

**‘Activated’, ‘responsibilised’ or  
‘empowered’?**

**Competing concepts of active  
citizenship in the context of  
government-funded programmes  
of active citizenship learning in the  
third sector in England**

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of the university or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Gabi Recknagel

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## Abstract

Citizenship education for adults has become increasingly marginalised within lifelong learning despite widespread concerns over declining political and democratic participation. While governments in many countries have been – and still are – summoning citizens into being ‘active’, critics have argued that these policies primarily shift public responsibilities towards private individuals rather than ‘empower’ citizens as political subjects.

When New Labour funded two pilot programmes of active citizenship learning in England between 2004 and 2010, involving amongst others a local third sector organisation (a CVS) in their delivery, this provided a unique opportunity for a situated social policy case study. Informed by theoretical approaches to the contested concepts of 'citizenship' and 'empowerment', this research analysed the contrasting views and experiences of third sector practitioners, adult learners and policy-makers within the wider social policy context. It was found that the CVS had not only 'activated' and 'responsibilised' but also 'empowered' active citizens.

The research was conducted as a qualitative organisational case study involving - and triangulating - interviews, participant observation and document analysis. An in-depth analysis of pedagogic approaches revealed how a learner-centred, community-based and experiential approach contributed to citizenship (alongside other) outcomes. Numerous individual learner case studies serve to illustrate these processes in a nuanced and differentiated manner, highlighting the various factors which promoted inclusive and empowering learning outcomes, and their limitations. Outcomes were more effective when learning had been linked to participation practice, and even 'invited [governance] spaces' had provided valuable learning for active citizens who subsequently pursued their own individual and collective interests, and challenged the status quo.

Through analysing organisational processes using insider-practitioner knowledge, the research contributed to current debates about the shifting relationship between the third sector and the state. It also suggests that reflectivity should be practised by voluntary and community organisations more routinely to avoid the trappings of managerialism and 'projectification' associated with state-funding.

## List of Abbreviations

Although I have tried to minimise the use of abbreviations, the following may be found in the text or in the appendices.

ALAC:	Active Learning for Active Citizenship
CDF:	Community Development Association
CIC:	Communities in Control White Paper, 2008
CTTLS:	Certificate to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector
CVS:	Council for Voluntary Service
DCLG:	Department for Communities and Local Government
HYCW:	How Your City Works
LTI:	Learning to Involve
NCVO:	National Council of Voluntary Organisations
NI (followed by a number):	National Indicator in the New Performance Measurement Framework in New Labour's 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review
PTTLS:	Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector
SP:	Speaking Up
SUI:	Service User Involvement
TP:	Take Part
TPN:	Take Part Network
TPP:	Take Part Pathfinder
TALIYC:	Taking a Lead In Your Community
VCS:	Voluntary and Community Sector
VSO:	Voluntary Sector Organisation
YVYV:	Your Values Your Voice

## Table of contents

Acknowledgments .....	3
Abstract .....	4
Table of contents .....	6
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	10
Chapter 2 Active citizens, citizen power and empowerment: a review of the literature.....	19
2.1 Competing conceptualisations of active citizenship .....	20
2.1.1 Citizenship and active citizenship in political theory: traditional and alternative approaches .....	20
2.1.2 Feminist challenges to traditional perspectives on citizenship .....	27
2.1.3 Interim summary .....	31
2.2 Active Citizens and power .....	32
2.2.1 Three dimensions of power .....	33
2.2.2 Alternative approaches to conflictual power .....	41
2.2.3 Implications for active citizen power.....	43
2.3 Active citizens and empowerment.....	45
2.4 Discussion.....	50
Chapter 3 The active citizen in UK policy .....	52
3.1 The emergence of active citizenship as part of neo-liberal policies during the Conservative governments of the 1990s .....	52
3.2 Active citizens under New Labour, 1997-2010 .....	57
3.2.1 The role of citizens in New Labour's Third Way: activated and responsabilised in the service of the state? .....	58
3.2.2 Competing conceptualisations in active citizenship programmes .....	63
3.3 The active citizen in the Coalition Government, 2010-2013 .....	82
3.4 Discussion.....	85
Chapter 4 Methodology .....	90
4.1 Main research paradigms and perspectives (ontology and epistemology) .....	90
4.2 Research strategies .....	92
4.3 Methods of data collection .....	96
4.4 Research design, sampling and planning of research activities.....	98

4.5	Approaches to interviewing .....	100
4.6	Managing the dilemmas of an 'insider-researcher' position .....	105
4.7	Data analysis and representation .....	108
4.8	Research ethics.....	113
4.9	My learning as a researcher – reflections on the research process .....	115
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Case Study Context .....</b>	<b>118</b>
5.1	The case study location .....	118
5.2	The CVS.....	120
5.3	Statutory and voluntary and community sector partners .....	126
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Perspectives on Active Citizenship .....</b>	<b>131</b>
6.1	The CVS perspective on Active Citizenship .....	132
6.1.1	‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship’ at the CVS.....	134
6.1.2	Take Part Pathfinder: tensions over competing concepts of ‘active citizenship’ .....	137
6.2	Learner Perspectives on Active Citizenship .....	145
6.2.1	‘Active citizenship’: a slippery concept?.....	147
6.2.2	Active citizenship for inclusion? A case study on the meaning of citizenship for women in a Sure Start area .....	150
6.2.3	Active citizens, community and responsibility: government discourses in evidence? .....	154
6.2.4	Resistance and counter-discourses to government policies (New Labour’s and the Coalition’s).....	159
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Learning for active citizenship: experiences and outcomes .</b>	<b>163</b>
7.1	‘Speaking Up’: active citizenship or personal development? .....	164
7.1.1	Speaking Up phase 1: 'empowering' service users and carers.....	165
7.1.2	Speaking Up phase 2: personal development or active citizenship? .....	175
7.2	Take Part Pathfinder learning programmes and their outcomes .....	183
7.2.1	Take Part civic role taster sessions .....	184
7.2.2	Longer civic courses (How Your City Works and Community Leadership) ....	187
7.2.3	Tailored group sessions: building capacity and providing access to learning to disadvantaged individuals and groups (learner case studies 5 and 6).....	193
7.3	Generic course outcomes: the value added by the social dimension of learning, and by networking (learner case study 7) .....	196
7.4	Interim discussion of Chapter 7 findings.....	197

Chapter 8	‘Empowering’ pedagogies for citizenship outcomes .....	201
8.1	The tutor perspective on ‘empowering’ pedagogies .....	202
8.1.1	The original ‘Speaking Up’: a pedagogy for participation?.....	203
8.1.2	Speaking Up ‘phase 2’: A change in direction?.....	208
8.2	‘Empowering pedagogies’ from the perspectives of course participants .....	217
8.2.1	Learner experiences of the courses: what they enjoyed and how it worked for them.....	217
8.2.2	Learner conceptualisations of ‘empowerment’ .....	224
8.3	Discussion.....	229
8.3.1	Weighing up the evidence .....	229
8.3.2	The significance of findings.....	231
Chapter 9	Empowerment through learning and participation: active citizen case studies .....	240
9.1	Citizen case study 1: From ‘Speaking Up’ to self-mobilisation .....	242
9.2	Citizen case study 2: active citizens with learning disabilities becoming change agents.....	248
9.3	Citizen case study 3: From Sure Start to Parliament: Parents ‘speak up’ and make their voices heard .....	257
9.4	Discussion.....	267
Chapter 10	The impact of government programmes of active citizenship learning on the CVS.....	274
10.1	Experience and impact of the ALAC programme .....	275
10.2	The Experience and impact of the Take Part Pathfinder .....	279
10.3	Discussion.....	285
Chapter 11	Conclusion .....	290
11.1	Research topic and rationale .....	290
11.2	Research design and methodology.....	291
11.3	Contribution to knowledge .....	292
11.4	Experience as a researcher .....	301
Appendix 1:	Invitation to take part in research, letter and project information.....	304
Appendix 2 (a):	Interview topic guide: learner interviews.....	307

Appendix 2 (b) Interview questions - tutors .....	308
Appendix 2 (c) -Stakeholder interview questions 1. Interview questions to DCLG civil servant .....	309
Appendix 3: Sample of an ‘empowerment journey summary’ - to illustrate one step in the preparation of qualitative data for analysis.	311
Bibliography .....	317

# Chapter 1 Introduction

‘Active Citizenship’ – what does it mean? I have asked myself this question from my first encounter with the term at a European project meeting in Weimar in 2001 and repeatedly over the many years of working in the third sector. Little did I know at the time that these two words would come to play a key role for me personally and for my employing organisation - nor was I aware of its significance in academic terms.

This research was a collaborative project involving a medium-sized Council for Voluntary Service (CVS<sup>1</sup>) that had developed specific expertise around active citizenship learning for adults in the context of a local voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation. Two central government pilots had contributed to this development, but had also posed challenges. Most of all, they raised key questions concerning the significance of the concept of active citizenship to the organisation, and whether it could be used to promote citizen engagement and ‘empower’ people, together with the impact of these programmes on learners, and on the organisation.

Active citizenship is an essentially contested project both in the academic literature as well as in the frontline of civil society. From early on in my project work I was struck by the contradictory responses to the term ‘active citizen’, and the tensions it seemed to create. One of the positive responses I vividly remember was by the coordinator of a Sure Start Parent Forum to my suggestion of her group’s involvement in the CVS’ first government-funded pilot in 2004, ‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship’ (ALAC). Rather pleased to hear that more free training was available to her group, she exclaimed (cited from memory and not a verbatim rendition):

‘That’s wonderful! The parents are going to be so chuffed! First they were told that they were “volunteers”, now they will find out they are “active citizens” too!’

In contrast, an example of a negative response was provided by a CVS colleague, typical of the more pervasive perception in the third sector of the term as representing yet another

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<sup>1</sup> The aims and remits of a CVS are described in greater detail in Chapter Five. In simplified terms, a CVS is a local infrastructure - or umbrella – organisation for the voluntary and community sector.

'top-down' imposition - and buzzword - by government. The comment was voiced at a team meeting at the start of the Take Part Pathfinder - the second government-funded pilot programme investigated - in a discussion about whether it was appropriate to profile the term 'active citizens' in the project publicity. This manager's response was:

'We can't use this term! Nobody knows what it means!'

We<sup>2</sup> did, however, and the project subsequently seemed to have managed to introduce the concept successfully with its learner audiences. In an evaluation meeting at the end of the programme, the same senior manager acknowledged that she had come round to the term, even though she still found it 'difficult'. By that time the second New Labour active citizenship learning programme had been completed and evaluated. However, not only did the concept continue to cause controversy inside the organisation, but the crucial question as to what impact this citizenship learning had had on CVS beneficiary groups remained unanswered. What, indeed, had been the implications of this stream of work for the CVS and for its learners, over time, and what had been learnt about the potential and the limitations of the concept? Could 'active citizenship learning' be considered as meeting the organisation's core aims, as its Chief Executive had persistently asserted, or was it akin to 'mission drift'? In the course of delivering these programmes, did the CVS make the concept its own or did it adopt it uncritically, in the latter case serving the government's cause rather than its own agendas? Were these programmes empowering to the organisation or were they examples of New Labour using third sector organisations as 'third arms of the state' (Wiggins, 2011)? What, in any case, were these policy agendas and what were their implications?

The academic literature suggests a number of explanations for the tensions caused. Political theory and social policy draw attention to the highly normative and contested nature of conceptualisations of active citizenship in democracy (Beiner, 1995; Delanty, 2000). In the broad sense, active citizenship provides a way of describing the relationship between citizens and the state, as well as of citizens to each other. In light of the complexity of the issues at hand it is often argued that people need to 'learn' to become active citizens (Johnston, 2003), but opinions are divided as to what they should

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<sup>2</sup> In this context, 'we' refers to the CVS and the Take Part project team, of which I was the coordinator for the first nine months. I was also involved in negotiating the terms of the contract with the fund managers.

participate in, and therefore, what knowledge, abilities or 'virtues' they need to participate effectively in a democratic framework (Kymlicka and Norman, 1995). The domains of 'active citizenship' are variously conceived of as participation in civic (governance) structures, civil society (or community), or in politics (Take Part Network, 2006); and many highly normative claims are made on the benefits of its practice. These include, for example, that participation makes better citizens (Mansbridge, 1999) and therefore, a stronger democracy (Barber, 2003); that it enables substantive - rather than merely formal - citizenship for excluded groups (Lister, 1997a,b); or that it creates a more egalitarian (Kymlicka and Norman, 1995) and socially cohesive society (Putnam, 2000). The promotion of active citizenship by successive UK governments over the past three decades has had a mixed reception in the social policy literature: critics have equated active citizenship rhetoric with neo-liberal policies which, put simply, aim to reduce the size of the state, and that by 'activating' and 'responsibilising' citizens, responsibilities are shifted from the state to increasingly more self-reliant 'active citizens' (Finalyson, 2003; Clarke, 2005), whose citizenship rights are simultaneously eroded (Lister, 1997a; Kabeer, 2005a; Clarke, 2005; Abrams, 2007). Thus active citizens would reduce the need for public services and rebuild the communities that were left fragmented by the demands for flexible labour in the globalised economy (Martin, 2003). The term active citizenship, therefore, evokes numerous tensions and contradictions, being on the one hand construed as inherently salutary, beneficial to the individuals concerned, to wider society and to the health of democracy (Crick, 2001; Blunkett, 2003), while on the other, being seen as a form of social control, used by neo-liberal governments for less desirable purposes that weaken the status and power of citizens more generally (Cruikshank, 1999; Crowther and Martin, 2009).

Yet, at the same time, the active citizenship learning programmes at the centre of this research provided real opportunities for the CVS to enable people to become involved and, according to New Labour's rhetoric, to increase their influence on public decisions. These two programmes, then, provided two concrete examples of a particularly contested aspect of New Labour's policies in practice, and thereby an ideal opportunity for contextualised research on active citizenship in practice as well as a third sector case study on the effects of government policy (Milbourne, 2013), thus filling a research gap (Gaventa, 2004). Academics had been divided over the extent to which New Labour's promises of democratic renewal and greater involvement of citizens in decision-making

had been realised (e.g. Lister 2001; Newman, 2001; Marinetto, 2003; Barnes et al., 2004, 2007; Davies, 2012), or whether its espousal of neo-liberal principles involving a consumer-oriented citizenship and the need to rebalance rights with responsibilities had in the end outweighed the more 'progressive' aspects of its ambiguous agendas (Lister, 2001; Taylor, 2007; Newman, 2010). Since the change in government in 2010 from a Labour to a Conservative-Liberal Coalition government the topic of active citizenship has remained topical throughout, as illustrated by the debates on the policy slogan of the 'Big Society' from 2010 to 2013 (Alcock, 2012). However, in the context of austerity measures aimed at reducing the size of the state even further, governments in the UK and further afield have increasingly called on 'local people' and 'communities' to become self-reliant or to deliver public services themselves, whilst entitlements are cut back. So should third sector organisations such as the CVS, whose mission it is 'to promote a more just and fair society', encourage active citizen participation, and if so, how, and in what form?

The central question for this research was, therefore, whether this Voluntary Sector organisation had been able to use the opportunities afforded through these government programmes to not only 'activate' but also 'empower' people as active citizens (Clarke, 2005) – through providing courses and information needed to enhance and broaden citizen participation (Taylor, 2007; Cornwall, 2008a, 2008b). By analysing learner feedback and experiences the research set out to examine the effectiveness of these targeted learning interventions, and thus to contribute to the debate in adult and community education on appropriate methods relevant to active citizenship in this contested field (Martin, 2003; Crowther, 2004). Some community development practitioners questioned, amongst other things, whether active citizenship can at all be 'learnt' through formal courses, compared with peer learning through community-based practice (Waterhouse and Scott, 2013), or whether active citizenship can be supported more effectively through a combination of learning and practice (Cornwall, 2008a). As the first programmes delivered at the CVS dated back several years the research was able to take a long-term view on the policies and their effects by studying the evolution of these active citizenship support programmes and of their impact on active citizens and on the delivery organisation. Indeed, in addition to considerations of impact of the programmes on learners (set within the wider context of public involvement), another question emerged more prominently in the course of the research: how had the organisation been affected by these programmes, and to what extent have the strictures of these central

government-funded programmes allowed it to use the reinterpreted active citizenship in ways that reflected its own aims and values, or had it been caught up in promoting – however unwittingly – the more contested and conflicting aspects of governmental agenda(s) of active citizenship?

The research was thus intended to fill an important gap in the literature in more than one way: first of all, there had been little, if any, empirical research on active citizenship learning programmes on adults in the UK<sup>3</sup>. Secondly, despite the growth of meta-studies on the Third Sector with the establishment of a Third Sector Research Centre in the UK, there was a dearth of situated studies on the impact of social policy on third sector organisations (Milbourne, 2013) at the micro-level, as well as on the benefits of voluntary and community action (Knight and Robson, 2007). In this sense, a specific organisational case study on how a third sector organisation was able to balance the constraints of such programmes with the benefits was going to add to the emerging literature on the changing relationship between the sector and the state (McCabe, 2010; Alcock, 2010, 2012; Milbourne, 2013; Knight, 2013), providing a contextualised analysis of New Labour's policies on active citizenship and participation. As the second programme, the Take Part Pathfinder (2009-11), spanned the period before and after the 2010 change in government from Labour to the Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition, the research was additionally able to compare the differences in the policy discourses between the two administrations through an analysis of grassroots' responses to the 'Big Society' policy.

This research had started out with the overarching research question, 'do government programmes of active citizenship learning *empower* active citizens and groups?' While the title was eventually adjusted to the final formulation of the thesis title, in order to reflect the importance of the tension between 'activation', 'responsibilisation' and the 'empowerment' of active citizens (Clarke, 2005), the research was organised around the first three main areas of inquiry (see appendix 1, Research Information for Participants):

- What are the meanings of active citizenship? How has it been conceptualised by different actors and stakeholders, from policy-makers to third sector practitioners, to active citizens themselves? Do these conceptualisations reflect, confirm or

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<sup>3</sup> Coare and Johnston's (2003) book, for example, studied the impact of adult learning with different learner groups *on* citizenship and community voices, rather than active citizenship learning as such.

challenge existing theories of active citizenship in the social policy literature?

- What has been the impact of active citizenship learning programmes on the ability of individual active citizens to engage in collective action, in civil and civic participation? To what extent (and how) have these specific programmes of active citizenship learning enabled people to participate for the first time, or enhanced their participation as active citizens? What can be learnt from these programmes in terms of citizenship learning for adults?
- What do we mean by active citizens being 'empowered'? How is empowerment interpreted and experienced by active citizens, and how does this relate to existing theories of power and empowerment? What is the respective role played by learning programmes compared with practices of engagement? How have active citizens and communities experienced central government 'empowerment' policies at the local level?

To answer these questions, a range of learners were interviewed and case studies of *individual* learners were used to illustrate 'learner journeys' and their experiences as active citizens. Additionally, as the research progressed, it became increasingly apparent that it also had an important contribution to make towards understanding the (changing) relationship between the state and third sector organisations (Alcock, 2010; Taylor, 2012; Milbourne, 2013) in the form of an *organisational* case study. This issue was all the more topical after New Labour's financial boost to the sector had ended with the general elections in May 2010, and changes in the funding landscape had started to radically transform the sector. This provided the opportunity to answer a fourth set of questions:

- To what extent has this third sector organisation been able to manage the challenges arising from these government-funded programmes, within the wider context of third sector policies? Has its involvement in these programmes - and potential role as 'third arm of the state' - furthered or compromised its own aims and values? What do these organisational responses tell us about the ability of third sector organisations to negotiate the pressures associated with government funding without jeopardizing their independence from the state?

The research was designed and managed as a collaborative research partnership<sup>4</sup>, that is, jointly between the Chief Executive of the CVS, myself and the academic partner, in accordance with the aims, values and priorities of the third sector organisation. It took on the design of a qualitative case study (Yin, 1984; Stake, 2000; Creswell 2007) to reflect the bounded nature of the study and the exploration of meanings in a social constructivist epistemology. This included both an *organisational* case study and several case studies of individual active citizens, or groups of active citizens (henceforth to be referred to as ‘citizen case studies’), reflecting the two main levels of the empirical investigation. The research explored the competing perspectives of different stakeholders, from local learners and practitioners to officials in local and central government, which were elicited in the form of semi-structured interviews. Interview data was supplemented by participant observation and documentary analysis, taking advantage of my privileged access as an ‘insider’ to a wide range of people, equipped with extensive local and organisational knowledge. This enabled the triangulation of data as a way of providing multiple perspectives on the same topic at hand (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

The thesis is divided into eleven chapters in total, and the findings are presented in five distinct chapters: four chapters to cover the four questions of the inquiry presented above, supplemented by a fifth chapter to present three longer learner case studies (two of individuals and a third of groups). Following this introductory chapter, the literature review is undertaken in two chapters: *Chapter Two* discusses the competing theoretical approaches that underpin conceptualisations of, first, active citizenship, secondly, power and empowerment as relating to active citizenship, and finally, empowerment theories in adult education for citizenship. *Chapter Three* reviews the social policy context on active citizenship from the 1980s, with a special focus on New Labour’s policies and programmes, which is contrasted with the approaches of the preceding Conservative government and of the subsequent Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition.

*Chapter Four* presents the methodological choices adopted in this research, its ontological and epistemological framework, the research design and strategies for sampling, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and reflections on my research experiences and learning from this research.

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<sup>4</sup> Funded by the ESRC through a CASE studentship, which stands for Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering.

*Chapter Five* sets out the case study context. As anonymity of the location was considered vital to protect the identity of both the participant organisation and individual respondents, this chapter briefly introduces the case study's location and the organisation itself in generalised terms, together with a short description of the programmes investigated, and finally, the relevant partners and stakeholder organisations involved in these programmes.

The structure of the following five findings chapters reflects the different aspects of the research. *Chapter Six* explores competing conceptualisations of active citizenship, the organisational perspective, the stance taken by its tutors and by learners. It examines the extent to which the views of the CVS and its tutors affected the way that learners came to understand active citizenship, and, therefore, what kinds of active citizens these perspectives implied and resulted in, in this third sector context.

*Chapters Seven and Eight* both explore the experiences and outcomes of the learning, with Chapter Seven focusing on the respective contributions made by different types of courses and approaches, and related learner outcomes, illustrated with several learner case studies. *Chapter Eight* focuses more specifically on the question of *pedagogies for empowerment*, and again contrasts and compares the tutor perspectives with those of learners.

A longer *discussion* of the findings from Chapters Six, Seven and Eight is included at the end of Chapter Eight to reflect the fact that while each of these chapters examined the courses from a different angle, they contributed to the same impact and outcomes.

*Chapter Nine* examines the learning and participation experiences of active citizens in the local context to understand the extent to which external factors either enhanced or counteracted the empowerment journeys initiated by the CVS Speaking Up courses. This chapter gives an insight into the opportunities provided by central and local government, as well as exploring the limiting factors. This chapter has its own discussion section.

*Chapter Ten* focuses on the organisational experience by examining the impact of the government-funded active citizenship learning programmes on the CVS, over time, and

specifically explores how this contextual example illustrates the changing relationship between the state and the voluntary sector under New Labour and since 2010.

*Chapter Eleven* is the concluding chapter, presenting the contributions of this thesis to research and knowledge. It includes reflections on my research experience as insider researcher and practitioner, and the extent to which this research has evolved theoretically whilst also promoting enhanced understanding that might help contribute to the future development of third sector organisations such as the particular CVS that I studied, and inspire future research.

# **Chapter 2 Active citizens, citizen power and empowerment: a review of the literature**

## **Introduction**

This chapter is the first of two literature review chapters: here the focus is on theories of active citizenship, citizen power and empowerment, whilst the second literature review chapter explores these issues in the context of UK policy.

Citizenship, citizen power and empowerment are all intrinsically complex and contested concepts, as well as interconnected: how one views power determines how one approaches empowerment, and the whole is framed by the purpose one ascribes to active citizenship in modern democracies. The first section starts by exploring conceptualisations of active citizenship in the context of the traditional schools of political theory, and how feminists have challenged the gendered assumptions inherent in the conventional conceptions of citizenship and 'political' participation. This broadens the compass significantly and is highly relevant not only to women but also to other disadvantaged groups targeted by the case study organisation. The second section examines the politically loaded and hence equally contested question of what constitutes power and asks specifically what forms of power citizens can lay claim to through means of their participation in a modern representational democracy. These ideas on different forms of citizen power lead directly to the question of how 'empowerment' for active citizens can be conceptualised. The third section of the literature review explores theories of empowerment and as it is specific focused on active citizenship learning, theoretical approaches from adult education and community development are drawn upon.

The short concluding summary singles out the pertinent theoretical questions arising from this review that will inform the subsequent research.

## **2.1 Competing conceptualisations of active citizenship**

### **2.1.1 Citizenship and active citizenship in political theory: traditional and alternative approaches**

'A more fruitful approach is to regard talk of citizenship as one of the central organizing features of Western political discourse. Ideas of citizenship are significant primarily because of the part they play in the political rhetoric and the political calculations of governments, non-governmental agencies and political and social movements.' (Barry Hindess, 1993:19)

Citizenship and active citizenship are both complex, 'slippery' and dynamic concepts that are 'essentially contested' amongst policy-makers and scholars (Lister, 1997a; Miller, 1999; Jones and Gaventa, 2002). Mentions of citizenship often call to mind the highly participatory - and exclusive – practices of Ancient Greek city state democracies. The participatory tradition which links the very concept of validating one's membership of a polity to one's active political participation has remained a dominant feature in one of the leading schools of thought in modern political thinking, civic republicanism. The other main influence has come from traditional liberalism, foregrounding citizenship as a formal status, as summarised in the following statement:

'Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.' (Marshall (1950: 28-9)

At its most basic, citizenship can be seen as offering a theoretical framework to describe the relationship between citizens and the state in terms of mutual rights and responsibilities, usually within democracies. This relationship is reflected in the four components of citizenship — status, rights, identity (e.g. to a nation state) and participation (Delanty, 2000). While against the background of post-colonial, economic and labour market globalisation and transnational migration, the formal status of citizenship based on the principle of nationality has been challenged, it continues nevertheless to determine who has and who does not have access to rights, and the extent

of these rights<sup>5</sup>. The biggest challenge, however, may stem from diversity and multiculturalism in post-modern societies and the demand for the recognition of religious, cultural and alternative minorities and lifestyles, which at times conflict with the key liberal principles of equality of rights and personal freedoms within modern democracy, protected by the state. Thus the 'Common Bond' between citizens of a polity sharing core national values has been repeatedly evoked by politicians (Goldsmith, 2008), especially in the context of concerns about national safety, and to justify authoritarian policies intent on controlling and 'integrating' newcomers and minorities. What emerges from these diverse challenges is that, first, by carrying a symbolic value, citizenship plays a far greater role than merely according rights through a formal status, giving expression to a sense of identity, belonging and shared values; and secondly, in contradiction of the notional equality it is equated with, it would appear that the status of citizenship itself is a poor indicator for actual inclusion in contemporary democracies. In other words, compared to the Greek or even the Italian Renaissance city states, questions of membership associated with citizenship have become more complex, fluid and dynamic (Coare, 2003), whilst the issues of social and political inclusion continue to hamper the full and equal realisation of citizens in the polity (Lister, 1997a).

