nicely, but that has come because I choose to go where I think I can make a difference ... I wouldn't be interested in just helping something tick along. (Susan Hodson)

Being a person who has impact and who can bring about positive change is an important part of her self-concept and it is also the reputation that she has secured for herself within the network, so that she is seen as an instrumental component of it. The interviewees talk about how they have been the purveyors of change for their organisations so they have been responsible for "Changing the course of the cultural ocean liner as I call it, knowing you have

really prepared it for a safe haven in future years” (Matthew Hughes). The difference that he has made is described as being monumental in nature, although not easy, he sees that he has been able to have a lasting influence and legacy on the culture sector in Wales. Being able to help an organisation to make real progress on a large scale is valued and is part and parcel of the responsibility of being a fixer so that “I ought to stick with them and be of use, be of as much help as I can be to, to make them make a big leap forward” (Susan Hodson). In order to make a difference in this way fixers must be practical people and the interviewees, therefore, stress this about themselves “I’m very much more a hands on person” (Christine Wall) and “I’m the sort of person who wants to get their hands into it and do something. I’m a doer” (Bronwyn Powell) so they will be able to make useful and tangible contributions to the organisations that they work with.

Fixers are people who enjoy making a difference and solving problems, particularly in areas where there are significant difficulties:

That’s a place at the moment where, which is broken, it’s in a bad place ... I’ve spent the last six months, trying to fix it and I’m winning now ... I love going in and fixing things. (Graham Johnson)

In the descriptions of the troubles that they have had to face they typically call upon the use of the language of conflict and catastrophe in order to emphasise the enormity and scale of these so they were “having difficulties, there was a tussle there” (Phillip Smith) and “There was an almighty crisis” (Mark West) and “Then suddenly the heavens caved in. It was terrible” (Gwen Griffiths) and “We’re going through some turbulence” (Martin Sweet). This serves to exemplify the hard and difficult tasks that they are faced with in their roles and the fact that they have ultimately triumphed. This sets them up as heroes. This is further emphasised by them saying that not only are they able to fix difficult problems but that they

actually enjoy doing this. When they look back at their career this is one of the things that has inspired and motivated them:

The challenge of course, the challenge was the thing, was something I wanted to do and ... I thoroughly enjoyed doing. I really did and yes it was a huge challenge.  
(Martin Sweet)

Challenges are regarded as providing them with the opportunity to really test, stretch and prove themselves:

I quite enjoyed the challenges of chairing committees and making big changes ... it was a body which faced considerable challenges and I would regard this as one of the things I look back on with a degree of satisfaction. (Phillip Smith)

They enjoy being able to fix something which is difficult to repair, further demonstrating their skills and expertise and value to the network and society. 'A degree of satisfaction' is a deliberate understatement of how much they relish these opportunities and the pride it allows them to feel. Embarking on a challenge, therefore, remains the driving force behind where a fixer will go next in the network "I'm always looking forward to the next challenge" (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). She is indicating that she is still as motivated and talented a fixer as she ever was.

One way for an individual to be seen to be making an obvious difference to the cultural landscape of Wales is to start up a new initiative, committee or organisation. The change they have made can be easily measured as something exists that previously did not and this process also brings with it its own set of unique challenges. This involvement with the beginning of things is recognised as being a familiar motif throughout their careers "So I set that up" (Aled Parry) and "I was involved in setting it up" (Rhiannon Evans-Davies) and "Nobody had ever set this up in Wales before" (Christine Wall) and "Most of the stuff I got involved with was starting things up and trying to make them successful" (Aled Parry) and "That again was great because again it was setting something up from scratch which was, the

experience I'd already had in my previous role" (Christine Wall). It provides a way that their success can be easily recognised and as members of the elite core these type of achievements have allowed them to increase their credentials. This then serves as one of the reasons why they are asked to set up other things, they have been judged as capable of doing this so they are a trusted pair of hands. Just as they report enjoying a challenge, they enjoy the challenge of setting things up "What do I look back on and think were the best things in that period? Creating the thing from scratch" (Phillip Smith). This is particularly rewarding and satisfying for them and can become the motivating force behind what they decide to do and which jobs they take:

The other person had barely done six months so I could kind of, I could make it my own and that is definitely, in a way you might say it was by accident but it becomes the driving decision for me of where I go. I want to make things that I think are really good projects land. (Susan Hodson)

She could make the position and project her own. She embodied it and so all its successes could be clearly attributed to her.

Fixers are not be perturbed by difficulty, rather they are constantly challenging themselves further and pushing their organisations "You're always aiming for something, you can always improve what you're doing and make it bigger" (Colin Wilson). They are ambitious and so one interviewee believes:

You have to have unreasonable ambition. If you just have an incremental approach to life you're not going to be high-performing. You're just going to mosey along. (Gareth Morris)

A fixer sets themselves big goals and this provides them with a constant challenge of always trying to achieve more so they are not just 'moseying along'. They want to have real purpose and so do not just want to sustain the mundane "It had challenges when I came in ... that was fine, but the on-going bureaucracy didn't appeal to me" (Phillip Smith). They lose interest when they have effectively 'fixed' the problem:

Once I've done something I'm happy to get out and let somebody else run it, once it's smooth, because it's nice putting things right and that's quite enjoyable and it's a challenge and you learn all sorts of new things all the time whereas if you just go on having put something right then it's plain sailing. It gets boring. (Colin Wilson)

Making a difference in this way is exciting and worthwhile. A bad board member may be happy to sit on a board of an organisation which faces no challenges or difficulties, for the status and the salary it brings, but a fixer will leave to go somewhere else which requires their skills and expertise. This fits with their argument that board members should move on from organisations and not stay in the same role for too long.

## **Part IV: Qualities and Attributes**

### **Having the knowledge: It keeps the marbles turning over**

While the stereotypical image of a board member is of a person who lacks the skills and knowledge required to fill these roles effectively the interviewees present themselves in direct contrast with this. They are individuals who give a large amount of thought and attention to the matters concerning their organisations “You know just thinking, thinking is a very important part of my job” (Stephen Owen) and “It keeps the marbles turning over” (Matthew Hughes). This enables them to make really useful and valuable contributions and this is something which they say matters a great deal to them, because they have the skills and expertise their involvement can be a real asset. This can be in the form of what they have learnt during their career:

Particularly using my professional knowledge, which I've done on all the committees I've been on, to help the organisation concerned ... It was my expertise and knowing how far you could go ... that happened frequently. So I knew I was of value. (Andrew Band)

Having this knowledge to share on boards can also be used as justification for their continued involvement with organisations “I'm still interested. And I'm still probably, on the board, am the person most experienced ... I've still got the knowledge” (Bronwyn Powell). So although

she is older she is justifying the fact that she has not retired yet because she 'still' has the right qualifications to be a valuable asset to the board, partly due to the fact that she has so many years of experience behind her. Members of the cultural elite regard being knowledgeable as very important so this then also influences what type of position that they will take on, unlike a bad board member who will seek out any role regardless of the skill set required to do it "For me it's about doing something that I can offer expertise in" (Annette Cook). She recognises that she does have expertise and so it is right that she should concentrate her time and effort on the areas where she can utilise this.

### **Giving the time: There's nothing heroic about coming to the office at six in the morning**

These positions, therefore, require dedicating a great deal of thought to them and this takes time and energy, whereas, the bad board member does not commit enough time to their pursuits the interviewees stress how hard they work, and the amount of time that is taken up by their paid employment and the board positions that they hold within the cultural sector. The interviewees who occupy full-time jobs, for example chief executives, work long hours so it is "a twelve hour a day job and twelve hours across the weekend" (Phillip Smith) and often sit on other boards as well. This fills their day:

My day starts early. I mean today I was on my computer at eight until about 9.30am, sorting out a few articles, back and forth with people, sorting out my emails, and then I come into work. Typically if I'm not going out in the evening, like I was speaking at two functions last week in the evening, after dinner type of things. If I don't go to something like that then I tend to leave work at seven and I get home and have dinner and then work until the *News at Ten*. (Aled Parry)

He illustrates his industriousness by describing a typical working day for him. It consists of him communicating with people in the network even before his official day job begins and it also importantly includes networking and attending events in the evening, this is a part of his role, the opportunity to develop connections which will then help him to do business. This also reveals his prominence in the cultural sphere as he does not just attend these functions,

but is actually invited to speak at them. Expressing that they work very long hours, that encompass working from dawn to dusk is common:

It is long hours. Quite often I'm in the office at six in the morning and sometimes I don't finish until eight or nine in the evening. I take work home with me sometimes. But there's nothing heroic about coming to the office at six in the morning. It just suits me. (Stephen Owen)

He reports to sometimes working more than twelve hour days and working at home but states that this is not heroic. This is just his normal working pattern which the role demands of him. He is actually presenting himself as even more of a hero by presenting this as the norm and playing down the level of commitment that this requires on his part. Others are similarly matter of fact about the long hours that they work:

I start work at 7.30am and I often work until my wife gets home at 7pm at night and we often work after supper which is very unreasonable really but that's just the way it is and I don't care. I enjoy what I do. (Iwan Williams)

He acknowledges that this may be 'unreasonable' but it is only really unreasonable by other peoples' standards, for people like himself who do all of these important things it has to be the norm otherwise they would not be able to achieve what they achieve, and crucially he enjoys it. This serves to blur any distinction there is between work and their private life.

Working long hours in the day job is compounded by the fact that the cultural elite typically also have other commitments and roles within the cultural sector, and so sit on boards of other organisations other than the one that currently employs them full time. Interviewees who were semi or fully retired and so are no longer employed in this way just sit on boards but this often means several at any one time. The stereotypical image of a bad board member is of someone who does little more than turn up to the meetings and who does not give thought to it and so, therefore, does not contribute very much in the way of ideas when they are there. The interviewees are keen to distance themselves from this portrayal, so while sitting on a board might require going to a certain number of meetings, they explain that there



is actually much more to their involvement, so it may be “eight meetings a year but there’s things to do in between” (Christine Wall) and:

Most of them only take, theoretically, two or three days a month ... but there are papers to read before the meeting. There are things to decide in between the meetings ... so I suppose each of them does take me something like a day a week if you include all the meetings and then what has to be done in between. (Christine Wall)

On the surface, to an outsider and in theory the job takes two days a month. The reality for her is that it fills one day a week, and as she holds several of these types of positions, her time quickly becomes taken up by all her different commitments. This phenomenon of a job taking more time than it first appears to was mentioned frequently, so “It’s two days a week but it’s much more than that ... you’re paid for two days a week and you’re actually working (*laughs*) twice that” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). This can then be used to present herself as heroic, she is working more than what she is paid to work and this underlines her unselfish dedication and commitment to the cause.

Another reported feature of occupying a board position is that the time that they take to do is very difficult to quantify. This is because of the thinking time that they require and because of the conversations that are frequently happening. One chair of a board described it as taking him:

About a day and a half or so a week, possibly a bit more. It’s difficult really to give a figure because emails come through regularly every day. We were on holiday last week in London but I had a Blackberry with me. (Phillip Smith)

Through the use of modern technology they can remain in touch with their organisations even when they are on holiday. This further portrays them in a heroic fashion, the sense that they are always available to help. These positions are not ones in which you clock in and out, rather they adopt a much more flexible approach “You kind of negotiate your hours. You just have to get the job done” (Susan Hodson). The thing that counts, and is counted, is not the amount of hours that they work, but that they do whatever is asked and required of them,

although this varies from month to month so that “It’s a sort of flow. But as and when and whenever I’m needed ... it sort of expands and contracts” (Mark West) and:

No two days are the same. No two weeks are the same which is great in a way but it does mean sometimes you end up working all weekend. (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

A good board member is always ready to help, even if this encroaches on what should technically be their leisure time so that “I speak to my chair, well anytime, Sunday morning, you know that happens quite a lot” (Martin Sweet) so for them there is no separation.

A further factor which makes the time that these various roles take difficult to quantify is that being involved in the cultural sector means that a lot of events take place in the evenings. Attending the opera or theatre at night becomes part of their job, and also allows for subtle networking to take place (as discussed in the previous chapter). This can have the consequence of their working hours becoming even longer than their already substantial office hours, so for one chief executive:

I used to go out sometimes two or three times a week especially during certain periods of the year and to do that on top of your everyday job is not easy. (Stephen Owen)

As this aspect of the job can infiltrate the time that is supposedly for their own recreation it is seen as important that they are able to decline certain invitations:

You could fill most weeks with various events, so you’ve got to be very careful about how many of those that you get invited to. How many dinners you get invited to. How many dinners that people want you to speak at. All of these sorts of things. People want a bit of you time, I can understand that, but you’ve got to be very careful because it can take up, not just a lot of your job, but most of your life as well. (Gareth Morris)

He is positioning himself as a true elite by signalling how in demand he is in the network so that not only do people want him to attend their events, he is also asked to speak at them. He recognises that it can become so consuming that a separate life outside of work is lost, and he does try to resist this, unlike many of the other interviewees. Such heavy involvement in the network can not only take up all of their time but also impact on their own identity, as they

are no longer seen as individuals distinct from their organisations. One consequence of this is that attending high cultural events can lose their appeal:

My partner despairs and in fact there are some things that she won't go to now because when we go there all that happens from the moment I get there is I'm saying hello to somebody or there's little bits of business being done. I know what she means and in a sense I relish things that we go to where I'm not going to see anybody that I know in that way so then you can enjoy what you're there for... part of it's that I've been around for a long time, part of it is that I run an organisation ... It's inevitable. It's the price you pay ... It does mean deciding what is public life and what is private life is extremely hard and it is extremely hard sometimes when I'm having a conversation with somebody when I'm somewhere to know whether I'm myself or whether I'm myself with my organisational hat on. (Martin Sweet)

This confirms the importance of using attendance at high culture events as networking opportunities and as a way to informally conduct business and shows that the reality for the cultural elite is that they see no dividing line between work and their leisure time. This can actually spoil their experiences as members of the audience. As a chief executive he represents and embodies his organisation and it has become an intrinsic part of his identity. Therefore, his organisation is always before him, even though he acknowledges the existence of a separate self underneath. He is stoically and heroically resigned to this as it is 'the price you pay' for holding such a high profile position.

Creating an image of themselves as people who have demanding day jobs, hold various board positions, attend lots of functions and events and are always available to help comes with the reported downside that they often do not have enough time to do all of these things. The result is that they are very busy, causing one interviewee to reflect that "I probably do a bit too much on top of the day job" (Kathryn Jones). However, the solution put forward by them does not seem to be to do less, rather it requires them to work longer hours and to successfully manage their time so that they "juggle all of these" (Christine Wall) which can require "boxing and coxing a bit" (Christine Wall). A mark of a good board member is that

they are always busy but are skilled at managing their time and commitments so that they are able to deliver on whatever they have promised. This can be difficult:

I invariably get it wrong, you invariably try to do too much which leaves you behind on certain things, there's only a certain number of hours in a day. It's not like a conveyor belt where somebody else will do your work for you. My work is still going to be here when I come back ... and you just have to catch up and make sure you don't overcommit again and you keep on making the same mistake. Or I certainly find I do. (Gareth Morris)

As the chief executive of an organisation he sees himself as the only person able to fulfil the tasks required of the role, which serves to place himself in a superior position over people in more routine or mundane jobs. Doing too many other things negatively impacts on how quickly he can get through his workload and means that in the long term he has to work even harder. Such is his desire to be of help in the network that he reports that he will inevitably make 'the same mistake' again. There is the sense that this is his duty and that he will continue to give his time, even if it is at a cost to himself but this is simply the nature of how it is for the cultural elite, and he will continued to be needed and called upon because of his value and worth.

Being so busy and working such long hours is seen as being particularly problematic for women in these type of roles because of the childcare and domestic responsibilities that they have. One interviewee believes that it would not have been possible for her to do her previous job, which involved a lot of travelling around Wales, and be a mother at the same time:

I've always developed my career, I don't have any children, but I'd have found it virtually impossible to have been able to do my previous job with a child. I wouldn't be able to do it, you know, so there we go. (Bethan Price)

Her focus has been on progressing her career, and she is very matter of fact about how the demanding nature of her position and the time and effort it required, would have been difficult to do with children. The notion that for women to be successful in their job requires

them making a choice, career or children, and that the two together are incompatible was expressed by one male interviewee who was particularly outspoken in his views:

Women will always leave an organisation to have a family and they very often don't come back and that's a major downfall for women in a career path ... Now don't tell me I'm someone who's against women in business. I'm all for women in business but as long as women want to go away and have families, it will hinder their performance. A lot of people would shoot me for saying that but it's a fact. I'm sixty years old and I've seen it. (Iwan Williams)

The problem as he sees it is that women will effectively abandon their career path in order to have children and this will 'hinder their performance' and ultimately put them at a disadvantage. The inference here is that it is still women who are expected to take the main responsibility for childcare and so for men who become fathers they are able to fulfil their roles in exactly the same way as before. He openly acknowledges that his view is a controversial one but he is confident enough to say it anyway because of his status, age and experience.

Other female members of the cultural elite have had children as well as pursuing their career. They report that managing the two together has been difficult for them:

A career that is very difficult with very little children because it's in the evenings, its all day for the business side of things ... and then of course everything else is in the evening so it's a very difficult one to balance with family life ... It was a constant juggling act and definitely I felt that my relationship with them was being a bit short changed. It kind of got squeezed in. (Susan Hodson)

Working in the cultural sector has meant doing a job that takes up her time, day and night, and so while she has enjoyed a very successful career for her it has come at a price. She sees her relationship with her children as being 'squeezed' and 'short-changed' because of the lack of time available to her to fit them in. She is judging herself by an ideal of motherhood and she feels that she has fallen short of this. An interviewee, whose two children are now adults, reflected on what it was like for her working full-time when her children were young:

There were so few really, of my generation, who didn't take a lot of time off when their children were small and so on. So I sometimes felt like a little bit of a freak really but this is what I am and this is what I am interested in. (Gwen Griffiths)

She compares herself with her female peers, many of whom stopped working in order to have children, but she is different and did both. She identifies herself as not the norm, rather she is 'a freak' who does not match up to the paragon of motherhood but she is unapologetic about this. She has been driven to work in the cultural sector and her achievements there speak for themselves.

The large amount of time that performing these roles take is harder for women to manage if they have children, although for some this is not an issue (four out of the eight women interviewed did not have any children and it may be that this has actually benefited them by allowing them to be able to solely concentrate on their career). It is a particular problem for women who are on the periphery of the network, as they are typically younger and so more likely to have dependent children. It is, therefore, another factor which makes it more difficult for women to gain membership to the core of the network, and explains why there are less of them there, they have not been able to spend as much time networking as men, who are not seen as having the same domestic responsibilities. As members of the core of the network are generally older, this can explain why women here are no longer disadvantaged by this factor, they do not have the childcare ties that they may have once had earlier on in their career "I'm an empty nester so I can do these things" (Kathryn Jones). She is now able to be out most nights of the week in a way that she could not be when her children were young. For women, who have had children and developed their career, it may mean that they have not lived up to the ideal of motherhood but it also serves to make their contribution to the cultural sector even more of an heroic one.