In theory the rights of the citizen – to protection, to equal treatment in law, to a range of civic and civil liberties – are guaranteed by the state in return for citizens' law-abidance and fulfilment of their fiscal obligations. After centuries of struggle for equal political rights, modern democracies are underpinned by the assumption that citizens inherently *want* to share in the democratic process, however perfunctory the election of representatives has become. And despite continuing electoral participation, few countries have made voting compulsory. The explanation for the steady decline in political participation as witnessed in all Western democracies has divided commentators and politicians, variously blaming societal changes, consumerism and the rise in the standard of living, and the way politics is conducted and portrayed in the media which has distanced politicians and the party political system from people and their everyday concerns, and eroded people's trust in traditional political institutions and their representatives (Power Inquiry, 2006). One way of putting it succinctly is a spreading sense of powerlessness.

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<sup>5</sup> It is ironic that my interest is in active citizenship and political participation given my status as EU resident which deprives me, along with around a million of other migrant residents across the EU, of the right to vote in national elections – a stark reminder of the still crucial link between formal status and rights, and the persistence of second class citizenship in our democracies (e.g. for ethnic minorities in a number of states in Eastern Europe).

The focus on the *formal* status of citizenship, in which citizens are construed as equal bearers of universal rights, has been the prevalent influence on modern political thinking on citizenship, influenced by political theorists in the liberal tradition. Liberal doctrine with its emphasis on freedom and universal rights not only has to be understood as a reaction to the autocratic regimes of feudal society and monarchies in Europe, but it assumes that the enlightened individual strives for personal independence and is motivated primarily by self-interest. In this view the granting of freedoms is paramount and understood to promote equality, whereas state intervention is only tolerated minimally as long as it serves to protect one's property and freedoms. In this view, the main responsibility of each citizen is to be 'good', that is, respecting the freedom of others, and the law, and to be active and self-sufficient in the pursuit of private wealth in a free market economy. The relationship to the state is essentially 'loose' (Heater, 1999:4) with the 'balance of rights and responsibilities' primarily aimed at minimising the power of the state over the individual.

The main critique of the liberal position is that it is based on a very limited conception of human nature, and with little regard to mutual dependencies, inequalities or social justice. As one feminist put it, liberalism 'constructs citizens as strangers to each other' (Yuval-Davis, 1997 in Jones and Gaventa 2002:66). What is claimed to be missing in this conception is the lack of commitment to principles of mutuality and solidarity between people which is able to create 'a common bond' in the polity as well as providing the very basis for mutual support through a state system of social insurance and welfare.

Furthermore, the liberal conception, propagated by neo-liberal governments since the 1980s, seems to pitch the individual against the state (Clarke, 2005) by assuming that state provision or intervention is invariably inimical to individual interest. Thus, in the traditional liberal conception the citizen is construed as resenting interference from the state and preferring distance to the state in return for greater freedom, which gives him or her fewer reasons for getting actively involved in public affairs unless there is a threat to their interests. Put simply, the liberal stance is associated with individualism, personal freedoms and an aversion to economic redistribution through taxes and state intervention. It talks of the citizen in the singular rather than in a collective plural, and favours economic responsibility and private enterprise in the context of the 'free market'.

The republican tradition, in contrast, starts from a different ontological premise. Civic republicans emphasise the social nature of human beings and what binds them together – in other words, the emphasis here is on their inter-dependency, their common interests and mutual obligations towards each other. The practice of citizenship is considered central to the realisation of humans as social beings, and community life forms part of the need to engage in the constant negotiation of the ‘common good’. The practice of citizenship not only represents a duty but is an expression of membership and belonging to a political community that stands in a mutually reinforcing relationship with the sense of belonging and identity, and ultimately, of general well-being. In this vision the state and its institutions are an embodiment of mutuality, ‘a collective instrument’ that serve the interest of all its members, and hence, it is not only each citizens’ duty but in their own interest to actively participate in the negotiation and shaping of the common good, of its terms, conditions and content. Active citizens are the ‘shapers of the public realm’, ‘constitute the state’ and their ‘civic fulfilment’ is equated with ‘democratic vitality’ (Tam, 2010: pp7 and 11). Central to this is the emphasis on ‘community’:

‘Community is therefore found wherever people take the practice of citizenship seriously, and the problem is to generate the required commitment to bring this about.’ (Jones and Gaventa 2002:56, reviewing Oldfield, 1990)

The republican idealisation of all things ‘civic’ is criticised by others as normative and exclusive, for by placing too much importance on ‘the performance of the duties of the practice of citizenship’ (Oldfield, 1990) it disregards the barriers to participation, including lack of resources and capacity (Lister, 1997a) as well as the lack of desire to be active in this way, however sporadically.

This leads us to the role played by social rights as highlighted by T.H. Marshall in his 1950 seminal text on ‘citizenship and social class’. His argument, in the early years of the British welfare state, has been that the ‘social rights’ of citizenship have represented an essential addition to the political and civil rights of citizenship, forming a ‘triad’ of rights; rather than relying on the liberal assumption of citizenship status and rights as an equalising force, Marshall argued that in a modern society defined by social inequalities (linked to capitalism and social class) social rights are required to provide the indispensable

preconditions for all members of the national community to be able to join in the 'life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society' (Marshall, 1950:11), and thus, to substantiate their participation as full citizens. Marshall felt optimistic that the benefits of the welfare state would, in time and with growing economic prosperity, not only improve the standards of living for the population as a whole, but also counter the nefarious effects of capitalism on social class divides. But not long after the period of the economic growth of the 1950s and '60s, the gap in social inequalities began to widen again in the economic crises and industrial restructuring of the '70s and '80s. Furthermore, neither the social rights of citizenship nor increased living standards seemed to have extended political participation – quite to the contrary. The biannual citizenship surveys undertaken by the New Labour governments since the 2001 are amongst several to show not only a general decline in political, civil and civic participation, but also the correlation between socio-economic status and rates of participation, with disengagement being far more pronounced in the lower socio-economic groups (Citizenship Surveys, DCLG and Home Office; Power Inquiry 2006; Pattie et al., 2004). In terms of citizenship theory this raises concerns about the extent to which people from excluded groups are able to 'substantiate' their citizenship rights in a welfare state, and consequently, questions the legitimacy of a democracy that is neither fully inclusive nor representative of the interests of all its constituent groups, and that alienates many from participating (Lister, 1997a).

A new political-philosophical stance impacting on theories of citizenship emerged in the United States in the late 1980s in the form of 'communitarianism' (Barber, 2003; Etzioni 1995), and has spread from there to Western democracies (in the UK, see Tam, 1998). It is a broad school with many variations. A few key points are necessary to note here, as they have been influential in terms of framings of citizenship in the political imaginary and in connection with the revival of 'community' policies (Taylor, 2012). In one sense, communitarian approaches share a critique of the narrow way in which the neo-liberal policies of the 1980s have promoted an excessive individualism at the expense of collective concerns. Whilst civic republicanism conceptualises active citizens as intrinsically constitutive of community, it does so in abstract terms (Oldfield, 1990), whereas communitarians attach a far more central, wide-reaching and moral dimension to community - and to active citizens - as the necessary intermediary between the individual and public institutions. The theoretical and practical implications to be drawn from this insight have ranged widely on the political spectrum, encompassing centre-left stances

criticising the free-market to more conservative, authoritarian ones. I will focus here on some of the main ideas put forward by Etzioni (1995) who is both widely cited and criticised in the active citizenship literature.

Strongly influenced by neo-liberal economic policies the 'New Right' pursued strategies intended to 'roll back' the state, at the same time attacking the very principles of the welfare state. Allegedly, 'rights' had grown disproportionately over 'responsibilities', and in the process eroded individual initiative and mutuality, because rights unbalanced by responsibilities have created high and unsustainable levels of 'welfare dependency', rather than the surrounding economic conditions; and that this has led to moral decline in terms of the disintegration of 'traditional' (i.e. two-parent, heterosexual) family model and community ties (Etzioni, 1995; Beiner, 1995). As the term suggests, 'communitarians' emphasise the socially embedded nature of citizens, stressing the role and benefits of 'social capital' derived from their engagement with each other. In modern society, however, 'the loss of [community and social capital] has led to the impoverishment of individuals' and communities' quality of life and well-being (Putnam, 1995; 2000). The communitarian solution, according to proponents such as Etzioni (1995), who became an influential figure on both sides of the political spectrum (and of the Atlantic), was to reduce welfare entitlements, make rights conditional on responsibilities, and to call on people to revitalise their communities by providing mutual support and supporting civil society services and local public institutions through voluntary work. 'Neighbourhood Watch' schemes were emblematic of community self-help as they reduce the need for public services whilst strengthening community ties.

Communitarianism has not only attracted widespread support but also criticism from different quarters: on the political left, it has been accused of depoliticising the practice of citizenship and the concept of 'community' (Taylor, 2003; Crowther, 2004; Somers, 2008; Gaynor, 2009), since it assumes community to be essentially benign and uniform. This, critics argue, depicts an uncritical, simplistic and outdated image of community which ignores the increasingly complex, socially diverse and heterogeneous society, and the various pressures on modern lifestyles exerted by labour markets. Importantly, it is seen to detract from the more fundamental structural-political dimension that sustains social inequalities based on an unequal distribution of resources in society. Such a depoliticised and moralistic take on community and active citizenship is also intrinsically at odds with

civic republicanism, which stresses the essentially political nature of community (see for example Crick's distinction between community 'volunteering' and 'active citizenship', Crick 2002) and its link to a vibrant and strong democracy (Barber, 2003). Nevertheless, this has not prevented civic republican theorists from being associated - or aligning themselves - with communitarianism, and sometimes the distinction is not easy to make, since both advocate greater involvement and 'community' values, whatever they may be.

Furthermore, criticism has arisen in some feminist quarters, on account of communitarians frequently advocating a return to 'traditional' family values, that is, based on 'traditional' gender divisions. However, feminists consider this as representing a throwback to earlier, patriarchal and oppressive social norms which restricted women's choice and independence by increasing their obligations towards family and community, whilst restricting their potential in the workplace. There is some evidence that with a greater proportion of women working outside of the home, the vitality of 'community life' has suffered (Robertson et al., 2008), but feminists are mainly concerned with even greater pressures placed on women - as care-givers, community members and workers (Newman and Tonkens, 2011).

Although both civic republican and communitarian positions tend to adopt a highly normative stance towards shared social standards and norms, the moral tone adopted by Communitarians has tended to be predominantly conservative, as well as exclusive (Taylor, 2003). Thus Etzioni's insistence on reciprocity being contingent on 'shared values' in the community assumes the existence of a consensus based on a community's dominant, hegemonic values, which is highly problematic. How can 'common values' easily be reconciled with social and cultural diversity, or the differentiated rights of individuals and non-conformist lifestyles? Moreover, the uneven distribution of the make up communities and their 'social capital' in the form of the capacity, wealth and resources to volunteer would exacerbate existing inequalities by restricting availability to services in areas of deprivation, in contrast with universal public services (Helm, 2014).

Yet for all the criticisms that communitarianism has attracted, it held sway over successive governments and their conceptualisations of 'active citizenship' and community. This has not been restricted to the US but influenced policies in the UK and elsewhere, across the political spectrum. Etzioni's (1995) call for a 'moratorium on rights' and a renewed focus

on personal responsibility had come at a time when policy-makers were already seeking to change the relationship between the state and citizens, systematically curtailing welfare rights whilst increasing citizen responsibilities.

In sum, and as Chapter Three will further illustrate, both the contemporary understanding of 'active citizenship' in social policy and its critique owes much to the influences of communitarian philosophy. By drawing on both liberal and republican influences, the issues concerning active citizenship have therefore become inextricable from considerations and concerns over social rights, community and the changing role of the state in relation to welfare and social services. At the same time, the issue of active citizenship as playing an essential role in a healthy democracy, and the link between status, practice, identity and belonging have remained valid elements in the debate on citizenship.

### **2.1.2 Feminist challenges to traditional perspectives on citizenship**

The continuing issue of exclusion from citizenship participation has been at the forefront of those concerned with citizenship from both a feminist and a progressive perspective (Kymlicka and Norman, 1995; Young, 1995; Lister 1997a, 1997b; Newman and Tonkens, 2011). Central to this is the notion that social exclusion often goes hand in hand with the lack of substantiation of rights and low levels of civil and civic participation, given the correlation between socio-economic status and participation (UK citizenship surveys; Pattie et al. 2004). This means that the interests of the more socially disadvantaged are unlikely to be represented adequately, if at all, in the political arena, and the lower their ability to influence matters of social justice by themselves. In other words, the lack of civil and civic participation only maintains and reinforces social exclusion and its manifold effects for individuals and entire communities. From a political perspective, the exclusion of entire sections of the population spells weakness in the reach of democracy, leading to greater inequalities with negative impacts for society as a whole (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Dorling, 2010).

Feminist scholars in political and social sciences have identified the historical exclusion of women and their underrepresentation in civic life and politics as rooted in the gendered nature – and origin - of the concept of citizenship (Lister, 1997a). Before explicating this

argument further, two points need to be made: first, the category 'women' is not intended as essentialist and generalising but, on the contrary, understood with a view to recognising the considerable differences *between* women and thus intersecting with power differentials based on social class, race, (dis)ability, etc. Second, this critique of citizenship, whilst originally focused on the oppression of 'women' (but also), also applies to other disadvantaged groups – the disabled, black and ethnic minorities, carers of both genders, refugees and migrants, etc – who are in one way or another structurally excluded (Young 1995; Pateman, 1992; Lister 1997a). This is not to diminish the strength of the feminist argument per se, but to widen its reach and validity.

Feminist perspectives on citizenship usually start with the critique of conventional citizenship as a 'gendered' construction which developed on patriarchal social structures that systematically oppressed and excluded women. Since Antiquity, not only was the positive image of the citizen and 'his' civic and political participation built on men's privileged positions in society (and, within that, of men with wealth and property) but it was made possible by the work of women (and slaves) who occupied a subordinate and marginal role but confined to the private sphere; in contrast, the sphere of the citizen being the public domain, women and their contribution to the *polis* were by definition placed outside of the domain of citizenship. Feminists claim, therefore, that both citizenship politics and were

'... constructed on the exclusion of women, and all that is represented by femininity and women's bodies. [...] Manhood and politics go hand in hand, and everything that stands in contrast to and opposed to political life and the political virtues has been represented by women, their capacities and the tasks seen as natural to their sex, especially motherhood. Many political theorists have seen women as having a vital part to play in social life – but not as citizens and political actors.'

(Pateman and Shanley, 1991:3)

The rationale for the exclusion of women was based on crude assumptions made on supposedly biological (presumably called 'natural') characteristics – and, by contrast, on the inherent qualities of men. This 'essentialist' understanding of gender was exemplified by reasoning such as Rousseau referring to the 'disorder of women' (Pateman, 1980) stating that their minds were ruled by their bodies, emotions and passions, and that,

therefore, they were incapable of rational thought and impartiality, and thus unfit for making judgments on public and political matters. Thus disqualified from public participation - since the Enlightenment particularly – women and their issues were relegated to the limited, private sphere of the family and, at the most, within the community (e.g. Victorian women involved in charitable work).

The gendered construction of citizenship thus posited a dichotomy between the public and the private spheres: women were identified with (and confined to) the private sphere, whereas men had exclusive access to, and dominance over, the public sphere, through both their economic and civic participation. The effect of the relegation of women to the private sphere and their exclusion from public life is still reflected today in the under-representation of women in politics and positions of higher level decision-making, despite the more recent events in which ‘private’ matters (e.g. care, family, domestic violence) have been turned into matters of public concern and become the objects of state intervention (Newman, 2010; 2011).

By implication, the absence of women in politics meant that their voice and issues were excluded from public consideration, since they were deemed to be ‘private’ (and anything to do with women’s bodies was declared unsuitable for public airing, anyway) and thus irrelevant to politics. Whilst during the 19<sup>th</sup> century civil and civic rights were developed and extended to males of different social classes, women were left behind. As a result:

'Behind the cloak of gender neutrality that embraces the idea of citizenship there lurks in much of the literature a definitely male citizen and it is his interests and concerns that have traditionally dictated the agenda. The reappropriation of strategic concepts such as citizenship is central to the development of feminist political and social theory.' (Lister, 1997a:3)

The private-public dichotomy has for a long time been used to justify the exclusion of women from citizenship, whether as bearers of rights or in terms of the historic lack of protection of women by the state from exploitation and domestic violence (e.g. rape in marriage was criminalised in England as recently as 1991). The feminist liberation movement of the 1960s and ‘70s rallied around the slogan, ‘the personal is political’ to highlight to women as much as to the wider community the fact that women’s issues

relating to relationships, gender roles in the private sphere or child-bearing/rearing, and their oppression and the violence against them, were in fact political issues requiring political action and solutions. Women's consciousness-raising on these issues formed part of their political education and action (Hanisch, 1969).

The feminist critique led to the conclusion (Lister, 1997a) that the liberal notion of equality of rights has to be seen as a 'false universalism', and that the civic republican conception of political participation is also exclusionary, on account of the gender-based division of tasks. However, political theory makes it clear that participation is the key to citizenship, or, as Voet claimed, participation in decision-making is a positive liberty and an indicator of citizenship (in Lister, 1997a). By this measure it would appear that the inclusion of women as 'active citizens' is of central concern to their emancipation, and arguably, to a balanced democracy and inclusive society.

The question is, however, what needs to be done to make inclusion more accessible to women, considering the high expectations placed on women and their 'special responsibilities' notably as primary care givers, on the one hand, and the reluctance of women to engage in formal political processes shaped by male preferences, on the other (Kittay, 2001)? The question of how to apply equal rights and at the same time offer differentiated citizenship to accommodate the situation of excluded groups has divided feminist political theorists. Iron Marion Young for example argued for a 'differentiated citizenship' (Young, 1995) by which oppressed groups, including women, would be given preferential status and representation in decision-making and positions of power, and special rights (e.g. quotas), where appropriate, to tackle their disadvantage in the economy and in politics. Only in this way would they have a chance to represent their interests and perspectives and be able to influence decisions on the 'common good'.

Lister (1997a, 1997b, 1998) elaborates further on Young's notion of 'differentiated universalism'. Concerned that 'essentialist' claims, such as Kittay's, could jeopardize women's long-term strategies for inclusion and equality (e.g. in the labour market, if women were paid to stay at home in a caring role) Lister proposes that conceptions of citizenship should focus on 'agency' or participation in a way that is relevant and accessible for women. In her 'synthesis' of the liberal and republican construction of citizenship, she argues on the importance of, on the one hand, universal citizenship rights,

i.e. those not made conditional on participation, in order to prevent discriminating against those who lack the resources to participate. On the other hand, Lister emphasised that agency or participation do play a crucial role in strengthening people's identity as citizens, fostering their ability to fully exercise (or substantiate) their citizenship rights. In this reasoning, citizenship is as much about the ability to 'be' a citizen (protected by status and unconditional rights) as it is to 'act' as citizens, in order to fully substantiate their rights as political actors, in a broad sense.

Finally, a broad conceptualisation of citizenship would include the informal domain of community activism. Lister (1998) cites various examples of research showing how the public-private divide can be overcome: in the context of community development women were able to develop as political actors when they had been able to identify their own issues and mobilise collective action around these; on the basis of this they were able to make rights claims and identify as political actors in their own right and on their own terms. It has also helped to bridge the public-private divide and bring private matters onto the public agenda (Lister, 1998:230). Community participation is, then, promoted as one of the ways by which women can overcome their barriers to citizenship participation and identity and, in the long run, may challenge the male dominance in the public and political sphere. The aim is not, however, to confine women to the community sphere, especially since notions of 'community' and 'civil society' are already construed by policy makers as 'de-politicised' by declaring it the realm of 'ordinary people' (Clarke, 2010). On the contrary - and in contrast with some feminist political thinkers - Chantal Mouffe warns of the importance of connecting feminist politics with formal politics:

'Only when [feminists] stress that the pursuit of more social and economic concerns must be undertaken through active engagement as citizens in the public world and when they declare the activity of citizenship itself a value will feminists be able to claim a truly liberatory politics as their own.' (Mouffe, 1992:76)

### **2.1.3 Interim summary**

Citizenship in the conventional constructions of the liberal and the civic republican tradition has been accused of being exclusionary, particularly by assuming that the principle of equality of rights included with the status automatically translates into

equality of citizenship. Instead, citizenship emerges as a 'Janus-faced' concept (Lister, 1997) since, on the one hand, it holds 'promises of freedom' (Fryer, 2010) with rights offering the potential for inclusion and liberation but, on the other, it risks remaining an empty promise for sections of the national polity, particularly those who are already marginalised and have the most to lose from not substantiating their citizenship.

The feminist challenge to citizenship has shown that rather than seeking fault with the concept itself, it remains highly pertinent for bolstering claims for inclusion. This would require a broadening of what can be considered to constitute both 'active citizenship' and the definition of the 'political'. Under these conditions participation could be made more accessible which, in turn, would enable currently excluded groups to claim their rights and affirm their status as full citizens (Lister, 1997a). The relatively recent arrival of neo-liberal conceptualisations of active citizens as consumers, and of communitarianism onto the political stage has shown that previous gains in rights, status and participation can – and have started to – be reversed. In the current policy context (which will be reviewed in the subsequent chapter) it is vital, therefore, to grasp the political dimension of active citizenship by the nettle. Such steps, it has been argued, require 'active citizens' to become engaged in the political process, broadly defined, whether at the local, community or at national or international levels, whether in the form of local issues, social movements or in formal political and participatory processes. Only through a politicised understanding of active citizenship can people's right claims be realised, though, and democracy be strengthened rather than weakened.

## **2.2 Active Citizens and power**

Both political sciences and sociology offer differing theories and approaches to the understanding and analysis of power, with the debate far from being settled. According to Lukes, power is an 'ineradicably evaluative' and 'essentially contested' concept (Lukes, 2005: 14, referring to Gallie, 1956), which has not prevented him from proposing his own theoretical framework that has informed contemporary debates and is therefore taken as this section's starting point. The main aim and focus of this section is to discover how these different theories of power can help elucidate the term 'empowerment' and to ask, specifically, what we mean by power when we talk about '*empowering*' active citizens.

In parallel with theories of power and citizenship in political studies there is contestation of the (often implicit) meaning given to the term 'political' (Newman and Clarke, 2009). What conventionally counts as 'political' in the context of the majority of surveys of 'political participation' (e.g. Home Office Citizenship surveys, or the Power Inquiry, 2006) tends to be limited to a very narrow definition (Pattie et al. 2004) restricted to established, formal and institutionalised political processes. By contrast, a feminist stance that is based on the notion that 'everything is political' (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 21) and which seeks to challenge the exclusive tendencies of the conventional conceptualisation of citizenship (Lister, 1997a) are calling for a feminist 'revisioning of the political' (Hirschmann and Di Stefano, 1996). It is not surprising, therefore, to see a tendency, particularly in feminist and radical approaches, to bring together conceptualisations of 'power', 'politics' and 'citizenship'. Given the inclusive ambition underpinning these theoretical undertakings, such alternative conceptualisations are particularly pertinent to this research.

### **2.2.1 Three dimensions of power**

Steven Lukes' theorisation of the 'three faces of power' (first published in 1974) has played a seminal role in understanding and analysing power both in political sciences and in sociology. In the context of examining the question of 'power' and 'empowerment' relating to active citizens, it seems apt to start with this approach, and to unravel these three dimensions, before considering alternative views.

#### ***2.2.1.1 The first dimensional view: a pluralist approach to politics***

The first dimension of power concerns the way power is seen to operate in democracies. In 1961 the American political scientist Robert Dahl published a seminal study of his analysis of democratic decision-making in local town hall meetings in New Haven (Dahl, 1961, in Lukes, 2005). His analysis was grounded in his persuasion of a pluralist view of democracy (according to critics, this bias may have flawed his conclusions, see Domhoff, 2005), in which the political decision-making processes are played out in an open system. The prevailing view so far had been that power is in the hands of a given local 'elite', which holds sway over local decisions. Dahl's study, in contrast, seemed to have provided evidence that this was not the case, since the winning argument is not inevitably

presented by the powerful elite, but the one that has prevailed in the political deliberations of the town hall meetings. This seems to suggest that power can be identified and analysed by tracking down who wins and who loses on key, clearly recognised issues, fought over within the confines of democratic structures and through open or public deliberation (Gaventa, 1999).

Lukes (2005) called this the 'first dimension of power'. Consistent with pluralist, liberal political theory and the principles of equal, universal political rights, it asserts that all citizens have equal access to power in a democratic system, whether as individuals or by organising themselves into associations or interest groups to exert influence on decision-makers (Gaventa 2004). Anybody can make their voice heard in the existing democratic processes, directly or indirectly (through representation), by voting, lobbying or becoming politically active. The contemporary rhetoric of citizen empowerment through inviting greater 'participation' in decision-making is tacitly premised on the assumptions underpinning the 'procedural' political equality suggested in this first dimensional view. As will be seen, however, it ignored the notion that 'the dice are loaded' (Taylor, 2003), making some people's participation more likely to be effective than others'; equally, non-participation is not considered problematic as it is supposed to 'reflect the contentment of the citizenry with the status quo, or [its] apathy' (Gaventa 1999:53).

#### ***2.2.1.2 The second (hidden) dimension of power: decisions and non-decisions, and why social movements are vital to democracy***

Dahl's somewhat over-simplified and optimistic view of how political power operates was contested by Bachrach and Baratz (1970, in Gaventa 1999; Lukes, 2005) who drew attention to the *hidden* dimension of power in democratic decision-making. They pointed out that power was exercised more effectively in determining both who gets to the table and what issues are open for discussion – and which are not. In other words, the second dimension of power is about control over what is deemed to legitimately enter the debate and constitute a legitimate 'political' issue, in a particular context. If politics is essentially about deciding which issues are open to contestation, then in the second dimension the powerful are able to 'mobilise bias' by trying to organise some things into, and others 'out of politics' (Newman and Clarke, 2009:23). Bachrach and Baratz have also pointed to the

power inherent in 'non-decision-making', since the failure to acknowledge and act on issues can be as powerful and effective as actual decision-making (Lukes, 2005).

In contrast with the first dimension, the second dimension of power thus focuses on the mechanisms which are used to keep some people (and their issues) out of the political process. This seems to represent a fuller and more critical account of democratic processes and explains the importance of social movements in their efforts – often over the long term – to bring issues and solutions into the political arena. It also explains why collective action outside of formal political processes, such as in civil society, forms such a vital part of the democratic process: it allows the mobilisation of counter-hegemonic views to be formulated and strategies to be developed with a view to changing public opinion, the press and ultimately politicians by drawing attention to grievances, issues or solutions. For the disenfranchised, the chances of entering the arena of the first dimension of political power are slim, to say the least, whereas access to social movements is theoretically easier, even if they do not guarantee actual influence and if so, efforts may take a long time before taking effect. Needless to say, those who are already powerful or aligned to the establishment do not face the same barriers, whether to political influence or social movement participation (hence, Marilyn Taylor's reminder [Taylor, 2003] that 'the dice are loaded', both for individuals but also for civil society and lobby groups). This dimension, then, broadens the political sphere from the very narrow confines of institutional politics to the broader one of civil society<sup>6</sup>. However, power pervades these spaces too.

### **2.2.1.3 *The third (radical) dimension: power everywhere and below the surface***

Steven Lukes (2005) has offered a third dimension of power which does not deny the role played by the first two, but goes much further. Concerned with how political beliefs influence and subordinate people who then come to seemingly support decisions that are

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<sup>6</sup> Without wanting to complicate matters at this stage or jump ahead of the argument, it has been argued by Foucault (2000) and Foucauldians (e.g. Rose and Miller, 1992) that the depoliticisation of civil society, by removing it from the 'political' sphere constitutes an example of 'political rationality' and 'discourse' inherent in governmental power which has led to the 'commonsense' assumption – enshrined in charity law – that charities, for example, are not to engage in 'political' activities such as campaigning. As mentioned earlier, the construction of the boundaries of the 'political' plays an essential part in the exercise of power.

against their own best interests, he analysed processes of subtle influencing which undermine alternatives, manipulate truth and manage to 'manufacture consent' and legitimacy without requiring coercion. Because of its hidden, underhand nature, manipulating subordinates without their awareness, this third dimension is an even more insidious form of power than the first two. By positing power as inherently conflictual – 'zero-sum' or 'power over' – and oppressive, Lukes theory is often associated with radical, Marxist analyses.

Furthermore, Lukes 'radical' representation of power drew on Gramsci's highly contested notions of 'hegemony' and 'false consciousness' (1971). In this view, the capitalist state consists of two overlapping spheres: the institutions of civil society (broadly understood) and political institutions (Heywood, 1994)<sup>7</sup>. Gramsci thought that the structures of civil society play a far more central and effective role in reproducing dominant social norms and beliefs than political structures. Through everyday public and civil society institutions (e.g. schools, religious bodies, unions, workplaces), the 'dominant ideology' works by convincing the subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable, thus imposing values that explain and justify their own subordination (Lukes, 2005:126). Political ideas thus become part of accepted and uncontested cultural norms and constitute 'truth' and 'reality'. While they serve the interests of the powerful but may not necessarily harm those of the subordinates, the problem is that the ideas, values and assumptions of the 'dominant ideology' and social order – or hegemony, to use Gramsci's term – are not normally open to interrogation. It is not that resistance is impossible, far from it. Scott (1985, cited on Powercube.net, 2011) for example, observed a variety of ways in which the hegemonic social order is resisted by the 'weak', including in popular cultural practices such as carnivals and other folk traditions which for a limited time give license to ridiculing the powerful and reversing power roles. Leaving these exceptions aside, the hegemonic system does not even rely on unwavering support, as long as its dominance and inevitability are not questioned. The hegemonic power and its dominant ideology make it very difficult for alternative 'discourses' to emerge and to gain legitimacy, as these are systematically dismissed by the dominant power (e.g. Thatcher's famous phrase, 'there is not alternative'). Such challenges are possible, of course, and do occur, as some political struggles manage to gain legitimacy and change the accepted view, whether through sudden revolutions or long term struggles (for example, Nelson Mandela's *Long*

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<sup>7</sup> But see the footnote above.

Walk to Freedom'). Importantly (again, the battle against apartheid in South Africa provides a good example) for 'counter-hegemonies' to be formulated and to gain a foothold requires critical understanding of the reality of a situation, and as part of this process, the unveiling of the 'distortion of 'truth' effected by hegemonic discourses.

Critics have pointed to the disputed Marxian notion of 'false consciousness' evoked by Lukes as a flaw in his radical view, arguing that the judgment about what constitutes people's best interest is inevitably based on a normative, arbitrary and ideological assessment (Hay, 2002). Hay also argues that Lukes' blurring of the differences between political manifestations of power and sociological processes of the production of social norms makes an empirical analysis of power exceedingly difficult. Others, especially those motivated by emancipatory agendas, have welcomed Lukes' 'radical view' as a crucial contribution to the power debate, since his emphasis on hidden and invisible forms of power raises the importance of different forms of 'counter-hegemony'. It is no coincidence that the early 1970s saw the publication of similarly 'radical' theories, including Gramsci's Prison Notebooks (1971, in Lukes, 2005) and Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire, 1970).

#### ***2.2.1.4 A Foucauldian perspective of power: discourses, 'governmentality' and resistance***

Meanwhile in France, and bearing parallels with Lukes' third dimensional power, Michel Foucault contributed to the analysis of power with new ideas. Arising from his genealogical analyses of social deviance in relation to health (1963), madness (1972), and sexuality (1976<sup>8</sup>) he came to study the workings of power in the context of the historical formation of the modern nation state and its institutions. His particular interest lay in understanding how power operates, and to identify its mechanisms (Foucault, 2002). In contrast with theorists who considered power mainly as a form of oppression, Foucault argued that power also is a socially productive force, and that power relations 'constitute subjectivity'. The latter refers to power relations as also 'compris[ing] the intention to teach, to mould conduct, to instil forms of self-awareness and identities' (Gordon, 2002: xix). Foucault emphasised the relational nature of power, and that by being implicated in all social

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<sup>8</sup> Dates referring to the original publications in French

relations power should be seen as flowing across society in all directions and into the furthest reaches of intimate relationships in the private sphere.

One important aspect in Foucault's analysis – similar to Gramsci - is the role played by individuals in the exercise of power. Rather than being merely subjected to power the individual is an active 'subject' in its exercise. As one can only consider power to exist if it is in 'a relation between two free subjects' (Foucault, 2002:326) it follows that he or she is free to choose whether and how to act on the impulse provided by power. Indeed, power always attempts to influence action, but the individuals at whom power is targeted can be either willing or unwilling. In other words, because power involves free beings the possibility of resistance is always, ontologically, present:

'At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom' (Foucault, 2002:342)

Because of the relational nature of power and its dispersal across the social body, it cannot be reduced to being localised in any specific body, person or institution; it is ubiquitous and operates through a complex network of agencies and individuals. His genealogical analyses led Foucault to focus on the apparatus of the state and how, through a network of governmental and non-governmental agencies, the modern state is able to govern both effectively and 'at a distance'. Therefore, one's study of state power should encompass not only the agencies directly involved in the exercise of power, but also the mechanisms and 'techniques' deployed in its exercise – and the ways in which these become part of the 'commonsense' inside people's heads. Foucault used the term 'governmentality' to

'... draw attention to a certain way of thinking and acting embodied in all those attempts to know and govern the wealth, health and happiness of populations. Foucault argued that, since the eighteenth century, this way of reflecting upon power and seeking to render it operable had achieved pre-eminence over other forms of political power. It was linked to the proliferation of a whole range of apparatuses pertaining to government and a complex body of knowledges and 'know-how' about government, the means of its exercise and the nature of those over whom it was to be exercised.' (Rose and Miller, 1992:174)

From this emerges that 'knowledge' and 'discourse' are both implicated in 'governmental' power. By closely associating power with knowledge ('power/knowledge') Foucault indicated that '[t]he exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power' (Foucault cited in Gordon, 2002:xvi). In this way certain forms of knowledge are sanctioned by the state (but it could equally be by other 'authorities' recognised within any social group), for example scientific knowledge, which is used to shape particular discourses and ideas which in turn are used to define social norms. Notably, Foucault examined the implication of scientific knowledge in the definition of madness, crime, acceptable and non-acceptable forms of sexuality, etc. But, as Rose and Miller (1992:177) explain:

'Knowledge here does not simply mean 'ideas', but refers to the vast assemblage of persons, theories, projects, experiments and techniques that has become such a central component of government. *Theories* from philosophy to medicine. *Schemes* from town planning to social insurance. *Techniques* from double entry book-keeping to compulsory medical inspection of schoolchildren. *Knowledgeable persons* from generals to architects and accountants. Our concern, that is to say, is with the 'know how' that has promised to make government possible.'

(Rose and Miller, 1992:177, my emphasis)

To the 'assemblage' of 'theories, schemes, techniques', etc, must be added 'discourse'. Rose and Miller again provide an extrapolation of Foucault's complicated ideas and uses of discourse, applied to the context of governmentality. Their analysis is directly and in more than one way relevant to the issues of concern in this chapter:

'Political discourse is a domain for the formulation and justification of idealised schemata for representing reality, analyzing it and rectifying it. Whilst it does not have the systematic and closed character of disciplined bodies of theoretical discourse it is, nonetheless, possible to discern regularities that we term *political rationalities*.' (Rose and Miller, 1992:178, my emphasis)

Neo-liberalism is one example of a political rationality that has been used by various governments in the UK and beyond to legitimise a particular political discourse, and through this, a particular 'schemata for representing reality', etc. Moreover:

‘First, political rationalities have a characteristically *moral* form. They elaborate upon the fitting powers and duties for authorities. They address the proper distribution of tasks and actions between authorities of different types - political, spiritual, military, pedagogic, familial. They consider the ideals or principles to which government should be directed - freedom, justice, equality, mutual responsibility, citizenship, common sense, economic efficiency, prosperity, growth, fairness, rationality and the like.’ (Rose & Miller, 1992:178)

Power, then, as represented in governmentality and through a Foucauldian lens, extends to the various ways in which it is used – including by governments – to influence people’s actions and thoughts. By following the aims of third dimensional views on power, ‘empowerment’ would involve raising awareness of these governmental strategies at play. They may be at once repressive and productive, but as they attempt to embed themselves in the form of hegemonic ‘commonsense’, it is important to identify these strategies and to assess them critically. Foucault himself recognised this when he said:

‘It seems to me that the real political task in a society such as ours is to criticise the workings of institutions, which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticise and attack them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight against them.’ (Foucault, in Chomsky and Foucault, 2011)

In this vein the government-funded programmes of active citizenship, for example (but also ‘governance’, as will be explored in Chapter Three), could at once be analysed as ‘discourses’ and as ‘technologies of citizenship’ (Cruikshank, 1999) which ‘attempt to alter or shape the actions of others’ (Cruikshank, 1999:4). More specifically still, within a neo-liberal ‘political rationality’, active citizenship discourses and technologies

‘... are aimed at correcting the deficiencies of citizens ... they operate according to a political rationality for governing people in ways that promote their autonomy, self-sufficiency, and political engagement; they are intended to ‘help people to help themselves’. (Cruikshank, 1999:4)

But returning to the immediate matter at hand, the implication of governmentality insights for this research is that it draws attention to examining the role played by both third sector practitioners at the CVS and their learners, and to their ability to critically understand and *reinterpret* the governmental discourse of active citizenship for their own purposes. As Foucault reminds us, dominant discourses can be and frequently are challenged:

‘Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it... We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart’ (Foucault, 1998:100).

At the same time, the ‘active citizen’ ‘identity’, through the ‘constitution of subjectivity’ that Foucault highlighted as immanent in power, should also be regarded as potentially productive, rather than as inevitably repressive or a form of social control that would necessarily act against the interests of citizens. Empowerment here, once again, would consist in enabling people to explore both of these aspects for themselves.

### **2.2.2 Alternative approaches to conflictual power**

Whilst feminists would generally agree with the role played by the third dimension of power in the subjugation of women, some are keen to highlight an alternative facet of power. The first three dimensions presented power in conflictual terms, as a force of domination and in terms of a zero-sum game. But power can also be seen as a positive force, as ‘energy, capability and potential’ (Hartsock 1996). This interpretation of power offers an alternative model to the patriarchal, ‘malestream’ value-systems, and seeks to emphasise supposedly ‘female’ values of cooperation.

This view recognises that power is created ‘wherever people get together and act in concert, [...] it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together’ (Arendt, 1969:52, in Hartsock, 1996:32). Arendt considered it as the expression and foundation of community,

and as essentially benign. Power is 'actualised' through a combination of words and action, where

'... words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities'

(Arendt 1958, quoted in Hartsock 1996:32)

Seen in this way, power ceases to function as domination: although violence and power are commonly found together, they are in fact opposites, and violence can destroy power. In tyrannies, the political system has atomised communities, and rendered its people powerless, unable to speak up and act together (ibid, p33). The authoritarian and hostile power of the state seeks to annihilate the collective power that is constitutive of communities, which are seen as threatening to the regime.

Arendt's analysis has resonated with feminist political thinkers as a basis for a feminist alternative model (Hartsock, 1996) which associates this form of power with women (Elshtain 1992). Elshtain, for example, contrasted the 'power' of women in families and communities with women's 'powerlessness' in the political realm. Community power is seen as 'informal' and is contrasted with the 'formal brutal force and coercion' associated with political power and the state. It is argued that women have not actually been powerless, but have been portrayed as such, when measured by the yardstick of male, Enlightenment values. These downgraded the emotive dimension of the private and the community sphere, whilst elevating the rational, public, disinterested and civic disposition into the realm of citizenship, from which women's power was excluded. Hence, both women's exclusion from citizenship and from the public sphere, and their portrayal as 'powerless', are two sides of the same coin of the patriarchal oppression of women.

As was seen in the previous section, any analysis based on an 'essentialist' view of gender is contested, including amongst feminists. For a start, it is argued that it is a mistake to consider the women-dominated realms of family and community as spaces free from inference from conventional, oppressive forms of power (Taylor, 2003). On the contrary, power relations are structured not only along gender lines but also according to wealth, status, race, ability, etc, and these unequal power relations run through the family and the

community, where they continue to oppress. Furthermore, Foucault alerted us to the ubiquity of power inherent in all social relations, including in communities and at the micro-level of family. It is therefore important not to ignore the existence of power relations in and between communities, as spaces where hegemonic power is reproduced, especially since 'to see power everywhere, and hence, nowhere', is to mask its political dimension (Hartsock, 1996). This note of caution seems particularly relevant in the light of communitarian approaches to citizenship, which have been criticised for taking a similarly depoliticised, euphemistic view of 'community'. There is a tension, then, between on the one hand valuing the positive 'power with' of communities, and, on the other, overvaluing it and thereby risking to ignore its political nature and exposure to the same power relations as the rest of society.

Hence, Hartsock suggests that a more adequate and liberatory understanding of power would 'neither reduce power to domination nor ignore systematic domination to stress only energy and community' (Hartsock, 1996:43). This reflects the view taken by Kymlicka (2002) who expressed similar concerns about an uncritical stance towards civil society's associational life, highlighting the need for the state to prevent discrimination against minority groups, wherever it occurs, and to take positive action as the basis for inclusive citizenship.

### **2.2.3 Implications for active citizen power**

The purpose of exploring different conceptualisations of power has been to be able to frame the power of active citizens and better understand what competences they require in order to become 'empowered'. Gaventa (1999:51) argued that 'each dimension of power implies a strategy for overcoming powerlessness'. The concept of overcoming powerlessness seems a good way of briefly drawing out the implications for active citizens in relation to the conceptualisations of power described above.

In the first dimension, the issue for active citizens is to find a way into decision-making positions. For this they have to understand how decision-making works, and how to 'play the game'. As will be shown in the next chapter, recent decades have seen a rise of participatory democracy and governance in the UK, followed by the devolution of power to the local level. Whilst new opportunities for joining decision-making forums have

sprung up, the limitations of such government-controlled, 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2008a) have become all too apparent. It would appear that, confirming Bachrach and Baratz's findings, the issue is about citizen control over the agenda, and what is and is not open for discussion. Furthermore, the formal processes in these spaces tend to be exclusive, acting as controls on who can participate, and replicating other manifestation of social power differences. Even if these spaces were to change the way they operate, the central question remains as to how much power is delegated to the local level (Gaventa, 2004) as opposed to being withheld by central government – or yielded to interests outside of the control of national governments altogether.

The second dimension, therefore, draws attention to the process whereby vested interests keep certain people and their issues out of the decision-making process altogether. The challenge then would be how active citizens can overcome these barriers if they want to bring their grievances to the table, and to work effectively to influence the democratic process. Gaventa (1999) points to the important role played by community 'organising' and by organisations which can take on the role of influencing with greater effectiveness and resources than individuals. Active citizens would thus benefit from learning how to work as a group and to take on leadership roles. But there is also the danger of groups losing their representativeness and their 'critical voice' as they become more professionalised or 'incorporated' into institutional systems (Milbourne, 2013). The second dimension, therefore, encourages an analysis of how citizens' issues are articulated, carried forward and potentially manipulated by organisational and institutional structures before they can even reach the arenas where decisions are made.

The third dimension of power presents at once a more pessimistic and challenging view on the extent to which citizens can exert power, as it would seem that they need to first unravel dominant discourses to discover the 'truth' and hidden agendas concealed by them before they can grasp what is in their 'best interest'. After having done that, they still need to tackle the challenges described in relation to the first two dimensions, or choose to adopt an alternative avenue outside of the formal processes of influence. The implications for citizenship empowerment will be discussed in the next section.

The feminist view of 'power with', in contrast to conflictual power, seems to offer more encouraging prospects for active citizens acting within the realms of civil society. Especially

within the informal terrain of social networks and community-based spaces, women and other groups can create power collectively without necessarily having to engage in the conflictual processes of formal politics and decision-making, and have direct – albeit more limited – effect.

Thus, feminists and other critics have questioned the effectiveness of such spaces and strategies that go beyond the therapeutic benefit of ‘self-help’. Moreover, these spheres are not exempt from the influences of power structures that pervade society, and therefore cannot be assumed to be as inclusive as some (particularly communitarians) like to assume. On the contrary, following Gramsci and Foucauldian, civil society organisations are just as likely to reproduce unequal power relations and hegemonic discourses. Identifying the politics of community is therefore a central task.

Another concern with an approach confined to the community level concerns its inherent limitations given the limited reach of women's voices in the public sphere, and hence enable their liberation, unless women and their organisations also enter the formal arena of decision-making and political representation (Mouffe, 1992). Nevertheless, it would appear that community spaces can offer an accessible and inclusive way for women and other marginalised groups to come together to start to realise their collective power and common interests, as first steps towards their empowerment (Mayo, 1997).

### **2.3 Active citizens and empowerment**

This section explores concepts and issues of empowerment and education for active citizenship, with a view to answering the question: ‘what do active citizens need to learn to enable them to become not only active but also empowered?’ Empowerment is a highly contested concept, and meanings vary depending on one’s starting point, purpose and context. To review a wide range of these different meanings – let alone, comprehensively – would not be appropriate here (for a trans-disciplinary review of empowerment, see Hur, 2006). Rather, I will focus the discussion on the meanings relevant to, and seeking to address the issues highlighted in this chapter so far. Moreover, the specific policy context of active citizenship in which this case study played out raises additional questions, which

will be detailed and discussed in the following literature review chapter, and in subsequent findings chapters.

The first part of the chapter emphasised the difference between different approaches to conceptualising citizenship, with the traditional schools stressing the relationship between citizens and the state in a reciprocal exchange of rights and obligations. More recent communitarian thinking has claimed that rights in welfare states have to be rebalanced with greater responsibility, both at the level of the individual and the community. This liberal-communitarian view has been associated with a particular kind of active citizen in a typology developed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), as the 'personally responsible citizen'. This category is equivalent to the 'good citizen' (Crick 2001) in terms of people taking 'personal responsibility' as law-abiding workers and tax-payers, with a degree of civility towards others and altruism, 'helping others' through volunteering and neighbourliness. As Westheimer and Kahne and other political theorists (e.g. Crick 2001) have pointed out, the good citizen is not necessarily doing much to uphold a healthy democracy, as this stance has nothing to say about political awareness or engagement. On the contrary, the 'personally responsible citizen' is usually part of conservative discourses, which associate social problems with personal character rather than with socio-economic and political conditions of their surroundings. To become a personally responsible citizen primarily requires, therefore, moral values and social norms that promote 'good', and possibly altruistic, behaviour, rather than the learning of skills and knowledge.

By contrast, the civic republican tradition takes the view that active citizenship represents 'democracy as a way of life' (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004:242) in the form of participation in the social life of the 'community' (however defined) and/or in the civic life of public affairs. This is said to bring social fulfilment and strengthen identity, social belonging and community, but is also essential for the definition and negotiation of the 'common good' (Oldfield, 1990; Crick, 2001). The emphasis in terms of active citizenship is on civil and civic participation, which require a basic understanding of how democracy and communities work, as well as how to become involved. The purpose of citizenship education for this kind of citizen would focus on civic knowledge and the promotion of a civic disposition, that is, the willingness to engage. Additionally, it requires social and organisational skills to enable individuals to work together effectively, to deliberate and develop leadership. Westheimer and Kahne's research into citizenship education in US

schools found that programmes aimed at promoting participatory citizenship rarely incorporated a political dimension. In the UK, civic republicans such as Crick (1998) have long insisted on the importance of political literacy as part of citizenship education, and Crick has made the point of clarifying the difference between volunteering and active citizenship (Crick, 2002). However, as will be mentioned in the next chapter, governments have been reluctant to promote political literacy in formal citizenship curricula, or as part of adult learning policy agendas. This not only lends weight to Westheimer and Kahne's finding that education for participatory citizens does not automatically involve a political element but also stressed the need for learning outside of the reach of governmental influence and control, within community and adult learning spaces (Crowther, 2004).

The third and final category of citizen identified in Westheimer and Kahne's typology is the 'justice-oriented' citizen, which differs from the previous two by its explicit political orientation or dimension. The justice-oriented citizen is motivated by issues relating to social justice, and actively seeks ways to effect 'systemic change' (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004:240). To support this disposition and enable active participation, education would seek to develop critical faculties which enhance the analysis and understanding of social, political and economic factors with a view to identifying the mechanisms of social injustice and knowing how to devise strategies to effect change. However, Westheimer and Kahne have found that school programmes that focused on developing commitment to social justice tended to neglect learning about the technical and institutional challenges presented by civic and political participation. This serves to make the point that both participatory and justice-oriented approaches are best seen as complementary approaches to active citizenship learning, and focusing on one at the expense of the other would be limiting the scope of active citizenship being promoted.

The main challenge, however, is represented by power's third dimension. In parallel to the critique of the first and second dimension (Lukes, 2005 [1974 for the first edition]) 'empowerment' as a radical concept to inspire social and political change has been developed by the educator Paulo Freire (1970). His starting point was the analysis of 'oppression' as a social, political and psychological phenomenon by which hegemonic views of the powerful are promoted as 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971 in Lukes, 2005) and come to be internalised by the oppressed. Freire identified the need for 'conscientisation', a process whereby people develop critical consciousness in order to

understand and challenge the dominant discourses that cause or perpetuate their oppression. Conscientisation involves a critical re-interpretation of the way people understand the world, as a prerequisite for taking transformative action. Rather than involving an abstract analysis, however, for conscientisation to be empowering it needs to start from people's own experiences, on themes and issues identified by them as relevant and expressed in their own words. This cannot be accomplished by text-book learning or education by rote, but involves interactive processes of learning in which the tutor facilitates the learning and learns from the learners about their view of the world and their issues at the same time. The tutor, whilst not laying claim to superior knowledge, has responsibility for directing the learning towards 'praxis', understood as 'reflection and action upon the world in order to change it'. The object of this learning is, therefore, to problematise the situations in which people find themselves, to transform their understanding of the situation and to encourage collective action for social change.

Freirean learning is intended to be 'emancipatory' by enabling people to empower themselves through understanding and knowledge about the nature and the root causes of unsatisfactory circumstances in order to develop real strategies for change (Thompson, 2000). It is by definition a social process which is aimed at collective action. This is because empowerment is essentially a social act (Shor and Freire, 1987), which recognises that individuals on their own lack the power to effect substantial social and political changes. Hence, learning to work with others collaboratively forms an important part of active citizenship learning.

Freirean principles of emancipatory learning have underpinned social purpose adult education as well as community development since the 1970s (Forrest, 1999), and specifically, a political strand of critical education for active citizenship that exists in 'symbiotic relationship' with social movements (Martin, 2003). Reconnecting with concerns voiced earlier about a simplistic and depoliticised interpretation of 'community', the proponents of emancipatory learning argue not only for 'political' active citizenship but also for a political understanding of community, or 'community as politics' (Crowther 2004). Such 'critical pedagogy' aims to

‘... enable learners to go beyond thinking in order to enable them as citizens to act as engaged agents in their various worlds, giving voice to their hopes and ambitions for change and improvement’. (Giroux 2007: 1-5, cited in Fryer 2013)

From this emerges the importance of education for active citizenship being linked to action. But what kind of action, and what can pass as 'political'? An answer to this can be linked to feminist views of empowerment in which active citizenship is defined as both status and agency, as identity and practice (Lister, 1997; 1998). The feminist perspective has identified barriers to active citizenship in its conventional forms for women and other groups as a result of traditionally exclusive and narrowly defined portrayals of citizenship and ‘the political’. Part of efforts to reverse this alienation involves fostering an active citizen identity. Lister (1998) used Hayatt’s term of ‘accidental activism’ through which ‘women who previously did not see themselves as in any way political are becoming advocates for social change’ (Hyatt, 1992, cited in Lister, 1998:232). According to Lister (1997a), this is supported through community development and specifically, through the recognition of women’s collective action in the community as constituting active and political citizenship. Recognition and accessible opportunities for active participation form part of an informal learning process which is particularly relevant for people who lack the confidence and self-esteem for any form of involvement. Lister argues that

‘[t]he emphasis on building up confidence and self-esteem is important in thinking about how community development work can help people to develop *as citizens*. But it needs resources, including training resources, to help people to realise their potential and the capacity-building not just of individuals but of whole communities.’ (Lister, 1998: 231, my emphasis)

However, community groups or civil society organisations are not inherently ‘civil’ (Evers, 2010), or egalitarian (Kymlicka, 2002). Thus, citizenship learning should also take place at the level of groups to foster inclusive practices based on equality and diversity training (cdx and changes, 2008). This confirms the notion of ‘empowerment’ as a ‘multi-level construct’ (Rappaport, 1987).

## 2.4 Discussion

'Asserting a single definition of empowerment may make attempts to achieve it formulaic or prescription-like, contradicting the very concept of empowerment'  
(Zimmerman, 1995: 583)

'Being an active citizen is a role that, somehow or other, has to be learned. Citizens need knowledge and understanding of the social, legal and political system(s) in which they live and operate. They need skills and aptitudes to make use of that knowledge and understanding. And they need to be endowed with values and dispositions to put their knowledge and skills to beneficial use.' (Heater 1999:164)

It has been argued that the term 'empowerment' has been used in paradoxical ways: as with power, it entails the temptation of 'empowering' people from top-down, whereas empowerment is something that people do by themselves and for themselves, and for purposes of their own choosing. How can this insight be reconciled with the range of conceptualisations of active citizenship, all of which advocate a preferred ideal of the active citizen and of the need for 'conscientisation' to unravel barriers to citizen power? Moreover, it is widely assumed that active citizenship has to be learnt, as encapsulated in the phrase, 'citizens are not born that way, they are made' (Mactaggart, in Woodward, 2004:1, and in Heater, above, for example).