Committing so much time to their different roles makes the cultural elite very busy people, but this is the true mark of a fixer and they report that they enjoy this element to it “I’d rather be too busy than not” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). Being busy means they are being useful. It is not that they simply work long office hours (although many of them do) but there is a sense that they are always working so that they “never switch off” (Iwan Williams) and “I never ever stop. I never switch off” (Susan Hodson). Even when attending high cultural events, as members of the audience, these provide them with opportunities to network. The consequence of this is that the lines between their professional and private lives blur so there becomes little distinction between them:

Do I have a work-life balance? and the answer is no (*laughs*). The other question is ‘Do I want one?’ ... A lot of people who do these sort of absurd hours push themselves to do it and I do recognise that I work a lot of evenings, weekends. I don’t really sort of break off but then I wouldn’t call a lot of it work. I am actually quite fascinated by the stuff in front of me ... probably looks quite obsessive but I’ve never really known where the norm is, this is me sort of thing. (Gwen Griffiths)

She sees that there is no ‘break off’ from work and no division between this and her own leisure time but for her this is not a problem because she is highly motivated and interested by it. Her role in the cultural sector is intrinsically tied up with her own self-identity and she is unashamedly proud of the amount of time that she dedicates to it. These sentiments are echoed by a male interviewee:

I start the moment I wake up and I finish the moment I go to sleep because it is, it is like that and you can only do these range of things if it is your life. You can’t, you can’t do the sort of things I do if it’s not ... there are no 9 o’clocks. ‘Right I’ll start doing these things then and then at 6 o’clock I’m going to have my tea and watch *East Enders* and do nothing.’ The whole thing blends in ... It’s a way of life and that’s why I think you have to be true to it. You can’t be ‘Oh work is a real grind’ you can’t do that. (Graham Johnson)

He is he outlining the long hours that he works, so that it effectively takes up all of his waking hours. He illustrates this by comparing himself to other people who clock in and out of their job, and then go home to relax in front of the television and enjoy forms of mass (read low) culture. His roles demand more of him. Being busy to the extent of never

switching off is the lot of a fixer and it simply would not be possible to be one unless they adopt the attitude that work is their life and there is no separation between the two. They must heroically commit themselves to it so that:

You just make time don't you? ... you do what you want to do in this life whatever you do or don't do. And if you want to do it you do it. So sometimes, you know, when I look back, I was out every night of the week at various meetings ... it's just a very full life. (Andrew Band)

Fixers dedicate themselves to their roles. They willingly give their time, so much so that it takes up their whole life and becomes what their life is about. It is their source of identity and brings its own rewards of feeling satisfied and proud of their contributions, achievements and industriousness.

### **Being a Leader: Am I doing this by snapping my fingers?**

In order to be an effective fixer, to be able to make a difference and bring about change, a fixer needs to be an effective leader. They must be the ones clearly positioned in the driving seat, making all of the key decisions, and heading and pushing the organisation forward. It is not about simply sitting back on boards and letting somebody else take control. Being in possession of leadership qualities is, therefore, an important component of the good board member. The interviewees describe themselves as instrumental leaders, but they see this role as being very much about actually leading "I don't necessarily have to be doing the work just encouraging" (Susan Hodson) and when a male interviewee is confronted with the interview schedule with the long list of organisations he is involved with on it he explains:

It's all about people. It's a myth to say that I do all those things. I don't. There's a massive distinction between leading something and doing something. It's everybody else who does it. (Graham Johnson)

People in their position are not involved in doing the work on the ground level, rather they elect what the people who are on the ground should be doing. This puts them in a privileged



and prized position, but one which they see as requiring lots of careful consideration and important decision-making, in order for them to actually ‘run it’ so:

You can’t waste your time fixing support mechanisms. If you’re running an organisation you’ve got to run it, which means you’ve got to define policy and push it forward ... then you can drive it. You don’t want your attention or the attention of your board turning to day-to-day administrative matters ... I bump into some people, some people who run organisations and they seem to, they seem to do it by snapping their fingers and I, am I doing this by snapping my fingers? I don’t know but that’s what I’d like, that’s what my organisation has to be. That’s what my organisation is going to be. (Martin Sweet)

He identifies himself in a clear leadership role using the language of a fixer so that his position is all about creating change and having a real impact for the organisation. It is the job of other people who are lower down in the hierarchy to perform the everyday routines. He aspires to be a better leader, one who can run his organisation by ‘snapping his fingers’, so it is slick and efficient. This places himself, the individual, as clearly the one in charge. His vision is uncompromising and he is confident in his aspirations for it. He states that not only is this what he wants but that it will be what he gets. He is showing himself to be ambitious, driven and ready for the challenge, and these are all attributes of a fixer.

Leaders, therefore, must lead and the cultural elite identify themselves as doing this:

I’m the guy that’s got the oil can in his hands and my job is just to oil the wheels every now and then. Also to make sure that the organisation is driven in the right direction. (Stephen Owen)

The organisation is portrayed as a machine, and in this extended metaphor, he is the mechanic, and not just another cog in the machine. He sees it as his job to keep it running smoothly, but again not to get his hands dirty by having to undertake routine tasks. He positions himself firmly behind the steering wheel and with this comes responsibility. This word is used frequently in relation to what their leadership roles require of them “I did actually take a lot of responsibility” (Bronwyn Powell) and “It’s a responsibility” (Matthew Hughes) and “You carry a lot of responsibility” (Stephen Owen). This is a crucial element of

being a fixer, being able to carry the weight of this, and having their 'names spell solidity' (Guttsman, 1968:38) so for them leading an organisation:

Gives you two things, it, first of all you feel ok, you've been given the ticket to do what you want as it were but with that comes all the responsibilities. (Martin Sweet)

Portraying themselves as people who successfully manage these burdens exemplifies that they do have the right credentials to hold these type of privileged positions in the first place and so further justifies them being there and simultaneously presents themselves in a heroic fashion.

### **Having the confidence: I'm getting a bit bigheaded as I get older**

Fixers are leaders who must have the knowledge and ability to drive change for their organisations. To undertake these type of high profile roles, which entail a lot of responsibility, it requires them to be confident and assured in their own abilities. They need to be certain that it is within their capabilities to occupy their roles so that they can embark on the various challenges that they set themselves knowing that they are likely to succeed. Fixers, therefore, are confident people and my interviewees present themselves as extremely confident individuals. Part of this is drawn from their numerous past achievements. Their record speaks for itself and they can then brandish this and use it in order to confidently justify the privileged positions that they hold "But the cv is quite good actually, if I'm honest" (Aled Parry). This is mildly self-deprecating as the cv in reality is more than 'quite good'. They know that their contribution is a valuable one because of the level of their skills and expertise "And actually to be frank, I'm good at it. You know, you need good people" (Rhiannon Evans-Davies) and "My best is still going to be better than some peoples' best" (Susan Hodson). They see themselves as being superior to others (the bad board member) and are proud of this and they recognise this confidence in themselves "I'm not insecure as an individual. I know I do a good job and I know the organisation does a good job" (Gareth

Morris). However, women can report to feeling less confident than the men they work alongside:

I think for men as well it's a confidence thing. They're far more confident. I know a lot of men who are in very high jobs and I'm thinking how did you get there? How? ... I think that a woman has to work twice as hard to prove herself. (Bethan Price)

She believes that some men have achieved certain positions because of being male, rather than their skill level. This means that women in her position, in a male-dominated environment, have to work extremely hard to showcase their abilities. They are disadvantaged by not being a traditional candidate and so lack in confidence, as they are in a marginal position. Confidence, therefore, is identified as being important for success in the network as a whole.

Being a confident individual means that they actively seek out further leadership roles and they feel completely undaunted when taking these on, so on a board:

If I'm going to be involved then I want to be chair (*laughs*) because you can make things happen (*laughs*) it's much more fun ... you can do far more than as chair, than just turning up for the meetings. (Colin Wilson)

Whereas a bad board member wants to simply attend meetings and then go home again, he claims to want to have a much deeper level of involvement. He wants to lead it because it is from this position that he can actually be seen to be driving change. He enjoys and relishes this, so much so that it is actually 'fun' for him, this serves to trivialise it and show himself as being supremely confident in his own abilities. Being confident also benefits them when it comes to actually carrying out their leadership roles. They bring this to their organisations, so it is one of the many qualities that they have to offer:

I think it's something quite subtle that I probably give but it seems to count, kind of just a confidence ... I bring a kind of confidence to scale up and think big. (Susan Hodson)

As a fixer she sees herself as having the ability to transform an organisation. She helps to make it more ambitious and her confidence is contagious. Another interviewee felt confident enough to make big changes “My first action coming in here was to say ‘We will rebrand this organisation’ and I decided, I didn’t even check, I just did it” (Martin Sweet). He alone decided. He acted quickly, independently and courageously to create a positive change. He tells this story to exemplify his confidence and to firmly position himself as a true leader. They can also demonstrate their confidence, by showing themselves to be people who will speak up in board meetings and make their opinions known:

I found it very useful to be able to tell the chief officers concerned that I didn’t agree with them ... and usually, not always, but usually my view was correct. (Andrew Band)

He used his expertise and professional knowledge to make meaningful contributions, and this gave him the confidence to stand up and disagree with them. This further highlights his worth and value as a board member because, as he says, he was usually right.

Another way in which the cultural elite can demonstrate the confidence that they possess is to present themselves as being confident to the extreme of being very outspoken. Two of the interviewees (note both males) saw this as a desirable characteristic to possess and one saw his appointment to an Assembly panel as being made precisely for this reason “They’ve put in place people who are outspoken” (Graham Johnson). He provides examples of incidents that confirm that he is very confident when it comes to expressing his opinions, and so when he left one board because he did not agree with how the chair was running it, he:

Told him what I thought about him because I had to do that and I told everyone I really think you’ve got problems in this organisation. I do it gently and I do it subtly and if no one listens I’ll tell you. This is a broken organisation ... most people don’t like that. They don’t get that. (Graham Johnson)

He not only told the chair his views but he did this in front of the whole board, showing the confidence he has in his own convictions. He recognises that this means that some people in

the network do not like him, but he sees himself as working for the greater good. If something is broken then it is his responsibility to try and help to fix it, and this sometimes requires him to be outspoken. He is signaling that he puts the needs of the organisation before his own personal reputation of being liked, because as a fixer he builds his reputation on the actual positive change he can bring about for the organisations he is involved with. Aled Parry reports to being equally outspoken and had a similar experience of standing up to the chair of one of the boards he was on “I was the only person really on the board that was prepared to stand up to him and tell him, basically, what an idiot he was” (Aled Parry). He is not like other people, who are bad board members, he is superior as he was the only one brave enough to confront him. Again, he put the interests of the organisation before his own, and as a result he was sidelined on that board. He acknowledges his outspokenness by saying:

I sometimes overstep the mark, for effect more than anything ... I should think a little bit more before I come out with some of these very direct criticisms of people and upset some people ... of course I have got a reputation of not getting up and making bland political statements, but really telling people how it is ... people do take notice of what I say. (Aled Parry)

Speaking his mind is part of his performance in the network and it is what he has cultivated his reputation upon. He is such a central player within it that it has become acceptable for him to do this, even expected, but he believes that people ‘do take notice’ of what he says, so that what or who he endorses in the network matters. He is presenting himself as an entirely self-confident individual, one who exists at the core of the network and so is above the rules of it. He says he is not concerned about offending people, because he has already secured his position, and now he sees that he should use this for the greater good, to help to put the world to rights, in effect to fix it.

Members of the cultural elite acknowledge that they are confident individuals but they also try to present themselves as modest people so while they talk about their achievements they

also signal that they are uncomfortable with this and do not want to be appear as if they are bragging “Well sparing my own blushes” (Martin Sweet) and “Although I am a relatively modest person basically, or was, I’m suddenly, I am getting a bit bigheaded as I get older” (*laughs*) (Gwen Griffiths). She identifies herself as modest but then checks herself because she recognises that in an interview where she has been talking about her career for the last hour that she might sound bigheaded and she makes a joke of this in order to alleviate it. She sees that during the course of her life she has achieved so much that in a sense she deserves to be this self-assured in a way that she could not be when she was younger. Another device employed is to play down their natural ability “I get by and do these things by perspiration not inspiration” (Graham Johnson). He attributes his success not because of his intellect but because he works extremely hard, and this is another way of justifying his privileged position. One interviewee says about his knowledge of one sector “I probably knew more ... than anybody else. That isn’t a boast. It’s a complaint in some ways” (Phillip Smith). He pompously makes a joke out of his level of expertise by saying it was a nuisance, but he is clearly very proud of this.

Attempts at modesty are only relatively successful. Other interviewees employ the technique of being very self-deprecating about themselves and their achievements, and these too are not entirely convincing, for example “I don’t know whether I’m successful I’ve just done a lot of things” (Gwen Griffiths). Although she only claims to have done a lot of jobs, the inference is that she must have done them well otherwise she would not have been asked to do more. So in a way this statement is still a boast, the fact she has done a lot is success in itself. Graham Johnson says of being asked to chair a government panel:

I was staggered when they asked me to do that. Actually I wasn’t staggered that they asked me to go on a panel. I was staggered that they asked me to chair it. (Graham Johnson)

He says he was ‘staggered’ but then he checks himself because he admits that he was not surprised to be asked to go on a panel, so presenting himself as a high-profile and important person within Wales, one that is self-assured enough to declare this. His confessed surprise is at being asked to chair it and this is rather more self-deprecating. This fine line between arrogance and modesty becomes a difficult one for the interviewees to tread and so they work hard to try not to appear as being too much in either direction. A male interviewee says of leading an organisation:

Well as I’ve been at the helm ... if it’s going badly I’d get the blame. If it’s going well I suppose I should accept some modest thanks but as ever it’s a combination ... I’m but the humble scribe. I just do the writing and fixing so it is a team effort. (Iwan Williams)

In one way he diminishes his contribution by saying he is only the ‘humble scribe’ and that it is a ‘team effort’. By doing so he is playing out his role of the gracious team player. He is simultaneously presenting himself as true leader. He is at the helm in the position of command and he is the one who takes the responsibility and culpability if things go wrong. Crucially he is the one doing the ‘fixing’ and so he is placing himself firmly as a valuable member of the network. Fixers are to be admired and respected, without them the world they inhabit could not function.

### **It’s partly in you. Partly you have to train it.**

The interviewees identify themselves as having the necessary qualities and attributes that enable them to make worthwhile and meaningful contributions to the organisations that they work for and the boards that they sit on. They, unlike the concept of the bad board member, have the knowledge and give the necessary time to these roles. Crucially they identify themselves as leaders who are very confident in their ability to lead but do they see this as an acquired skill or something innately within their character? How they explain this reveals

how they justify their position of influence and further exemplifies how the network functions. Some of the people in my sample reveal that they have been leaders all their lives:

I became a leader at a very young age. I was Captain of the school fifteen. I was Head Boy ... I was less of a debater up in London than I had been in school but I still kept at it, ended up running one of the rugby teams and was pretty much in a leadership role in my own peer group, put it that way, if nothing else. (Aled Parry)

This suggests that as leadership is something which came naturally to him it is a personality trait of his and so he identifies himself as always being a leader amongst his peers. This characteristic has continued into adulthood and so as a consequence he is now a principal figure within the network. Other interviewees see leadership as something which comes from within but also as a skill which is honed by experience:

It's partly in you. Partly you have to train it, and you wouldn't be a good leader if you thought just being you was the right way to lead people. (Graham Johnson)

He believes that while certain aspects of being an effective leader come from a person's personality there are other elements to it that require work because presenting yourself as just yourself is not enough. This relates to the important aspects of self-presentation and performance in the network. To be successful, people need to know how to manage and work with others so that leadership:

Is actually a learnt skill. Part of it is personal inclination that you're reasonably good with people and that you can get them to agree and things like this. But part of it is also sort of just learning. (Gwen Griffiths)

This echoes the sentiments of the previous quote and shows the importance of being able to develop and sustain positive personal relationships within the network.

The idea that experience teaches, shapes and changes them is expressed frequently, so that they actually see themselves as being transformed by the process of their career "I think you grow into these things ... for many years I didn't aspire to any great leadership role, to tell you the truth" (Glyn Edwards). While early on in his career he says his focus was just on



doing what his job required of him but then as he developed his expertise he saw how he could use this to command a position of influence in Wales. Members of the cultural elite, therefore, believe that having experience is very important and as typically older people they do have a lot of this “I do by now have a few years of experience behind me” (Matthew Hughes). This is a big understatement as ‘a few years’ does not accurately reflect the decades of his life that he has spent working within the cultural sector in Wales. Past experiences are described as preparation and education which have enabled them to acquire knowledge and understanding that they put to use in their current roles “I was glad about that lesson” (Gwen Griffiths) and “Fantastic education I think. It prepared me for this sort of work that I'm doing now ... great groundwork for what I'm doing now” (Stephen Owen). They see themselves as individuals that have evolved and developed as a result of events in their career so that:

You accumulate experience hopefully. Some more knowledge, a little bit more knowledge, knowing how you could make that happen ... Every time I think I try to learn something so that the next step makes you more strategic or more useful and I can now think of useful questions to ask or levers much more quickly than I would have twenty years ago because I have been pulling different levers or failed to pull different levers, so I think it's kind of a lifelong learning exercise. (Gwen Griffiths)

She sees that the benefit of her experience is that it has increased her usefulness so she is able to effectively bring about change and have an impact somewhere, which she describes as ‘pulling levers’. This resonates with the image of a fixer who actually makes a difference to their organisations and also with their idea of being a leader. She is outside of the machine (the organisation itself) but is the one clearly controlling it. As a successful fixer she is confident enough to admit to mistakes she may have made in the past, levers she has failed to pull, but she has learnt from this and this accumulated body of knowledge now makes her a real asset to the network. As discussed in the previous chapter, the only way to be truly part of the network is to be part of the network because this is the only vantage point from which to really understand it. In the same way the only way to become an effective fixer is to have

experience of actually doing these types of roles, of leading organisations and sitting on boards.

The cultural elite recognise that experience has changed and developed them. It has equipped them with practical skills and improved their knowledge and understanding, all of which are required to be a fixer. It has also increased their confidence, which as previously argued, is a key component needed in order to enjoy success in these roles and in the network, so for example they see themselves as confident when dealing with the media:

I'm quite confident about that side of it because obviously I've got experience in the field so I don't, I mean I think if you didn't have that experience you'd, one would be quite worried about doing those type of interviews. (Annette Cook)

She distinguishes herself and her particular skill set from that of other people. She knows she is capable of talking to the media and so is confident about it and this has grown out of her previous experience in this area. One way to demonstrate their current self-assuredness, is to talk about incidents that occurred early on in their career when they were lacking in the confidence that they now possess. One interviewee talked about how he felt when he first became chief executive of his organisation:

I've told this story before to many people, you have that, I mean for about the first four, five months as I drove into work I'd feel this heavy weight in the bottom of my stomach ... thinking am I going to be able to do this? (Martin Sweet)

By openly acknowledging that he has told this story many times before demonstrates his current confidence. By admitting to once questioning his capabilities, he is showing himself to be confident, as he no longer doubts himself because the answer to the question is yes, he could do it and he has been very successful at it. Confessing to this type of self-doubt also adds an extra dimension to his personality and serves to portray him as more human. This actually then makes him an even greater hero. He has achieved all of this but he is a mere

mortal and so he deserves extra acclaim for his efforts. Another interviewee described her experience as a new board member attending her first board meeting:

In my first meeting I was afraid to say a word ... then I did say something and this guy said to me well our policy isn't that ... and I didn't say anything for the rest of the meeting but I felt afterwards well that is ridiculous, so I'll go back and have another go, so I had a go ... but I felt I got put down that day but I thought that's not going to happen again when I went out. So I speak up, and I think that with being there in meetings, with it comes more confidence. (Bronwyn Powell)

She reports to being too scared to speak and when she did she felt that she was 'put down' but crucially she did not let this deter her. She shows a resilience in her character as she made a conscious decision not to let this happen again but she also argues that confidence increases with experience of sitting on boards, and so it is now much easier for her to voice her opinions.