Whether one aims to support participatory, social-justice oriented, or critical citizens, it seems that active citizenship empowerment offers at once a range of different approaches to choose from as well as potential dilemmas. For example, to what extent does a Freirean approach to empowerment risk imposing its own worldview through the form of 'directive facilitation'? Indeed, as Freire insisted, '[f]or me, education is always directive, always. The question is to know towards what and with whom it is directive.' (Shor and Freire, 1987:109). Is the high aspiration with which critical pedagogy prides itself by aiming to help people 'make sense of the world *and* change it for the better' (Crowther, 2004:130, my emphasis) too ambitious and hence, a potential burden for some of the people whom it is intended to empower? Could high expectations be potentially disempowering, and if learners fail to acquire critical consciousness or do not want to 'change the world', where does this leave empowerment for active citizenship from a radical perspective? Or maybe

should empowerment adopt a more open-ended approach by seeking 'to enable[e] people individually and collectively, to realise such power as they have, and to use this power to maximum effect [...] based on the view that even the exploited and the oppressed do still have some power, [a]t the very least [...] to say "no"'? (Mayo, 1997:127)

Amongst the assumptions to carry forward and put to the test in the subsequent research is the insight gained from Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and Freire (1970) that the adult educator involved in active citizenship learning is never neutral, and that their conception of active citizenship has a direct influence on the kind of active citizens that their interventions help produce. By the same token, one of the key roles of citizenship learning that emerges from this chapter should be, at the least, to enable people to critically assess the policy agendas that promote active citizenship to ensure that they do not 'uncritically or unintentionally subscribe to the only vision of human virtue recommended'. (Allen, 1997:20). It is to these policy agendas that the next chapter turns now.

## **Chapter 3 The active citizen in UK policy**

This chapter explores different conceptualisations of 'active citizenship' within the British policy context from its emergence in the late 1980s to today, with an emphasis on the New Labour administrations. The aim is to identify the meanings and implications of some of the key policies associated with active citizenship and their underlying philosophies.

'In addition to academic debates citizenship has become a central concern to politicians and policymakers, faced with difficult social and economic problems arising from changes in society and politics.' (Pattie et al., 2004:2)

As pointed out in the previous chapter, 'active citizenship' is allied to conceptualisations of 'citizenship', both of which are contested, complex and 'slippery' concepts. It is worth recalling that 'citizenship' provides a way of framing the relationship between citizens and the state, on the one hand, and that between citizens themselves, on the other (Finlayson, 2003). These relationships are dynamic and have undergone many significant changes over the past decades, including as a result of societal trends and government policies - or indeed a combination of the two.

In addition to reviewing the literature on this topic the chapter incorporates a close-up analysis of the active citizenship learning programmes investigated in this research in order to draw out the opportunities and challenges which arose from these measures for active citizens and promoters of active citizenship, such as the CVS, within the broader policy context of New Labour's Third Way. The chapter concludes with a short analysis based on the more recent developments since the Coalition Government came to power in 2010.

### **3.1 The emergence of active citizenship as part of neo-liberal policies during the Conservative governments of the 1990s**

The Thatcher government pursued a political ideology informed by the neo-liberal ideology of the New Right. At the heart of this political dogma was a critique of the welfare

state which argued that the state had grown to unsustainable proportions, represented an ineffective way of coordinating human activity and services, and an economic drain on the country; furthermore, the welfare state was morally flawed by fostering welfare dependence, sapping self-initiative and undermining the sense of responsibility and freedom as autonomous individuals (Clarke and Newman, 1997). Consequently it was argued that people had to be 'freed' or rescued from the stifling grasp of an 'overbearing, intrusive and paternalistic state'. The government felt it necessary, therefore, to intervene by cutting welfare services and redressing the balance of rights and responsibilities – what Clarke termed, the 'responsibilisation' of citizens (Clarke, 2005:449). Thatcher's policies, then, represented a major departure from the 'post-war welfare settlement' of the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 1988), and resulted in the beginning of a phase of gradual erosion of the social rights of citizenship (Twine, 1994) - although it has been argued that the conditions for the 'crisis of the welfare state' were already evident from the late 1970s due to political-economic, social and organisational changes and pressures (e.g. Clarke and Newman, 1997:13). While the public sector came under attack, the New Right elevated the private sector with its market principles and managerialism as the 'antidote' to monolithic state services (Newman and Clarke, 2009:13), promising greater efficiency and responsiveness to the 'consumer' needs of citizens. Many state services were privatised, and others, like the NHS were opened up to private enterprise (creating an 'internal market'). Citizens were construed as the 'consumers' of public services and encouraged to look to the private sector for alternative provision for their pension, health and education. By exercising 'choice' they were deemed to not only be liberated from the paternalism of public sector professionals but to contribute to the transformation of the state, as part of a wider drive towards greater public service efficiency and responsiveness (Clarke and Newman, 1997).

The 'citizen consumer' principle became a guiding theme for John Major's reform of public services. His Citizen's Charters were to empower citizens and to drive up service standards by giving people the right to expect better and more accountable services, giving them the right to complain and to demand information on performance (Major, 1992), guided in some areas by the publication of 'league tables' (Clarke and Newman, 1997). In one of John Major's speeches (Major, 1992) he put forward the idea of the 'democratisation of choice' (later to be echoed in Tony Blair's phrase 'choice for the many, not the few', Blair 2003) as a tool for greater social equality and justice (Root, 2007, in Newman and Clarke,

2009:159). As Clarke (2005:449) noted, the government tried to position itself as the People's Champion, against 'recalcitrant, inflexible or incompetent' public service providers, but he also pointed out that the Charters were not establishing 'substantive' citizen rights, merely procedural rights for 'citizen-consumers'. Critics of these neo-liberal policies argued that the means-testing, stigmatising and abandonment of the poor to the vagaries of the market would undermine not only their social inclusion but also social cohesion more generally (Twine, 1994) – in other words, unbalancing Marshall's three-legged stool of citizenship (social, civil and political rights) (Powell, 2013).

These policies could be seen as conforming with a narrow, liberal representation of the citizen as a rational, self-regarding and self-interested individual whose responsibility it was to make the 'right choices' for themselves and their families, to work hard and to 'strive' in the economy to maximise their success and contribute to the nation's wealth creation and fulfil their obligation as taxpayer (Crick, 2002). However, Thatcher also claimed, '[w]hen you have finished as a taxpayer, you have not finished as a citizen' (cited in Heater, 1991), and '[t]here's no such thing as entitlement, unless someone has first met an obligation' (1987, cited in Davies, 2012). Even though Thatcher famously denigrated the value of social solidarity by denying the existence of society, by the end of the 1980s, the Tories were associated with a culture of greed and individualism, so they were keen to restore their image. By the end of the decade social inequalities and poverty rates had grown to unprecedented heights, on the one hand causing social unrest, but on the other, a hardening of social attitudes towards the principle of income redistribution and social welfare benefits for the so-called 'undeserving poor' (Taylor-Gooby, 1988).

It was in this context that the Conservative Home Secretary Douglas Hurd introduced the concept of 'active citizenship' onto the political stage at the 1988 Conservative Party conference. Active citizenship was presented 'as a way of overcoming the lack of a sense of community, lawlessness and overdependence on the state' (cited in Davies 2012:8). Unsurprisingly, it was received by critics on the left with scepticism, e.g. as a 'policy ploy to defy Opposition attempts to equate conservatism with material self interest' (Allen, 1997:20), especially as the Conservatives' notion of this 'active citizenship' encompassed a particularly narrow conception focussed on volunteering, philanthropy and charity. Derek Heater, for example, saw in the Conservative's vision of the active citizen a return to Victorian values:

‘The active citizen is the person who seeks out opportunities to succour the needy, protect the environment, administer schools and defend, through neighbourhood watch schemes, the local community against the depredations of the burgeoning criminal class. Much of this citizenly activity will take place at the local level. This is both convenient and desirable; it is part of the process of the whittling down of state power and interference, a cardinal item on the Thatcherite agenda.’

(Heater, 1991: 141)

As with Thatcherite policies in general, the active citizen was in the singular (as later expressed so poignantly in John Major’s *Citizen’s Charters*), with an emphasis on *individual* rather than *collective* participation. With the promotion of excessive individualisation and values emphasising wealth accumulation (or ‘greed’, as some would have it), there were real concerns by the end of the 1980s about the long-term impact the New Right’s discourse and policies would have on the social fabric of the country. The Conservative ideals of the active citizen and of private capital sustaining philanthropy were unable to fill the gaps left by a ‘rationalised’, i.e. partially dismantled welfare state (Clarke and Newman, 1997). Thinkers on the centre-left, such as Ralf Dahrendorf, defended the welfare state against further encroachment by the market, arguing that it was in the collective interest to have public, not privatised, services, and to safeguard the state as the guarantor of welfare rights (Marinetto, 2003).

The Conservatives thus construed the ‘active citizen’ in very narrow terms, as part of a neo-liberal ideology which prioritised the ‘good’ citizen, i.e. law-abiding, tax-paying and altruistic, but suppressed the political dimension of active citizenship. This became apparent in the report of the Speaker’s Commission on Citizenship (1990), which proposed ways in which ‘Active Citizenship’ could be encouraged, developed and recognised through citizenship education, particularly in schools. Bernard Crick, political theorist and long-standing advocate for political literacy education in schools, commented scathingly:

‘... there was marked tendency at the time to take over the term “active citizenship” to mean only, or mainly, civic spirit, citizens’ charters and voluntary activity in the community; but not how individuals can be helped and prepared to shape the terms of such engagements.’ (Crick, 2001:7)

It was not just in light of the civil protests against Conservative policies (including that against the poll tax that contributed to Margaret Thatcher's resignation (Boix, 1998; Reitan, 2003), but foremost on theoretical grounds that numerous critics deplored the lack of substance of the 'Hurd-Patten' concept of active citizenship (Heater, 1991:154; Allen, 1997; Crick, 2000). It was argued that by neglecting the political dimension of citizenship and especially 'active' citizenship, the Conservatives' depoliticised image was not only an impoverished, truncated vision but also a contradiction in terms in a democratic context. It was argued that a politically literate, reflective and critical citizenry is at the very heart of democracy; if citizens are to be active, political participation and dissent should form a core part of democratic practice – rather than merely 'volunteering' in the community, and should be actively promoted, including through education. Successive Conservative governments, however, not only omitted any reference to 'political activism' from their definition, but were also hostile towards including political literacy in their citizenship education policies (Heater, 1991; Allen, 1997; Crick, 2000). In contrast with such democratic aspirations, the Conservatives' impoverished image of active citizenship was likened by one critic to

'...a feature of totalitarianism since the obligations are those of a loyal and dutiful subjects acting out a single political image. Active citizens do not have obligations to the preservation and extension of rights, obligations which, according to Dahrendorf, are a feature of free citizens of the democratic state. Robespierre, Stalin and Pol Pot would happily live with the Hurd-Patten concept.'

(Allen, 1997:21)

Chiming with Crick, Allen insisted, therefore, that active citizens 'in a healthy and genuinely representative democracy' had to be treated, by definition, as political subjects and that they should have access to 'a range of alternative conceptions of active citizenship' which would include dissent (Allen, 1997: 26). The question was whether New Labour would fulfil this expectation when it came to power in 1997.

### 3.2 Active citizens under New Labour (1997-2010)

After a dubious start under the Conservatives, active citizenship had come centre stage under New Labour's term of office (Marinetto, 2003; Clarke, 2005; Mayo, 2010). Alongside 'community' and the voluntary and community sector, active citizens played a central role in New Labour's 'third way' political project, both as policy targets and as instruments across a multiplicity of policy areas. Bearing the imprint of Etzioni's communitarian thinking, the 'third way' (Giddens, 1994, 1998, 2000; Driver and Martell, 1997; Taylor, 2003; Alcock, 2010) posited 'active and responsible' citizens and community organisations as partners in New Labour's 'modernisation' project (Newman, 1997). Citizens were to be 'reconnected' to the state through 'civil renewal' and given greater influence in public decision-making (Giddens, 1998), but in turn, they were expected to realise their obligations towards society and the state. With these characteristically 'communitarian' references to citizens' 'responsibility' New Labour sought to underline - rightly or wrongly - its supposed distinctiveness, on the one hand, from the Conservatives and their strict adherence to neo-liberal dogma, and on the other, from Old Labour's statist approach to public service and civil society (Driver and Martell, 1997; Powell, 2000; Lister, 2001). Be this as it may, importantly, the theme of citizen responsibility provided a leitmotif for New Labour's citizenship policies for its entire time in office.

By steering a middle path between right and left, or transcending the conventional political divide ('beyond' left and right, as Giddens put it) the 'third way' adopted values and principles taken from both. Thus New Labour was able to promote at once:

'... wealth creation *and* social justice, the market *and* the community; [to] embrace private enterprise but not automatically favour market solutions; [to] endorse a positive role for the state – for example, welfare to work – but need not assume that governments provide public services directly: [as] these might be done by the voluntary or private sectors'. (Driver and Martell, 1997: 149)

Commentators and critics were quick to point out, however, that the third way lacked ideological consistency and substance (Taylor-Gooby, 2000) and was riddled with ambiguities and contradictions (Powell, 2000; Rao, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Lister, 2001; Finlayson, 2003). This section will examine the extent to which such criticisms could also

be said to apply to New Labour's conceptualisations of active citizens, thus undermining potential 'empowerment' with 'responsibilisation', to use Clarke's 2005 formulation.

The present section explores New Labour's active citizenship policies by examining these tensions in greater detail. It is undertaken in two stages: firstly within the wider context of 'third way' policies more generally, and secondly, in the specific context of policies that are particularly pertinent to this research, that is, in the area of citizen engagement and participation. This two-pronged approach will allow an appreciation of the opportunities and especially the limitations that arise from the overall policy framework of the third way, as well as the potential provided by policies aimed more particularly at promoting active citizenship.

### **3.2.1 The role of citizens in New Labour's Third Way: activated and responsabilised in the service of the state?**

New Labour has been much criticised by social policy commentators on the left for adopting a neo-liberal framework of its policy agenda, and its uncritical acceptance of the perceived inevitability of the globalised economy and the market logic (e.g. Levitas, 1998; Lister, 2001; Finlayson, 2003; Newman, 2011). Contrary to New Labour's claims, critics argued that these priorities and market principles would risk undermining and jeopardizing the socially progressive aspects of its social policy agenda. This would also have repercussions for active citizenship policies, as will be seen subsequently.

The phrase 'no rights without responsibilities' became mantra to the reconfiguration of the 'new' relationship between citizens and the state that the third way was to forge (Giddens, 1998) and was realised across its social policy areas. New Labour insisted that its approach would not be in the style of 'Old Labour', which it associated with the promotion of 'unconditional rights' and a 'something for nothing culture' (Blair, 1999, cited in Fairclough, 2000; Giddens, 1998). As New Labour's 'guru' Antony Giddens put it, echoing communitarian ideas (Etzioni, 1993), 'with expanding individualism should come an extension of individual obligations', not only for welfare recipients 'but for everyone' (Giddens, 1998:65, 66).

Alongside progressive measures (e.g. the introduction of a minimum wage) the rebalancing of rights and responsibilities in respect of welfare was implemented quite early on in New Labour's first term. From 1998 the different New Deal programmes (e.g. for the long-term unemployed, young people, single parents<sup>9</sup>) demanded of benefit claimants to 'actively seek employment' (hence the new term, 'job seeker') and to take up training and unpaid work placements – and where this was not found in the private sector economy this was extended to placements in the voluntary sector – to make themselves 'work-ready' or more employable, or otherwise risk losing their benefits. From the government's point of view, these policies were to empower people by reducing their 'welfare dependency', since 'paid work' was to be solution to their individual social exclusion and poverty, and that of their communities (Levitas, 1998). Some critics, however, pointed out that these welfare reforms represented a transfer of responsibility from the state to the individual, since, as long as the state was unable to provide the conditions for full employment, individuals are unable to remove the social and economic structural barriers to employment (Coffield, 1999; Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Driver and Martell, 2000). Some critics equated the welfare reform with an erosion of social rights and entitlements by making them more conditional (Lister, 2001; Powell, 2002; Marinetto, 2003; Clarke, 2005; Newman, 2011). Private sector employers and contractors for employment support and training, meanwhile, seemed to emerge from these New Deal programmes as the main beneficiaries, while many job seekers who did not find secure or sustainable employment had to be content with enhanced 'employability' or work-readiness. Yet New Labour continued to insist unwaveringly that 'paid work' was *the* answer to social exclusion and poverty, and that the role of the state should only be to provide 'equality of opportunities' through education and training, for example, rather than equality of outcome in the form of income redistribution (Levitas, 1998; Taylor-Gooby, 2000). New Labour's budgets did include redistributive measures, such as Working Families Tax Credits, but kept these efforts deliberately modest and indirect in order to avoid being seen as reverting to 'Old Labour' socialist and statist policies of redistribution (Driver and Martell, 2000).

Similar contradictions characterised New Labour's approach to social exclusion: on the one hand, the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit and of the Early Years Education (Sure

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<sup>9</sup> There was also a New Deal for Communities programme, which was an area-based initiative targeted at the most deprived communities (DETR, 1998).

Start) programme were widely praised as socially progressive measures that pooled resources into social interventions to tackle the social exclusion of targeted groups (e.g. Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Lister, 2001; Finlayson, 2003); on the other, the approach adopted by the Social Exclusion Unit was much criticised for being moralising, stigmatising and individualising and, again, failing to recognise the systemic and structural nature of these complex and entrenched social issues (Levitas, 1998; Lister, 2001; Powell, 2002). Following the same rationale, the area regeneration policies such as the New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy (ODPM, 2001, in Taylor, 2007) promoted the idea that disadvantaged communities had to be enabled to find their own solutions, develop social capital and resilience, and the like, potentially implying that they were responsible for their disadvantaged circumstances in the first place (rather than, say, the decline of traditional industries).

Powell (2000) famously described New Labour's policy rhetoric as 'populist and pragmatic' (or 'PAP') as it played to popular conservative values in the electorate with its authoritarian, 'taking a tough stance' rhetoric towards socially excluded target groups (e.g. criminals, truant teenagers, single parents, anti-social neighbours, etc), and 'pragmatic' by stressing its managerial intentions of supporting only 'what works' rather than being driven by ideological considerations. Here too, critics found inconsistencies, as repeated private sector failures did not seem to deter the government from investing in private sector projects on behalf of the state (e.g. large IT projects in the NHS, or the Private Finance Initiative).

Despite its claims, then, New Labour followed neo-liberal principles and the market logic, especially by framing its overall modernisation project in the context of globalisation (Giddens, 1998). Not only in the area of economic and financial policies (e.g. deregulation of banks) but also in education and public sector reform, the main responsibility of government was to increase the competitiveness of the UK economy in the global market, for example by investing in the country's 'human capital' (Blair, 1998; Driver and Martell, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Powell, 2000; Lister, 2001). Globalisation was presented in this 'political rationality' (Rose and Miller, 1992; Foucault, 2002) as an inevitability; likewise, the view that Britain was now primarily a 'knowledge economy' (rather than one dominated by primary industry or manufacturing) was used to justify its lifelong learning policy which involved the responsibility of the workforce to acquire and maintain the skills

it needed to keep pace with the latest technological developments and needs of the labour market. Thus, New Labour's education and adult learning policies (e.g. DTI, 2001; DfES, 2001, 2003) aimed to ensure the competitiveness of 'UK Plc' or, as Blair famously termed it, '[e]ducation is the best economic policy we have' (Blair, 1995). As a result, adult education became increasingly targeted at those with no or few qualifications, and on the 'basic skills' of literacy, numeracy and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) at the expense of the broader and traditional aims of education and lifelong learning; no more 'learning for yearning' or citizenship education, but only 'learning for earning' (Finger and Asun, 2001; Martin, 2003; Biesta, 2006). Here too, citizens had to take responsibility for making (and keeping) themselves attractive to the changing demands of the labour market, by becoming 'lifelong learners'.

'Whereas in the past lifelong learning was an individual's right which corresponded to the state's duty to provide resources and opportunities for lifelong learning, it seems that lifelong learning has increasingly become a duty for which individuals need to take responsibility, while it has become the right of the state to demand of all its citizens that they continuously engage in learning so as to keep up with the demands of the global economy.' (Biesta, 2006:176).

Public service reform was another key plank in New Labour's modernisation project. Its aim was to make public services 'fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century' (DETR, 1999) and to contribute to the economic competitiveness of the country. It was to be achieved by combining market principles (what was called, since the 1980s, the New Public Management, referring to the adoption of private sector management practices) as well as citizen involvement (DETR, 1999). Citizens were to be placed at the centre of the reform, and echoing John Major's Citizen's Charters, the aim was to place 'consumer' interest at the heart of services, in opposition to 'producer-interest'; increased 'choice' ('for the many, not the few', another Blair quote) was to act as a mechanism for change (Needham 2003; Newman and Clarke, 2005). As a result, public services were further opened up (through competitive tendering, for example) to private and third sector providers, increasing 'choice' for citizen-consumers. However, there were also some differences with the previous Conservative policies. New Labour was intent on giving citizens a greater role in decision-making and with a view to improving services across the board (education, justice system, police, health and social care, local services) by harnessing their knowledge and expertise,

including as 'expert citizens' in healthcare. As will be explained in more detail in the next section, the government acknowledged that this required a two-pronged approach to building the capacity: targeted at communities, to give people and groups the skills and confidence to participate, and targeted at government agencies so that public officials would learn how to engage with local people and to do so more effectively (Home Office, 2004).

The question of the greater involvement of citizens in decision-making was a key strand in New Labour's agenda, sketched out from the start by both Blair and Giddens: as Blair stated, 'we need to find new ways to enable citizens to share in decision-making that affects them' (Blair 1998:6-7). This notion was developed over the course of Labour's three terms across various parts of government under different themes, which will be detailed in the subsequent section. While participatory policies were already being widely promoted in the context of international development, e.g. by the World Bank (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Gaventa, 2002; Hickey and Mohan, 2004) and by some Western democracies (Fung and Wright, 2003), New Labour very much adapted its participatory agenda to its other policy strands. With participation policies so integral to the specific active citizenship policies at the centre of this research they will be examined in greater detail in the next section.

An important general point to make is that participatory policies have to be seen in connection with another broad and international trend in Western democracies, that of the shift from 'government to governance', which has been the subject of much debate, especially from the perspective of governmentality theory (e.g. Newman, 2001; Taylor, 2007). Governance has been defined as the 'process through which political power is exercised through a range of government and non-government bodies' (Lister, 2010:118), brought together in the form of 'partnerships' – another key leitmotif in New Labour. Under New Labour, then, sites of 'governance' proliferated and were justified by the need for modernisation as well as to 'reconnect the citizen to the state' through the 'double evolution of power, that is, by transferring power 'from central government to local government and from local government to citizens and communities' (Miliband, 2006). One of the key mechanisms for governance (drawing on partnership structures in area-based policies initiated under the Conservatives) were the creation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) which brought together a range of different public agencies,

representatives from business as well as the third (voluntary and community) sector organisations, to agree local strategies and priorities for the implementation of public policy. Governance was more widespread, however, inviting citizens to sit on a range of strategic partnership boards, including Sure Start Centres, Foundation Trusts (Hospitals), the Police (Police Authority), not to mention the civic contributions of parent school governors, magistrates, and many others, which involved individual active citizens in some form or other.

New Labour's policies towards citizenship emerge, then, as an 'assemblage' (Newman, and Clarke, 2009) of different policy discourses, interweaving communitarian and neo-liberal conceptions of citizens into a broader canvas of neo-liberal agendas.

### **3.2.2 Competing conceptualisations in active citizenship programmes**

This section undertakes a close-up analysis of the specific programmes of active citizenship learning as they emerged during the second and third terms of New Labour's time in office, and places them into their policy context. The aim is to highlight the conceptions of active citizenship that emerge from these programmes and the extent to which they provide a situated and nuanced insight into New Labour's vision(s) and how it/they evolved over time. Indeed, ALAC within the Civil Renewal agenda, and the Take Part Pathfinder within the Community Empowerment agenda, were not only conceived at different moments during New Labour's time in office - respectively, in the second and third terms - but also by different ministers, in different government departments, and under different prime ministers. The examination will consider the extent to which the programmes were consistent with the key policy themes outlined so far or whether there were significant variations including those that may have offered opportunities for the kind of 'bottom-up' approaches to empowerment outlined in Chapter 2.

The section starts with the Civil Renewal programme, developed during 2003 and 2004, out of which sprang the Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) programme, and then moves on to the Community Empowerment agenda of 2007/8 which provided the context for the Take Part Pathfinder (TPP) programme. Additionally relevant to the experiences of the active citizens in this research are the programmes of service user

involvement in health and social care, which will also briefly be considered to complete the policy context.

### **3.2.2.1 *Active citizens: from Civil Renewal to Community Empowerment***

The Civil Renewal agenda is associated with David Blunkett in his role as Home Secretary between 2003 and the end of 2004. In light of the fact that Blunkett had in his previous role as Education Secretary initiated the Citizenship Education in schools programme, he is generally credited as the main architect of New Labour's 'active citizenship' policies (Fryer, 2010), and a champion of 'direct citizen involvement with public services' (John, 2009:22). Having studied politics under Bernard Crick may explain his propensity and ability to couch his policy rhetoric in civic republican terms. For example the notion that

'The freedom of citizens can only be truly realised if they are enabled to participate constructively in the decisions that affect their lives' (Blunkett, 2003a:3),

can be read as a characteristically civic republican statement. This could have opened the door to a conceptualisation of citizenship with predominant civic republican ideas that promote the political engagement of citizens. Indeed, in his speeches Blunkett often drew on the classical ideal of democracy with its strong focus on citizen duty (Blunkett, 2003a; John, 2009), citing the 'social democratic imperative' that 'requires us to articulate, defend and practise a new form of democratic politics, based on individual empowerment and active citizenship within strengthened communities' (Blunkett, 2001, cited in Fryer 2010:174). Like other governments in the West, New Labour was concerned with the 'democratic deficit' (Pattie et al., 2004) and the perceived lack of legitimacy of public institutions. The question was, however, whether especially under the aegis of a minister with seemingly civic republican credentials, the notion of politically engaged citizens would be able to counterpoise New Labour's predominantly communitarian conception of citizenship, which was critiqued for its 'depoliticising' tendencies (Driver and Martell, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Craig, 2007; Newman, 2011). Early indications from Blunkett's time as Education Secretary were not encouraging: concerning Citizenship Education in schools, Blunkett managed to disappoint not least his former teacher Bernard Crick who, on seeing the outcome of the implementation of his Advisory Group's recommendations, remarked bitterly:

'[t]he new curriculum will result in forms of volunteering that will fail to challenge the students to think and act "politically" ...' (Crick, 2002, cited in Annette, 2010:20).

In his 2003 Scarman Lecture Blunkett set out his vision of Civil Renewal:

'strong, empowered and active communities, in which *responsible citizens look after each other*, with the state helping to support and enable them to lead self-determined and fulfilled lives.' (Blunkett, 2003a:6, my italics)

Active citizenship occupied a central place, since

'The active involvement of citizens and communities with public bodies to improve their quality of life is crucial to the achievement of a wide range of Government objectives. It helps achieve civil renewal, with more people exercising their rights and responsibilities and participating in the public realm.' (Blunkett, Home Office, 2004b:2)

The agenda consisted of three strands: *active citizenship*, with citizens supported to 'defin[e] and tackl[e] the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life'; *stronger communities*, where self-sustaining organisations bring people together to deal with their common concerns; and citizens and communities working in *partnerships* with public bodies 'within the established democratic framework' to improve the planning and delivery of public services (Blunkett, 2003b).

As argued by Barnes et al. (2007), New Labour construed 'active citizenship' around four discourses of the public, each with a different emphasis: the citizen-consumer discourse (to improve public services through exercising choice), the empowered public discourse (focused on the social inclusion of marginalised groups and communities), the stakeholder discourse (in relation to the good governance of the public realm), and the responsible public discourse. All four are represented in the Civil Renewal agenda but it is to the 'responsible public' discourse that Blunkett most often appeals in his policies and speeches. Moreover, Barnes et al. state:

‘Active citizens are those who are ready and prepared to take on the obligation of citizenship by contributing directly or indirectly to the good governance of their communities. Different levels of support may be needed to enable ‘hard to reach groups’ [...] to take on these obligations, but there is a clear assumption inherent in the civil renewal agenda that acceptance of these obligations is non-negotiable.’  
(Barnes et al, 2007:20)

At times, as here in *Building Civil Renewal*, the responsibility theme is phrased in potentially more empowering terms, highlighting the inherent tension in the conception of the active citizen and their empowerment:

‘Our vision is of a society in which citizens are *inspired* to make a positive difference to their communities, and *are able to influence* the policies and services that affect their lives’ (Blunkett, Home Office, 2004a:1, my emphasis).

The development of the Civil Renewal agenda involved an extensive review undertaken by the Civil Renewal Unit (CRU) at the Home Office Active Communities Directorate and a consultation with the Voluntary and Community Sector (Home Office, 2004a, *Building Civil Renewal*). Since 2001 New Labour could also draw on the biannual Citizenship Surveys commissioned by the Home Office, which measured the public’s views on issues of community cohesion, civic engagement, race and faith, and volunteering. The surveys highlighted the issue that the majority of people (61% in 2005) felt they had no influence over the decisions of public bodies that affect them (Fryer, 2010). In order to reconnect the people to the public realm and improve services, the government felt that citizens needed to be given opportunities to take part in decision-making, which lent additional weight to New Labour’s participatory governance agenda, which it intensified in its second and third terms. Where previously participation was focused on specific groups of citizens in their relationship as services users, for example in health and social care, the involvement of citizens was expanded to a host of public authorities and new partnership forums (Taylor, 2007). Before moving on from the Civil Renewal agenda, however, we need to consider its concern with capacity building for citizenship, out of which arose the first of the active citizenship learning programmes that provide the focal point of this research.

Government considered that,

‘Civil Renewal depends on people having the skills, confidence and opportunities to contribute actively in their communities, to engage with civic institutions and democratic processes, to be able to influence the policies and services that affect their lives, and to make the most of their communities’ human, financial and physical assets.’ (Blunkett, 2003, cited in Fryer 2010:173)

In the first instance, *Building Civil Renewal* argued the need for a two-pronged approach: first, ‘community capacity building’ was needed to enable people to participate, and second, ‘support’ was targeted at public officials and institutions to enable them to engage with citizens. Whilst the concept of Community Capacity Building was seen by some critics as New Labour’s way of re-packaging old notions of ‘community development’ built on a deficit model and identified with ‘top-down’ state interventions (Craig, 2007), it was important that New Labour recognised that public institutions needed to change too. Indeed, critical advocates of public participation had for some time pointed to the obstacle represented by existing institutional cultures and practices that were inhibiting meaningful engagement, and claimed the need for ‘working both sides of the equation’ (Gaventa, 2004a., 2004b.).

The notion of ‘Community Capacity Building’ would lead to subsequent policies such as the £231million ChangeUp programme directed at voluntary sector infrastructure, but in terms of ‘active citizenship learning’, there was very little direct support. The notable, although small-scale, exception was provided by the ‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship’ (ALAC) programme. An initial scoping report (Woodward, 2004) persuaded the CRU that in the voluntary and community sector valuable work was already being undertaken (albeit informal and ‘hidden’) which supported active citizens through learning, and that this good practice ought to be captured with a view to informing government on how to ‘build sustainable programmes of citizenship education’ (for adults) in the future (Mactaggart, Ministerial Foreword to ALAC report, Woodward, 2004:1). ALAC was set out as an 18-month long action research programme to collect evidence of good practice of ‘active citizenship learning opportunities for targeted adult audiences, using different approaches’ (Home Office, 2004b:18) from different ‘active citizenship hubs’

from around England. In *Firm Foundations* the Home Office which highlighted the ALAC programme it was envisaged that '[t]he lessons learnt will inform an expansion in sustainable and appropriate provision' (ibid), and to this effect commissioned an evaluation led by academics (Mayo and Rooke, 2006). The sharing of good practice across government levels and departments (as well as within the VCS) was to be 'reinforced by the Citizenship Education Working Party, convened by the DfES, and chaired by [...] the Minister for Schools' (Home Office, 2004b). This suggested the intention of 'joining up' government, with lessons about 'what works' in active citizenship learning to be shared with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). As the ALAC programme unravelled, this link did not, unfortunately, deliver the anticipated influence on DfES policies, with very little cross-over, let alone interest by the DfES in the ALAC framework that was developed at the end of the programme. Instead, the findings from the ALAC evaluation stayed within the Civil Renewal Unit relocated to the Communities and Local Government Department (Mayo, 2010).

The conceptualisation of 'active citizens' in the ALAC programme thus broadly followed the Civil Renewal notion that '[f]or society to work well we need more people to be active citizens who have a say in the decisions that affect their lives' (Mactaggart, in Woodward, 2004: 2). At the same time ALAC set out

'...to improve the capacity of individuals and communities to relate to the world around them as active, *critical*, engaged citizens.' (Mactaggart, in Woodward, 2004:2)

It also emphasised a social learning process that would be driven by the needs and aspirations of community groups, encouraging citizens to get involved collectively, rather than individually. This was congruent with the Civil Renewal agenda, which promoted a collective approach to community 'self-help' (Blunkett, 2003a; Newman and Clarke, 2009). At the same time, the brief for ALAC (Woodward, 2004) was not particularly specific. While some critics saw this as a weakness (e.g. one critic described ALAC as 'a strange initiative' with a 'vision of active citizens [that] is devoid of any clear political content', (Somerville, 2011:156)) it could be argued that the adoption of a more open-ended form of active citizenship was essential to the ALAC approach. No doubt, there were tensions to be negotiated between the demand for a more formalised 'citizenship curriculum', moulded

on Bernard Crick's 'three heads of citizenship' as had been developed for schools (cited in the report's appendix) and which would result in a qualification, and the preference for an informal and 'bottom-up' approach to learning inspired by community development principles. Rather than pursuing a curriculum akin to 'political literacy' as demanded by Crick (who sat on the ALAC steering group) the ALAC report referred to the need to foster awareness-raising of power and of structural barriers to participation and influence:

'Learning about active citizenship will [...] focus on the hidden inequalities in power surrounding everyone and affecting their life chances, as well as on personal abilities and skills. In order to participate and have their voice heard, citizens need to understand power and how to have an impact. Because citizens act together, they need to know and understand something of the conditions of other citizens, to support collective action. Active citizenship education will involve participants in social learning where the educational focus is on collective, innovative, problem-solving processes of action, reflection, communication and co-operation.'

(Woodward, 2004: 11)

During David Blunkett's time at the Home Office other documents published by the Civil Renewal Unit explicitly endorsed the concept of the 'critically engaged' citizen. For example the *Building Civil Renewal* review proposed this definition of empowerment:

'[empowerment] should build the skills, confidence, and *critical awareness* of participants'. (Home Office, 2004a:8, my italics)

It could be argued that these examples are indicative of New Labour's support of the 'third sector', including as partner in policy-making (Alcock, 2010). The sometimes critical feedback from consultations from the Civil Renewal Unit seemed to have informed policy, for example regarding the necessary changes that had to be made to enable effective citizen involvement in all areas of the public sector. In the section title 'Getting the Government's act together' (Home Office, 2004a:23) the CRU stressed the need for coordination and consistency across all government departments in the provision of support for community capacity building. By directing the 'pedagogic state' (Newman, 2010) not only at citizens but also at public organisations and public officials, New Labour had embarked on an intensification of community engagement and governance (Taylor,

2007). Here, the 'active citizen' was increasingly placed in the collective context of the *local* community and the 'neighbourhood' and expected to step up the modernisation of public governance 'from below' (Clarke, 2010). This development gained momentum in New Labour's third and last term, which also saw the resurgence of active citizenship learning.

### **3.2.2.2 *Active citizens in the context of Community Empowerment and Localism (Empowerment White Paper 2008 and the Take Part Pathfinder programme)***

In 2006 the Civil Renewal Unit, in a major departmental reorganisation, was moved from the Home Office to the newly created Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Under its new name 'Community Empowerment Unit' it combined the responsibilities for 'neighbourhood regeneration' from the now defunct Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) with those for 'community' from the Home Office. The voluntary and community sector policies became the remit of a new 'Office of the Third Sector' in the Cabinet Office (Taylor, 2007).

Under its second Secretary of State, Ruth Kelly, the new Communities Department (launched by David Miliband, its first minister) published the 'Local Government White Paper', *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (DCLG, 2006). This continued the key policy themes of citizenship and stronger communities, but focussing on the 'radical reform' of local government that was required to make local services more 'responsive', 'effective' and 'accountable' to 'local people' and communities. The shift of power from central to local government, and from there to 'local people' (rather than active citizens) and communities (what Miliband had termed, the "double devolution") was again presented as a mechanism for driving up service standards. Hence, 'responsive services and empowered communities' are held up as a central point of reference throughout the paper and the two terms are presented as standing in a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing relationship.

Among the measures launched by the two-volume White Paper were the 'Community Call for Action', an instrument through which citizens could challenge their local authority through their local Councillor(s), and a New Performance Framework for local authorities and Local Area Agreements. As a managerial instrument this National Indicator (NI)

framework would take on particular relevance for setting the parameters of the Take Part Pathfinder programme two years later. Out of a set of 200 National Indicators, local authorities and strategic partnerships were to prioritise 35 for their strategic plans, on the basis of which their performance was to be measured and evaluated for central government through the Comprehensive Area Assessment. Indeed, while this framework was presented as giving 'local public services and their partners' greater freedom 'to meet the needs of their communities' ('responsive services') government could at the same time ensure delivery against 'national priorities' for 'complex cross-cutting issues like climate change, social exclusion and anti-social behaviour' (DCLG, 2006, Vol 1:11).

This White Paper reserved the term 'responsibility' for local public services and local government, rather than citizens and communities. The rhetoric strives hard to present these new institutional changes from 'top-down' central government as a positive development which grants greater powers and freedom to authorities in their 'new' roles as 'place-makers'. However, not only was their performance controlled by central government through performance management and a new 'Place Survey', but also the framework added new responsibilities to the statutory duties of local authorities such as 'sustainable economic development' and the ever-present host of 'complex social problems' (DCLG, 2006). On the one hand, the local strategic partnerships would need to work harder to coordinate their activities across the sectors and agencies involved, but on the other, the stronger emphasis on localism could be seen as a mechanism whereby central government divests itself of its responsibility (and the potential blame for political failure) for the wider structural conditions created by its policies (Taylor, 2007; Lever, 2011). The representation of the voluntary sector, local people and communities in local governance would ensure that they too are seen as being implicated in the success or failures of tackling these policy issues.

Paradoxically, then, it has been argued that the shift of responsibility from central to local government and the dispersal of power across local governance partners has had the effect of decreasing rather than increasing political and democratic accountability, since no single government body or authority can be held to account. Moreover it has been argued that government's claims of decentralisation and power transfer from central to local government, and into the hands of communities, were in fact counteracted by the strengthened monitoring and auditing regimes allowing central government to stay in

control (Taylor, 2007; Newman and Clarke, 2009). For example one study into the workings and impact of a Community Safety Partnership (Lever, 2011) showed the biases introduced by central government targets and funding prioritisations on the local decision-makers in the strategic partnerships, linked to the National Performance Framework: this distorted the process of strategic decision-making and resource allocations within the city to the extent that individual decision-makers were knowingly having to make choices which were not beneficial to tackling the long-term social problem the partnership was set out to tackle – thus disproving the assertion that local strategic partnerships would automatically lead to an ‘improvement’ in local decision-making (Lever, 2011). This, however, did not prevent the next Communities Secretary, Hazel Blears, from asserting that:

‘There isn’t a single service or development in Britain which hasn’t been improved by actively involving local people.’ (Blears in DCLG, 2007:2).

In its third term in office, New Labour reaffirmed its commitment to community engagement through a policy of ‘double devolution’ announced by David Miliband in 2006 (Taylor, 2007) in order to ‘improve public services at neighbourhood level and to bridge the gap between citizens and democracy’ (Miliband, 2006). This would usher in a ‘new settlement’ in the relationship between central government, local government, and citizens by ‘find[ing] new ways to enable citizens to share in decision-making that affects them’ (Blair 1998:6-7). Between mid-2007 and mid- 2008 the third Communities Secretary, Hazel Blears, articulated a new policy of ‘Community Empowerment’, which included the launch of an Empowerment Fund of £35million and the publication of the ‘Empowerment’ White Paper *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* (DCLG, 2008). As its title suggests, the thrust of this policy was to ‘pass power to the people’, albeit in the context of Localism. There was a renewed emphasis on active citizens and ‘communities’, and it is within this context that the parameters were set for the launch of the successor of ALAC, the Take Part Pathfinder (TPP) programme.

The main purpose of the Empowerment White Paper (CIC) was to increase the involvement of local people in ‘decisions that affect them’, and to promote self-governance in communities. In Gordon Brown’s introduction, this is combined with the

responsibilisation theme, expressed in the way that the issue of government is problematised as relying on the active participation of citizens (Foucault, 2002 [1978]):

‘In the modern world there are many challenges that cannot be met by central government alone, and to address those challenges effectively we need to harness the energy and innovation of front-line professionals, local government, citizens and communities.’ (Brown in DCLG, 2008a:i)

Hazel Blears introduced the Empowerment White Paper with the statement:

‘... there are few issues so complex, few problems so knotty, that they cannot be tackled and solved by the innate common sense and genius of local people. With the right support, guidance and advice, community groups and organisations have a huge, largely latent, capacity for self-government and self-organisation. This should be the hallmark of the modern state: devolved, decentralised, with power diffused through society.’ (DCLG, 2008a:iii)

At the same time, the Communities Department website (DCLG, 2007) continued to uphold David Blunkett’s definition of active citizenship in an online glossary:

‘Citizens taking opportunities to become actively involved in defining and tackling the problems of their communities and improving their quality of life.’

It could be argued, then, that New Labour’s policies, from Blunkett’s Civil Renewal to Blears’ Community Empowerment agenda were both ambiguous and contradictory with regards to government’s intentions for active citizenship: on the one hand giving citizens a greater say, on the other, confining their influence to specific interactions with the state as ‘service user’; or encouraging the notion of self-governing communities whose local knowledge is able to improve their quality of life, while on the other, being expected to take up an increasing number of governance roles on ‘invited spaces’ as part of the continued modernisation of public services. Some feminist authors (Lister, 2007; Barnes et al, 2007; Newman and Tonkens, 2011) also added the contradiction - felt especially but not solely by women - between the pressure for the unemployed to take up paid work or become ‘employable’, on the one hand, and volunteering in the community and on

governance roles on the other, in addition to one's responsibilities towards the self and family members.

Moreover, in the context of CIC the term 'community' would, in its association with 'complex' problems, suggest that once again 'community' is shorthand for disadvantaged communities (Taylor, 2003) who are tasked with (and to that effect, 'empowered' to) finding their own solutions. This message is reinforced by the numerous (24) case studies with which CIC is illustrated (and which, incidentally, included a case study of a carer who had been supported through ALAC by the CVS). The case studies illustrate successful initiatives realised by citizens both individually and collectively in the context of charities, local authorities, housing associations, and schools, covering a wide range of activities: from being a good neighbour to mentoring young black men, from civic roles in lay governance to a local authority offering its citizens a 'community pride contract' (DCLG, 2008a). Rather than merely being focused on disadvantaged communities solving their own problems through self-initiative and to save public resources, the examples can also be seen as demonstrating New Labour's interest in innovation linked to their policies in the area of equality and diversity, and 'social cohesion'. The case studies chosen to illustrate the report thus portray people, groups and communities who reflect the ideal image of a cosmopolitan active citizen who embraces diversity, and likewise, public authorities which give voice to young people, support local councillor candidates from minority ethnic groups, or use assistive technology to make their website accessible to people with visual impairments. This represents an idealised situation, given that critics have pointed out that the systematic focus of participatory policies on 'localism' tends to encourage parochial, rather than cosmopolitan, allegiances, and with it the risk of 'narrowing the political imaginary' to a 'normalised' public (Newman and Clarke, 2009:145), thus excluding marginalised groups and their interests.

As a White Paper *Communities in Control* (CIC) is a striking document in the way it presents its messages. In stark contrast with the rather drab *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, this policy document is very attractively designed and presented in a reader-friendly format and accessible language: the front and back covers are taken up with photos of people holding up placards – the entire document is presented as if government 'speaks through people' both in terms of its content and images. Thus individuals who look like they have been cherry-picked to represent a carefully constructed sample of 'ordinary

people' as government wants to see them (rather middle class, diverse in gender, ethnicity, and age, including one individual in a wheelchair...) display the policy's messages, for example, 'I want to serve my community; ... to get involved; ... to have my say; ... to put things right', etc. This contrived device of 'ventriloquism' (Clarke, 2010), or, as the paper puts it, seeing things 'from the perspective of individual citizens' (DCLG, 2008a:1), and the comparison with historical political struggles from English history further suggest that governments considered that it was responding to popular claims by contemporary citizens for 'real power' in the form of greater political control over *local* decision-making.

The rationale for prioritising the 'local' was also backed up with research into the 'democratic deficit' which showed, now and again, that people were more likely to engage with the more tangible local or service-related issues 'that affect them' directly rather than with the 'abstract' issues of national policy or politics (Power Inquiry, 2006). The Power Inquiry (2006:3) even recommended the introduction of a 'duty of public involvement' as a way of systematically increasing citizen power and participation.

As Clarke (2011) has also suggested, New Labour had an obsession with 'ordinary people' – here termed 'real people' – which he argued signifies an attempt to favour a de-politicised kind of citizen, of people who are untainted by any association with 'dirty politics', or even social movements around communities of identity (Newman, 2011). At the same time, the government in CIC explicitly states its support of political activity as 'valuable and worthwhile' and that it 'should be recognised and rewarded', as an 'essential part of Britain's national life' (DCLG 2008a:13). It refers to the findings of the Power Inquiry (2006), for example, to support measures that restore faith in politics and 'take on the cynicism which corrodes our political system (DCLG 2008a:13). Nevertheless, John Clarke may have a point, considering that the CIC goes on to describe the purpose of political engagement as more consensual than antagonistic, as tending towards constructive 'nation building' rather than critical of policy (and politics):

'We aim to show that by engaging in politics people can enact beneficial change, serve their communities, develop their own skills and experience and contribute to a strong society and nation.' (DCLG 2008a:13)

### ***The Take Part Pathfinder programme***

So what has become of New Labour's earlier concern with 'community capacity building' and equipping citizens with the skills and knowledge needed to engage? The Empowerment White Paper's primary focus was the reform of mechanisms by which citizens and local public services could interact more effectively with each other, and it included the reminder that 'capacity building' of communities was the remit of the Office of the Third Sector at the Cabinet Office. However, since the end of the ALAC programme in 2006, the programme had been lying dormant, despite organisation of a national 'Take Part Network' composed of the former ALAC hubs, who had produced the renamed 'Take Part' learning framework for active citizenship learning. The Take Part Network had held regular meetings with the Community Empowerment Unit within DCLG, reminding them of the contributions 'Take Part' could make to the Community Empowerment agenda. Whether or not as a direct result of this lobbying, 'Take Part' active citizenship learning was included as one of the measures supported by the White Paper. In chapter 2 'Active Citizens and the value of volunteering', under the sub-heading 'citizenship learning' and after mentioning citizenship learning in schools, the White Paper resurrected 'Take Part' with a renewed and revised purpose:

'Citizenship learning is also important to adults. *Some* local people want to know more about how local services are managed and local democracy operates. *Some* people need support and encouragement to have the confidence to speak up and get involved. We will support a Take Part local pathfinder programme, offering information and training on how to be an active citizen. It will build on the existing Take Part network.'

(DCLG, 2008a:39, my italics)

The scope and focus of this programme was, then, confined from the outset to a narrow group of the population ('some people') who are motivated by engagement with local democracy and who 'need' support, or rather, 'information and training on how to be an active citizen'. In other words, the groups to be targeted were people from mainly disadvantaged backgrounds or communities and who wanted to engage as active citizens in very specific ways. In the view of a senior DCLG civil servant interviewed in this research

who had supported ALAC at the Home Office, the design of the *Take Part Programme* had been influenced by Hazel Blears' personal background and interests:

'Then, the next major phase [was] Hazel Blears coming along and [being] very committed to community empowerment. She was nurtured in the civil renewal agenda and was the champion for *Together We Can*, but then she came in and I feel probably slightly less focused on learning for learning sake, certainly less interested in community development, more [...] in local governance, less interested perhaps in local democracy, but [more] in civic governance [and in] influencing local government, *like Speaking Up - that was right up her street...*'.

DCLG Civil Servant, interviewed in 2011 (my emphasis)

Hence, the Take Part Pathfinders (TPP) reflected Blears' policy focus on 'civic activism' (that is, formal roles within existing civic and governance structures) as opposed to a broader 'civil' engagement agenda. While this represented an apparent shift from the perspective of the former ALAC, it is important to remember that Blunkett had in the Civil Renewal agenda, which had funded ALAC, always stressed the role of citizens working with the state to improve public services (see previous section), rather than merely being active in 'civil' participation in their communities. Nevertheless, there was a *perception* by most of the former ALAC hubs, who were invited to deliver the first phase of the TPPs, that the priority given to 'civic' participation represented a shift in policy. As far as the CVS was concerned, however, this shift was not really of concern or relevance, since its ALAC work already focused on teaching people how to 'speak up' in order to engage with the state— which is why, perhaps, one of its former learners was selected to feature as a case study for the 'Take Part' approach in the Empowerment White Paper.

Returning to the Take Part Pathfinder programme, its activities were to achieve the following outcomes:

- 'Increased levels of participation in civic activism, consultation and civic participation; and in community leadership roles.
- Increased skills and confidence among citizens, particularly those from more disadvantaged groups and communities, to support participation

- An increase in the numbers of people equipped to press for change in support of community leadership.’

(DCLG, 2008c, unpublished project document)

Clearly, the government was aware that, in spite of having presented CIC as if in response to popular demand, these active citizens first needed to be ‘discovered, groomed and developed to take up their governance roles’ (Newman and Clarke, 2009: 104). This, then, is the intended purpose for the Take Part programme, which defined the following priorities for action:

- ‘Programmes of learning that build skills and confidence, within a community context. This includes shared learning leading to increased individual and collective voices, action and influence.
- Community leadership programmes that offer tailored support into civic activism and/or lay governance roles
- Information about the availability of opportunities for influence and lay governance roles across the public sector in the locality, and support for greater mobility between such roles’

(DCLG, 2008c, unpublished project document)

On the one hand, the support could lead to ‘voice, action and influence’ (e.g. by learning to ‘Speak Up’), but on the other, as mentioned above, the brief explicitly privileged the uptake of ‘civic’ and ‘governance’ roles. This was to be reinforced by the design of the partnerships through which the Pathfinders were to be delivered, on the one hand, organisations that could deliver community-based learning and access to the target groups and communities (to ‘narrow the gaps in participation between different groups in order to raise involvement of disadvantaged sections of society’, as stated by the TPP brief, op. cit.) and, on the other, Local Authorities who had signed up to the National Performance Indicator 4 (NI4) which measured the ‘percentage of people who feel they can influence local decisions that affect them’. Thus, the Pathfinders were to contribute to these specific local authority targets and promote specific forms of involvement rather than ‘active citizenship’ in a broad and open-ended sense. The above-mentioned contradiction between a government-centred and a people-centred approach to citizen participation thus persisted, in spite of assertions which always presented the policies as people-centred, as seen here in Gordon Brown’s foreword to the Empowerment White Paper:

[This White Paper] is about helping citizens to get involved *when they want to on their own terms*, paving the way for a new style of active politics that not only gives people a greater say but ensures that their voices are heard and that their views will make a difference’ (Brown in DCLG 2008a:i., my emphasis)

In contrast, from a citizens’ perspective the ‘top-down’ nature of government’s policies was all too obvious. As one of the active citizens interviewed in this research commented, referring to the Empowerment White Paper:

‘... “Communities in Control” - we are not in control here ...we’re lectured from a great height!’ (Max)

### **3.2.2.3 Active Citizens as Service Users in Public Sector Modernisation**

This section briefly reviews the context of New Labour’s policies towards ‘active citizens’ as partners in the reform of public services in the area of health and social care, as they were directly relevant to the aspects and experiences of active citizen involvement examined in this research. They also offer further examples of the tensions and contradictions inherent in New Labour’s active citizenship agendas.

Public sector modernisation had been a major policy thread for New Labour from the outset. The 1999 White Paper *Modernising Government* (DETR, 1999) set out an agenda for improving public service standards with citizen-centred modes of delivery. This ‘made it a legal requirement for local authorities, and others such as police and fire services, to consult with service users about different aspects of their service provision’ (Marinetto, 2003:115). Central to modernisation was to shift the focus of the service design and delivery to the user’s viewpoint, which would ensure that services reflect ‘real lives and deliver what people really want’ (Cabinet Office, 1999, cited in Finlayson, 2003:91). This was accompanied by the intent of joining up government services - for example, in health and social care - for a seamless delivery.

Commentators have pointed out that service user movements in mental health, learning disability and physical disability have had significant influence on New Labour’s policy-

making in health and social care (Newman, 2011). The advocacy movement had been at the forefront of campaigning for changes to services, including to the relationship between service users and providers. At the core of their claims lay the challenging of the so-called 'medical model of disability' which was based on a deficit model and defined service users by what they could *not* do; in contrast, they advocated a 'social model' which posits that it is society that needs to change and to remove the barriers to full citizenship and inclusion. From this flowed the principle of independent living and the idea of direct payments to service users as the means to achieve it (Carr, 2004; Beresford, 2008). It also required a shift in the relationship between service users and providers, with service users being given greater choice and control over the services they received, more generally (Newman, 2011).

Thus, in the area of learning disability, people and service users (not all people with learning disabilities are in receipt of care services) insisted on being seen as 'people first'. New Labour's learning disability strategy, 'Valuing People' (DoH 2001; updated in 2009) aimed to promote the citizenship of people with learning disabilities, giving them more rights and support for independent living. For this, it was recognised that people required support either to enable their self-advocacy (people speaking up for themselves) or citizen-advocacy (advocacy through a volunteer) (DoH 2001:46).

In order to ensure the coordination of health and adult social care services, the government set up Learning Disability Partnership Boards in each local authority. Their aim was to implement New Labour's 'Valuing People' strategy and bring together service managers in health and social care as well as people with learning disabilities, families and carer representatives. The purpose of these boards was to give strategic direction for the development of services according to local priorities. The boards had quite a wide remit, covering not only health and social care but also housing, employment, citizenship, etc. Alongside the boards, support was given to advocacy and user groups, especially the 'People First' groups which were user-controlled groups through which people could participate and share their concerns and direct their own advocacy (information based on research interview with Learning Disability manager in 2012).