One reason provided for why confidence increases with the number of board meetings attended is because it gives them an understanding of how things operate and how business gets done. It is only through having this firsthand experience of this that real insight can be gained and this is why being in the network is such a fundamental part of being a true elite, without it they cannot accumulate the knowledge of how this world works. One such learning experience concerned how a chair can subtly and skilfully influence the outcome of a meeting which was:

A really contentious, really tricky board meeting. Twenty people around the table? Dealing with a really contentious issue ... she chaired the meeting and got the outcome, perfectly, without speaking. And she kind of conducted it with her eyebrows and her looks and I can remember sitting there, I'd spoken to her beforehand, and it hadn't occurred to me until after the meeting that she'd spoken to everybody of course. She'd spoken to me beforehand, she knew my view ... so when an argument came in over here, I'd get a look, as if to say, 'What are you going to do about that?' So without realising I was doing it, I'd come in and argue the corner and it was masterful, masterful, absolutely superb. (Graham Johnson)

The meeting is described as being conducted by the chair. It is a performance, one which she has stage managed by finding out the views of everybody beforehand so that during the

actual performance she does not need to speak at all. Graham Johnson is clearly in admiration of her and being part of this show has meant that he has learnt these strategies for himself so it would be possible for him to employ them in his role as chair of other boards if he so desired. If he had not initially witnessed this firsthand he would not know this, as he says that it 'hadn't occurred to me until after' so without this experience he would not have learnt this board room tactic. Another thing that can be gleaned is the importance of the pre-meeting to board meetings. This often means that groups attending the board meeting have already decided on how they will vote, so for example local authorities:

Always had a pre-meeting so if people have a pre-meeting there's not much point in the meeting itself because they've already decided ... so I was cheeky and said can I come to your pre-meeting? (*laughs*) and they said yes so before they came to their final decision I was able to influence their decision. (Colin Wilson)

Knowing how and where business really gets done is again learnt from experience. He then uses this to his advantage and attends the pre-meeting but says he was only able to do this because he was 'cheeky'. He can take advantage of this situation because he is a confident individual. He presents himself as an instrumental fixer because he was able to effectively use this maneuver to his advantage.

The network operates using informal and personal connections which are built up through subtle networking. In order to move successfully from the periphery to the core its members need to secure a positive reputation as a fixer. This is only possible if they understand how the network functions, and know how to utilise their connections, this too comes from experience, leading one interviewee to conclude that:

There is no course in any college on this world that would prepare you for this job. There is no such thing. It's a mixture really of trusting people, trusting yourself, being able to work with people ... Every now and then you have to put your hands up and say I'm wrong or I was wrong and if you are wrong you have to learn from that. (Stephen Owen)

He is describing his leadership role as one that requires confidence, being brave enough to admit when he has made a mistake, and as hinging on the development of personal relationships built on trust. The fact that he sees there being no formal route to achieving his position shows how difficult these high profile roles are to achieve. It is only through doing it that a person can really learn about it, and so recruitment is narrow as it relies on calling on people already known to them from within the network. An individual's success comes from being able to secure these connections in order to progress through the ranks:

I realised a lot more about what leadership was all about ... there was a bit more to the job, than just delivering what you've been asked to deliver. It's a lot more to do with finding out what people at the top really want. (Aled Parry)

Making advancements can only be achieved if they understand the nature of how the world really works and this comes from their experiences of being in it.

There is the sense that being a leader has a lot to do with being able to put on a good show just as networking is an act and board meetings are a performance. People need to be able to present themselves effectively to the wider audience (the rest of the network) and this is described as:

When you're talking the talk yourself you cease to be impressed by other people when they're doing the same thing. So instead of sitting there thinking 'Oh really' you think 'That's a load of rubbish' so that self-confidence is important ... You can't be self-confident until you've got an organisation that works and that you're proud of and then you can feel self-confident. You can't feel self-confident if it's not working properly or there are inherent problems within it. (Martin Sweet)

An element to success in these roles comes from the ability to 'talk the talk' about the organisation that they represent, just in the same way that Fenno (1978) found that congressman have readily prepared mini-speeches to deliver that serve both explanatory and presentational purposes, and this once again, is seen as requiring confidence on their part. For him confidence is not an inherent characteristic that he possessed but something which has increased over time. It is only from having experience of doing this that they can then

recognise when other people are putting on similar performances. As a result he has learnt not to be intimidated or impressed by this, in a way that he might have been earlier on in his career, when he was at the periphery of the network, and lacked experience of this. As a chief executive his self-image is intrinsically tied up with how successful he judges his organisation to be. He draws confidence from his achievements and his ability to fix things and eradicate issues within it.

The interviewees see their ability to competently lead and fix organisations as stemming in part from their personality but mostly as a result of their vast experience, this shows why being in the network for a long time is valued. However, they also attribute some of their success as being simply due to luck, for example “The first kind of lucky chance from which everything comes” (Susan Hodson). She sees the first job that she got as happening quite by accident but this gave her the opportunity to rapidly develop her career in arts administration. One interviewee began his interview by stating:

I would start by saying that I find myself in a situation where I lead a number of organisations, a lot of organisations actually, not by design just kind of, you know, stop, that’s where I find myself. (Graham Johnson)

Right from the outset he wanted to make it clear that his success was not planned, rather it just happened, this while portraying himself as benefiting from luck and circumstance, also enhances himself as someone who has managed to achieve so much without even meaning to, and with little effort on his part. Similarly others express the belief that they have benefited from circumstance during their career:

I don’t think, by any stretch of the imagination, that I was probably the best candidate but for once in my life, I was actually in the right place at the right time. (Gareth Morris)

He achieved his first job in the cultural sector in a competition with 268 applicants (note he is proud of this achievement illustrated by the fact that he remembers the precise figure).

Stating that their success is due to luck serves to play down their own personal attributes and abilities in a self-deprecating manner, and this is a familiar technique for the cultural elite. This idea of being in the right place was reported by other interviewees when explaining their secret of success “I was very lucky. In fact I have been incredibly lucky with the jobs and opportunities and everything, and so I quickly got this really top job at that time” (Aled Parry) and:

A lot of it is luck. It's not that you can ever map out your career and say I want to go from there to there to there and it's not always an upward trajectory ... I've been quite relaxed about it. I've just sort of thought well if an opportunity comes up and I'm in the right place to go for it I will and mostly I've been fortunate, they've come up at good times for me. (Annette Cook)

She states that she has never planned her career but has still been able to progress upwards, and attributes this to luck. This undermines what the interviewees have previously said about their roles demanding the knowledge, hard work and quantity of time that they give to them but it is, on the one hand used in a self-deprecating manner, so to humble themselves so they do not appear too boastful and arrogant and it is a device to explain away the unexplainable. Why is it that they have achieved such prestigious roles in positions of influence and advantage? It is not so much the luck of being in the right place at the right time, rather about being in the right place in the network, being strategically connected and visibly situated so that when a position arises they are there ready and waiting to occupy it.

## **Conclusion**

The profile of the bad board member is of a fully or semi-retired male who continues in the same role within the same organisation for too long. The cultural elite work very hard to distance themselves from this negative stereotype, so while many of them are officially retired they defend their continued involvement by stressing that their skills are still needed and that they are as hardworking as they ever were. They declare themselves to be in favour

of short terms for board members as being in the best interests of the organisation. Although some of them have put this principle into practise in their own careers others have remained in the same positions for lengthy periods of time and so they justify this again because of the valuable contributions that they are still able to make. The majority of board members are male, and female interviewees report to suffering from discrimination and sexism during their careers, but they felt this more so when they were at the periphery of the network. They strongly object to women at the core of the network who do not assist other women to get there as well. The concept of the bad board member, therefore, is used as a point of contrast and they create their own self-concept in direct opposition to this. It also then serves to help them to justify the privileged positions that they occupy.

The cultural elite portray themselves as altruistic people. They say that they do all the things that they do, and sit on multiple boards not for the money or status that this can bring them but because of a genuine desire to help because they care (where these feelings derive from will be discussed in the following chapter). In the discussions of their motivations the interviewees create the dialogue of a fixer. This is somebody who is knowledgeable, skilled, capable, busy and hardworking who can have a real positive impact upon the organisations that they are involved with. These are the attributes that they see themselves as possessing, that they hold in esteem and which are valued by the wider network. In order to have success in the network a person must, therefore, secure their reputation as a fixer. They must be seen by others in the network to fix problems and make a difference to the cultural landscape of Wales. Fixers are heroes and the cultural elite present themselves in a heroic fashion. They dedicate themselves to their roles to such proportions that work and leisure time are not two distinct elements in their life. Being a fixer is a way of life. Part of being able to secure a reputation as one is by putting on a performance and this extends to the interview site itself.



The interviewees perform during the interview and so while portraying themselves as confident leaders they can also be very self-deprecating about themselves and their achievements. While for some this is a tool to try and avoid sounding arrogant it is also a device which can be used to underline their importance, value and worth. Crucially the way to become a fixer is to accumulate experience of fixing things and so experience of the network from the inside is once again fundamental for success. This echoes the conclusions of the previous chapter that only from being in the network can a person really understand that network and further illustrates the importance of the periphery for obtaining access to the core, showing how membership can remain tight.

## **Chapter Six**

### **‘Good Eggs’: Being Cultured**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapters I discussed how members of the cultural elite in Wales construct the concept of a network and the factors that membership to this then relies upon. This chapter will explore how the interviewees are specifically cultural elites. They are involved with the cultural sector either as paid employees of arts organisations and / or as members of their boards. This means that they are actively involved in creating and sustaining culture as well as participating as members of the audience which, as already argued, facilitates their ability to network. They are also importantly Welsh elites who live in and work for Wales and they aim to sustain a distinct culture for their nation. These are important defining factors for how they see themselves, their roles and their vision for society. Crucially they then use this identity to help them to explain the altruistic nature of their involvement (which was presented in Chapter Five) and to justify their positions of power and privilege.

#### **Part 1: High Culture**

The first part of this chapter looks at how the interviewees experience and construct ideas about high culture. I argue that despite them subscribing to a broad definition of what they believe culture is, they themselves actually value things which belong to high culture. More than just simply appreciating this they have a deep investment in it, partly because their relationship with these art forms has been with them for such a long time, often since childhood. It has become ingrained within them as part of who they are and forms an integral element of their self identity, as well as ensuring that they are extremely proficient in it. They

make a much clearer and sharper dividing line between themselves and ‘mass culture’ and their views on what the majority of other people like. Here they create further divisions and ultimately undermine their concept of culture as broad and all encompassing.

### **I enjoy a broad culture**

The sample was drawn from a range of organisations that are involved in transmitting what is deemed as ‘high culture’ i.e. opera, theatre, ballet, classical music, visual art and literature, as well as sport because (deemed as an important aspect of Welsh culture). It has been reported that high culture and its audience are in decline (Holt, 1991; Lamont, 1992), perhaps because either high culture is losing out in a competition with popular culture or as DiMaggio (1987;1991) suggests it could be actually crumbling from within as a result of the postmodernist movement which overtly challenge the traditional cultural hierarchy so that what was once deemed as ‘popular’ or commercial culture is no longer as clearly segregated from ‘serious’ art. The interviewees present culture as something which is broad and includes a wide range of forms and many different activities. As a result it is not easy to neatly define and summarise “It really depends on how you define culture to me. I enjoy a broad culture. But my culture includes food, golf, everything really” (Stephen Owen). His explanation of culture includes a range activities, like sport, and are not just specifically arts based ones. If culture is as broad as he suggests then one implication of this is that the appeal that it has widens as the number of people who experience it and appreciate it also increases. One interviewee began his interview with a discussion of how I was using and applying the term ‘culture’ in my research:

You use the word ‘culture’ for me the word culture it’s a very loosely textured word so, that you know in the tightest texture you’re talking about the world of art, music, entertainment perhaps in the broader world it’s somewhat synonymous with what is not science. (Phillip Smith)

In actual fact his 'tight' definition is still rather broad but he then constructs it to be even more extensive, to mean everything which is outside the domain of science. This is one method of conceptualising culture, by contrasting it in opposition to something else, something 'other' and I will argue that for the cultural elite this is specifically mass (or low) culture. Despite this, they say that they subscribe to promoting culture to a wide audience so that the work of their organisations have broad appeal, and aim to promote:

The range of styles and interests ... what makes the culture that we live in our culture. It's not the standard view that you get from the academics or from the politicians or from The Arts Council. It's something greater than all those. It's that, it's making that work in the organisation, is I suppose still my front aim. (Martin Sweet)

The idea of being 'greater' reinforces his presentation of culture as something which is multi-faceted and all encompassing. Here he is constructing his definition of culture in opposition to the 'standard view' which he perceives to be a much more restrictive one. He wants a culture that belongs to the people and the 'our culture' he is referring to is, therefore, specifically Welsh in nature.

### **We're great users of the arts**

Despite defining culture using such broad terms the interviewees, when asked about the types of culture that they themselves choose to attend and experience during their recreation time, overwhelming list activities that are typically identified as belonging to 'high culture'. It is this which they receive enjoyment from and this is probably not surprising considering the amount of time and effort they give in order to help high culture organisations exist and function. They feel passionately about these art forms and are deeply committed to sustaining and promoting them. One reason for this is because they themselves want to be able to continue experiencing it as a member of the audience for their own personal pleasure. Familiarity and involvement with high culture also carries prestige (DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985) within the network, and a demonstration of one's cultural capital can assist with the act

of subtle networking (as discussed in Chapter Four). It can also result in tangible benefits for people, for example DiMaggio (1982, 2001) found that familiarity with it is the best cultural predictor of school success.

The interviewees report enjoying a range of forms of high culture, attending the opera being the most frequent one “we see pretty well all the operas really. I’m a friend of the Welsh National Opera, even though it costs us quite a lot” (Phillip Smith) and “we have a subscription every season for the Welsh National Opera” (Christine Wall). They can use their participation to signal that they are fully fledged members of the cultural elite, specifically the Welsh cultural elite because it is the Welsh opera company that they are supporting. It is a tangible display of their commitment to high culture as well as being a status symbol within the network, in a similar way as large donations to arts organisations can be used by philanthropists (Odendahl, 1990) and can help individuals to pass into the upper class (Aldrich, 1998). Other interviewees said that, while they enjoy going to the opera, they do not have such a deep (or financial) investment in it so they say “I get to see as much as I can. I’ve just arranged, booked some tickets for the opera in March, which is nice” (Iwan Williams) and “I go to the opera two or three times a year” (Aled Parry). The other high cultural activities that members of the sample identify include theatre and classical music, for example “We go to the theatre my wife and I, literature events, concerts, music. I like symphony better than opera. We’re great users of the arts” (Mark West). They also mention visual art “the visual arts is one of my great pleasures so going to galleries and exhibitions” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies) and “on a personal level I spend far too much money on pictures in the galleries in Cardiff” (Iwan Williams) and literature, so that reading is described by one interviewee as “I think that’s what keeps me sane actually” (Christine Wall).

A discrepancy, therefore, arises between their rhetoric concerning how culture should be broad and inclusive and the culture that they actually experience and enjoy in their own lives which is one which fits with a much narrower definition, that of high culture. So while they claim that they like 'everything' when they are asked what cultural events they attend, it is clear that they really mean that they like everything that falls within the category of high culture:

I like contemporary dance so if there's anything on there we will go and see that. Theatre, I like theatre, I just haven't had much time to go to theatre. I like WNO, you know, I like pretty much everything really. (Annette Cook)

Peterson (1997) argues that the new cultural capitalists are the 'omnivores' who appreciate high culture and popular culture and everything in between. This is what the interviewees are reporting to be, but in reality they present the culture that they experience as one which only appeals to a specific audience:

You've got The Millennium Centre which is a wonderful place to go to. The Sherman when it reopens will be wonderful ... We go occasionally to art galleries in and around this area, and there are many. You have the Welsh Folk Museum. You have the National Museum of Wales, there is so much to be involved with there in terms of culture in its broadest possible meaning. (Matthew Hughes)

Once again, the word 'broad' is used but the culture that is being discussed includes theatre, art and history. He phrases it using the second person by saying 'you have' with the implication that it is there for him, for me, for everyone. He sees that culture should be open and accessible to all so that everybody can experience and appreciate it.

### **I hate blockbuster films**

While members of the cultural elite initially report to liking everything when talking about how they themselves experience and enjoy culture, they then effectively undo this by contrasting what they appreciate with what the majority likes. They work to establish an identity as a 'cultured' person and distance themselves from any activity which they regard as

‘uncultured’ and so one interviewee recalls an incident when people attended an event he had organised thinking it was:

Some sort of a circus or something like that and they came, but they were demanding their money back in less than an hour because at that time we didn’t sell any beer, neither did we have bingo, you know, it is a cultural thing. (Stephen Owen)

He categorises forms of mass culture, namely activities such as drinking alcohol and playing bingo, as clearly distinct from the type of culture that his organisation transmits. In a similar way another interviewee reflects on a culture that revolves around drinking large amounts of alcohol:

What is the definition of culture in that respect? Drinking culture? ... I think, I think the waterfront down here is reasonably respectful. It’s not like the centre of Cardiff which is like the Wild West on a Friday and Saturday night. I think The Bay is still reasonably civilised. (Iwan Williams)

A geographical distinction is made between The Bay, where many of the key (high) cultural players physically exist, and the city centre which is likened to the Wild West which carries connotations of alcohol, violence and danger. People who appreciate culture and attend venues like The Wales Millennium Centre in The Bay are, in contrast, much more sophisticated, and yet one interviewee was actually quite disparaging of The Wales Millennium Centre, because although home to the Welsh National Opera, he believes ‘it’s main purpose is to “put on ‘Mamma Mia’ and ‘The Sound of Music’ ... it’s just commercial interests” (Mark West). Here popular culture, in other words what the majority like, has precedent over forms of high culture, such as literature and contemporary art. The cultural elite then juxtapose the two forms of culture, mass and high, alongside one another in order to demonstrate the ideal of culture that they really subscribe to:

I love going to plays, particularly the sort of plays that are subtle, that are small. A small number of actors intellectually putting through some sort of idea, really twisting some idea, a nice little twist and I always identify those types of plays up in London and try to make sure I go to them. And the same with film. You know, I like going to film a lot but I hate blockbuster films. I only go to films that are a film version of a play basically, where it is subtle. (Aled Parry)

He presents himself as a connoisseur of culture because he has the ability to detect, and then appreciate, clever and sophisticated plays. This extends to his taste in films, which he aligns with high culture and starkly contrasts it with, and throws scorn upon, ‘blockbusters’ which the masses enjoy. The interviewees draw a clear dividing line between what they experience as culture and what appeals to the majority, and the latter is spoken about in a derogatory fashion.

Members of the cultural elite are also critical of the majority because they perceive that they are not aware of many of the cultural events that are happening around them. Their complaint is not so much that the masses are not attending things like the opera but that they lack general awareness about the arts in Wales and so “it’s on their doorstep and yet people, they’re not aware” (Andrew Band) and:

Cardiff is blessed with millions of interesting things for anybody who has got any interest in the arts ... Cardiff is really lucky to have that. I only wish Cardiff people were aware of how lucky they are because most of these things are attended by one man and his dog, occasionally his wife too. (Mark West)

He believes that ‘people’, meaning the wider public, should be grateful that they are living in a city which provides such a range of arts events. Absence of knowledge about the cultural scene in Cardiff results in poor audience attendance while a general lack of understanding about the cultural sector and its role in the economy means that:

If you asked in Canton Street ‘What is the Arts Council?’ I don’t think people could tell you what it is so it’s getting that message across ... get basic facts out there and plus basic facts about The Arts because people don’t realise it’s one of the biggest employers in Wales, you know, it’s that kind of information. (Bethan Price)

They believe that culture and the important role that it plays in society, and for Wales specifically, should be understood and acknowledged by everyone, even if individuals themselves do not personally appreciate it as members of the audience. High culture should enjoy a prominent profile so that people have awareness of it “just as they know what WNO



is whether or not they attend” (Mark West). The general public can identify WNO as a cultural force because of its history, size and reputation. The cultural elite see it as their role to promote the same status for their cultural organisations so that these are then similarly applauded for the contribution that they make to Welsh society.