The service user movement, in turn, insisted on the availability of collective advocacy 'as key both to personal development and empowerment' including to support individual

decision-making in relation to increasingly personalised services, and 'as a crucial starting point for effective and broad-based participation and partnerships.' (Beresford, 2010: 498). The role of service user movements has therefore been essential, in particular to support their

'engagement with state and related structures for participation through their own self-organizations. In this way, it is felt, they can engage from a position of greater individual awareness and understanding and increased collective strength and solidarity.' (Beresford, 2010:498).

This was all the more necessary as the neo-liberal principle of 'market-citizenship' (Root, 2007 in Newman and Clarke, 2009) which construed citizens as 'consumers' had pervaded New Labour's policies in health and social care. This posited 'choice' as the main mechanism for service improvements (Needham, 2003). However, as Newman and Clarke (2009) have repeatedly argued, New Labour's policies cannot be seen as following a single logic or agenda, and hence, a more nuanced approach is required which not only questions the consistency of policy-making but also the possibility of different agendas permeating different discourses. Thus, contradictory notions of the neo-liberal, individualised 'citizen-consumer' frequently rubbed shoulders with the empowered citizen and service user in many New Labour's policies.

Users of services were also going to be given a greater say but the risk was that this would be through 'choice' and that 'voice' was encouraged primarily on an individual rather than a collective level. This was despite the insistence, by service user groups, that power between users and professionals can only be rebalanced through collective voice, rather than individual voice (Beresford, 2010).

As with New Labour policy more generally, these different strands in the policy represented an ambiguous mix of socially progressive ideas inspired by user advocacy movements and neo-liberal principles of the citizen-consumer (Needham, 2003). Moreover, the effectiveness of service user involvement in the transformation of health and social care has been the subject of much criticism in the same way as in citizen engagement more generally, and for similar reasons (Needham, 2003; Barnes et al, 2007; Cowden and Singh, 2007; Beresford, 2010). Rather than repeating these arguments here,

one of the more specific points to be made is the vital role played by independent service-user controlled organisations to exercise advocacy and campaigning, whereas the New Labour approach to ‘partnership’ involvements has implied the risk of co-option of such groups. Any dependence from the state, whether through funding or partnership arrangements, risks jeopardising their freedom to act as effective advocates and campaigners (Beresford, 2010; Milbourne, 2013).

As Chapter 5 will show, the CVS had nevertheless been able to draw on the service user and carer involvement agendas in attracting resources for user groups in learning disability, mental health and for carers, so amongst the questions to be posed for this research is the extent to which, within the existing frameworks of involvement policies, the active citizenship learning and ‘Speaking Up’ in particular has added strength to the ability of services users to engage critically with public services providers.

### **3.3 The active citizen in the Coalition Government, 2010-2013**

Shortly after it had come to power, the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat government announced its plans for a Big Society programme, promising it would usher in ‘a new era of people power’.

‘A cross-government policy programme will create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a Big Society that would roll back big government, bureaucracy and Whitehall power.’ (Cabinet Office, 2010b.)

Right from the start David Cameron’s rhetoric announced a return to the Conservative critique of the state as ‘too inhuman, monolithic and clumsy to tackle our deepest social problems’ (Cameron, in Cabinet Office, 2010b), and therefore, requiring to be rolled back and replaced by Big Society. Similarly to the Conservative governments of the 1980s and ‘90s, active citizens were called on as volunteers (but rarely with direct reference to the term, instead, using the abstract notion of the ‘Big Society’) and through charity donations to come to fill the growing gaps left in the state provision.

Another theme extolled by Cameron was the notion of the 'broken society' and that people should be given more responsibility, personally and towards each other, as family members and neighbours, and community organisations to 'break the cycles of poverty'. In 2012 the Centre for Social Justice, a think tank close to the Conservative Secretary of State and Pensions, Ian Duncan Smith, gave out awards for innovative projects in the following categories: 'family breakdown; educational failure; worklessness and economic dependency; debt; and addictions'. This language was all too obviously underpinned by the deficit model of the conservative 'moral underclass discourse' (Levitas, 1998), seeking to blame the character of individuals rather than structural causes (Coote, 2010; Rowson et al, 2012). Whilst New Labour's approach towards poverty and social exclusion had been criticised on similar grounds, the Coalition government's policies not only stepped up a gear in its language but inflicted punishing cuts to welfare services and entitlements without New Labour's accompanying (and, to some extent, compensatory) policy measures. Furthermore, while New Labour was committed to 'equality' and Human Rights, the term 'equality' had been erased from the Coalition Government's policy rhetoric and replaced with the much harder to define concept of 'fairness' (McCabe, 2010). The Home Secretary Theresa May described equality as being 'associated with the worst forms of political correctness and social engineering' (Gentleman, 2010), and accordingly amended the Equality Act.

In respect of policies, however, the Big Society was often accused of being essentially a political slogan, 'appealing to anti-statist sentiments' (Alcock, 2010:11) without any traction in terms of substantial policy measures. A few measures had sprung up around Localism, in essence continuing New Labour's double devolution and community empowerment but clothed in new language. This gave local communities extended (but conditional) rights in the area of local planning. Other measures included the 'Community Organisers' programme and the National Citizen Service for young people (Burls and Recknagel, 2013). Whilst the former received 'pump prime funding' for one year and relied on workers' ability to secure their own continuation funding, the latter was expanded from a small pilot to gradually larger schemes. But the National Citizen Service was seen as siphoning off funding from statutory Youth Work for activities that were running only during part of the year and available to a far smaller proportion of young people. These measures, then, were insufficient to foster and support citizenship on the scale that would be required in a vision of an expanding Big Society.

Keen to differentiate itself from the New Labour government in all aspects including language, the Coalition Government replaced the term 'third sector' with that of 'civil society'. As critics have pointed out, 'civil society' refers to a 'space' rather than a sector or associational forms and thus runs the risk of diluting policy towards a 'voluntary and community sector' (Evers, 2010, in Alcock, 2010). Where New Labour sought to expand the latter by including social enterprises in its 'third sector', the term 'Big Society' was intentionally left undefined and, after only three years, the 'Big Society' was by and large 'dropped' from the Coalition Government's policy language, and even discredited by those who were involved in its design (Helm, 2014). Not only had it been deeply unpopular, but the gulf between rhetoric in support of voluntary and community effort and the impact of draconian funding cuts to the sector had become unbridgeable, 'embarrassing' even (Hetherington, 2013). While the sector had seen unprecedented growth both in funding and in the number of charitable organisations during New Labour's time in power (Alcock, 2010; Milbourne, 2013), it had also become increasingly dependent on statutory funding (36% of its income in 2010, Alcock, 2010), both from central and local government sources. Now third sector organisations were amongst the first casualties of the deep cuts to local government budgets under the government's austerity measures, as a result of which the sector has experienced both a retrenchment and a structural reorganisation, with many organisations having had to merge or otherwise disappear. As under New Labour, the Coalition government says it wants to see third sector organisations deliver more public services, but increased competition for ever larger public contracts, and payment on outcomes, have made this unlikely for all but the largest third sector organisations. In this context, and in the light of the majority of public sector cuts still to be made, the sector is facing if not 'division and decline' (Alcock, 2010) then at least a period of 'hard times' whilst undergoing substantial transition compared with the period under New Labour (Milbourne, 2013). The changes to third sector infrastructure organisations and its impact on the case study CVS are considered in Chapter Five.

Even after only three years of Coalition Government, the outlook for active citizenship in the context of austerity measures may seem predominantly bleak. On the one hand, the Coalition Government may claim that it is making things easier for people in communities by, for example, cutting red tape and giving groups the 'right' to buy public assets or provide services, but on the other hand, changes have been made that undermine both

the structures for volunteering and opportunities for citizen participation. For example, the *Duty to Involve* has been abolished as soon as the Coalition came to power, defying government claims of empowering citizens vis-à-vis public services.

There has also been opposition to some of the principles underpinning the Big Society, such as the idea of substituting paid public service professionals with volunteers. The suggestion of communities and volunteers taking over public services such as libraries has had limited uptake and has been confined to parts of the country with high levels of 'social capital' (Helm, 2014). Indeed, it has been argued that the absence of state support for active citizenship and capacity building is likely to affect volunteering and charity capacity, at least in disadvantaged areas, in the long run. The Centre for Social Justice has already described some particularly deprived areas as 'charity deserts', 'where the state [i]s dysfunctional and there [i]s no charitable sector to plug the gaps' (Helm, 2014). More generally, the executive director for volunteering and development at the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, Justin Davis Smith, has raised the issue of how volunteering can be sustained or indeed increased when the third sector organisations are deprived of resources to support volunteers and diversify opportunities for volunteering, and at a time when 'tried and tested' voluntary sector infrastructure services have been 'undermined' (Third Sector Review, 2014)

While New Labour has been criticised for its instrumentalist and 'command and control' approach to active citizenship, communities and the VCS, the long-term effect of austerity measures alongside the further erosion of social rights of citizenship and the widening gap in inequalities may result in significant retrenchments within the voluntary sector and with active citizenship becoming an increasingly exclusionary and elitist activity.

### **3.4 Discussion**

The public policies outlined above and covering three and a half decades show commonalities and differences, continuities and innovations, in their implications for active citizenship. From the first explicit mention of the 'active citizen' in 1990, successive governments have made the citizen a prime target and instrument of public policy (Newman, 2011), serving diverse and sometimes contradictory policy agendas. Each of the

three main orientations, for the sake of argument labelled as neo-liberal, civic republican and communitarian, have taken varying degrees of priority. Undoubtedly, one of the continuities has been the reform of the welfare state – and of public services more widely – which translated into a shift of responsibility and expectations on the mutual obligations of citizens, on the one hand, and of the state, on the other. This new settlement has mainly involved citizens (and communities) having to become more self-reliant, taking responsibility for their own well-being and financial security, and that of their families, while being expected to look after their neighbours and get involved with the wider community and, indeed, in public sector modernisation. At the same time, the neo-liberal primacy of economic independence through participation in paid work has pushed more people (particularly women) into work, which, it has been found and argued, detrimental effects on ‘social capital’, ‘quality of life’ and social cohesion within increasingly fragmented and diverse communities (Putnam, 2000; Robertson et al, 2008).

Another policy area that has grown under New Labour (and shrunk again under the current Coalition government) has been community capacity building which had been focused on the more deprived areas. The underlying rationale of community capacity building was that active citizens involved in their communities and engaging with the state would, apart from benefiting the common good, contribute to their personal development in terms of skills and confidence, and thus facilitate their return to the labour market. As part of a neo-liberal ideological framework, paid work was held up by New Labour as the primary route out of social exclusion and poverty (Lister, 2001). In this sense, the least disadvantaged people and communities have, more often than not, been the primary targets of citizenship ‘activation’ and ‘responsibilisation’, within a context of social and economic policy rather than just or mainly political or democratic renewal. Meanwhile, as Citizenship Surveys have repeatedly shown, the take up of new opportunities for participation has continued to attract the better off and more educated (Pattie et al, 2003; Power Inquiry, 2006). In this context, both the ALAC and the Take Part Pathfinder programmes of active citizenship learning could be seen as community capacity building measures targeted at deprived communities, as well as being interwoven with various and sometimes contradictory policy agendas relating to ‘active citizenship’.

The review of the debate in this chapter has supported the idea that New Labour’s active citizenship policies should more appropriately be understood as a complex ‘assemblage’ of

agendas and discourses, rather than as a single and coherent strategy (Newman and Clarke, 2009). The involvement of active citizens in governance, for example, underpinned by civic republican ideas, contains the potential for social and political change by extending citizen voice and influence (Cornwall, 2008). The scope for a transfer of 'real power' (DCLG, 2008), however, was hampered notably on account of the often 'instrumentalist' intentions of governments, using citizens for their own agendas, and New Labour's predilection for a 'command and control' form of government (Powell, 2003; Newman and Clarke, 2009). Governmentality theories have in this respect drawn attention to the inherently ambivalent nature of governance arrangements, whereby governments' claims of extended power and influence to citizens, community groups, service user groups, and voluntary and community sector organisations in fact allows governments to 'govern at a distance' more (cost-) effectively (Rose and Miller, 1992). Research into governance and partnerships has shown that the weight of existing power imbalances and institutional biases limits the transformative potential of 'citizens' in a variety of ways, not least by determining whose voices are included in the first place. On the other hand, a Foucauldian theory of power also insisted on the ever-present possibility of resistance created at every point of the social nexus of relations, and the 'unstable' nature therefore of any formal structures. Thus, even the bounded 'invited spaces' of governance can lead to unpredictable results including the introduction of new ideas and challenges to the status quo arrived through the dialogue created between different stakeholders (Taylor, 2007; Barnes et al, 2007; Cornwall, 2008; Newman and Clarke, 2009; Newman, 2011).

The governmentality theory also emphasises the state's efforts in 'constructing subjects' or 'publics' or 'summoning active citizens' (Newman and Clarke, 2009; Newman, 2010, 2011). This way of thinking studies the various government policies and government-led initiatives directed at active citizenship as strategies or 'technologies of citizenship' that seek to regulate the population (Cruikshank, 1999; Marinetto, 2003) – in other words, forms of social control. For example, a close up analysis of the Empowerment White Paper can be read as revealing the lengths to which New Labour resorted in order to summon active citizens through a contrived act of 'ventriloquising' (Clarke, 2010) and to justify the introduction of new statutory duties on local government by presenting them as if they were the result of popular struggles for political power (DCLG, 2008b). While the case studies of active citizenship selected in the Empowerment White Paper are of 'real people' and in many cases highlight the potential of people from diverse and disadvantaged

backgrounds, there is also at work a careful construction of the type of active citizens that government favoured. This is the 'active' not the 'activist' citizen, doing the government's bidding but not challenging *central* government policies or powers (while it is acceptable to challenge *local* government), and to challenge only through formal institutional processes. Indeed, recent journalistic investigations revelations have shown how under a New Labour government activists and protest movements have been systematically undermined through undercover state surveillance (Evans and Lewis, 2013). This provides further evidence for the contradictory and highly selective nature of New Labour's 'active citizenship' mobilisation, promoting an idealised form of the 'good' and essentially depoliticised 'ordinary' citizen whilst 'erasing' forms of engagement in protest and political dissent that risks destabilising the social order from its definition of active citizenship altogether (Newman, 2011:122).

The second useful insight gained from governmentality theory appertains to the means by which the government discourses are conveyed and implemented. Thus, rather than merely acting through coercion (e.g. conditionality in the welfare reforms by which recipients have to agree to 'do something' in return for their benefits) government uses a range of technologies and discourses which allow it to govern more efficiently, even at a distance or 'at arms length'. In this vein, New Labour's policies towards the 'third' sector overall had been viewed with suspicion, as seeking to exert influence by setting the parameters within which voluntary and community organisations could operate (Milbourne, 2013). This refers not only to direct funding policies and priorities but also to indirect techniques, such as accounting and reporting mechanisms. These managerial approaches constitute governmental 'technologies' (Rose and Miller, 1992) which influence what people and organisation do, and how they do them, and how they come to view and evaluate reality and their own responses to social issues as a result of 'hegemony' and the potential internalisation of governmental 'political rationalities'.

This policy analysis has the following implications for this research: first, it directs attention to the 'what' of the active citizenship programmes and the competing conceptions of active citizenship inherent in a complex and ambiguous policy context that reaches beyond a community-based conception of active citizenship. And second, it throws light on the 'how' of their implementation, inherent in the way in which governmental intentions and agendas have subtly influenced 'empowerment' activities by

prescribing and 'normalising' particular practices within the third sector. Governmentality theory, in this respect, alerts us not only to the discourses and techniques used to convey 'political rationalities' of government, but also to the potential for resistance at every point of social interaction. Hence it has been argued that

'[r]eality is often recalcitrant. People sometimes refuse to "know their place". So in the context of New Labour strategies to modernise them, do people – in their complexly differentiated places – live up to the aims and ambitions of these strategies? Do they comply cynically and calculatingly? Do they resist or refuse?'

(Clarke 2005:460)

This, then, applies not only to the active citizens (the 'learners') in this case study research but also to the practitioners in the case study organisation who were involved in delivering the active citizenship learning programmes.

# Chapter 4 Methodology

## 4.1 Main research paradigms and perspectives (ontology and epistemology)

This qualitative research is inscribed in an interpretative ontology, or worldview, which emphasises the social construction of reality (Schwandt, 2000). It also considers the role of research to be informed by feminist and by critical social theory. In this sense it questions the positivist assumption that there is an 'objective' and reliable 'truth' waiting to be discovered and that can be apprehended through research, using rigorous and objective (preferably quantitative) methods. Instead, social constructivists argue that 'reality' is unreliable and a matter of perspective, and as it can only be apprehended through our individual and subjective perspective, it is intrinsically a culturally and linguistically embedded interpretation. It follows that we cannot know the true nature of the world and have to accept the existence of multiple interpretations (Williams and May, 1996).

While positivist research looks for patterns and theories to explain the world, a constructivist paradigm investigates social meanings and the processes that produce such meanings. Therefore, it is within the constructivist paradigm that this research is undertaken, both for philosophical reasons and due to the nature of the object of this research. Instead of seeking to discover generalisable 'truths' and explanatory models for the causality of social phenomena, this research aims to offer in-depth insights ('Verstehen', as Weber termed it) into social processes that define meanings and which people use to explain their actions. According to Dilthey (1958, cited in Schwandt, 2000:192/206)

'[t]o understand the meaning of human action requires grasping the subjective consciousness or intent of the actor from the inside.'

How such understanding can be achieved is the matter of much debate. According to Schwandt (2000:206), the debate was even within the interpretive tradition approaches, ranging from a 'more artistic interpretation' (exemplified by Geertz, Wolcott and Stake) to

'a more scientific approach' (e.g. Hammersley, Silverman, Strauss and Corbin).

Phenomenological sociology, for example, considers that everyday social life is constituted through conversation and interactions (Schwandt, 2000). Sociologists like Giddens (1991) consider that in late modernity the emphasis is on 'life politics', by which individuals seek 'self-actualisation' as reflexive human beings. The quest for identity involves, as Foucault (1979) has recognised, multiple identities and is influenced by relations of power coming from all directions, including from forces associated with the state. These general observations are intended to emphasise that the focal point of inquiry in this research is the social construction of the 'active citizen' as a deeply contested identity, and of the processes and discourses that influence this identity formation.

As suggested above, the rejection of a positivist paradigm does not mean that qualitative research has to abandon all scientific aspirations - quite to the contrary, qualitative research methods strive to generate verifiable findings, applying rigorous methods to data collection and analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). One key characteristic of qualitative research in a social constructivist epistemology is to acknowledge and indeed value the role played by the person of the researcher. If 'all knowledge claims and their evaluation take place within a conceptual framework through which the world is described and explained' (Schwandt, 2000:197), then the subjective perspective of the researcher is crucial to the hermeneutic process.

Rather than considering the researcher's subjectivity to constitute an obstacle to scientific rigour, the researcher's unique relationship to their research subjects is of particular interest to feminist researchers (Reinharz, 1992; Neuman, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). They challenge the notion that the person or identity of the researcher has no effect on the quality of the findings (Harding, 1986: 162). On the contrary, feminist researchers consider that the 'researcher as a situated person' not only influences the social reality she studies but brings her own subjective knowledge, experience and relationships into the process (Reinharz, 1992). This adds value to research, rather than merely risk invalidating it. At the same time it requires a strong commitment to reflexivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

Another central philosophical position adopted for this research is critical social research. This perspective declares its ambition to undertake research with a view to ultimately

changing the world by increasing knowledge about social processes which perpetuate unequal power relations (Harvey, 1990; Neuman, 1994). Knowledge in this perspective constitutes a resource for people to further their collective struggles (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001), and can be used as a means to empowerment.

Feminist social science research shares with critical social research an endeavour to challenge the status quo and to empower the 'oppressed' (Reinharz, 1992; Neuman, 1994), although for feminists their focus is on the oppression of women. Conventional social research is deemed to have perpetuated patriarchal and androcentric power relations, and suppressed the voices and perspectives of women from the public domain<sup>10</sup>. Feminist researchers therefore consider it important to produce knowledge from a feminist perspective, with feminist values, on issues that are relevant to women, and using methodologies that are sympathetic and anti-authoritarian (Reinharz, 1992).

This feminist concern with, and interest in, the lives of women and other marginalised groups was central to this research. It impacts on the research in three ways: first, in the choice of a research topic that would not only be relevant to marginalised people but also would show them in a different light (Fine et al, 2000) compared with stereotypes and superficial quantitative analyses of citizenship participation (Pattie et al, 2003; Citizenship Surveys between 2001 and 2011, Home Office and DCLG; Power Inquiry, 2006); second, by adopting methods that would empower research participants through the research processes; and third, by grounding the research in an axiomatic framework inspired by an 'ethic of care' and the notion of 'interdependence' of the self' (Gilligan, 1982; Wood, 1994 – both in Christians, 2000).

## 4.2 Research strategies

Based on the ontological and epistemological foundations of social constructivism, feminism and critical social research, this current project adopts a qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) defined qualitative research as

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<sup>10</sup> In a recent televised lecture, 'Oh Do Shut Up Dear!' (BBC, 17 March 2014) the Classicist scholar Mary Beard reasoned how, since antiquity, women's voices in the public sphere had been systematically discredited and silenced. The only topic on which women were allowed to talk, sometimes, was women's issues, whereas men in the public sphere talk on behalf of everyone. Beard argued that this bias persists to today and partly underpins and sustains misogyny.

‘... a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations [...] This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’.

In terms of research strategies I found that the case study was the most pertinent for my research object and topic. A case study, according to Yin (1984:23), ‘investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used’.

In this current study, the central object of the investigation was constituted by the experiences of research participants connected to active citizenship learning programmes in a localised, third sector setting, and the meanings attached to these experiences. The lack of boundaries was also evident in the scope of the impact of the phenomenon. For example, studying processes of empowerment would require the teasing out of multiple influences and it would be difficult to attribute with certainty relations of cause and effect between different activities and outcomes.

‘Multiple sources of evidence’ were used in the form of interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis - a combination deemed suitable to case studies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). Multiple methods, such as semi-structured interviews, the examination of existing documentary data and ethnographic participant observation, allowed me to gain rich insights into the multiple views and perspectives of different types of participants, and over time.

Robert Stake makes the distinction between an *intrinsic* and an *instrumental* case study, with a case study always ‘draw[ing] attention to the question of what specifically can be learned from the single case’, and seeking out ‘what is common and what is particular about the case, but the end result regularly portrays something of the uncommon’ (Stouffer, 1941, in Stake, 2000:438). Indeed, the practices of active citizenship learning in

this organisation, prompted by these specific government programmes, may be unique but may share common characteristics that can be transferred to similar contexts.

Stake (2000), however, argues that case study research – particularly where the case is of intrinsic rather than of instrumental interest – should not concern itself too much with the issue of representativeness, generalisability and theory-building. In an *intrinsic* case study the researcher may, at least initially, be more interested in the particulars of the case than in theory-building. Here the researcher 'shares an intense interest in personal views and circumstances' and teases out the stories of those 'living the case' (Stake, 2000:438). This tends to generate research reports with 'thick descriptions' which provide insights and opportunities for learning. This is not to say that generalisations cannot be made but they are not the main purpose of an intrinsic case study.

Stake insists that the line between intrinsic and instrumental case studies should not be drawn too tightly since the researcher's interests may simultaneously be in the particular and the general (Stake, 2000:438). I found this conceptualisation useful for understanding my own, evolving, relationship to the case study. Thus, while this research started off as a predominantly *intrinsic* organisational case study, as time went by it became more apparent that the case study also had instrumental value by providing insights on the relationship between the third sector and the state, with a greater potential for generalisability.

Funded through an ESRC CASE studentship (see footnote 4) the research was collaborative in its nature and design. This involved the joint management of the research by the CVS as the host organisations and the academic partner. Due to organisational pressures and priorities this caused some restrictions to the researcher's activities, which are discussed in more detail in the sections below.

Another potential research strategy that is commonly associated with university-community research collaborations is participative research. This usually translates into the involvement of community members as researchers (Goodson and Phillimore, 2012). Of course, I could consider myself to be a community member who is learning to become a researcher! But leaving this aside, and despite previous experience of having coordinated a participative research project in this organisation, it was decided that in this instance it

was neither suitable nor desirable to involve other participants as researchers. I preferred to undertake this research myself in order to meet the academic requirements of the PhD. The CEO also advised against a participative project, first because of capacity issues, since a fully participative research project would have required the recruitment, training and supervision of people as researchers, and secondly because of concerns over the appropriateness of these specific research questions (which were the reason for the CVS to support this research) to either staff or community members. My initial intention had been, nevertheless, to run focus groups in which learners would be able to share their views and comment on emerging findings, but in light of the amount of data already collected and because of lack of organisational capacity these plans were abandoned.

In considering research strategies I also explored the suitability of 'grounded theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1998, in Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory is defined as

'the intent [...] to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a process (or action or interaction) [that is grounded in data and] shaped by the views of a large number of participants. Participants in the study would all have experienced the processes at the centre of the inquiry, and the development of the theory might help explain practice or provide a further framework for research' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, quoted in Creswell, 2007: 62-63).

Grounded theory typically develops low-key or 'middle-range' theories of situated social behaviour, more substantive than abstract, but with the potential of complementing more abstract theory (Charmaz, 2003). While I was much attracted by the idea of an inductive analytical mode of inquiry that is 'flexible yet systematic, directed but open-ended' (Charmaz, 2003, n.p.), I was aware that my research did not aim to build a theory, whatever its range. Rather I was aiming to explore the relevance and appropriateness of different theoretical approaches to my research questions, in the specific context of the case study. I was also uncertain about the extent to which the 'open-coding' method of data analysis that is so central to grounded theory, would be appropriate – a point to which I will return below.

Finally, considering the position of the researcher in qualitative research, it has already been pointed out that feminist qualitative research considers the advantages of a

researcher, who is able to bring an insider perspective and familiarity to the socio-cultural 'field' and the people studied. The 'intersubjective understanding between the researcher and the persons studied' (Reinharz, 1992: 46) is considered beneficial in terms of enabling both positive and non-exploitative relationships with participants and a more germane interpretation of data. It also acknowledges the researcher's convictions which lend significance to the cultural reality she seeks to analyse (Christians, 2000:237). My own values were by and large congruent with those of the collaborative organisation. This had implications both as an advantage and as a disadvantage, and in any case it required reflexivity. These issues will be examined in detail in subsequent sections, including the dilemmas posed by an insider-researcher position.

### **4.3 Methods of data collection**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:22) a case study relies on a combination of interviewing, observing and document analysis. These three methods were deployed with different emphases to address my research questions. The research question was initially articulated as, 'Do government programmes of active citizenship learning *empower* active citizens and community groups?'. This reflected my personal interest in the topic and the question posed by CVS colleagues who had been delivering these programmes (see introduction and context Chapter Five). The purpose was to generate insights and evidence on the social construction of active citizenship, of its processes and its effects on the adults involved in learning at the CVS, as well as to consider the role played by the CVS interventions in mediating these meanings as an intermediary agent between citizens and the state.