The problem with this, as argued by the interviewees, is that for the majority of people it is not simply that they lack awareness concerning culture but that they are actually wary and even hostile towards it. High culture is seen as the reserve of the upper classes. One interviewee explained this as:

The old Bullingdon club with their fancy jackets, you know, the antithesis of popular support isn't it? It's seen as elitist and not what the majority like. (Iwan Williams)

He portrays the mass of people in society as being directly opposed to anything that is 'elite' or that appears 'elitist' with its implications of inequality and injustice for all but the advantaged few. This type of reaction accompanied the construction of The Assembly building and The Wales Millennium Centre in The Bay which created a public outcry about the financial cost. It was seen as being a large expenditure that would only benefit those people who were already in a position of advantage and do nothing to help the ordinary Welsh person (Hannan, 2000). It is opera in particular which is identified by the interviewees as being viewed with suspicion:

It's a pity that opera is considered still to be elitist. It isn't. Opera isn't elitist. I mean it's much cheaper to go to the opera than it is to go to football or to rugby. And yet most people know something about what is happening in the rugby world. If you stopped 99 people out of 100 in Queen Street, they would know about rugby probably. Very few of them would know that the Royal Welsh College exists, maybe 10, 15% of 100 people you would stop. It's a great shame. (Andrew Band)

He decries the general public in Wales as lacking knowledge about the cultural sector and defends opera as not being elitist by making the argument that it is actually much more affordable than other leisure activities, such as watching the rugby, which is experienced by

the masses. So while the cultural elite in Wales subscribe to a broad definition of culture, this provides further evidence that they themselves perceive there to be clear barriers between high and mass culture.

### **I've always dabbled**

Members of the cultural elite possess personal appreciation of a variety of forms of high culture, and place important value upon this, because they have had experience of it for a very long time. This enables them to be extremely proficient in it as successful accumulation of cultural capital requires familiarity with culture from a young age (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). This then serves them well in the network and can be utilised and displayed during acts of networking (as discussed in Chapter Four). In order to successfully pass as a member of the cultural elite they need to be able to demonstrate a lifelong commitment to culture and have evidence in their own biography to illustrate this:

I'd gone to a Cathedral school in Canterbury and had been brought up with cathedral music, and I love cathedral music, and that always resonated with me and I still go to Llandaff Cathedral now because of that childhood interest in cathedral organ music.  
(Iwan Williams)

He describes how he has been 'brought up' with Cathedral music. It has fundamentally influenced and shaped him. His upbringing was a specifically cultural one. Early exposure in childhood has created a lifelong appreciation and is one which he can now use in order to personally reconnect with his past. At another point in the interview the same interviewee discusses his love of visual art:

In my teens and twenties, I went down to St Ives and bought some pottery, and I've still got some of those rather special pots by a famous place called Troyker, so I've always dabbled. (Iwan Williams)

He explains how even from an early age he had sophisticated tastes and this is used in order to emphasise his credentials as a true cultural elite. However, he simultaneously belittles this

by describing it as ‘dabbling’ so while his early engagement was for personal and recreational purposes, his current involvement is serious and on a much grander scale, having implications on the cultural landscape of Wales. A female interviewee recalls precious childhood experiences of seeing Welsh National Opera perform and so the company “meant a lot to me already. I’d seen some amazing things” (Susan Hodson) as well as formative experiences while she was at university in London:

I had a fantastic time given the student offer in London at that time. Student standing seats for three, four, five pounds. Having been to The Royal Opera House, ENO and The National Theatre every night, almost. I was quite keen to have some money so that I could go on participating in the arts as a member of the audience. (Susan Hodson)

Having arrived at university already in possession of an interest in the arts (she chose to study English and Drama) she has been able to successfully build on her cultural capital, reportedly to an almost obsessive degree of going to performances nearly every night because it was then relatively inexpensive for her to do so. She cites her love of culture as being her motivation for finding paid employment but it was actually the cultural capital that she had already acquired which resulted in her being able to get a job within the arts sector and so her participation and engagement increased even further still.

Although the interviewees have had experience of high culture for a long time they confess that some of their initial encounters with it, specifically opera, were not always positive ones:

I went as a child, my Auntie would take me to the opera once a year to WNO and I hated it with a vengeance, with a passion. I didn’t understand it, it was very long and there was a lot of screeching. (Bethan Price)

Going to the opera, and specifically to see the Welsh opera company, at such a young age was part of her cultural upbringing and although not appreciated at the time it has meant that as an adult she is rich in cultural capital and now enjoys and values going to the opera, as

well as her interests in theatre and contemporary dance. Another interviewee describes his first time at the opera as a young man:

When I went to university I thought I'd try opera and my first experience of opera was disastrous. It was Faust actually ... because I was a student I could only afford the gods ... you sat on very, very narrow benches which had no backs, so it was very uncomfortable apart from that the opera was very gloomy and dark and I didn't like it at all. Put me off opera for years. I didn't go to opera again until I was in my fifties.  
(Andrew Band)

He relishes telling this story about how awful his initial experience of opera was. In this way he portraying himself very much alongside the masses, who do not like or appreciate this art form, but then he is different (and superior) because he has persevered with this, albeit much later in life, and now opera is an important part of his life. There is the idea expressed then that culture can change an individual. They see themselves as personally altered by their early cultural experiences often citing one particular moment or event that has effectively turned them on to culture, for example a chance meeting with some ballet dancers led to a lifelong interest in ballet for one interviewee, so that he describes this event as having “awakened my love” and he sees himself as being “sort of transformed” (Iwan Williams) by it. Another interviewee credits his love of classical music to his time at grammar school when he had a “very good music master ... he would play records on his wind-up gramophone” (Andrew Band). These are vivid memories of how they have been personally shaped by culture.

### **The Arts are part and parcel of who I am**

Culture continues to have a pivotal role in their lives. Early exposure and those key transforming moments have led to a deep and committed interest in the arts. It is part of their life and lifestyle “my connection with the theatre and music generally continued throughout my life. I always went to theatre and music concerts” (Andrew Band). It also means that they themselves are now involved in transmitting cultural capital to the next generation:

It's kind of how home is. So our, I have two sons, and there would not be many people who know more about the cinema and films than them. Not because we've made it an issue but, you know, every family has its currency, its subject, and ours is films. My elder boy is reading English and has a love, a real deep love of poetry. If I could have chosen, I mean he chose it for himself, but if I could have chosen what I wanted him to do that was exactly what I wanted him to do ... it's part of, our, part of what we do. Trying not to sound pretentious but it's just part of what we do. (Graham Johnson)

His sons have early experience of culture and he stresses that this is not something that has been forced upon them rather it has arisen naturally and has resulted in genuine interest and 'a real deep love' of it. For him culture is an emotive topic. It is integral for the time that they spend together as a family and their individual self-concepts as his son is now studying literature at university. He does not want to 'sound pretentious' as he tries to explain how culture is not a separate part of his life but that it runs through all elements of it; his work and family and leisure time. For members of the cultural elite, therefore, high culture is a fundamental and pervasive aspect of their identity, so much so that one interviewee explained this as:

The Arts are part and parcel of who I am ... Somebody once asked my mother how does she define herself and she said 'I'm a Welsh-speaking woman who's a Christian' so those are the three things about her I'd, well if somebody asked me 'Well what would you define yourself as?' I'm a Welsh-speaking, well, cultural woman. (Bethan Price)

She perceives that being a Welsh-speaking woman forms fundamentally who she is, but where her mother describes herself as a Christian, she replaces this with being cultured. Her dedication and commitment to culture is equivalent to her own religion.

### **The world would be a far better place**

I have argued that members of the cultural elite, while subscribing to a view of culture that should be broad and all encompassing, actually create a division between themselves who appreciate high cultural art forms and people who follow mass or popular culture. They

recognise that their own lives and identity have been shaped by culture and so they make the argument that it has the power to transform the lives of other people too:

I think culture ought to be embraced at all levels. I think there's something virtuous about culture and I think to be cultured is a virtue because if I say in conversation someone is cultured, that's, that's praise isn't it? I don't know whether you use the same phraseology but this is a cultured kind of guy would mean, you know, he'd been brought up to read some sensible type of books, been taken when he was young to a stage play or something. And I think we should make sure more people should get the chance to do all that, to read sensible books, to take part in debates, to go to all of those things ... Culture is virtuous and a lot of people who are less privileged, that well, we would like to see rising up the social scale, let's try and make sure they get to do those things that are free like museums. (Iwan Williams)

Being familiar with high culture i.e. literature and theatre, makes someone 'cultured' and this is then admired and respected by the interviewee. He argues that this culture should be 'embraced at all levels' meaning by those at the lower end of the social scale who were not born with the advantages that he himself had. Culture should be used to transform and change people and he sees it as part of his role and duty, as a member of the cultural elite, to assist with this. The overall aim is to benefit and improve society in this way:

I can see a huge role for the creative industries in both the UK and in Wales in awakening people's interest in debate. There's so many people who have got turned off by the political scene, and it seems to me that quite often, it's with the subtlety of performances that you actually get proper debate about the different options that are facing us ... it's really the cultural sector, that really needs to take the lead in opening up the debate, it seems to me. (Aled Parry)

He believes that culture can be used as a tool in order to engage more people with politics, and this also underlines the need for elite integration of the different spheres. Culture can be instrumental for creating change in society, and for Wales in particular, and it can benefit the character and nature of society:

I think it's nice for a country to honour its poets, and its prose writers and its musicians and its artists. I wish more countries would do that. I think the world would be a far better place if more people put more emphasis into culture rather than other things. (Stephen Owen)

He maintains the division between 'people' meaning the majority, who do not currently place enough value upon high cultural artefacts such as literature and poetry. In his view society

would improve if they embraced his culture, which here is not only high but a noticeably Welsh one.

The interviewees' appreciation of high culture, the lengthy nature of their relationship with it and their 'othering' of mass culture may well be generic to other elite groups, i.e. the English cultural elite. The focus of this thesis is on the Welsh cultural elite and so while the interviewees construct ideas of culture as being high, including opera, classical music, ballet and the visual arts, it is often specifically Welsh forms of this that have significance and relevance in the lives, for example Welsh National Opera and The National Eisteddfod. In the next section of this chapter I discuss how it is that they carve out a distinctly Welsh cultural identity for themselves.

## **Part II: Welsh Culture**

The elite group of interest in this study are specifically a Welsh cultural elite. Their nationality forms an important part of their self-concept and identity and it also impacts on how they see and define culture. In this section I explore how the interviewees define themselves as Welsh and this reveals why being Welsh is important for success in the network. While they declare themselves as opposed to the clichés and stereotypes and about Wales they do actually revert to the romantic notions of Wales as a meritocratic country. This is a place where culture, learning and education are valued in their own right. They then use these ideas in order to tell their own biographies and so to prove their credentials as a true member of the Welsh cultural elite, as well as helping them to try to justify their positions of privilege.

## **Welsh is what I am**

The majority of the sample are Welsh (see Table 1) so what does their nationality mean to them? And how does it impact on how they understand and experience culture in Wales? There is general confusion about what Wales is and what it means to be Welsh (Day, 2002) and this is revealed in the interviews with one interviewee directly posing this question to himself “And then of course you’ve got the notion of what constitutes Welshness which is a ripe question” (Mark West). He acknowledges that there is ambiguity and that this creates debate. In order to address this and to help them define ‘Welshness’ the interviewees draw on the cultural aspects of the country, portraying it as a particularly cultured nation which has its own distinct culture (which is specifically different from England and being English):

It’s what we’re about in Wales. It’s passion, it’s ... sport, it’s culture, it’s in our psyche, it’s in our, it’s what we are, it’s what defines us. Welshness is all of this ... We come from a broad culture that includes sport and singing, these are things that make us Welsh. (Bronwyn Powell)

Welshness here is inextricably linked with two important elements of culture and these are music and sport (this adds validation for my decision to include a sports organisation in my sample). Culture is an intrinsic part of them, it shapes them and their identity as a Welsh person. They feel emotionally connected to their country and this resonates with the concept of the Welsh patriot, for whom Wales is everything (Morris, 2000). For those with a Welsh name, it allows them to wear their Welshness as a badge (and this is why pseudonyms were chosen which reflected this):

Welsh is what I am, it’s obvious from my name. If you establish someone else is Welsh you always ask each other where you come from. (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

Her Welsh name gives her a concrete Welsh identity and she is very proud of this. It can then be used when she is outside of Wales in order to establish relationships with her fellow countrymen / women. It is important to ask where they are from, with the likelihood that themselves will know it because Wales is a small country. Having this shared knowledge and



experiences creates a common bond which can then assist with the act and process of networking.

Working in, and making contributions to the cultural sector in Wales is experienced differently, therefore, for members of the cultural elite who are not Welsh, although these are in the significant minority. It is the case that Wales does employ people from outside its borders (Williams and Morris, 2000) and that this has created some tensions, leading some commentators to see Cardiff as all but English (Morris, 2000). However, an important aspect of being a member of the cultural elite is being Welsh. The inner circle is often described as the ‘taffia’ and the ‘crachach’ and membership to this relies on being Welsh and Welsh speaking. This then creates problems for people who hold high profile positions in the cultural sector who are not Welsh. Susan Hodson is English and on her arrival to Wales did “encounter some hostility ... I think I fooled myself. I think they were more suspicious and a bit more hostile than I thought” (Susan Hodson). She dealt with this animosity by pretending it was not there, demonstrating her credentials as a fixer, she is resilient and courageous and able to meet a challenge. While this strategy may not have been wholly successful, she did develop another one. She remembered that her father had actually been born in Wales although he had moved away as a very young boy. She has since been able to use this information to declare some Welsh roots in order to help her to pass in the network, and she reports that the effect that this has had was that “everything changed”. She has continued to use it as a tool to facilitate networking in order to build connections:

Sometimes I’ve played a bit of a game I’ve played up my, you know, I’m English, born in Oxford, studied in London, first jobs in London, almost feeling the anti-electricity and then the moment when I drop it in, and a couple of times I’ve actually known people just about enough to say you’ve changed now you think of me differently now and they kind of laugh it off but they know it’s true. (Susan Hodson)

The fact that she does this reiterates how important she believes it to be to be Welsh, or at least be able to claim a degree of Welshness, in order to enjoy meaningful relationships with other (Welsh) people in the network. For her, doing the act of networking, has become a more complicated one. She puts on a performance of an English person for dramatic effect, but the twist or punch line in the story is that her father was born in Wales.

### **We loath the use of the dragon**

Being Welsh, therefore, is a very important component of being a member of the cultural elite in Wales, both for their own personal self-concept and identity and in order to facilitate relationships in the network. However, they simultaneously turn against what they see as the clichés about Wales and Welsh culture and try to distance themselves from these. They are keen to emphasise that their understanding of culture is not one that is concerned with stereotypical images “we loath the use of the dragon in all things Welsh” (Graham Johnson) or one that is solely concentrated in the past which relies upon:

The black face is the famous one ... the lottery launch for Wales had people with black faces coming up a hill singing Welsh hymns and you just thought well, you can imagine what we all thought, Oh god, you know, is this what you want to underline?  
(Susan Hodson)

This clichéd image of Welsh people is used as a symbol to represent the whole of the Welsh nation but she is arguing that there is more to Wales than this and so this is doing a disservice to the country, instead the focus should be on its current cultural achievements. Another interviewee makes a similar argument:

Was it Harold Macmillan that said, you know, the past should be a springboard for the future and not a sofa or whatever that you lounge in and I'm very much of that opinion really. (Annette Cook)

The interviewees express a commitment to the present and the future of Wales rather than wanting to dwell in the past, which is accompanied with all the clichés and stereotypes. The Welsh are portrayed as people who have a ‘love affair with the past’ (Hannan, 2000) and

their obsession with its romanticised traditions has itself been with the Welsh for a long time (Morris, 2000). Although the interviewees declare themselves opposed to this, in reality they too call upon these romantic notions of Wales when telling their own biography and in explaining their vision for Wales, as Smith (1984) argues that often the clichés are too close to the truth to ignore.

### **From pretty ordinary stock**

One ideal of Wales that they draw upon is the idea of Wales as a cultured nation. It is seen as a land of learning where the accumulation of knowledge and appreciation of a variety of art forms is valued amongst the mass of ordinary people, the *gwerin*. They are cultured, well-educated and self-disciplined (Williams, 1985). This concept of the Welsh as a literary people, who value educational achievement and recognise talent with the Eisteddfod, is a pervasive one and it has helped to shape the national identity of disadvantaged people living in rural Wales (Baker and Brown, 2008). The interviewees use this image in order to construct their own cultural self in the same vein and so work hard to present themselves as ordinary people, originating from humble beginnings “My family are from Grangetown. I come from pretty ordinary stock ... really, my mum was from Barry Island” (Iwan Williams). Similarly another interviewee talked about how in an article about him in *The Western Mail* it “said born in Splott ... my mother was mortified ... she had spent her entire life not mentioning the fact that we come from Splott” (Graham Johnson). While the previous generation may have been ashamed to say they were from Splott, he is now so proud of his origins that he is prepared to disclose this to a wide audience. It serves to make him a man of the people, in a similar way to how politicians try to appeal to voters, as being posh and privileged is not appreciated (Walden, 2004). He is just like everybody else despite his current financial wealth and his Welsh celebrity status, but it is ironically his success that has

provided him with the confidence to disclose his place of birth, knowing that this can no longer serve as a barrier to him in his career, as he has already effectively ‘made it’.

Having loyalty to ones origins has been described as a specifically Welsh characteristic and often the picture that is painted by the interviewees is of humble origins that are specifically Welsh in character:

I am originally from a mining village in North Wales and my parents still live in the same two-up two-down end terrace that I was brought up in ... I’d actually grown up in an environment where, looking back, people would probably classify that as being deprived. Actually, I never considered myself deprived because everybody was in exactly the same boat. Everybody had hand-me-downs. Everybody looked the same when they went to school and nobody knew any different. (Gareth Morris)

He identifies himself as belonging to a working-class community that functioned around the coal mine. Although materially disadvantaged his upbringing was culturally rich. He places his origins at only a relative distance away from him because his parents still live in the same house. His connection to this way of life, a cultured existence, remains. Proudly declaring their humble origins, therefore, serves several purposes. It aligns them with Welsh traditions and gives them the credentials of a true Welsh person. It helps them to present themselves as being like the rest of society as they attempt to eradicate the status difference by saying that they too are of the people. It is also used as a way to justify their current position of privilege because they are subscribing to the idea of a meritocratic nation which rewards talent and hard work, similar to business elites, who claim modest backgrounds and attribute success to the values that their parents have given them (Maclean *et al.* 2006). How humble their origins were in reality is difficult to judge, for example members of elite groups often confess to not being rich but this is only because they compare themselves to their peers who are extremely wealthy, rather than the mass in society (Domhoff, 1983; Ostrower, 1997), but crucially they wish to be seen as coming from ordinary and humble origins which are also distinctly Welsh and cultured.

Many of the interviewees emphasise their humble origins in order to qualify as a 'true' Welsh person but it also serves an additional purpose. By highlighting where they have come from they can use this to simultaneously convey how far they have travelled (up the social ladder) and this has the effect of underlining the current high status that they enjoy. I have argued elsewhere that members of the cultural elite construct their ideas of self by constructing this in opposition to an 'other' (i.e. a bad board member, people who enjoy mass culture). Here they are using this device of contrasts, albeit slightly differently, by making a direct comparison between themselves as they are today and their younger selves. Matthew Hughes who has been involved with the National Eisteddfod in a leadership capacity began his interview by stating "My first involvement with the Eisteddfod was to sell ice-cream on the field when I was about ten years old" (Matthew Hughes) as a way of providing a context for understanding his success. Actually, I already knew this because I had read the same thing during my analysis of secondary data in preparation of his interview schedule. It is for him, therefore, an important part of his biography, one which he frequently flags up because he is proud of the fact that he has been involved with the National Eisteddfod for so long. As a result it is intrinsically tied up with his (Welsh) self-concept. A similar technique was displayed by another interviewee as he reflected on being made an honorary fellow of Newport University. He said that he was particularly pleased with this because:

I was born and brought up in Newport. My earliest memories of the Newport campus are scrumping apples there as a small boy in short trousers.' (Phillip Smith)

Again, this serves to highlight how far he has travelled in terms of social status, but also reiterates his Welsh heritage, that actually geographically he has not strayed that far from his roots. Another way in which this device of contrasts is used is by comparing themselves to their parents:

My father was a miner ... and he would have loved to know that I ended up on the board, you know, after he died, he would have loved to know that. (Aled Parry)

His father worked in the mine and now he sits on its board. The difference between only two generations starkly emphasises his social mobility while reiterating his credentials as a true Welsh man born out of humble Welsh industrial origins. This echoes the findings of McCrone's (1992) work in Scotland and the existence of the *lad o'pairts*, somebody from humble origins who through education can rise up the social ladder without losing touch with their origins.

### **The grammar school made me**

The social mobility that they have experienced has been made possible because of education and this is something traditionally valued by the *gwerin*. For the ordinary people in Wales success is seen as coming from education and dedication to self-improvement (Baker and Brown, 2008) but importantly traditional Welshness is about educational and cultural achievement in its own right rather than worldly success (Rees and Delamont, 1999). If the interviewees subscribe to this ideal of learning and intellectual advancement, then this would help to explain why often they are self-deprecating about their achievements and try to play down their worldly success in an attempt to portray themselves as a cultured individual, motivated for purely intellectual reasons rather than selfish ones concerning their own personal advancement in society. Members of the cultural elite, therefore, describe their humble beginnings as also being environments which promoted education and learning "Education was probably the first and most important influence on me" (Gareth Morris) and it was their parents which instilled this upon them:

A lot of where we get to as individuals is, can go back to your kind of family upbringing really. Definitely for me it did. A kind of belief that you could achieve whatever you wanted to, within in reason, if you worked hard and applied yourself ...I never felt 'Oh I can't do this because I'm from South Wales and I was brought up in an ordinary family home' ... I always felt that if I worked hard I might be able to do it and if I wasn't good enough then well fair enough. (Annette Cook)

She attributes her success to the outlook that she was given about life during her upbringing. Rather than thinking about her 'ordinary' origins as a hindrance the emphasis is placed on hard work and diligence. This device of stressing the importance of hard work and being good enough is also a common one amongst financial elites (Harvey and Maclean, 2008). In a similar way Gwen Griffiths acknowledges the influence that her father had on her:

My father was somebody who had left school very young, had no formal education, but had taught himself. He was a great reader and although he had quite a, a very working-class, a very poor background ... he was actually one of the kind of leaders of his society and I had always assumed really that people who were intelligent or who read and thought and discussed would naturally be people who would be some sort of leader, as they were in a very working-class environment in that kind of era. (Gwen Griffiths)

She employs the familiar Welsh motifs. She grew up in a working-class environment and although her father was not formally educated he was well read and cultured and this resulted in him being a leader within his community. She uses this ideal in order to construct her own identity, as someone who is intelligent and cultured herself she believes that it is right for her to take on a leadership role, now not just within her community, but for the whole of her country.

One cliché about Wales that was expressed concerns the perceived limited opportunities that were available to the educated person in the past who was coming from these working-class communities so that "then it was a fairly blinkered structure you were either a preacher or a teacher. What else was there?" (Matthew Hughes) and another interviewee talks about how his parents "always impressed on me the importance of education and that was always seen as the way out, whether it was as a teacher, as a minister" (Gareth Morris). Only having two available options, while employing a Welsh stereotype, also serves to emphasise the nature of their own success story that they have broken free of these restrictions. Additionally it also portrays education as being of fundamental importance. It is 'a way out' and allows an

individual to raise themselves up the social scale. This is seen as being possible because of the belief in Wales as a meritocratic nation, which is seen as different to England:

I think things are very different in Wales ... certainly nowhere near the same degree as it is in England in terms of the public school network and if you ever look at the background of most people I think it's a much more meritocratic society that we actually have here. (Gareth Morris)

He believes that it is much more typical in Wales to find successful people who have humble origins and so in a way this becomes a marker that can be used to facilitate access to the network. On one hand it assists to denote the individual as a true Welsh man / woman and at the same time helps the network to portray itself as fair and open.

The interviewees have experienced a number of different types of educational institutions. A couple of them had attended public schools and saw this as having a lasting impact upon their behaviour so that "I think that goes down to my public school background, shining my shoes everyday" (Iwan Williams). A few of the younger interviewees had been through the comprehensive system of secondary education but the majority in the sample, what with being of the older generation, had experienced the tripartite system and so having passed the 11 plus examination had attended grammar schools. It is this that they see as effectively providing them with a passport out of their humble working-class origins and enabled them to go on to another level of learning at university. One interviewee spoke particularly fondly of the grammar school system:

It was an incredible time, because so many of us, and I see colleagues ... people my own age, my own sort of peer group, and we're all amazed at how easy it was in the late sixties and early seventies to transcend class barriers and the movement was hugely supported, of course, by the grammar schools. I mean they were elitist. I mean that is what they were, and we understood that, but it did have a transformative effect on people like myself, of course, who came, who were from a very working-class background ... we lived through a period when so many people were able to better themselves and move into a completely different class, from working class to almost the upper-middle class really with ease. It's sad that we haven't got that now. It's sad that we've lost that. (Aled Parry)



While he recognises that there were inherent problems with the system, that it was 'elitist', it did directly benefit him and others of his generation and allowed them to be socially mobile and so he mourns the loss of this, in a similar way to Annan (1990). Another interviewee reflected on this:

I think the grammar school made me. The headmistress was a stickler. One of my punishments was to recite a Welsh poem in an Eisteddfod, and oh god, she made me go in ten minutes every day to go through this blimin' poem with her, but I still remember her with fondness because it actually made me concentrate. (Bronwyn Powell)

She chooses to present a personal memory of her time at grammar school. She specifically credits this for her success because it 'made me'. Her experiences there are specifically Welsh in nature, related to the language and culture, and through this she learnt how to focus and apply herself, a skill required to be an effective fixer.

While the interviewees had differing school experiences a key characteristic of their education is that the majority attended prestigious universities and it is these that are important in the formation of the cultural elite (Annan, 1990; Rubinstein, 1993). As they reflect on their experiences at institutions including Oxford, Cambridge and London School of Economics, they concentrate on the difference between these elite establishments and their humble origins and this is further use of the device of contrasts which serves to emphasise their modest beginnings while exhibiting their significant achievements:

I adored Oxford, and the buildings. I mean it was a culture shock in that there were so many people from very very prestigious schools and they'd obviously been highly advantaged but Oxford was also a place, it was a place where merit counted quite a lot and if you had a scholarship for example you were in a very elite group ... you immediately had something, well to buoy you up. To think I must be as good as these people, they've had a lot more advantages than me ... It was so different, but I knew it was going to be different, and I wanted the difference. (Gwen Griffiths)

She benefited from receiving a scholarship and she used this as a status symbol once at Oxford University. This anecdote emphasises her talent, ability and hard work because she

got there because of these, rather than because she was born privileged. Although she describes it as a ‘culture shock’, because things were so socially different there, she actually embraced this opportunity and challenge (as a true fixer does) and importantly sees herself as having a right to be there, as in Baker and Brown’s study (2008). These experiences were also shaped by the fact that they were a Welsh person who was now living and studying in England. One interviewee enjoyed his time at university:

Despite the fact that when I got there nobody could understand a word that I said (*laughs*). I’d never travelled anywhere away from Wales before. It was really strange. I got up at a debate to speak ... and after I’d spoken for about five minutes somebody said ‘Would somebody mind translating that for us’. I mean (*laughs*) it was just so embarrassing. (Aled Parry)

He is different, not only because of his working-class background, but because of his ‘foreignness’ to the extent that other people claimed that they could not understand what he was saying. Now he is in a position to laugh about this episode, and although it did not detrimentally dent his confidence at the time (he carried on debating while at university), telling the story reiterates how far he has travelled, in both a geographical sense as he was once an outsider in a new country, but also socially. It makes his achievements in England (he enjoyed a career as a civil servant in Westminster) even more impressive.

### **Sport is part of our life**

The interviewees do not see their education when they were growing up as something which stopped at the school gate. Preparation and their grounding in culture, and an understanding of a specifically Welsh culture, continued through activities within the family and the wider community. They see themselves as benefitting from a Welsh upbringing which has helped to shape their personality and hone their interest in the cultural sector. This passion, rooted in childhood, has remained with them and now acts as an important motivating force and so

they are genuinely interested and really care about it because it is a core component of their life. One important element in their background is the role that sport has in their lives:

As a school girl I was passionate about sport. I was from a sporting family. My father was a sportsman and so it was ingrained in me, as it is in most young people in Wales that, you know, sport is part of our life. (Bronwyn Powell)

Sport is such a fundamental part of her character that she describes it as 'ingrained' in her but crucially she portrays this as being the case for the majority of people in Wales. For her personally this has resulted in a career developing sport for her country on a national and international level but she sees this as starting out of a very normal Welsh upbringing. Another interviewee who also remains involved with sport, alongside a range of other cultural organisations, also identifies that as a young Welsh person sport was a predominant factor in his life:

My father is a massive rugby man and so rugby it was, the culture at home was rugby. Rugby, rugby, rugby, rugby... it was just, we all have our, that's just what life was. (Graham Johnson)

Rugby, seen as the traditional sport of Wales, defined his life from an early age and it took up a large amount of space within it. In a similar way to how his current range of cultural interests and activities consume his time, but this is how it has always been for him, it is a natural part of his existence with culture and life being one and the same.

### **Why are there so many great Welsh singers?**

Their other Welsh training ground is reported as being the tradition of the Eisteddfod, a specifically Welsh practise which celebrates the cultural achievements of its countrymen and women. So while members of the cultural elite may claim that they are not interested in the obvious clichés about Wales actually they do use these traditional notions, rooted in the Celtic legacy of the country with a focus on poetry and literature (Petro, 1998) in order to construct their concept of Welsh culture. 'Welshness' for them, therefore, is intrinsically

related with this Celtic apparatus (Day, 2002) in a similar way as tartanry is used in Scotland (McCrone, 1992). The Eisteddfod is described as being born out of specifically working-class communities:

It was a quarry valley so at the time that I was growing up there was actually slate quarrying going on. It was a huge bustling village where although people didn't have a lot of money at all there was lots of active creativity, Eisteddfodi, chapels, self-generated activity almost all of it. (Gwen Griffiths)

Her humble origins are explicitly Welsh in character drawing on ideals of a close-knit society based around a traditional Welsh industry. People living there were hardworking, and although not financially wealthy, had their lives enriched by culture and importantly were actively participating in creating it. This is identified as being a fundamental part of their own personal upbringing, and early emersion into cultural life, so participating in Eisteddfodi was:

We did it because we came from a Welsh speaking part of Montgomeryshire, where to speak Welsh and to enjoy ourselves in Welsh whether it be competing in any shape or form was, we just grew up that way. (Matthew Hughes)

The Eisteddfod has relevance in their own lives, it has shaped their biography but it is also seen as having wider benefits. It is an important training ground that ultimately benefits the cultural well-being of the whole of the nation. It is described as being “very empowering for young people ... it is fine to sing and recite and perform in Wales. There's no self-consciousness about it” (Susan Hodson) and this early involvement can be the beginning of an illustrious career:

Why do these people, why do they succeed? What is the route to Bryn Terfel's success? And Rebecca Evans? They will tell you that it all began in Chapel. It all began in the Eisteddfod. They had an early opportunity of performing at a certain level and then the opportunity was there for them to develop and be trained, professionally trained. (Matthew Hughes)

The Eisteddfod becomes a way of identifying talent, this can then be honed and can result in international success for some individuals, which in turn profits Wales by adding to its portfolio of cultural achievements, but importantly this is born out of Welsh tradition.

### **A jewel which should be protected**

The Eisteddfod is a competition through the medium of Welsh and the language is an intrinsic part of Welsh culture. Although not all of my interviewees spoke it (see Table 1) it is an important requirement for belonging to the core of elite Welsh society and I have discussed previously (in Chapter Four) how the language creates divisions within the network and serves to create an inner circle. For those who are Welsh-speaking it forms an important part of their identity, being intrinsically related to their own self-concept as well as their ideas and ideals about culture “It’s not just another language. It’s a way of living and having your being which is completed by the language in my view” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). These sentiments are echoed by:

The culture and the language go hand in hand and they’re integral to each other. More so than the English language in England and the cultural element because they’d be more stand alone, its separate from the language, but I’d argue in Wales that they are coded and they are central to each other. (Bethan Price)

The language is seen as fundamentally important for maintaining a specifically Welsh culture in Wales but for people who do not speak the language they are excluded from appreciating and participating in this. The Welsh language is regarded as precious, as “a jewel which should be protected” (Stephen Owen) and so he argues that:

We should all realise that this language is a living language. It’s worth preserving and whether we speak it or not, we shouldn’t be afraid of it and we should do everything we can to ensure that it does survive. The world would be a very, very boring place if everybody in the world spoke the same language with the same accent, same dialect, and everything. I think languages enrich the world, enrich our experiences and we should do everything we can to ensure that these languages survive. (Stephen Owen)

He celebrates the diversity that is created through people speaking different languages while simultaneously suggesting that it does in reality create fractions and tensions. His use of ‘we should all’ emphasises his belief that even people who do not speak Welsh should help to sustain it because it adds to the cultural life of Wales. An English (and non-Welsh speaking) interviewee also recognises this:

There is a whole cultural tradition, which actually isn't just tradition, it's still developing and still going forward through a whole lot of art forms that belong to Wales that belong to the language ... that are really important for the nation, for Wales and for its identity. (Susan Hodson)

She first calls the Welsh language art forms 'tradition' but she then checks herself in order to acknowledge that actually these are still evolving, and are not just relics from the past. Once again Welsh culture is portrayed as being entrenched in the language, and so retaining this is important for Wales and its cultural well-being as a whole.

When talking about their own use of Welsh, some of the Welsh speakers use it to further emphasise their humble, and specifically Welsh, origins. For them, as native speakers of the language, it is a language that belongs to their childhood and which often became unused when they moved to England as young adults to study and work. Having returned to Wales and being employed in the cultural sector they now need to use their Welsh in order to conduct business, during board meetings and when talking to the media and they report that they have found this difficult:

I'm shy about my Welsh because we only spoke it at home until I was about ten so when I came back to Wales it was with very childish Welsh which I hadn't used for years. (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

Her Welsh is part of a distinct time in her life and she now has to utilise it during very different contexts. In a very similar way another interviewee talks about how he did not use his Welsh when he was working in London:

The only conversations that I would have had would have been with my parents on the phone or when I came home for a holiday and then you talk about the weather and what you want for tea. Those usual sorts of things. So when I came here, I think probably the quality of my Welsh wasn't as good as I would have wanted it to be because I didn't have the vocabulary. If somebody sort of said to me 'What has been the impact of the recession?' I'd think, 'What's the Welsh word for recession?' I know it now, it's diswasgiad, but at the time I wouldn't have known it and so over the years I have had to learn a new business vocabulary almost. (Gareth Morris)

He has had to invest time and effort into his Welsh so that he can effectively use it in order to fulfil his role adequately. This shows how far he has travelled socially and also suggests that it is his fundamental ‘Welshness’ that has been incredibly beneficial to him in the network.

Members of the cultural elite in Wales construct an idea of what it means to be a Welsh person. Being Welsh is important and they see Welsh culture as having personal relevance in their own lives, as well as being a signifier of belonging to the group and so this puts those people in the network who are not Welsh at a disadvantage. For them a sense of what it means to be Welsh is fundamentally linked with culture and being cultured. Although they proclaim to not wanting to be held back by the past, including the clichés and stereotypes about Wales, they do draw upon the traditional and romantic notions of the country as one of working-class communities in which people enjoyed learning and culture for its own sake. The interviewees stress their own humble origins as a device to justify the privileged positions that they now hold because this emphasises that they were not advantaged from birth and demonstrates their belief in a meritocratic Welsh society. They see themselves as being fundamentally, and personally, moulded and shaped by Welsh culture, including sport, the Eisteddfod and the language. This forms a crucial part of their self-concept and identity. This has important implications for the jobs that they do within the cultural sector in Wales as it impacts on their motivations and creates a sense of duty to high culture generally, and Welsh culture specifically. The next section of this chapter will look at how they use this concept of ‘Welshness’ and the importance of Welsh culture for them in order to explain their declared altruistic involvement, in other words how they use their Welsh identity in order to work for Wales.

### **Part III: Working for Culture**

#### **Everyone's got to put their shoulder to it**

One aspect of Welsh heritage that the interviewees use in order to help them define their own identity, and also to explain their motivations, is the concept of the public-spirited individual and this is something that they hold in high regard “I’ve got nothing but admiration for people who serve the public in that way” (Annette Cook). For them it is a specifically Welsh public-spirited person and so they (once again) revert to calling upon romanticised images of the past of working-class communities that functioned around Welsh industry, for example the coal mines. These people were shaped by these settings and used their skills for the benefit of Welsh society:

People who led, who gave something back to their society, who you would turn to for advice, for some common sense or for solving a problem or something like this.  
(Gwen Griffiths)

Here she is describing the epitome of a fixer as a natural leader who uses their intellect and talent to help their community and it is important that they were motivated by purely altruistic reasons:

These people would give up a lot of their free time ... none of them were in it for any particular advancement. They were all in it as a public service ... they gave a lot of their time for nothing. (Phillip Smith)

He is describing the generation before him as consisting of people who were unselfishly generous with their time, acting out of a genuine desire to help society. This explains the origins of the idea of a ‘fixer’, somebody who is motivated not by the financial incentives or in the hope of progression in the network but because they actually care. One interviewee reflected upon how public-spirited individuals had directly and personally influenced his own life by encouraging him to take part in the Eisteddfod:

So I am very grateful looking back for the people, little did I realise at the time who did give up so much of their time to help us as young people to do something ... we grew up that way and we could have lost out so I have a great debt to those people ... and again volunteers, it was the farmer, it was the postman in that village ... this was



voluntary from our point of view and from the leaders point of view and we were representing our village not our school. (Matthew Hughes)

The Eisteddfod provided an opportunity for the village to come together and compete as a real community. He acknowledges that the people who instigated and led this were ordinary people who had regular jobs, and so they embody the ideal of the *gwerin*. They were cultured, enjoyed music, poetry and literature, and they acted out of a belief that this knowledge and passion should be passed on to the next generation. He emphasises that their involvement was voluntary. Their motivation was their commitment to culture and the collective pride that they shared in their community. His personal gratitude to these individuals in his own life, who formed such a crucial part of his own cultural upbringing, means that in a very similar way as they did, he himself wants to give something back to Welsh society.

Therefore, having constructed the notion of a public-spirited tradition in Wales, one which is based around the idyllic working-class community, the cultural elite then use this in order to present themselves in a very similar way. They describe their involvement as a ‘public service’:

My one sort of luxury if you like is ... that’s not remunerated. That takes up quite a lot of time actually on top of other work but it’s something that I care about so I’m happy to do that as a kind of public service because I think I can offer something.  
(Annette Cook)

She is talking about one of her board positions that she is not paid for but even though this requires a lot of her time and attention she describes this as a ‘luxury’ rather than a burden. As a true fixer she enjoys helping them, because she cares and because she believes that she can be useful to them as someone in possession of the right skills and expertise which are required. In a similar way another interviewee explains his involvement as being because:

I’ve never been inspired by money. I’ve always enjoyed achieving things, seeing things done, helping, my father was an enormously public spirited person and I in a

sense, I grew up in that environment so in a sense a lot of what I do now I would see as a natural part of life sort of thing. I don't see it as a chore or anything like that. It's not. (Phillip Smith)

He has been influenced by his own background and upbringing, and uses this in order to explain where his declared altruism originates from. As a fixer he enjoys helping to achieve things and sees his involvement, and being public-spirited in this way, as an inevitable part of life.