The overarching research question was initially broken down into three areas of inquiry, broadly, with the first investigating the concept of active citizenship, its social construction in interaction between the state (via these programmes, and social policy more widely), the CVS tutors, and the participants in the programmes. The second area of inquiry was to unpack and examine the various and different pedagogic approaches that had been developed by the government-funded programmes, and its interactions with different target groups of adult learners (e.g. people with a range of backgrounds, levels of experience, and motivations). The third area of inquiry aimed to gain insight into the

contested issue of what constitutes 'empowerment' and the contribution of the courses and teaching methodologies to the empowerment of active citizens.

A fourth question emerged in the course of the study concerned with understanding the significance of the government-funded programmes to the wider debate on New Labour's policies towards the third sector. Indeed, the literature review had shown that the 'governmental strategies' at work in these specific programmes formed part of broader trends and developments in the changing relationship between the state and the third sector (Marinetto, 2003; Taylor, 2007; Milbourne, 2013).

The first three areas of inquiry required data on the learning interventions, their purpose and their implementation, in different contexts, and the influences that shaped their development. This was undertaken in the form of first, interviews with a cross-sample of learners representing the different courses delivered under these programmes and in support of active citizenship; second, interviews with staff and tutors; third, documentary analysis of policy context and programme information (from the government departments), enhanced by an interview with a senior civil servant; fourth, analysis of course documentation generated by the CVS, and of 'static' learner data (registration and feedback forms); and finally, interviews with staff in external local agencies who had supported or witnessed the learning and/or subsequent participation experiences of CVS learners.

In order to answer the fourth area of inquiry, I took advantage of my insider knowledge acquired through my own experiences as programme coordinator. This consisted of participant observation both reflecting back in time and contemporaneous to the research. As the Take Part Pathfinder was still being delivered and evaluated for another two years after the start of my research, further observations could be made, for example by participating in courses and events, by supporting the project evaluation and seeing its impact on the organisation beyond the end of the programme. This area also involved interviews with a range of staff more or less directly involved in the delivery or management of the projects.

Participant observation took a central role as it underpinned all areas of inquiry, with valuable observations of, for example, Take Part courses, and learners at conferences and

events 'speaking up'. It generated – and was reflected upon in the form of – a reflective diary or memos.

A range of policy papers and unpublished project documentation and documents produced internally (e.g. learner records, course flyers, and Speaking Up course workbooks) also provided valuable insights. Some of these documents were historical, some contemporary to the research activities, and finding out about relevant new documents required frequent personal contact with CVS colleagues. Additional data was contributed by CVS colleagues, including the transcripts of a CVS radio programme with Speaking Up learners, and learners' 'coursework' (see in particular the third citizen case study in Chapter Nine).

Regarding the effect of the programmes on learners, a large amount of project data already existed (and was still being produced). It captured the immediate feedback from course participants, plus additional evaluation data and analysis, and case studies in written, audio-recorded and filmed formats collated as part of the Take Part programme. For an in-depth view, however, additional participants needed to be interviewed to elicit their learning and active citizenship experiences, and their views and definitions of active citizenship and 'empowerment'. In order to see their personal accounts in context, the perspective stakeholders from within and from outside the case study organisation were also gathered. This was not undertaken so much with a view to 'triangulation' in the sense of data verification, but to 'clarify meaning by identifying different ways by which the phenomenon is seen' (Stake, 2000:444). Thus, the observations of third parties to the learners interviewed added depth and context to the impact the learners had, and the changes they had undergone as a result of their participation in the learning programmes and/or as active citizens.

#### **4.4 Research design, sampling and planning of research activities**

The research interviews sought to elicit information from three categories of people: colleagues from the case study organisation, programme beneficiaries, i.e. learners from either of the two main programmes at the centre of the study (ALAC/Speaking Up and Take Part) or from the intermittent Speaking Up courses; and external stakeholders or

partners in the third sector or in the public sector. Whilst in the first and third category the interviewees were selected according to their role and relevance to the research, the aim for the second category was to arrive at a sufficiently large sample of research participants. Since this research rejects a positivist paradigm of social reality, the aim of purposive sampling (Creswell, 2007) of learners was not to arrive at a statistically representative sample, but to gather enough data to reflect a variety of viewpoints from different types of learners and courses. The challenge was, indeed, that the citizenship learning programmes were very varied in the type of courses they spawned, and so were the learners who attended. Therefore, in order to be able to draw any meaningful conclusions, it was necessary to ensure that the sample reflected this variety. The approach was therefore at once random and purposive (targeted at people with relevant experiences), since research invitations were sent to a pool of 400 learners who had either attended the Take Part programme or Speaking Up courses. Similarly to the 'constant comparative method' used in grounded theory research I aimed to achieve 'maximum variation' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, in Creswell, 2007) within the sample in terms of learner demographics and course attendance, as well as the range of experiences within the sample (e.g. positive and negative experiences of learning). I regularly reviewed the learner data as the interviews progressed. As is typical of a qualitative approach the data analysis took place throughout the research process, from the first interview to the very end of the project.

The final sample of research participants who were interviewed (some more than once, and some jointly), included 27 learners, 7 CVS staff and 5 external stakeholders, that is, 39 individuals in total<sup>11</sup>. In addition, documentary data included the feedback of learners given in a variety of ways, so the total number of learners whose experiences directly fed into the research was more likely to have been forty.

The process of inviting research participants within the group of course participants or 'learners' will be briefly described because it is important to point out that it was intended to form part of an inclusive and empowering approach: Speaking Up learners (reaching back to 2003) and Take Part courses were sent a letter (see appendix 1) which explained

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<sup>11</sup> In addition, one more learner (accompanied by a support worker) was interviewed. But this interviewee had to be excluded from the sample because she was unable to recall much of the course she attended, due to her learning disability, and two CVS project workers whose perspectives were tangential to the inquiry.

the research and its questions in some detail, inviting them to participate in a research interview or a focus group (focus groups had initially been planned but subsequently abandoned). This gave them the opportunity to talk about their experiences as learners, their views on active citizenship and the impact of their learning. In order to make the research topical, the letter made reference to the then current government policy on active citizenship, such as the 'Big Society' which had been much in the news at that time. This provided a random sample of relevant learners who volunteered to take part. A £10 voucher was offered both as an incentive and in return for giving their time, and was aimed at attracting disadvantaged learners to the research. It also followed the organisation's good practice guidelines for user involvement.

External stakeholders were identified as the learner data analysis progressed to enable the collection of feedback in general and specifically targeted to the areas of involvement of learners studied. Furthermore, stakeholders in regional organisations and from central government provided their perspective on the policy context.

#### **4.5 Approaches to interviewing**

While interviewing is integral to social research, the challenges involved should not be underestimated. Jones (1985:45) for example, argues that interviewing requires a wide range of social skills. I would argue that a high level of reflexive awareness is also required. In another seminal paper (Benney and Hughes, 1956:219) the research interview is described as an implicit 'contractual' arrangement into which the participant has entered 'freely and willingly'. However, its authors warn against the simplistic general assumption that 'information is the more valid the more freely given' (ibid). Instead, we must be aware of the hidden agendas and complex strategies at play on both sides in the social construction of meaning which constitutes the interview (Jones, 1985), and which reflect the reciprocal expectations about the encounter and the roles played in it by each side (Benney and Hughes, 1956).

The purpose of interviews is 'to understand other persons' constructions of reality... and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their own terms ... and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meanings' (Jones, 1985:46). In

order to enable such an exchange to take place, the researcher has to continually make choices 'about which data they want to pick up and explore further with the interviewees, and which they do not' (Jones, 1985:47). In this way the choices made during the interview process, and the skills deployed to facilitate the interview, have major implications for the data analysis (Fine et al, 2000).

The interview is generally considered by feminist researchers as 'a situation in which women should be able to feel comfortable enough to tell their own story as they see it' (Puwar, 1997, n.p.). The researcher's task is, then, to provide conditions in which a non-hierarchical friendly interview relationship can take place (Oakley, 1991; Puwar, 1997). As explained previously, even though this research included interviewees from both genders, it applied feminist principles in order to give a voice to the powerless, or to those whose voices were normally not heard on this topic. They included people with learning disabilities, people with mental health issues, women from disadvantaged parts of town (some with low educational qualifications) and male and female carers.

The researcher thus has to gain the trust of participants and ensure that the data remains confidential and is not used against their interest. This implies more than merely anonymity. Fine et al. (2000) also emphasised how social responsibility applies to the representation of data. But I would argue that this starts with the data collection and the interview, and even with the invitations to participate in research. This is especially so when the intention is to 'empower' research participants through the interview process, in which 'self-expression is facilitated to an unusual degree and that this is inherently satisfying', as Benney and Hughes (1956:210) argued. Amongst the skills that researchers need to have, Les Back called for the importance of the 'art of listening'. It takes account of the fact that 'sociological subjects are selves-in-process, not fixed at the point of interview but part of their own past and the socio-cultural history that has helped shaped them, and of course selves in the process of becoming' (Smart, 2009:299).

The feminist researcher's attempt 'to give away the maximum level of the space to the interviewee, in order to create an 'empowering experience for the researched' (Puwar, 1997, has to be balanced against her own requirements for addressing the research questions or topics (Jones, 1985). To this end, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were selected as offering a practical compromise between maximum

opportunity for self-expression and an overall framework for the questions that needed to be covered (Jones, 1985). But, I applied great flexibility - within this semi-structured framework. As Jones (1985:47) pointed out:

'Yet although we are tied to our own frameworks, we are not totally tied up by them. ... [If we] modify, elaborate and sometimes abandon our prior schemes in a contingent response to what our respondents are telling us is significant in the research topic, then we are some way to achieving the complex balance between restricting structure and restricting ambiguity' (Jones, 1985:47)

In fact, my decision to adapt to each individual and, in a few cases to almost abandon the structure altogether, did pay off in other ways. For example, I spent one interview simply listening to the participant. In this case the interviewee's recent experiences in a public sphere had had a huge impact on him, and he used the entire session to 'off-load' his troubles. It was apparent that this interviewee, who had attended a number of TPP courses, had mental health issues (which he himself mentioned), but also aware that the insights gained from such a perspective might be particularly valuable since people with mental health issues were one of the priority target groups for the CVS. Thus I allowed this exchange to take place (for almost 3 hours) and then, having felt we had established rapport and trust, I invited him back to a second interview, in which I was able to prioritise my research questions.

In another situation, a participant arrived with her own agendas and the expectation that I would be able to prompt the CVS to intervene on her behalf in a local charity that was a CVS member organisation. I soon made clear that this was neither the purpose of the interview nor within my or the CVS' powers, and she was content to pursue the interview. And while we did not address many of my questions directly, she (and a few others, in different ways) added to the data by representing a 'negative case' or 'anomaly' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Charmaz, 2000). A 'negative case' is valued in grounded research as a way of disproving the theory (Charmaz, 2000), contributing to maximum variation; in my case, as I am not undertaking grounded research, it is nevertheless a useful way of accounting for the full range of data.

This was valuable to my research because it could be argued that the participants who self-selected were generally positively biased towards the courses, and hence, were keen to talk about their positive experiences. In contrast, three or four of the learners interviewed had not found the courses particularly useful in relation to their aims or expectations – in most cases it was established that this was as a result of a mismatch between the learner's specific aims and the aims of their specific course. However, regarding the participant who had hoped that the CVS would take action against the charity which had upset her, her story not only gave some insights into the less 'civil' and egalitarian practices within the sector (age, gender and other forms of discrimination) but provided me with a 'negative case' to my sample in a different way: this participant represented active and *activist* citizens whose 'learning' had taken place in form of their participation in social movements. As Benjamin Barber (2011) pointed out at a conference, 'citizenship classes' in some form or other did not appeal to this group (see also, Waterhouse and Scott, 2013). Not long after the interview I found out that she was taking part in the local 'Occupy' protest camp. In this way, by having been open to a range of perspectives to emerge in the interviews with learners, and by being very flexible and adapting to each individual learner, the shortfalls and limitations of the learning programmes were able to emerge, despite a potential bias in the interviewee self-selection sampling process that overall favoured positive learning experiences.

The learner interview questions were structured around the three main lines of enquiry, with open-ended questions (Appendix 2a). As an easy start to the interview, learners were asked to describe the courses they had attended, their reason for attending them, their course experiences, and then to reflect upon their outcomes. I was able to follow the topic guide of questions with very few learners in the order in which they were written. Consequently I had to be vigilant when listening to interviewees to ensure that I did ask all the questions – this did not always work out, as I often allowed interviewees to talk more freely. With others, in contrast, the interview only moved along with the help of questions. In these cases it could be said that the lack of engagement could have compromised the depth and quality of the data (Jones, 1985), but there were only one or two interviews which did not directly contribute to the research questions.

One of my aims was to elicit a discussion on active citizenship in an accessible way. The important point was to 'adapt [my] style to the particular person [I was] with', as argued

by Jones (1985:51). This started by asking people whether their course had mentioned the phrase 'active citizen' in some way, and if so what they thought of it. Their responses, and knowing which courses they had attended, gave me some indication whether or not this topic was worth pursuing with this participant. For some, the term was meaningless, which was a finding in itself. Others consistently talked about their 'volunteering' or shared their views on the 'Big Society', which had been very topical in the press at that time (Alcock, 2012). With one learner in this category (who had ignored the term active citizen in the two short TPP sessions she attended) I had a revealing exchange about terminology (see 'Yolande' in Chapter Six), while with two others it felt inappropriate to mention 'active citizenship' at all, to avoid putting them into a 'deficit' position that would have emphasised their lack of knowledge, their cognitive or linguistic abilities.

My strategy to put interviewees at ease and therefore, to make it easier for them to 'open up' to the interviewer, started with the invitation to participate in the research which had included all necessary information on the research and on its main lines of enquiry (appendix 1). This enabled those who volunteered to be interviewed to prepare themselves. Some, indeed, brought along with them course materials, learner portfolios and even their 'active citizen' CVs, to show me their list of involvements. By giving people opportunity to reflect on their experiences as active citizens the interview gave them recognition and contributed to legitimising their active citizen 'persona' and rendering their actions intelligible (Jones, 1985).

Another strategy I used to enhance the participant's positive experiences during the interview was by not only treating them as 'informants' but giving them useful information in the course of the interview, whether on free courses or resources, or relevant local projects or organisations. In addition, I made the point of learning from them on various issues, to elevate them into the 'expert position', to use Benney and Hughes' phrase, wherever possible. Indeed, regardless of how much I asserted my interest in their views about active citizenship, it was clear that many regarded me as 'the expert' on active citizenship. Although Benney and Hughes' notion of the contractual nature of the interview is pertinent, the majority interviewees evidently enjoyed having been able to share their views and experiences, judging from their responses or direct comments of appreciation, and several offered to help beyond the interview.

Interviewing colleagues in the organisation represented a different kind of challenge. This more closely linked to the dilemmas of being an insider-researcher, and will be discussed in the next section. Interviews with external stakeholders presented a different challenge yet again, with the main issues having been the need to protect their own position and the reputation of their organisation. Some were more cautious about what they said, and differentiated between their opinions and the stance of the organisation. For interviewees who had positions in local organisations that could very easily be identified, confidentiality of the interviews was essential. This realisation prompted me to anonymise the case study location. Sensitivity as to what was published arose with one particular local partner and officer who had been interviewed both for this PhD research and for the project evaluation. In the overall orientation and focus of the research, however, the views of the stakeholders, while providing an invaluable insight into aspects of policy development and implementation, were less likely to be given the same degree of exposure as those given by learners and colleagues, as they were more on the periphery than in the centre of the issues, and their main purpose was to provide additional insights from a different perspective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:5).

#### **4.6 Managing the dilemmas of an 'insider-researcher' position**

The insider researcher position entailed both advantages and disadvantages, but one must be aware of easy assumptions. For example, a researcher's existing understanding as an insider - or familiarity, in ethnographic terms - of the culture or the 'field' of study can present an obstacle by blinding her to the object of study. Ethnographers have called for the need of insider-researchers to 'make the familiar strange rather than the strange familiar' (Van Maanen 1995: 20). Through 'defamiliarisation' or, what Bourdieu called, 'objectivation' (Bourdieu, 2003), the researcher 'transforms and questions the implicit values' of the object of study (Atkinson et al, 2003:36). In his 'theory of practice' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) Bourdieu offered a series of analytical concepts to support this process. These 'thinking tools' include the notion of conceptualising, respectively, the social space as a distinct 'field' in which social actors jostle for different forms of power (Thomson, 2008), the everyday practices and internalised cultural dispositions of actors in this field as 'habitus' (Maton, 2008), and unstated and taken-for-granted beliefs as 'doxa' (Grenfell, 2008). Along with these concepts defamiliarisation was helped by relocating my

place of work from the organisation to my home, by reviewing the literature, undertaking data collection and analysis, writing up, and not least, the passage of time. Strathern (1981, cited in Atkinson et al, 2003:40) describes how 'what started as a continuity [of shared worldviews] ended as a disjunction'. By becoming a researcher my role changed from that of a third sector practitioner to that of a knowledge producer (Bourdieu, 2003). At the same time I experienced the 'strangeness' of the new 'field', habitus and doxa of academia, and its inherent dynamics with the third sector, in the field of knowledge production. I would argue, though, that my position remains one of marginality in the one and the other. Each field also set its own parameters for this research project, with its own set of rules, criteria and expectations. Reflexivity, therefore, played an integral part in all aspects and dimensions of my involvement with this research, its object, processes and outcomes from beginning to writing up, and probably beyond.

Another challenge was presented by my proximity and existing relationship to the research participants at the CVS. Here it was important to consider the micropolitics of work relations, and how these affected my new role as researcher, and my colleagues' perceptions of me. So whilst it had been relatively easy for me to undertake interviews with outsiders and to make these empowering, my relationships with colleagues turned out to be far more complicated. In this case, the interviews were underpinned by the micro-politics of not only interpersonal relationships but of differences in positional power within the organisation.

As Freire (1970) and Westheimer and Kahne (2004) emphasised, the views of tutors were likely to have a significant bearing on the outcomes of active citizenship learning – which meant that an examination of their practice formed a core part of this case study. This required a deeper and potentially more critical understanding of their work. Also, their participation in the research was mandatory rather than voluntary, compared with that of 'learner participants'. Amongst the information I wanted to obtain from them was their perspective on active citizenship and how they saw their role as tutor, and what learning strategies and methods they specifically employed. These were challenging questions as they required the tutors to reflect as practitioners (Schoen, 1983) in their interviews with me, and in several informal encounters or email correspondence with me.

For the first time, also, I requested to observe the tutors' classes. The different responses to this request – acquiescence from one and outright refusal from the other (the third, Tutor A had retired by then) – reflected not only my relationships with them but also their respective position in the organisation. While Tutor A had recently retired, Tutor B had taken over her work as coordinator and lead tutor, so her role was permanent, whereas Tutor C was employed only for the duration of the TPP and had no guaranteed job beyond the current contract. All tutors were very committed to their work and enjoyed teaching in this environment and developing courses, but they were also used to working quite independently. In addition, the Take Part tutor (Tutor C) had demanding targets to deliver, which resulted in some considerable pressure, with additional stress arising from staff absences and changes within the small Take Part team. My relationship with this tutor was more strained from having tried previously to coordinate her work, which she had resented as interfering.

There were, then, some underlying tensions and agendas that were played out in more or less subtle ways. Tutor C thus acted as gatekeeper to learners and did not seem to have encouraged their participation in the research, and she refused to allow me to observe her classes, and I even struggled to take part in some civic sessions as a member of the public. I also felt that in her first interview she had tried to prove to me her professional competence by talking almost exclusively about successful parts of her work. However, when I returned to the interview recording a year or more later, I realised that despite this evident attempt at manipulation, she had given me a good insight into her perspective, whatever her agendas had been. This insight was expanded on through a second interview with her which took place at the end of the Take Part project, when our relationship had been improved. Nevertheless, it was obvious and understandable in my interviews with tutors that each, in their own way, seemed to have used the interview as a way of communicating certain messages via me to the Chief Executive in the organisation, since they knew that my research activities were managed by him. The question of trust and confidentiality were, therefore, far more complicated than it might have been for an outsider researcher. And I was often reminded of my duty of care towards all research participants.

I can only guess how colleagues perceived the research, and whether and how their perception of it changed over time. But from start of the interviews I was able to share

with CVS staff some quotes from learners, and since these were either very complimentary or included constructive suggestions (for example on how to reach learners more effectively) colleagues could better appreciate the value of the research, or in some cases at least, that it did not jeopardise their position. The research activities were managed flexibly, and any temporary setbacks created by obstructions, such as those mentioned above did not impede or impoverish the data; rather, these resistances brought to the fore additional issues and led to new insights. Nevertheless, I believe that the benefits of being an insider, in this case at least, far outweighed the disadvantages, and it required a great deal of reflexivity, patience and tenacity in the researcher, as well as good management in the organisation, and support from the university partner.

#### **4.7 Data analysis and representation**

In qualitative research that has adopted a constructivist, non-foundational paradigm, data analysis is undertaken in a hermeneutic perspective (Schwandt, 2000). This means that the researcher constructs a 'reality' from her interpretations of the data provided by the subjects of research, rather than, seeking to reveal an immanent 'truth' in them, as it would be the case in a positivist paradigm. This implies that other researchers, with different backgrounds, could come to very different conclusions (Schutt, 2011). At the same time, questions of validity are not erased by the subjective nature of the interpretation. Quite to the contrary the researcher should evidence validity and integrity in other ways notably by explaining the rationale for her process of interpretation and the choices made in relation to the data selected. First, I describe the data analysis process, using an example of one aspect of the research, and then I turn to the representation of data.

The first step in data analysis process in qualitative research usually involves the organising of data into categories (Schutt, 2011). I used NVivo software as it gives maximum flexibility through 'live' and multiple coding of text segments. Although qualitative approaches are defined by emerging rather than pre-determined categories, the broad outlines of coding categories (or 'nodes', in NVivo) were provided by my research questions - that is, whether the data contributed to the first, second or third areas of inquiry - while the lower levels of nodes were emergent.

My research aimed to answer questions about learning processes, how they were experienced by learners, and with what outcomes. The interviews provided the main source of contextualised data to address these questions. For this reason it was appropriate to use the format of the semi-structured interview, and articulate it around the main three areas of inquiry (i.e., what is active citizenship, how courses enabled or enhanced people's active citizenship, and whether and how they were 'empowered' as a result). As can be expected, the interview data was less than straightforward, not only because I allowed the interview to be shaped by the learners, but also because of the uniqueness of each learner's situation. In this way the interview data of learners could be seen as a collection of 27 individual 'cases' (enhanced by additional data from documentary sources which added valuable learner narratives to the data). As each of these 'learner cases' is intrinsically valuable and unique, they would require a contextualised analysis and representation in the form of 'thick description' (Stake, 2000).

At the same time, I hoped to find commonalities across learners, for example, how certain courses and approaches to active citizenship education could lead to certain outcomes, taking into consideration different learner needs. In order to examine relationships within the narratives provided, I started by organising and tabulating the data and using NVivo to create 'free nodes', and then I copied the data into tables. A resulting proliferation of tables showed trends and consistencies, but these yielded few insights. The main benefit of presenting the data in this way was to show which interviewee had offered definitions of, say, active citizenship, and the distribution of, for example, certain motivations for attending, and the extent of outcomes achieved. It also allowed me to adjust the data collection, using a demographic analysis and the courses that the learners had attended, and to fill any gaps with more targeted interviewing. After these adjustments I felt that the data collected from the learners represented a sufficient, rich and diverse body of text for analysis that would reflect a 'maximum variation' of learner types and experiences. Later on, additional data was shared with me by tutors that supplemented my interview data with valuable collective experiences of democracy learning and participation (citizen case study three in Chapter Nine). Similar adjustments were made with regards to external stakeholders (identified in the course of the analysis) and, of course, organisational data. I was also able to pose new questions to different staff members as they emerged.

The next step in the analysis was to examine relationships within the narratives provided, to cast light on the 'empowerment journeys' of learners. The question of 'empowerment' was a particularly knotty issue but central to my analysis. However, once I had 'tabulated' the data, it had become too fragmented and removed from its context, and I needed to restore the data to its context in order to study the learner stories more closely. To this effect I wrote a summary of each learner transcript, following the same format and incorporating copious quotes in form of footnotes. Compared with both the full-length but unorganised original transcripts and the topically arranged but fragmented presentation of data, the bound copied of learners' 'empowerment journeys' proved to be far more useful for querying the data in depth, and as a quick reference source. A single learner summary (without footnotes) is included in the appendix (appendix 3). Yet in spite of the usefulness of these summaries I still found it necessary to return to the full transcripts. It seemed like an immersion and repeated querying of the data in different ways all contributed, in their different ways, to the interpretation. Additionally, my engagement with the literature elicited new avenues for inquiry within the data.

Spending time on seeing the data (in this example, the empowerment journeys) in their full, complex and rich context strengthened the validity of my interpretation. Rather than inferring tenuous conclusions from weak causalities between a learner's course attendance and experience, it was crucial to consider the range of factors that contributed to learner outcomes. Knowing that I wanted to measure the impact of the courses on active citizenship, learners may have overemphasised the importance of the courses, especially when they had 'enjoyed' them, as many of them had pointed out. I took care, therefore, in the interview and in the analysis of identifying actual outcomes, of distinguishing between 'subjective' empowerment ('feeling empowered') and 'actualised' empowerment. In the latter, the subjective empowerment was followed by (verifiable) actions which were unlikely to have happened without the intervention of the courses. These, then, presented more robust and significant empowerment outcomes in terms of the research topic.

While my findings presented both 'subjective' and actualised empowerment outcomes, the material provided by the latter offered themselves up for 'good stories', to use Fine et al.'s term (2000). A range of such stories were indeed selected to illustrate and present learners' unique journeys in the form of individual (or 'citizen') case studies. These offered

'thick description' (Geertz, 1975) with contextualised information that provided a nuanced analysis and presentation of the learning programmes and their effect on different individuals and groups.

Validity is a central but contested and evolving issue in qualitative research, and often associated with authenticity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 2008; Clark et al, 2012). The Sage Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods (2008, n.p.) states in its entry on 'authenticity' that

'Authenticity involves shifting away from concerns about the reliability and validity of research to concerns about research that is worthwhile and thinking about its impact on members of the culture or community being researched.'

Concerns with validity, then, may still ask questions about the conditions in which informants are sharing their insights, that is, whether it is freely and willingly given, in an open-ended manner that allows for spontaneity (Becker, 1958 cited in Schutt, 2011)), whether informants are deemed trustworthy, and whether the interpretation drawn from the data is internally consistent. When these conditions are fulfilled, the next issue appertains to the representation of data.

According to Fine et al. (2000), the question that feminist and critical social researchers committed to challenging unequal power relations should ask themselves is 'for whom' the research is undertaken. Research becomes a catalyst for critical consciousness (Christians, 2000:148) and requires 'moral discernment', or social responsibility, in the researcher's choices about the kind of data presented to the public. Dilemmas may arise as to whether to represent respondents' accounts and voices truthfully, if this would risk reinforcing existing prejudices and stereotypes. In their view this would defeat the purpose of undertaking feminist or critical social research in the first place, if this could be used by the powerful to legitimate their oppression.