The nature of their involvement as being born out of a commitment to benefit society, is also used as a way of explaining how busy they are. Fixers are very busy people. They want to be seen as people who can always be relied upon to assist their country and the cause of culture and so they describe themselves as people who have difficulty in saying no to things "they don't ask me to do very much actually, fortunately because it would be difficult to refuse" (Christine Wall) and they present themselves as always being willing to help:

Very often the phone rings and says 'Can you help?' and my initial response is to say yes if I can in anyway rather than to say no and then regret it. (Matthew Hughes)

He does not want to miss an opportunity to have a positive impact on the cultural landscape of Wales. This sense of obligation that they feel could also be enforced by the network because of the need to maintain connections within it and the use of favours and promises (as discussed in Chapter Four). Critically though, the interviewees report that they are happy with this. They like being busy and enjoy being helpful "I suppose all my life I've been happy to be of help to people" (Andrew Band). Following the nature of the true public-spirited individual they perceive their contributions, and the time this takes, as an inevitable part of their life, so they see it as "the world has to be made to turn. Everyone's got to put their shoulder to it" (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). By explaining her involvement as simply being because everybody works together to make society function is a deliberate oversimplification, firstly not everybody does contribute to society in the way that she does, but

also by being self-deprecating about her own involvement (by presenting it as ordinary) it simultaneously serves to increase her in stature, because her willingness to work is so natural and becomes even more heroic. It also conveys the sense of duty that she has, and this is echoed by another interviewee who recognised that he had “a duty to provide classical music in the city, and theatre in the city, in the same way that we had a duty to have swimming pools and whatever” (Andrew Band). He sees himself, as someone with power and influence, to have had a responsibility to ensure that culture (note high culture is deliberately contrasted with what will appeal to the masses) could be experienced by people in Cardiff.

### **Put something back into your community**

While the interviewees talk about being public-spirited and giving something back to society, they actually mean making contributions to Welsh society and to Wales. They are specifically motivated to assist their country. Their sense of duty is to Wales and their local community; the humble origins that they derive from. One interviewee who was captain of his school rugby team as a teenager reported that as he got older and increasingly successful:

People would often say ‘Become a vice-president. Put some money back into the club. Get us some sponsorship. Put something back into your community.’ (Aled Parry)

Here community is intrinsically related to the rugby team, the traditional sport of Wales. As a Welshman he describes the obligations that are placed upon him to make not only financial contributions but also to donate his own time and leadership skills. He did become vice-president of the club and so by telling this story he presents himself as a hero. He was needed and he answered the call for assistance, because he believes it was his duty and responsibility to do so. It is, therefore, seen as important that the people who work for Wales, and who do so in the Welsh cultural sector, are themselves Welsh. Good eggs (people who are in possession of the right attitudes and beliefs to be granted access to the network) are

overwhelmingly Welsh (see Table 1). This gives them a loyalty to Wales that they believe an outsider could not have. One interviewee proudly declared “I was born in Wales. I trained in Wales. I worked in Wales all my life” (Christine Wall). Her identity has been fundamentally shaped by her nationality and there is a sense of debt of that she owes to her country, she has effectively repaid this by working in (and for) Wales throughout her long career.

Being Welsh also has the practical benefit of assisting recruitment within the network, so for example on high-profile committees it is crucial to have Welsh people sitting on them. One interviewee explains her appointment to one such committee as being because she “was well-known in Wales because several of the board members were going to be from London” (Christine Wall). It can also help when applying for jobs within Welsh cultural organisations, so being Welsh “made a difference there I think because I would have a loyalty to Wales” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). Having a sense of duty and, therefore, loyalty to Wales are seen as very important. This is presented in direct contrast with people who come to work in Wales from elsewhere and who will only stay a short time:

If you expect to go on living in Wales then your attitude is quite different from you coming from possibly deepest London, or New York or somewhere in the States. You happen to be put here to run something for a few years and then you’ll be off to Timbuktu. So your interest in Wales while you’re here is not a deep interest ... Welsh business in Wales is suffering considerably from the lack of family business and therefore commitment to Wales. (Colin Wilson)

People who are not Welsh lack ‘deep interest’ and ‘commitment’ unlike his fellow countrymen and women who are dedicated to securing what is best for Wales because their interest and attachment is a personal and emotional one.

### **You’re such a small fish up in London**

One reoccurring feature of the biographies of the interviewees is that although they were born in Wales and experienced their initial education there, many of them then moved away from

home to attend universities in England and / or for employment opportunities (specifically in London). Critically at some point in their lives they have returned to Wales. This can either be after a lengthy career:

I had been working in London and as a spoilt child in the civil service I had done most of the things that I had wanted to and I wanted to live in the country so that's when I moved back to Wales. (Rhiannon Evans-Davies)

or after only a brief time "I'm Welsh and I wanted to come home after four years in London really. Simple as that. I never intended to stay in London" (Annette Cook). For her, her identity is Welsh and her home is Wales and so it was inevitable that she would return. Similarly a male interviewee said:

When I was young I went to work in London for three years, had no intention of staying but it was a different world that I wanted to learn a bit about. (Graham Johnson)

He emphasises that it was never his plan to permanently reside there, he very much enjoys living and working in Wales, whereas London is presented as a very different, almost alien world. He went to London for the experience and experience (as already discussed) is an important element in the make-up of a fixer. It has also helped him to develop his London network and make contacts there which he has then brought back with him to Wales, meaning he can also be a successful mover as London connections are valued in the network (as argued in Chapter Four). There is the sense expressed that even when they have been away from Wales, they have continued to have a strong connection with, and loyalty to their country, as one interviewee expresses it:

The Welsh angle is very important and even when I was up in London, I always saw myself for some strange reason coming back to Wales at some point, either at the end of my career, or sometime in my career to do something ... I never thought at that time that I would actually put myself in a position where I could be a source of good and positive action because, you're such a small fish up in London, you can't envisage yourself having an influence and that's what was so great when I came back to Wales that I suddenly found that I could have this influence. (Aled Parry)

Once again the return to Wales is described as having an element of inevitability about it. His experiences in London have honed him as an effective leader and fixer and he is now in a position to have a positive impact on his country. He sees this as being made possible by the fact that Wales is a small nation. This has enabled him to develop a high profile which could not have happened in the same way in London due to its large size. Additionally he has also benefited from now being a Welsh person in a Welsh network. His nationality would not have advantaged him in the same way if he had stayed in England. So although he professes altruistic motivations of helping his country it has also served to benefit him in his own career. Another interviewee makes the same point about his return to Wales from London. He considered whether he wanted to be “a bigger fish in a smaller pool” (Gareth Morris). Returning to Wales has meant he has been able to quickly position himself in a place of power and influence.

### **We’ve got to be better than England**

The majority of the sample have experience of England, from living, working and studying there and England is important for how the interviewees construct their own identities as Welsh, just as they describe how they network by saying that they do not do ‘obvious’ networking and explain their involvement as not being like that of a ‘bad board member’. They present Welsh culture as belonging to Wales and so it is kept distinct from England and what happens across the border. One interviewee argued that this outlook, of constant comparison between the two countries, can be problematic:

I think the Assembly government is terribly wrong. They always go on about being different to England which is nonsense. What they don’t say is we’ve got to be better than England, better than anybody. Let England follow. (Colin Wilson)

He has greater ambitions for his country one in which Wales is a leading nation of innovation and creativity and there is the sense expressed that this is happening and that Wales does have a lot to be proud of:

I think we as a nation, the Welsh, I'm Welsh, we are terribly self-critical. We have this terrible inferiority complex, that everybody else thinks we're parochial and old-fashioned ... whereas before I used to think that if I rolled up to some swanky meeting in Threadneedle street, that they would say 'Oh I've got one of the Welsh coming' I think, because obviously the Welsh are quite cool, I believe that if you have the kernel of something, then you must believe it yourself and you must live to that, then actually everyone will catch up with you very quickly. (Graham Johnson)

He describes Welsh people as often feeling inferior and he himself has experienced this when he has been working in London which is presented as a different and alien world, one in which the Welsh are viewed with suspicion and are seen as unsophisticated. He argues that this is not the case, and so once again the desire to distance themselves from the heritage of the country is expressed, and instead he describes Wales as 'cool'. This reverberates with the sociological literature concerning Wales which outlines a new and reinvented 'Cool Cymru' which has benefited from the contemporary Welsh music scene and the regeneration of Cardiff Bay (Blandford, 1999) so it has been described as having 'new power, purpose and confidence about it' (Morris, 2000). The investment in specifically the cultural sector, for example The Millennium Centre, has helped to transform Cardiff, because, as Yudice (2002) argues, culture can be used to alter the image of a city and help to build a creative economy. However this favours the tastes of the professional and managerial class and so can actually serve to deepen class divisions in the area.

Members of the cultural elite in Wales identify that it is culture that can, and should be, used by Wales in order to showcase the country (specifically to England) and so one interviewee identifies the need for:

A Wales in London event where we really flag up the achievements and the cultural diversity that is now Wales ... there's a fantastic opportunity here for Wales, you

know, to punch above its weight in this particular sector. We've got some fantastic artists, some fantastic cultural icons ... we need to be singing our praises in London, where we could have an impact, and tell people not that we've only got the WNO, but we've got also a good business district now in Cardiff, and you could come and invest and link culture very much to inward investment. (Aled Parry)

It is the cultural sector that is viewed as the vehicle through which Wales' reputation across the border can be enhanced by, and this will then ultimately benefit the Welsh economy. This also illustrates how important it for the cultural and business sectors to be linked, and helps to explain why elite members try to simultaneously occupy multiple positions within the different influential sectors, which itself creates further overlaps between the elite circles. The culture that is spoken about, which needs to be harnessed and utilised in order to ensure this future prosperity, is high culture, consisting of artists and opera and it is this which will appeal to the audience of the cultural elite in England. Importantly though it is also Welsh in character so that Wales should use its cultural traditions as a unique offering to the cultural domain of the whole of the United Kingdom. The National Eisteddfod, therefore, is described as "an opportunity to blow your trumpet for Wales" (Glyn Edwards). It is an event which can be used to very visibly showcase the cultural achievements of the nation and the intended consequence of this is to change peoples' (read English peoples') opinion of Wales, so that they recognise that Wales is a cultural and cultured place:

When you produce people like Bryn Terfel and Rebecca Evans in terms of opera and Welsh National Opera in general and the BBC Orchestra in Wales and so on, they know that there is a culture and the people in England would also need to know that there is a Welsh language culture ... and many people do realise that Wales is no longer a land of tall hats and sheep farming and so on, that it does have a culture. (Matthew Hughes)

Once again, culture is defined as being both high and Welsh and he places particular emphasis on the role of the Welsh language in this. He believes that achievements in this sector can be used to override the stereotypical images of Wales based around rural industry, and yet really he sees the future success of Wales as still being carved out of the cultural traditions of the past.



A key debate within this area of using culture for the benefit and transformation of Wales, is whether the interviewees should be working to promote culture of the highest calibre or should their focus be on sustaining and growing what is Welsh? Welsh National Opera is a perfect example of being both world class and Welsh, but even for this organisation this issue remains:

The opera company right from the word go has been of world interest and it's 100% to be proud of and it came out of the community but ... the point is, it started there but it's gone beyond and the question is, is it allowed to go beyond? or is there a kind of sense of let's keep it Welsh, rather Welsh and community. Is that the most important thing? Or is the most important thing that amateur passion gave birth to professional excellence at the highest order and my view is definitely professional excellence at the highest order is the important thing and that you're only more interesting and get advantage if you recall those community roots and do lots of very, very interesting things with them but you don't, you don't let that haul you back. (Susan Hodson)

She acknowledges the importance of valuing, acknowledging and using the Welsh origins and heritage of the opera company but in her view the principle aim should be to promote what is the best, not simply what is Welsh, in order to maintain its world class status. The romantic notions and traditions of the past are expressed as being cumbersome baggage and that Wales now needs to be more forward-facing. In a very similar way another interviewee remarks about Welsh culture:

It depends whether it's good. Just because it's Welsh isn't really enough. It needs to be like the Welsh National Opera. Outside of Wales it needs to be seen as world class ... If we say we just want to improve Wales then you don't have a very high standard, whereas if you say we want to be world class in what I'm doing and yes we happen to be in Wales, then Wales comes up with it. Wales comes up as part of that. (Colin Wilson)

The key issue for him is that everything that is done in Wales should be done with the aim of being the absolute best and it is only by having this type of mind set that the country will benefit in the long-term. For other people the maintenance of a specifically Welsh culture is of paramount, and this is particularly true in relation to the Welsh language art forms:

I think with the Welsh language, the arts clique will go and see anything and everything ... I had this conversation with somebody who works for the Arts Council

and she was saying that she has a Welsh night and an English night and that she would go and see things that she was not interested in in the medium of Welsh but she wouldn't do that in English ... because it's a smaller audience it's that worry that if you don't go then that could be one of the things that disappears and you want to keep it going. Now I kept on telling her that if there isn't an audience for it then it should disappear so you're not helping the situation by sitting there hating every minute of it. (Bethan Price)

The interviewee herself reports to only attending things that are actually of a high standard and is of the view that simply maintaining something because it is Welsh is not in the best interests of the cultural sector in Wales, but there are people who see it as their responsibility to help traditional forms of Welsh culture to survive. This argument also extends to be one about the people who are employed within the Welsh cultural sector in Wales. Should they be the best that there are? Or is the more critical issue that they are Welsh? Being Welsh (as discussed) is obviously very important but the problem with Wales is that as it is a small country it is perceived that "there isn't a very great depth of talent" (Mark West) and so this could help to explain why the interviewees remain involved, even after they have passed the official age for retirement. Seeing themselves as people who have the necessary experience, knowledge and skills, they then feel obligated to continue with their roles, because they judge that there is no one else able to fix a problem quite like they can.

## **Part IV: The enjoyment. The thanks. The future**

### **I just do what I've enjoyed**

Members of the cultural elite do not do all the things that they do purely for altruistic reasons. They also profess to receiving a great deal of enjoyment and pleasure from occupying these various roles within the cultural domain. This is a theme in the literature concerning philanthropists, who are motivated by their personal love of culture (Ostrower, 1998). The interviewees reflect positively on their career and the positions that they have held in this

sector “that gave me a great deal of pleasure” (Aled Parry) and “pretty much everything that I’ve done has been a privilege” (Phillip Smith). They report to feeling very engaged with and energised by their participation in various projects “you feel this involvement with the whole thing and you get caught up in your own enthusiasm as it were” (Matthew Hughes). They acknowledge that enjoyment is a driving force behind their contributions so that they say “I just do what I’ve enjoyed” (Colin Wilson) and “I’ve enjoyed them all actually. I wouldn’t have carried on with them if I hadn’t” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). She is presenting herself as a very privileged individual because not only has she been fortunate enough to enjoy her work she has also been able to choose what she has done.

The reason for the enjoyment that they experience as a result of occupying their various roles is explained as being a direct consequence of being involved in the cultural sector. They are personally connected to both high and Welsh culture and this has been the case for a long time and so it is of fundamental importance to them. As Putnam (1976) argues elite members work to serve the interests of their own class, the interests that they are protecting here are their own personal cultural tastes. They identify that it is roles within the area of culture which really inspire them “what I enjoy is being involved with the arts” (Andrew Band) so that it is perceived as “a privilege in the sense that most people who are passionate about it don’t get an opportunity to really lead an organisation, a national organisation” (Annette Cook). She classifies her position as a coveted one. She is the figurehead of a body that she genuinely cares about and is able to make decisions about it which will hopefully secure it a lasting cultural legacy in Wales. Being involved in the arts also means that for people working in management roles that they can work alongside artists who are involved in the act of actually creating art and culture:

What I really enjoyed the most is the opportunity that I've had to work with incredibly talented people ... I can soak it up and then I pass it on. So those opportunities to work with those people's visions I really value. (Susan Hodson)

She is able to use her role to ensure that these artistic visions are portrayed to a wider audience in Wales and as an individual who has appreciation and admiration for high cultural art forms she can also personally benefit and learn as a result of this close involvement.

### **It is a very great honour**

The other benefit to holding these roles in the cultural sector, other than the enjoyment and monetary rewards that they bring, is that as individuals they are publicly thanked for their contributions. They are recognised, praised and receive accolades both from within the network and in wider society. As argued in the previous chapter, fixers particularly enjoy starting up organisations, bodies or initiatives, because this is a way in which they can be seen to be obviously making a difference. They want their achievements to be quantifiable. One interviewee who has made significant contributions to the cultural sector in Wales by not only sitting on numerous boards, but by giving money to organisations (for example Welsh National Opera) explains this involvement as being because:

I do like what I do and I think I like being useful to people. Very egotistical in a way. It's like why do we support financially all the things we do? Which we are invariably asked and formally asked, because we get enjoyment from it. I was going to leave a lot of money to certain arts charities in my will and then I thought why should I leave it in my will? I can give it, if I don't need it, I can give it to them now and enjoy the fact that I'm giving it to them. (Andrew Band)

He gets enjoyment from giving, firstly this is because he can see how the money is being put to use and as a member of the audience can experience the creative things that are produced as a result. Secondly he acknowledges that his involvement also serves to flatter his ego. He enjoys being thanked, knowing that he is being useful and instrumental to culture, and specifically the cultural sector in Wales. He is proud of this and it forms an important part of his self-concept. Giving large donations in philanthropic ways can help the nouveau rich pass

into the upper class (Aldrich, 1998) and secure a place in the elite ranks (Crook, 1999) and in a similar way contributions by members of the cultural elite can help to secure their place at the core of the network. Often these are not financial in nature, rather it is their time, skills and expertise that they give freely to organisations by sitting on their boards.

Recognition and thanks for this is formalised through the use of awards and a number of people in my sample had received OBEs and CBEs and had been made honorary fellows of at least one university (see Table 1). Some of the interviewees described their sense of pride in these “It is a very great honour because it is the highest honour” (Matthew Hughes) and use them as an emblem to stand for what they have achieved in their career:

I, well, you always like it (*laughs*) when somebody says thank you and well done. I was of course particularly pleased that, it's very seldom that you get upgraded if you've got an OBE ... and that was a great surprise that I have a CBE on top. Yes it's a nice feeling. (Colin Wilson)

He likes being thanked and the fact that his honour was ‘upgraded’. He emphasises this point because as something that is rare he is able to use this in order to mark himself out as special. He also concedes about awards:

I think a good use of them is to motivate people. I don't think I've ever done anything with that in mind at all but the whole purpose of things like honours is to show appreciation and there's nothing more effective in motivating people than appreciation. (Colin Wilson)

While awards may help to motivate ‘other’ people he positions himself as possessing higher morals than this so that his contributions are truly altruistic in nature. A female interviewee also reflected on the use of awards as motivation:

Somebody believes that I'm doing something that's right so it is a little bit of motivation for me ...I wouldn't say that my work has gone on because of the awards but it has helped because it's kept my motivation going. (Bronwyn Powell)

Although being in receipt of awards is not the sole factor that drives her, it does help and it also forms an important part of her self-concept, because of the fact that she knows she is

appreciated and respected by the network, and this can then help her to secure her status and reputation as a fixer.

Other interviewees express much more discomfort about their various honours and awards. After asking about one interviewee's CBE she replied with "I tried not to make too big a fuss of it" (Gwen Griffiths) and they often do not want to appear to be boastful "I think it's big-headed to think I deserved it, it's not that at all" (Glyn Edwards). Importantly they do not want to appear as somebody who is involved for their own ends (as the bad board member is) but someone who is truly public-spirited and altruistic. They work hard to play them down, presenting them as ordinary and mundane "I've got good relationships with them (*a Welsh university*) so that the next thing I knew I was being offered a fellowship there" (Bronwyn Powell). This actually has the effect of making her even more distinguished, the fact she has these contacts and connections in high places, and that being honoured in this way is quite a normal and routine part of her life, in which she is already in receipt of a CBE. Another interviewee 'forgot' the title of a recent award "Well I was amazed when I was nominated for this award, now what was it?" (Andrew Band). While this may have been a genuine lapse in his memory, it also serves to show that it was not that important to him, otherwise surely he would have remembered its name? He is, therefore, trying to show that his focus and attention is on nobler causes. For members of the cultural elite, being in receipt of awards can assist them with building their status, increase or sustain their motivation and "fan ones ego. If your ego needs fanning" (Iwan Williams) but they position themselves as superior to this, as unselfish and altruistic individuals who do not need their egos 'fanning'. They are already confident about their worth and value to the cultural sector.

### **I want to hit the wall running**

The identities of the interviewees is formed from them being movers, fixers and good eggs and these elements are such a part of their self-concept that it is very hard for them to envisage a time when this will not be the case. Retirement, therefore, is a difficult subject to contemplate. It is not simply the fact that they would be leaving a job, but because of the nature of their involvement and never ‘switching off’ (as discussed in the previous chapter) there is no divide between work and leisure. Work is their life. This may help to explain why one of the components of the profile of a bad board member is that they never retire, and this is something that many of the interviewees could not refute about themselves, only work hard to justify. When asked about their ideas for the future, those that were older and / or already semi-retired could not see themselves as stopping “I would hope to have some sort of involvement for some time to come” (Phillip Smith) and expressed that they still “have one or two irons in the fire” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies). This is used to signify that they are still of value and are in possession of the relevant skills required which can ensure their status at the core of the network is protected. While some wish to keep working at the same level and pace “I want to hit the wall running” (Rhiannon Evans-Davies) others do acknowledge that they will decrease their commitments over time:

I wouldn’t stop altogether. I will always do something ... I will always be hopefully involved in something in Wales. So winding down rather than stopping. (Bronwyn Powell)

She cannot picture a time when she will not be involved in some capacity. It is important for her that she continues her work in and for Wales and this once again emphasises the sense of duty and commitment which they declare for their country.

The interviewees explain this continued involvement by describing themselves as people who would rather be too busy than not. Their participation means that they have something

worthwhile to occupy their time which they can give their mental energy to “I just enjoy doing things day by day as they come along ... I don’t want to be bored” (Colin Wilson). Once again, they directly contrast themselves with the concept of a bad board member, somebody who is content to do as little as possible while enjoying the social elements to their roles “I’m not one to put my feet up and I’m not one to spend a long time on a golf course” (Phillip Smith). They, on the other hand, belong to a special breed of people who have a duty to be an active member and contributor to society:

I don’t think I can be a person who just sits in the house doing nothing. I’d need something to do ... I’d like to somehow participate in public life. I wouldn’t mind being a politician with a small ‘p’ ... I would like to try and help people if I could, maybe by sharing my experience with somebody. (Stephen Owen)

It is in his nature not to be lazy, this is a cardinal sin and fixers are never idle. He wants to always be involved in public life in some capacity, to remain an active and important member of the network. He professes an interest in politics which exemplifies the possibility of overlap and movement between the different spheres of culture and politics as well as the idea that he might want to help others (people on the periphery of the network) by sharing his years of expertise with them. His public-spirited nature, therefore, is presented as ceaseless and he is tireless in his commitment to the cause of culture.

The justification provided for not retiring or stopping is that they still possess the relevant and required knowledge, expertise and skills and benefit from their years of experience in the network. They still have the intellect and mental ability to make meaningful and worthwhile contributions “My brain hasn’t slowed down one bit and I don’t think it ever will because I’m just by nature so busy, it’s what I want to do” (Iwan Williams). They report to still being full of vigor and enthusiasm. Their busyness is a fundamental component to their existence, not being involved and not being busy equates to not really living:



I said many many years ago they'll carry me out of here in a box. No, I like work and I like meeting people. I like feeling that I am of use ... I've seen people of my generation give up working at the age of sixty-five and become cabbages, lost all interest. (Andrew Band)

He likes feeling that he is being of use and sees this as such a fundamental part of life that it will continue until he dies. This level of commitment is also about their own self-preservation. It serves to maintain and protect their status and standing in the network as having roles in the network is the only way to be truly part of the network. As a result giving up their positions of power is a daunting prospect for them:

Having been at the very top of that organisation and knowing that there was a time when you would move on. It's difficult to move to top to bottom isn't it? People saying 'Oh well the king is dead. Long live the king.' Yes it's nice to still be involved ... I can't see that I'd ever stop being part of it. Having taken on that mantle you wear it with pride. (Matthew Hughes)

He acknowledges the system of fixed terms, which meant that he could not be president of his organisation forever, as well as the existence of the periphery of the network in which people are waiting to take his place. And yet his involvement has not ended (he is an honorary life-president) and will continue to be until the day he dies. He is proud of this fact because it can still be part of his life, as well as importantly shaping his self-identity.

## **Conclusion**

Being known as a mover, a fixer and a good egg are all important elements to the public reputation and the internal self-concept of the cultural elite. They function as members of a network. Being a successful and instrumental part of it, one who works for the benefit of Wales in the tradition of the public-spirited individual, allows them a sense of pride in their contributions and a positive feeling of self-worth. Without their involvement their identity is threatened, and so they are keen to maintain their positions and, therefore, place in the network. This helps to explain the apparent unwillingness for elites to retire. They enjoy

making contributions to the cultural sector not only because they themselves benefit as appreciative members of the audience, but because they see themselves as working to sustain the cultural life of the nation.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Long live the good egg, fixer and mover?**

#### **Introduction**

This thesis has explored the experiences and attitudes of members of the cultural elite in Wales using analysis of data gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews. I began by arguing that while research on elite groups within society has generally fallen out of favour in the social sciences, it is particularly the case that in Wales the powerful have not been systematically studied even though its small size facilitates explorations of its elite networks. The claims that the Welsh are meritocratic and classless coupled with the acknowledgment and resentment of the privileged (the crachach or taffia) make for an interesting research site because of the inherent contradictions within this. In Chapter Two I considered the literature on the key debates concerning elite groups, definitions of the term 'elite' and the extent of the cohesion amongst the top sections of society. I then examined the different elite typologies, how these have been researched and the main conclusions that have been drawn from this. I also explored the ways in which Wales has been typically characterised and that little attention has been paid to those in positions of power and influence. In Chapter Three I presented a critical and reflexive account of how I gathered the data with a particular focus on how the interview is a social interaction which requires attention to be given to the unique power dynamics inherent within it. I discussed issues of sampling, gaining access, choice of method, construction and use of the interview schedule, the process of analysis and ethical issues. The three empirical chapters followed, and the data was presented and organised around themes of how the interviewees experience the network, the necessary skills that are perceived to be required in order to qualify as a true member of the cultural elite and finally how they construct ideas of culture, being both high and Welsh in character.

In Chapter One I asked the following main research questions:

- 1. Do the Welsh cultural elite belong to a closed, restricted, self-recruiting and self-referencing network?**
- 2. How do members of the Welsh cultural elite explain and justify their position of power and privilege?**

In this final chapter I will answer these by bringing together the findings from all three empirical chapters and by highlighting the overlapping themes and key arguments. In the final section I will discuss the wider implications that this piece of research has, both for studying up in society generally, in Wales specifically, and for the methods that can be employed to do this. I finish by considering some possibilities for further research in this area.

## **The closed, restricted, self-recruiting and self-referencing network**

### **Characterising the network**

The interviewees belong to a closed and self-referencing network and this was described in detail in Chapter Four. This was born out by the analysis of secondary sources, and Figures 3 and 4 show the extent of the overlaps within this network. Most importantly the interviewees identify themselves as belonging to a network. They spontaneously used the term and so it was part of their own subjective understandings of their social world (as Knoke, 1990 advocates) and as a qualitative piece of research this is important. They characterise this as being very small, one which has numerous connections between its various interlinking parts. They see the same people all of the time and this allows them to build relationships, and collect contacts over time, as they themselves move around the network. These connections are often characterised as being personal and informal in nature. Conversations take place behind closed doors and on the golf course and this allows for a system of exchange and

personal favours. This reciprocity is possible because of enforceable trust embedded in the network (Porter and Sensenbrenner, 1993), as insiders they are trusted, they can make promises and compromises under a sense of obligation to the network.

### **The structure of the network**

The network that the interviewees describe which was presented in Chapter Four is structured in terms of a core and a periphery. The people at the core are the inner-circle (Useem, 1984; Swartz, 1985) or the 'elite within an elite' (Dye, 1986). They are the people with the greatest amount of influence who control the membership and shape of the network. They make the decisions about who gets what job so success in the network depends on developing relationships with these people at the core. Membership to the core is restricted and it is difficult to gain access to but is helped by being a traditional candidate (an older male) with implications of the 'old boy network' and old-fashioned methods of recruitment. A key characteristic of being at the core is having multiple board positions to key organisations, and this serves to keep membership tight and self-recruiting. People are recruited who hold similar attitudes to those already at the core, who are known to them, who they have worked with before, and so it is a very narrow net that is cast.

### **Overlapping sectors**

There is overlap between the culture sector and the political and business worlds, this is especially true as Wales is a small country, with a limited number of people to fill the top positions, which makes such overlaps more likely. Having contacts and connections in different spheres facilitates movement between them, and actually serves to tighten the network further. Political relationships are crucial for assisting with recruitment to top

positions in the network. People need to work to build a positive reputation for themselves in the Assembly, and be able to demonstrate their skills to those with political influence. The relationships with the political actors are often characterised as being friendly, using informal channels to pass information, although these must be managed carefully so to avoid accusations of bias. Links with the political world in London facilitate transition to the centre of the Welsh network, as people are advantaged by bringing their experience and contacts to Wales. Business is important for culture because it funds it, and cultural events can be used in corporate hospitality, as a place for an individual to demonstrate their cultural capital while simultaneously building social capital. Key players were members of Cardiff Business Club who were involved in the corporate world but who also sat on the boards of arts organisations, and I had not anticipated this when I first embarked on the research process.

### **Getting in and staying in**

Gaining access to the network, and in particular to its core of the network is reliant on a number of factors as outlined in Chapter Four. It appears that it is easier to gain access to it if a person is male and it is still the case that there are generally more males on these boards and in high profile positions than women. Secondly if they live in close proximity to Cardiff because this is regarded as the powerhouse of Wales and so for those people in North Wales it is harder to be visible in the network, to develop personal relationships that are crucial to success through attendance at social events. Thirdly it is important to be Welsh and the vast majority of the sample were Welsh. This is seen as important because not only is having a Welsh name a badge of belonging which can facilitate acts of networking but it also means that they will have loyalty and commitment to the country that an outsider would not and so this will help recruitment to boards. Being Welsh-speaking is also important. Certain roles

demand this. It is easier to have conversations with other Welsh-speakers and is an obvious symbol of Welsh identity. Gaining access to the *crachach*, the small Welsh-speaking inner core, demands this. This illustrates how the network is not a cohesive entity. It is itself divided between speakers of the language and those cannot speak it, between men and women, North and South, artists and non-artists. It is a fragmented network and people must traverse the different sections, those who can do this the most effectively, and can join up otherwise unconnected elements are the most influential (Burt, 1992). The network is complex and understanding positions within it is crucial for success, in other words knowing how the network works matters. Therefore, to gain membership a person needs to be in possession of this knowledge.

As this is a discussion of cultural elites, membership to the network is dependent on being fluent in high culture, and being able to demonstrate a real interest and commitment to the arts, either by holding a paid position in the sector or by sitting on boards, as well as making financial contributions (through being a ‘friend’ or business sponsorship). People need to be able to demonstrate their cultural capital and act to continue to build their social capital. The act of networking is fundamental for an individual’s success in the network. Obvious networking approaches adopted from the corporate world of working the room and swapping business cards is aligned with younger people on the periphery of the network. The core members, the true cultural elite, object to this and distance themselves from these obvious forms of networking. They do acts of subtle networking, which is more restrained and takes place in more informal settings, during their leisure time, such as on the golf course or at the opera or theatre. Here they can demonstrate their cultural capital, show their commitment to it and extend their social capital (Erickson, 1996). Subtle networking requires understanding the correct social etiquette, picking up threads, sharing memories, embodying the

organisation they represent, while maintaining a presence in the network and this requires excellent interpersonal and communication skills, these can only be learnt and honed by being in the network, by seeing others do it and by practicing it. Networking is a performance which needs to be rehearsed on the periphery of the network and so membership to the periphery is fundamental for eventually gaining admission to the core.

### **The advantages of being an insider**

There are a number of advantages of belonging to the network and so this explains the effort that people put into networking. Together these accumulate and mean that belonging allows a person to strengthen their place within it. This is for a number of reasons. Firstly belonging to the network gives people a platform on which to demonstrate their skills. Sitting on boards means that they can showcase their talents to others in the network. It serves as one long interview process, if they can build a positive reputation this will help them get further jobs and appointments. The more a person does the more that they get asked to do. Being in the network gives a person visibility, people know them by reputation and through others in the network even if they do not know them personally, and so the personal nature of connections means that people who are trusted can offer their opinions.

Being well-connected increases the likelihood that other organisations will want that individual to work for them because they become a more desirable candidate because they can bring their contacts to their new position, also being high-profile means attention will follow them to their new organisation. Being well-connected also benefits the individuals once they hold these types of positions. It opens up lines of communication, especially as core members hold themselves at a distance, it helps to get through the barrier, especially if



the nature of the conversations that they have are informal, friendly and relaxed. Belonging to the network also serves to increase a person's understanding of it, holding multiple positions means that they have experience of it from different perspectives and this will increase as their career progresses. They learn how the network is connected, that nothing is distinct or separate, how business is done and how to be proficient in the art of networking. Crucially all of this can only advantage a person if they are already a member of the network. It is, therefore, a catch-22 situation as a person can only understand it and act to increase their profile within it from inside of it. This is why the periphery is so important, it allows people to be tried out, to hone their skills and build their reputation without destabilising the core. Acceptance to the core is a lengthy process dependent upon experience so membership is typically reserved for older people who have had time to build up their connections, showcase their abilities and refine their leadership and networking skills. They are then the people who decide who gains other positions in the network and this explains how the network remains tight and self-recruiting.

### **Explaining and justifying power and privilege**

Members of the cultural elite justify themselves and the positions of power, prestige and influence that they have in Welsh society in a number of ways.

#### **Skills and attributes: Not a bad board member**

One way in which they present themselves as being entitled to hold these positions is to directly contrast themselves with their image of a bad board member, as shown in Chapter Five, this then can be used by them in order to emphasise their own worth, credentials and contributions. The bad board member represents stereotypical images held in wider society.

They lack the necessary skills to competently fulfil these positions, take these roles indefinitely and are motivated by financial reasons and to serve their own social interests. By working hard to continually present themselves as not like this ‘other’ it helps to justify their own place in society, acknowledging that this idea exists and criticising it serves to distance themselves from it and so present themselves as very different from this stereotype.

### **Skills and attributes: Fixers can fix it**

The cultural elite justify their positions by calling upon the skills that they have to offer. The shorthand for this that has been used in this thesis is the idea of a person who is a ‘fixer’. Fixers have skills, knowledge and expertise to offer and they use these to be of real instrumental help and benefit to the organisations that they are involved with. They are practical people, who actually make a difference and have an impact. They solve problems, are good in a crisis, and actually enjoy a challenge. They are leaders who are prepared and capable to take on responsibility and manage this responsibility. They are supremely confident and ambitious. They particularly like to start up projects, and once they have fixed a problem they move on (as a good board member should) to somewhere else in the network which requires their skills. Being asked to go somewhere else depends on them having established a positive reputation as a successful fixer.

### **Skills and attributes: The importance of experience**

The interviewees justify holding positions because of their experience, this is fundamental for allowing them to fulfil their role effectively, it has given them insight and understanding. As typically older people, they see that their experience has honed their skills as a fixer. Holding various roles has given them knowledge, confidence and connections and the ability to

manage these and understand how the network works. They see there as being no formal preparation for these types of roles, the only way to learn is by doing them, while this shows the catch-22 nature of gaining access to the network it also means that it is only them who are qualified to occupy them. Only they have the right credentials. This is particularly the case as Wales is a small place so there is a perceived lack of people with the necessary skills, there is the sense that there is no one else to do it but them.

### **Skills and attributes: Giving all of their time to it**

They justify their positions of privilege by stating how committed they are to their roles by emphasising the large amounts of time that it takes them to fulfil them. They work long hours and also need to attend cultural events which take place in the evening as these provide them with further opportunities to network. It becomes difficult to quantify the actual time that they work and they must be skilled at managing their various commitments. There is the sense that they never switch off, but rather than see this as a problem they report to liking this. They are this dedicated to the greater cause, and so present themselves in a heroic fashion.

### **Skills and attributes: Still needed**

One element to the 'bad' board member is that it is typically seen as the pursuit of older people who are retired or semi-retired and this is the case for the interviewees, therefore, they work hard to justify their continued involvement. They say that they had intended to retire but were unable to do so because their expertise is still required and that retirement has continued to develop them, rather than as something which has meant they have stagnated with little to offer. While many confess to liking the current system of short fixed terms, contrasting it

with how things were done in the past (so to highlight it as a better system) because it is important for the health of the organisation they explain how this has not always been the case for themselves personally because of the valuable contributions they can still make. They say they have tried to get off boards but that this is very difficult, so stressing their importance, value and worth in the network.

### **Skills and attributes: Being important people**

Some of the interviewees justify their position by performing to me as the interviewer to let me know that they are important and so deserve their place in the network. They tell me that they do not do 'obvious' networking, this is beneath them as they are at the core and have already made it. They are skilled subtle networkers, proficient enough in the art of networking to be able to avoid social embarrassing situations (for example of not knowing peoples' names while simultaneously implying that everybody knows who they are because of their high profile). In terms of appointments they are often 'persuaded' to apply, such is the demand for their skills. They are used to making decisions about the shape of the network and so people ask them for their opinion on people. They are, therefore, firmly positioned at the core as they determine the composition of the network. They must also navigate the Welsh cultural and political scene with caution because of their involvement with so many organisations so that competing interests becomes a problem. They can even refuse some things, knowing this will not jeopardise their overall standing. All of this serves to reinforce their importance in the network, as a core, prominent and valued member. They are important and so deserve to be there.

### **Skills and attributes: Meritocracy at work**

Stressing their skills, and saying they have got their positions as a result of this is setting up the system as a meritocratic one. One way of doing this is by talking about the appointment process in a way which tries to portray this as a fair system as well as conveying their discomfort with the notion of a biased one. They do this by contrasting it with the system of the past, as explained in Chapter Four when there were no formal appointment processes, and it was very much a case of personal connections and reputation in the network, rather than being in possession of a particular set of skills. People who had the right profile (typically older male candidates) got a phone call out of the blue and were asked to do people favours, all taking place behind closed doors. The interviewees report to not really knowing how this worked and so distance themselves from it, saying they do not understand it is a way of saying they were not instrumental in it, biases inherent in it were not their fault. In contrast they explain the new system of equal opportunities and open advertisements as better and fairer, benefitting women in particular, and requiring people to have the relevant skills and expertise, being an intellectual is no longer qualification enough (Bauman, 1989). Others are more honest and talk about the charade of public appointments, or at least admit to the fact that private phone calls still take place, the inherent contradictions exist, that it is an open competition but they are encouraged to apply, the influencing that takes place, but again the interviewees try to distance themselves from this by claiming they do not really know how it all works. Clearly relationships with those at the core, particularly key figures within the political world, friends in the Assembly, are hugely beneficial in the recruitment process.

### **Skills and attributes: The art of self-deprecation**

The cultural elite are also self-deprecating about themselves, their skills and achievements. They try to play down and belittle these. The tendency to do this has been illustrated throughout the three empirical chapters, so in terms of networking they say their success at it is simply the result of being around a long time, rather than crediting their success to the fact that they have mastered the fine art of networking. They say that being asked to do lots of roles within it is because they are a familiar face, rather than because of their skills and expertise. This serves to oversimplify why they have been successful and dodge the real issue. It is a way to explain away the unexplainable. Why have they been successful? Because they have been able to use the system and make the network work for them. By acknowledging this they would be admitting that it is a biased system of appointments, based on who you know, so better to explain it in other ways so detracting attention away from how the network really works.

They can be self-deprecating about their skills, playing down the impressive nature of their cvs, the amount of experience they have and their natural ability, as well as attributing success in their careers to luck, again rather than skill (although this also illustrates the importance of being in the right place in the network at the right time and having good connections within it). They also use their specifically Welsh background and upbringing in a self-deprecating way. They state their humble origins which serve to denote them as a true Welsh person, a man or woman of the people. It also has other purposes of trying to portray the network as open and fair. It is a meritocratic society in Wales. It also highlights how well they have done and how far they themselves have travelled up the social ladder, where once they spoke childish Welsh now they conduct business in the language.

## **Explanations for involvement: Motivations**

The cultural elite are keen to distance themselves from stereotypes about being motivated for the ‘wrong’ reasons, for the money or the social standing that these positions can bring and this was discussed in Chapter Five. They present evidence to support their more selfless motivations, for example by saying that they did not know the salary when they first accepted positions. Rather they do what they do because they care about the culture sector in Wales, for the morally right reasons because they are altruistic. They draw upon the ideals of a public-spirited individual who acts for the benefit of society as shown in Chapter Six. This is specifically Welsh in character and they identify themselves in the same vein. They express the idea of a sense of duty towards their country and a loyalty to Wales, so even if they have lived in England at some point in their careers, they have returned to work not just in Wales, but for Wales and to promote specifically Welsh forms of culture. They go to great lengths to portray themselves as acting out of altruistic reasons, and that these public-spirited tendencies (rooted in romantic notions of Wales) are ordinary and natural to them, so portraying themselves as even more heroic. They are self-deprecating about their achievements, recalling the traditions in Wales of being a place where self-improvement and learning is done for its own inherent value rather than for worldly success. They claim that they are not interested in this and present themselves as being uncomfortable with receiving awards, one interviewee even ‘forgetting’ the name of one of his, so presenting themselves as truly altruistic because being thanked and recognised is not the reason for their involvement. They claim to act unselfishly and so should not be criticised for the positions of advantage that they hold in society, rather applauded for the contributions that they make (Scott, 1982). But of course, they are rewarded, their involvement secures their place in the network, allowing them to be part of society (Ostrower, 1998) as well as being meaning that they are working in a sector which they enjoy and receive a great deal of pleasure from. Ultimately they are

acting to serve the interests of their own class, because it is elite forms of culture that they are helping to sustain.

### **Significance of culture: Rich in cultural capital**

The cultural elite of this study work hard to establish their identity as that of a cultured person. They enjoy high culture and are proficient in this (despite their rhetoric about enjoying a 'broad' culture). They have been familiar with high forms of culture for a long time so making them extremely proficient in it. They use evidence from their own biographies to show a lifelong commitment to culture, which is seen as inevitably resulting in a role in the cultural sector. They create an image of themselves as a cultured person, signalling deep investment in it on a personal and also often financial level (i.e. by being a friend of the opera, or involved with a business which sponsors events) so that it is an intrinsic part of their self-identity and becomes another way in which they are qualified to hold the positions that they have (while also facilitating their ability to use cultural arenas to perform acts of subtle networking).

### **Significance of culture: Using Welshness**

The majority of the interviewees have been brought up to have Welsh forms of cultural capital, so it is not only high culture but also Welsh culture they are interested and competent in and this was discussed in Chapter Six. This includes the Eisteddfod and they see this as benefiting them, and particularly for Welsh speakers the language has developed them culturally. Being Welsh in this way is an important part of their self-concept, and so while they at once express a dislike of the clichés and romantic notions of the past, they do call upon these in order to help them to justify the positions that they hold, especially the image of



Wales as a meritocratic nation, a land of learning, where the *gwerin* can benefit from education. They identify themselves in a similar vein, as ordinary people from humble (and specifically Welsh) origins who have benefited from attending grammar schools and have attended elite universities as a result.

### **Ideas for a better, more cultured society**

As argued in Chapter Six the interviewees argue that culture should be broad and all encompassing, but actually they are only interested in participating in high culture activities. They see it as a problem in society that the majority of people do not appreciate high forms of culture and even feel hostility towards it, so they erect barriers between them and people like them, and everyone else in society. Members of the cultural elite want there to be prominent profile for culture in Wales and for it to be used in order to transform individuals (as it transformed them early on in their lives) and society. They believe that culture, specifically Welsh forms of culture, built on the traditions and images of the past should be harnessed in order to show off Wales (specifically to England) and to benefit the economy, further revealing the possibilities of overlap between the business and cultural spheres. The issue is whether they should act to sustain simply what is Welsh or rather whether it should be about what is best and of the highest standard but heritage remains important. Even if they say they do not want to be always looking backwards they are unable to shake off the romantic notions of the past.

### **Implications**

This study has a number of implications for research which focuses on elite groups within society. Firstly as a study which has generally looked ‘upwards’ it has demonstrated that this

is a worthwhile pursuit. Giving attention to the powerful, exploring their opinions and values, is important because these are the individuals who are the decision and policy-makers in society (Hiller, 1996). This is a particularly salient issue because of the overlap between the different spheres (cultural, political and business) and so their influence is wide-reaching. I have argued that the concepts of the classical elite theorists concerning elite formation and the use of two layers of the network to assist recruitment, is still applicable and useful today. It is the case that studying up in the current financial climate makes it a particularly timely endeavour, but also this is true because this is the age of equal opportunities when a supposedly fair and transparent system of recruitment is in operation. On the surface it may look like the appointment process is an unbiased and meritocratic one but, as this study has shown, conversations still take place behind closed doors. These serve to influence and encourage, people are still vetted by the network, and so to some extent the formal process is a charade. This is a particular issue because members of the network can declare it as a fair and open system (Savage and Williams, 2008) and to an outsider it may be difficult to detect any evidence to the contrary. These inherent biases can continue to disadvantage women, who do not always have the same opportunities for networking that men do and because discriminatory practices still exist. Many of the interviewees credit their success as being a result of living in a meritocratic society, but this is one which specifically featured the grammar schools of the old tripartite system of education, because they are typically of the older generation who, therefore, directly benefitted from this. It would be interesting to see how the next generation of core members explain their success and whether the changes in the education system will have an effect on elite formation in the coming years.

This study also has implications for the choice of method which can be employed to carry out research on elite sections in society. Throughout this thesis I have argued that in order to gain

a real understanding of how the network works this needs to be done from the viewpoint of those who are in it, in other words how they see it working for them personally and how they understand their place within it. Talking to elite respondents can create issues for researchers for a number of reasons. Firstly because of the perceived difficulty of gaining access, although this was not an issue in this present study, and I believe this is because they were invited to talk about a topic which they felt very passionately about. The researcher also has to carefully navigate the inherent power imbalance in the interaction and try to get past their use of rhetorical discourse (Futrell and Willard, 1994). Experiencing their performances first hand, and then crucially reading between the lines of these, highlights how the network operates and the complexity of this, in ways not possible by only using the method of mapping board memberships.

While the study of elite groups has generally been neglected in recent decades, it is particularly the case that there has been very little systematic focus on the powerful in Wales. I have used this study to show that this is an avenue which is worthy of more attention, especially as its small size allows networks to be easily identified. Listening to the voices of the members of the cultural elite in Wales allows for a fuller understanding of the whole of Welsh society. They are effectively making decisions about the form that culture should take (believing it should be both high and Welsh). The 2011 referendum resulted in more powers being devolved from Westminster to the Assembly, including the subjects of culture and the Welsh language. Awareness of the attitudes of those who make policy, in whose hands power is now firmly placed, therefore, is now even more important. A recent example can be seen in the speech given by John Griffiths, the current minister for culture in Wales at the 2013 Arts Council of Wales annual conference. He acknowledged the funding issues that the arts currently face but he also emphasised the wider value of art for society:

We recognise the importance of arts and culture, how it helps define our national identity and how we represent ourselves in the wider world ... I firmly believe that the Arts have a vital role to play in inspiring people from all backgrounds, in particular those from some of our more disadvantaged groups and communities. It's not just something to be enjoyed by the middle-classes.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of these ideas a review of how the cultural bodies in Wales can work together in order to help more people in disadvantaged areas to access the arts is being carried out. The overall aim of this is to raise the aspirations of people from all backgrounds across Wales in order to ultimately try to reduce poverty. These sentiments mirror exactly those expressed by my interviewees. The idea that the power of culture should be harnessed in order to transform individuals (so expressing the belief that they need changing) and therefore the whole of society. The way that they see this as being able to be achieved is by acting to consolidate the network further, by the joining up of more organisations. The result for society could be that while the elite group itself becomes more cohesive they may still fail to reach out to the mass of people and so will have only acted to actually further deepen the divisions within society.

### **Further research**

This study has revealed the possibilities for carrying out research in Wales which focusses the attention of the social scientist 'upwards'. This piece of research deliberately focused on the Cardiff Metropolitan elite because of their positioning in close proximity to power, namely to the policy-makers in the Assembly (Lovering, 1999). This thesis has shown that it is important to be physically near to the capital city in order to exert influence in the network and to be able to maintain a place within it by doing regular acts of informal networking. However, a very similar study to this one, still focusing on members of the cultural elite, could also be carried out in North Wales. This would provide further insight into how power

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<sup>12</sup> Taken from the article entitled "The arts "not just for the middle-classes" says Minister for Culture' available on the Welsh Government Website ([wales.gov.uk](http://wales.gov.uk)) accessed on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

plays out in this sector but for the whole of the country, which is one which is typically represented as having two polar parts (Dunkerley, 1999). Such a study could explore the extent to which a separate North network exists, and whether this functions in a similar way to the one that has been outlined in this current project. Whether it too has a core and a periphery and if, and how, language and gender divide it. It might be expected that the extent to which there is overlap with the political and business spheres is lesser than for those people living in the capital because of the geographical distance away from Cardiff. Specifically it would be worthwhile to examine the extent to which the two networks are connected to one another. Is it the case that people who can connect them, and therefore fill the 'structural holes' (Burt, 1992) play a more significant role in one or both of the networks? What is the relationship between the networks like? Is it characterised by remoteness or even hostility? On one or both of the sides?

This thesis has presented the experiences of both males and females in the network, as a criticism of most of the work on elite groups in society is that this has been gender-blind, typically focusing only on the experiences of male members (Kanter, 1977; Pakulski, 2011). I have shown that women do experience the network differently because they are in the minority within it. Through the course of the interviews many of the male respondents alluded to their wives. These are the women who have the supper ready and waiting for them when they come home late from their numerous meetings. They also accompany their husbands to the cultural events. It is very much the case that 'we go to the opera' rather than them attending by themselves. I believe a piece of research which interviewed these women, the wives of the core members of the cultural elite (as the majority are men) would provide further insight into how the network really works, in a similar way to how Finch (1983) interviewed the wives of the Anglican clergy. Research questions could focus on their own

personal characteristics and their views and experiences of culture. Is it that they are motivated to 'work' to promote the cultural sector in Wales in a similar way to their partners? To what extent do they exist in their own network? Is it a network of wives? And does this serve any instrumental purpose? Do they resent attending events, knowing that it is a form of work for their partners? Are they briefed by their husbands before they go out? Or is it the case that they are the ones doing the briefing?

Throughout this thesis I have advocated researching elite members using qualitative methods. In this study I used in-depth semi-structured interviews to hear how individuals construct their own unique understandings of their social world. I think that studies of the powerful should draw on the full range of methods available to social scientists, including social network analysis and discourse analysis, and Kompotis (2005) study is a very good example of the latter being done in Wales. I also believe that researchers should attempt to use ethnographic methods when studying up, although fieldwork involving elite groups is often not attempted because of issues of access. An ethnographic study of a cultural event could be used to examine not only the attitudes and opinions of the elite actors involved in the design of this (those 'pulling the levers') but also how these messages are transmitted and realised by those people working for the organisation at 'ground level' and how it is experienced by members of the general public and also other members of the cultural elite, for example the social aspects of the opening night, as captured by Thornton's (2008) ethnography of the art world. The Artes Mundi visual arts competition, which takes place biannually in the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, presents the perfect opportunity to do this. It requires sponsorship from a number of the key organisations which are represented in the network and so such a study could also show how contacts and connections in the network are utilised and formalised through business deals, as well as highlighting the overlap between the cultural

and business sectors. It is an international competition so could also demonstrate how members of the cultural elite try to use a high profile event like this one in order to market and promote Wales on a worldwide scale.

### **Final thoughts**

In conclusion I want to stress the need for the social sciences to pay attention to all sections of society, particularly in Welsh society, rather than being preoccupied with the working class. As Nader (1972) argued methodological issues, such as the perceived problems of gaining access to elite groups, should not deter the researcher from studying up. I acknowledge that I was lucky to be studying a topic which was immediately appealing to my prospective interviewees because it was something that they cared about and so gaining access did not act as an obstacle to carrying out my research. I would go further, and argue that taking part in my study was another way in which the interviewees performed their roles of being a good board member, a fixer, a true core member of the Welsh elite. It was an opportunity for them to showcase their work, their organisations, their passion for all things Welsh and cultural. As they performed this for me, I was able to gain insight into their underlying attitudes and values, and it also gave clues to how they might put on similar performances in the wider network. I too performed for them, particularly acting out competence and confidence in order to minimise the power differential. It is fair to say that I did not feign interest because at all times this was genuine.

## Appendices

### **Appendix A: List of organisations represented in the research (in alphabetical order)**

Aberystwyth University  
Academi (since rebranded as Literature Wales)  
Artes Mundi  
Arts and Business Wales  
Ballet Russe  
BBC Wales  
British Council of Wales  
Cardiff Business Club  
Cardiff Metropolitan University  
Cardiff University  
Chwarae Teg  
Glamorgan University  
Institute of Welsh Affairs  
S4C  
Sinfonia Cymru  
Sport Wales  
Swansea University  
Symphonia Cymru  
The Arts Council of Wales  
The National Eisteddfod  
The National Museum for Wales  
The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama  
The University of Wales Lampeter  
The Western Mail  
Wales Millennium Centre  
Welsh Assembly Government  
Welsh National Opera



## **Appendix B: General template used for the initial contact letter (or email).**

Dear

My name is Alice Clayton and I am a PhD student from Cardiff University, attached to Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods (WISERD). My project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and I am being supervised by Prof. Paul Atkinson and Dr. Sara Delamont.

My research topic is cultural leadership in Wales. I am interested in how people, who are involved with important institutions and organisations in Wales, see their roles within contemporary Welsh society. I hope you do not mind me contacting you but I interviewed ..... as part of my project and he / she passed on your contact details. Obviously because of the number of high profile roles that you hold, your viewpoint would be invaluable to my research.

I would like to arrange an interview with you which will take approximately forty-five minutes of your time. I am very flexible concerning date and time.

I have enclosed an information sheet and consent form to this letter which provide you with more details about my research. I have also enclosed a proposed list of general topics and questions so you can get a sense of what it is that interests me in order to help you to consider whether you wish to participate.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Alice Clayton

## **Appendix C: Interviewee Information Sheet**

### **Information Sheet**

I would like to invite you to participate in my research project which explores Welsh culture. This information sheet will give you an overview of the project including why it is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully so that you can make an informed decision about whether you wish to take part. Please feel free to ask me any questions that you might have.

#### **Who is doing the research?**

My name is Alice Clayton and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University. I am being supervised by Professor Paul Atkinson and Dr Sara Delamont in the School of Social Sciences.

#### **What is the purpose of the research?**

The project is being funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and is linked to the newly formed Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research Data and Methods (WISERD). The aim of the research is to add to the understanding of the contemporary cultural landscape of Wales by exploring the work and experiences of individuals who currently hold, or have previously occupied, important roles within it.

#### **Who is being invited to participate?**

I am inviting you to participate in this study because I know that you occupy key roles in important cultural organisations in Wales.

#### **What would be involved?**

If you choose to participate then I would like to talk to you about your involvement with a variety of organisations in Wales in the form of an interview that will last for approximately forty-five minutes and will be digitally recorded so that I have a record of what was said.

#### **How will the information be used?**

The interview will be transcribed and you will have the opportunity to amend or delete anything that you do not want to be used. The information gathered from all the interviews in this project will be used in my PhD thesis and may also be used in other forms of academic writing such as journal articles after your approval.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is a voluntary decision to take part in this study and you will be asked to provide your written consent. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You do not have to answer any questions that you feel uncomfortable with and anything that you wish to said 'off the record' or anything that involves any third parties will be treated in the strictest confidence.

**Who else will know what I have said?**

Everything that is said in the interviews will be confidential between you, me and my two supervisors. The transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Cardiff University and be kept according to the Data Protection Act. The research has the approval of the School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University.

**Contact Information**

If you would like more information about the research project then please contact me and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Tel: 07739 435675

Email: ClaytonAC1@cardiff.ac.uk

Postal Address:

Cardiff University  
Cardiff School of Social Sciences  
Glamorgan Building  
King Edward VII Avenue  
Cardiff CF10 3WT

## Appendix D: Interviewee Consent Form

### Consent Form

- I have read and understood the information sheet for this study. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I might have and these have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation in the interviews is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that I will be asked if I am willing for the interview to be recorded and that I have a right to decline from this.
- I understand that no-one will have access to the recording beyond the researcher and her two supervisors.
- I understand that anything that I say which I wish to be kept 'off the record' will remain confidential between myself, the researcher and her two supervisors.
- I know that I will be offered a copy of my interview transcript following the interview and I will have the opportunity to discuss this with the interviewer and change or remove any parts that I am not happy with.
- I understand that the information I give will be used as part of a PhD project and, after my approval, will appear as a PhD thesis and in other academic papers.
- I am willing to take part in the interview and I agree to take part in this study.

Name of Interviewee:.....

Signature of Interviewee:.....

Date:.....

Name of Researcher:.....

Signature of Researcher:.....

## Appendix E: Example of an interview schedule

### Proposed topics for discussion

#### 1. Your roles and career to date

Including:

- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

How did your personal career path develop? I am interested in learning about what these roles required of you, the process involved in acquiring these positions and the reasons for these ending.

How did you first achieve these positions (the process involved in appointments) and what are your personal motivations for your involvement?

What do you see as the general purpose and functions of the organisations and more specifically what your particular roles involved and required of you (including the actual time commitments)?

How did / does your involvement with organisations impact on your life? i.e. the benefits and disadvantages?

What did you enjoy most about each one?

#### 2. Overlaps

I am also interested in learning about how your work might overlap with other organisation in Wales. So maybe you would like to think about:

- Any other organisations that you are currently involved with or work alongside and why you think these are important for Wales?
- How these different roles interlink in your life?
- Do you find yourself working with/meeting the same people? (at work and during social events).

#### 3. Welsh Culture

- How do you see the cultural landscape of Wales developing in the future?
- Do you see any cultural differences between North and South Wales?
- Do you see positive links being made between England and Wales?
- Do you think the Welsh language is important for Wales as a country?

#### 4. Possible additional issues that could arise

- What do you see as your biggest achievement in your career to date? (Feelings about being awarded .....)
- Your future aspirations and career goals.
- Do you feel your gender has ever had a negative or positive impact on your career?
- How do you spend your leisure time?
- Anything else that you think is important and that you would like to talk about.

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