This had implications in several ways in terms of my social responsibility, given the political nature of active citizenship. I will focus here, however, on my responsibility towards the research participants. First and foremost, as an insider researcher, my responsibility was to the organisation and its staff, and to external participants, including learners (and in some

cases, organisations) and officials from other local agencies. Concerning the organisation and its staff, I had to strike a balance between being critical rather than complacent, but without abusing my power as knowledge producer. I acknowledge that I shared the values of the CVS, but tried to examine their implementation more critically, while unpicking the 'doxa' or unstated or underexplored assumptions (for example, that any activities as long as they were intended to be empowering were necessarily so). I was equally aware of flaws in the management of the organisation, but appreciated the constraints and pressures the managers had to juggle, and I believed that they aimed to 'do their best' in the interests of the organisation. Through reflexivity and the analysis of data (and if necessary, returning to the person with more questions), I aimed to be fair to the CVS staff whilst maintaining a critical stance and integrity in my analysis of their work.

As mentioned above, the 'good stories' of personal transformation prompted by the courses in some required the need to present them with contextualised information (Creswell, 2007), which at the same time risked to divulge personal information that could not only identify them to insiders, but also feed stereotypes (Fine et al., 2000). My long experience in the third sector had alerted me to issues of diversity and equality. I had learnt to respect people's potentially complex and sometimes very difficult circumstances (not all of which may be obvious or known). This stance and commitment to equality influenced the way I portrayed people, that is, portraying people with care and respect.

Particular attention was also paid to the representation of underrepresented voices. While it is all too tempting to privilege quotes from respondents with greater abilities of articulation, I wanted to make sure that everybody who presented for interview was treated equally. For this reason I invested much time and effort in transcribing all interviews as completely and accurately as possible. But this was far from easy in the case of interviewees who spoke quietly or with accents. Another dilemma arises in the representation of speech in quotes which show up the educational background of interviewees. However, I decided not to alter or 'improve' them beyond conventional use of grammatical adjustments necessary to comprehension and indicated with brackets.

Finally, as the research was framed by an 'ethic of care' and 'interdependence' of the self' (Christians, 2000), it influenced the choice of data and the interviewees. I rejected one potential interviewee, who had come to meet me, somewhat hesitantly, in an exploratory

way before agreeing an actual interview. He was himself aware that his views may not have fitted with the ethos of the organisation, and indeed, he had come to the attention of colleagues and other learners (as raised in interviews) with his blatantly authoritarian, discriminatory and undemocratic views. After meeting him we both agreed tacitly not to take this further, and I would have refused to interview him, had he requested it. The findings chapters sought to highlight wherever possible how active citizenship was promoted by the CVS and enacted by learners in an ethic of care, with a view to social solidarity and *interdependence* – in other words, a democratic and egalitarian form of active citizenship – but also to draw attention to situations where these aims and values had been compromised.

#### **4.8 Research ethics**

‘Fieldwork is an arena where trust, empathy, rapport and ethics are closely linked’ (Ryen, 2004:235)

‘The foolproof – universal and unshakeably founded – ethical code will never be found’ (Bauman, 1993: 10)

In any research involving human participants, the researcher has to consider the ethical implications for the entire process, from data collection to reporting. Ethically sound research serves several purposes: to lend authenticity and thereby quality to the research data; to ensure the integrity of research participants and avoid any harm that could result from the research to human participants individually and to organisations, and finally, to maintain the reputation of social research and leave the field open to future researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

The current research was undertaken as an open and transparent process, with colleagues and research participants fully informed about my undertaking the research (e.g. as participant observer) and its purpose. One of the challenges in relation to my insider status was that colleagues especially had to be reminded that the research was not ‘Gabi’s PhD’

but jointly owned by and central to the organisation<sup>12</sup>. Apart from CVS staff, all other participants who provided data in the programmes' evaluations agreed for their feedback to be used in research, and those who were interviewed contributed voluntarily and signed consent forms<sup>13</sup>. Information on the research was handed out in hard copy and written in an accessible style (appendix 1) and disseminated inside the organisation as well.

It would be dishonest to pretend that maintaining confidentiality and anonymity as an insider throughout the entire research process was always easy or free of dilemmas. I had to report emerging findings to the CEO as part of regular formal and informal reviews, and his decisions impacted on the direction the research was taking, and where and in what way I could undertake observations and collect data. I was also asked to share raw feedback, which I did on a few occasions, but protecting the anonymity of learners.

I also had to revise my initial assessment of the degree of confidentiality required in relation to research interviews. This was because rather than representing abstract discussions of active citizenship and feedback on course programmes, for example, most learner narratives were accompanied by more or less sensitive but often deeply personal information. These realisations and my social responsibility towards both the organisation and individual participants informed my decision to anonymise the case study as a whole.

As already discussed in the previous section, I had to balance the need for confidentiality with the need to provide information that would contextualise the findings (Creswell, 2007). This stood in tension with the need to provide necessary context for example about someone's learning disability, (mental) health issues, education, articulacy, ethnicity, age, faith, social class or political affiliations - I provided this information only when it added meaningful context necessary to the analysis.

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<sup>12</sup> As time went on, the understanding and awareness about the research seemed to fade. Towards the latter part very few people inside the CVS knew what the research was about or even who I was: four years is a long time in a third sector organisation and many staff come and go, and I visited the organisation less frequently in the later stages of the PhD.

<sup>13</sup> All CVS staff were expected to participate, but the ultimate decision about their participation lay with the Chief Executive and was subject to wider priorities.

A high standard of safeguards was therefore adopted throughout to protect the identities of the organisation and of individual research participants, not only in the presentation of findings but throughout the entire research process.

#### **4.9 My learning as a researcher – reflections on the research process**

My main challenge as a researcher was what Bourdieu called 'objectivation', by which he meant 'objectivizing the [researcher's] subjective relation to the object' (Bourdieu, 2003:282). In my understanding, 'objectivation' involved a constant critical reflection of myself as a researcher, and of my relationship to the object of the research, and to people – especially former colleagues. For example, I had to identify and tackle both positive and negative biases towards former colleagues and managers – or even towards the organisation - as well as understanding that they too might similarly have biased perception towards me as a researcher, and the research project itself. I also had to acknowledge my colleagues' insecurities, expectations or even their indifference towards the research. Thus as I was not on the case study location site very often, colleagues often forget to keep me informed of events, staff changes, or documentation that could have been relevant to the research.

Also, while I was generally trusted as a colleague, this trust needed to be renewed in my new role as researcher. This may have raised some suspicions, as the research was closely managed by the Chief Executive. The limited involvement of other staff also resulted in a low level of ownership by others colleagues in the research, and information was shared primarily with the Chief Executive. In fact, he acted as gatekeeper to information sharing, particularly towards the Board of Trustees. The limitations linked to low ownership became more obvious during the dissemination phase, and after a change of Chief Executive towards the end of the research project, the new postholder was even less aware why the research had been commissioned at all. It also turned out that few trustees had been kept informed about the research progress and its findings, and what it could offer to the organisation. As a result, after the research was completed, neither the new CEO nor the board of trustees requested a presentation of the research findings. What I learnt from this was that for research collaborations it is important to involve different stakeholders throughout the research process, which in this case, however, had been

discouraged by the previous CEO. Clearly, with such a long project as a PhD, this is more challenging than in the case of shorter projects.

### ***Research activities and changes made to the research design***

Probably the most significant change had been the realisation, as part of the data analysis and my ongoing literature review, of the significance of the organisational management and other operational issues connected to the programmes. What I had previously considered to be merely internally contingent issues, specific to this organisation, emerged in fact as having a wider significance and being symptomatic of the New Labour's policies with the third sector and the consequences of managerialism on third sector organisations (Milbourne, 2013). Apart from this addition, my other three research questions remained unchanged in outline, and were able to inform the investigation in three key areas of inquiry.

Flexibility was a key requirement and applied throughout the data collection, in order to reconcile the research activities to the contingencies of the organisation. The CVS was under particular pressure during the delivery of the Take Part Pathfinder. This required both patience and sympathetic understanding of the constraints and stresses that colleagues were under, to balance the needs of the research with those of the organisation.

Another change to the initial design was that I had to abandon the plan to run focus groups with learners, intended to add an element of participation by allowing them to comment on the findings. This was mainly due to a lack of capacity (mine and the organisation's) to organise and support focus groups and to process the data that would emerge. The decision was not just mine but made jointly with the CEO and the supervisor.

### ***Literature review and data analysis***

Apart from managing a vast amount of data (about 200,000 words of interview transcripts) described above, the main challenges for me as a third sector practitioner were the academic conventions in this country, and the scope of the literature. Having been educated in France, and in disciplines that were only partly relevant to this research, I was not only new to the concept of literature reviews, but also my research topic demanded a broad swathe of literature to be reviewed.

With hindsight, had I been more cognisant of the literature before starting this research I would likely have adopted a more focused approach to the research questions.

### ***Negotiating the insider-researcher position***

In the above section I already described some of the challenges flowing from the insider position, and what steps I took to manage these dilemmas. In sum, however, there were distinct advantages which appeared not only during the research (countered by disadvantages) but in terms of the depth of analysis. I was able to compare my insider position with that of a research colleague, who was appointed as an outsider researcher on a similar project in another organisation, and the results turned out to be somewhat surprising. Where one might have expected it to have been easier for the outsider-researcher to take on a critical stance towards her research object, the opposite was in fact the case. Due to my insider-researcher role my understanding of the organisation and its recent history added both breadth and depth to my analysis and particularly to an analysis that could be more critical both towards positive and negative achievements. This was to no small extent enabled by the existing relationship of trust between myself and the organisation, and the support it had provided me with. However, the research was seldom a priority for the CVS compared with their day to day work - not helped by the fact that for most of the time I was mostly 'out of sight, out of mind' as far as the CVS staff were concerned. Some new staff members did not even know who I was. Despite these reservations I enjoyed an overall positive and trusting relationship with the CVS. Even their relative indifference towards the research findings was in some way advantageous as it gave me greater freedom in writing up and publishing my findings (e.g. Recknagel, 2013, Recknagel and Holland, 2013). This highlighted the importance of relationship of mutual respect and trust that predated my research undertaking in this organisation, whilst it would need to be consciously fostered by 'outsider' researchers.

## Chapter 5 Case Study Context

The context of the case study will be presented in two steps: the first section is intended to give a sense of the local context, whilst leaving out key identifying details. Any data given was the most recently available at the time of writing. The second section introduces the case study organisation and partner organisations relevant to this research.

### 5.1 The case study location

The location is a medium-sized, historic cathedral city with a population between 100,000 and 150,000. The city functions as a regional retail, administrative and educational centre, serving the city and its rural hinterland. Although in a peripheral location, geographically, it is well connected to the rest of the UK and to international destinations by road, rail and air.

The resident population is expected to continue to grow by 6% annually (local authority figures, 2012). The demographic profile is balanced in age, similar to national averages. Employment levels are relatively high, and well above both regional and national averages, with 76% of the working age population economically active and unemployment only around 2.3% (compared with a national rate of 7.6%)

The distribution of employment by category shows a bias towards lower level occupations with fewer jobs in the higher categories (executives, management) than in national comparisons. At the same time, the local resident workforce appears better qualified than average, even overqualified or underemployed for the work available locally. This may reflect the lack of career opportunities in the local labour market and indicates that when people settle for a lower level job here (with a high level of people relocating in their thirties or on the cusp of retirement) low wages are offset by the high quality of life (the city came top in a recent national housing survey).

In terms of its institutions, the city's economy is predominantly service-led (89%), with over a third (36%, 2012 data, source: NOMIS) in the category 'public administration, education and health'. Four large employers stand out, the NHS, a top-tier local authority, a national organisation which relocated to the city less than ten years ago, and a

university, and the city has invested in science and technology 'parks' to strengthen these links.

The local university is highly ranked nationally and internationally, and together with numerous international language schools, attracts a relatively significant number of foreign students. The city also has a large further education (FE) college, several private and public schools. The student population is equivalent to about 15% of the total number of residents. The presence of the university and of foreign students engenders a growing cosmopolitan feel in the city, which in turn attracts an increasing number of BME citizens. Although the city has no historical connection to any one particular BME group, the percentage of the resident BME population has risen over the last decade from 2.4% in 2001 to 6.9% in 2011 (Census data), and 10.5% of school children are from Black and Minority Ethnic groups (JSNA 2011). The population is thus very diverse, and the local Islamic centre, for example, commonly caters for people from up to 70 nationalities. The largest ethnic minority is represented by the Chinese-Cantonese, who came to the city to run takeaways and restaurants. The recent migration and population data therefore contradicts the city's portrayal by national media as lacking diversity.

Another relative misconception is that because the city is perceived as relatively well off there is little deprivation. In reality this image belies the existence of some real pockets of disadvantage as defined by the index of multiple deprivation (2010). Importantly, in terms of unemployment, low education, skills and training, low income, poor health and disability the city contains nine Lower-Super-Output-Areas (LSOAs) within the lowest 20% nationally, with two in the lowest 10%. However, overall deprivation is not considered nationally as high or sufficiently intense to warrant major government regeneration or social inclusion funding. As a consequence, such funding may arrive in the city late, if at all. The Sure Start programme, for example, was part of a second phase roll-out to target areas that ranked within the 20% most deprived in the country. In an effort to fill this funding gap local initiatives have arisen by sometimes accessing a mixture of European and local public sector funding in efforts to address deprivation issues within the city. The lack of eligibility for regeneration funds can make it difficult for both public and third sector organisations to access funding, generally, compared with other cities.

The city is also adversely affected by a relatively high cost of living (housing and utilities) which impacts on accessibility for those earning lower than average resident worker incomes. It may be argued that this might be offset by the quality of life in the city and surrounding countryside more generally, but in financial terms, poor accessibility to homes and utilities has a real bearing on the poorest sections in the local population. Like in other parts of the country, housing affordability is a big issue locally.

## **5.2 The CVS**

The Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) is a voluntary sector infrastructure organisation serving the local district area since 1947. It is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. At the time of the research it counted around 30 staff (circa 20 FTE) and a variable number of volunteers. As a membership organisation it is run by its members (or 'council') - currently around 130 signed up local voluntary and community organisations. The CVS shares premises with the Citizens Advice Bureau. It has meeting and training rooms and office space to host other projects and organisations. One of its training rooms has been set up as an IT training suite.

The purpose of the CVS is to 'support and promote local voluntary action, to encourage cooperation with the public and private sectors to help develop a more just and caring society' (CVS mission statement). It does so through a range of functions and services: the first is 'to develop and support local voluntary and community action through providing direct support, learning and information, advice and guidance to local organisations'. This includes newsletters and Members Services. Secondly, it 'engages people to become volunteers and active citizens and to have a voice', through its Volunteer Centre and Learning and Development department. Thirdly, it 'connects' by 'building and strengthening networking and collaboration, and brokering support within the local voluntary sector and as a partner with the public and private sectors'. Its fourth function is to 'influence' by 'consulting and listening to member organisations and engaging with local and wider policy issues to enable effective representation of the interests of the sector' (CVS annual report, 2011-12, based on CVS functions formulated by the National Association of Voluntary Action, NAVCA).

The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees made up mainly by representatives of local member organisations. A small senior management team is headed by the CEO, and reports quarterly to the management board. The composition of the board was recently reviewed in order to bring more external expertise to help it face the current challenges arising from Coalition government policy and changes made to the funding regimes of infrastructure services (more of which below).

The main areas of activity of the CVS are run by its Volunteer Centre, its Members Services, a small Learning Department, various project work, and core staff. Its **Volunteer Centre** offers not only a brokerage service, using the national Do-It database, but is amongst a small number of Volunteer Centres able to offer a face to face advice service, provided by a team of advisors (who are also volunteers). This enhanced service is of benefit not only to people unsure about where to volunteer or what they could offer, but allows the CVS to be tuned into local volunteering trends, and the support needs of potential volunteers. Over 300 local volunteer-involving organisations are signed up to the Volunteer Centre, and, through their regular contacts with the Centre to advertise their opportunities, they receive advice on good volunteering practice, including equality and diversity in volunteering. The Volunteer Centre has developed nationally recognised expertise in promoting inclusive and supported volunteering, and aims to make volunteering accessible for everyone. It runs several projects which provide direct support to people. Its staff also run a weekly radio show with contributions from around its members and users, giving people the opportunity to tell stories and promote their activities (for example, Speaking Up learners spoke about their experiences of a visit to Parliament, and the course in general, the transcript of which was used in the research data).

Part of the capacity building in local organisations is undertaken by the **Learning and Development department**. Many years ago this was confined to organisational training to help people in the sector run and manage charities and volunteers, recruit trustees and comply with legislation, but from the early 2000s this gradually expanded into a wider range of courses, often kick-started by project work. Now, aside from a training programme for the local sector it offers personal development and IT courses. The Speaking Up course, for example, started with a need identified by the learning disability advocacy project and was soon then offered to mental health service users and the carer

support group. Together with European Grundtvig Adult Learning projects, active citizenship learning developed out of this project-based activity. Regarding the advocacy projects, the learning disability user group had become independent and moved out of the CVS (and has since disbanded), while the mental health service user group and carer support have been absorbed by partnership consortia; even though they are still based at the CVS, its staff are no longer employed by it directly.

In order to be able to offer free training to groups and individuals the CVS frequently obtained project funding, sometimes combining training with advice and support for volunteering. But its funding has become (temporarily) more sustainable after having developed accredited courses and nationally-recognised qualifications. It is now able to draw down mainstream post-16 funding which allows it to offer free training on a number of courses, both delivered at the CVS or in outreach. Another breakthrough was becoming a franchise partner of the local Further Education (FE) college. This was not an easy relationship to begin with but it matured over the years and the CVS is now the College's only external franchise partner, helping it to achieve community learning targets with more excluded groups. Most Speaking Up learners thus are enrolled as College learners. More recently, the funding per learner per unit has, however, been decreased. Further funding is accessed from Adult Community Learning, the Skills Funding Agency and other bodies.

However, delivering accredited courses and being a franchise partner comes with additional requirements, both having to regularly adapt courses to new criteria and priorities, to comply with monitoring requirements, submit learner portfolios for verification, and keep up with quality standards. This means that the CVS currently employs more permanent administrative than tutor staff. However, the Lead Tutor also supervises external trainers, paid and voluntary, who deliver specific learning programmes (e.g. courses for organisations or project work). As funding for adult learning has been becoming tighter, the Learning and Development department has had to explore all options and has more recently run courses for unemployed people, funded by the Department for Work and Pension, for instance. This allows it to offer free training to people from disadvantaged groups, particularly, and to offer subsidised courses open to all.

The core functions of the CVS are provided by a small number of core staff: a part time (one day a week) Member Services Officer, a Finance Manager (offering payroll to organisations), an Office Manager who provides the newsletter and information service, and a Chief Executive Officer. The bulk of the time of the CEO is taken up with strategic representation of the sector on local strategic partnerships and collaboration within the sector. Up to recently the CVS had a Business and Development Manager whose main role was to secure funding, but under current financial constraints this role had to be merged with that of the CEO. The Volunteer Centre Coordinator is also a permanent staff member, as are the reception and administration teams. It has to be pointed out, however, that the statutory grants that the CVS receives has for many years now been totally insufficient to cover its core functions: most activities such as the Learning and Development department do break even, and fees from membership, training and hiring out meeting rooms and office space bring in a modest income, but again, are unable to contribute significantly to CVS core costs.

### ***Funding situation***

The CVS's annual turnover has risen in the early 2000s from around £125,000 in 1999 to £1 million within a few years, and its latest accounts (at the time of writing) showed an income of £1.3m. Of this, only 43% went to services and support, and less than £300,000 were unrestricted funds. A significant chunk of the income was for partnership work, and thus, shared with other organisations. The high turnover was made possible through the CVS accessing a very wide variety of funding sources, including European funding (e.g. ESF), central government funding, and much of it in partnership. The proportion of 'grant' support from the local authorities has always been very low, representing only a tiny proportion of its income (in contrast with many other CVS in the county whose turnover of was, in some cases, made up entirely by statutory grants). As explained above, the organisation relies heavily on project funding and management fees for its core staff and basic CVS functions. Over recent years grants from statutory agencies have decreased, which has resulted in some activities having to be discontinued or funded alternatively. The latter has been the case for a supported volunteering project that provides administrative support on four days a week and meaningful volunteering for people with support needs, and thus, time off for carers, as well as administrative services. The project is now funded out of CVS reserves.

One key asset is the contribution in kind from the district authority in the form of the building which houses the CVS (and the CAB). This used to be the council's tax office before being relocated to the main council offices, and the building, which is in a central location, was made available to the CVS and the CAB rate and rent-free since 1996, approximately.

The CVS had been able to benefit from New Labour's support for infrastructure organisations, usually in partnership with other CVS and third sector bodies in the county or beyond. But, as documented elsewhere (Milbourne, 2013; Knight, 2013), this type of support has had drawbacks. As pointed out above, the Chief Executive's working hours became increasingly dedicated to strategic partnership commitments on committees around the city. Whilst this representative function formed, of course, an key part of a CVS' chief officer's role, it arguably left a management void in the organisation. Over recent years, several key roles that had been vital to the internal management of the organisation and its 'departments' (e.g. Volunteer Centre Manager, Training Manager, Business Development Manager) were made redundant, as part of efficiency measures. This left a skeletal team of non-specialist operational managers to administer and manage a wide and demanding range of projects. More recent changes included the departure, at the end of 2013, of the long standing Chief Executive, who had commissioned and overseen this research for over three years, and a radical reorganisation of the management structure in the wake of the new appointment of a new Chief Executive (2014).

Competition for funding has – and continues to be- intensified, as the entire funding landscape undergoes substantial changes and under the effect of 'austerity' measures. Firstly, public sector service level agreements have made way to every larger scale contracts, and the local voluntary sector was no longer regarded as the preferred provider, but had to compete with private sector companies. Public authorities bundled together pieces of work that were previously contracted out to individual organisations or small consortia, moving from district-level delivery to county-wide delivery, and from multiple to single contracts. The service user participation and engagement work in learning disability, mental health, carers and older people was an example, as, in 2010 it was turned into a single engagement contract by the local authority, requiring the smaller VCOs involved to

divide the work up between them. As a direct, the CVS not only holds fewer funds for its own staff but has also 'lost' some of its long-term staff, who, despite still being hosted at the CVS premises are now being employed by external organisations and partnerships. In other words, the voluntary and community sector is being fundamentally restructured, which has been regarded as both a threat and an opportunity (see Milbourne, 2013; Knight, 2013).

Another change to this CVS had been prompted by the Coalition government's aim 'to rationalise and transform the support services which [local infrastructure organisations] provide to front line civil society organisations', 'so they are well-led, influential, responsive, efficient, and less reliant on statutory or Lottery funding' (Cabinet Office, 2012). At the time of writing this work was not yet fully completed but it looked likely to result in this CVS leaving the long-term partnership it had with the other CVS and Volunteer Centres in the county, in favour of joining a new alliance of different types of local infrastructure bodies. This major shake-up in the organisation of local voluntary sector infrastructure meant that CVS were now potentially competing with each other for infrastructure contracts. This programme of rationalising the sector brought about mergers in many parts of England (see Alcock, 2010, on these trends in the sector).

In this broader context, 'cutting edge' project work such as that around active citizenship has played a significant role in the expansion of the CVS, including beyond mere financial considerations. Even some of the more unusual project work allowed the CVS to develop new areas of expertise, which in turn has led to new funding streams. The work with the European Commission may serve as an example: whilst the grants never covered the work in its entirety it introduced new topics (including active citizenship) into the organisation, created new partnerships, and these were used with other funders (including central government), as well as increasing chances to access further EU funds.

There is an inherent question, of course, encapsulated in the notion of 'mission drift' (Milbourne, 2013), and the CVS has often been accused in the past of engaging in project work for which the rationale was not evident in the eyes of its members or even its own trustees (interview with CEO, 2012). However, without such funding 'acrobatics' and certain risk-taking the CVS would almost certainly not have been able, for many years now, to sustain the provide the organisation at a viable and dynamic level, let alone provide the

core staff needed for the basic infrastructure services for which it was set up. The constantly changing and always unstable and short-term funding regime has, for some time, presented a real challenge, which so far the CVS was able to counter by being creative, innovative, flexible, and prepared to take risks. On the other hand, this has led to a fast turnover of project work and staff, and the frantic pace of change - accompanied by growing requirements on accountability and management – may have exposed the organisation to managerialism at the expense of learning from such projects or allowing new practices to be embedded with greater long-term benefit.

These are some of the challenges that the subsequent analyses will need to consider and reflect upon.

### **5.3 Statutory and voluntary and community sector partners**

The programmes that were being investigated involved partner organisations, of which some staff also contributed directly to the research.

Starting with the ALAC programme, the main partner with a direct involvement in the activities of the ALAC hub was Social Services (now, Adult Services) which, in this two-tier local government authority, form part of the County Council. This particular Social Services manager had been very interested in the involvement of carers, and valued the support that the CVS gave to carers for more meaningful involvement. This interest was supported by the policy drivers for user involvement in health and social care services, but it nevertheless took the commitment of this particular manager to persuade the service that this was worth supporting.

The ALAC funding was seen as a great opportunity, since it allowed the Speaking Up courses to be made available to service user and carer groups across the county, rather than mainly in the city. Equally, Social Services gradually warmed to the idea of ‘joining up’ services with health, as encouraged under New Labour, which, in the area of user involvement, led to the **Learning to Involve** project. This provided continuation funding after ALAC. Run in joint partnership with, on the health side, the Foundation Hospital Trust, the Partnership Trust, and the Primary Care Trust (PCT), and in Social (Adult) Care, the local authority, the project developed good practice for user and carer involvement.

The main activities included the training of users and carers and the facilitation of training activities for health and social care staff by users and carers, which involved users and carers. Other activities included the production of awareness-raising material, e.g. training videos, and good practice guidelines. The project was funded by the organisations' staff training budgets, and paid for the training and development work undertaken by the CVS tutor and a counterpart based in the statutory services, who promoted the opportunities for the involvement of service users and carers. This project ran for several years until 2010, by which time the contribution by the health partners had already diminished, and when County Council funding was withdrawn.

In the area of Social/Adult Services, another key partner in the Council – although less directly involved in ALAC – was the Learning Disability Service. Here, the link to the CVS was facilitated by the fact that the Development Manager for Learning Disability had previously held the post of advocacy worker at the CVS. She maintained close links to the different user groups in the voluntary and community sector, and is an example of 'cross-boundary' careers which enable interesting links and power transfers between sectors (Lewis, 2008; Barnes and Prior, 2008).

Associated with Learning Disability user involvement has been the Learning Disability Partnership Board, which was set up under New Labour's Valuing People (DoH, 2001) strategy. This too brought together managers from health and adult care agencies, alongside user representatives, their families and carers. Some of the experiences with the partnership board are related in a citizen case study in Chapter Nine (section 9.2.)

Another direct partner with both ALAC and the Take Part Pathfinder was a large Sure Start Children Centre. This organisation actually covered two Children Centres in deprived areas of the city, and maintained close relationships with the CVS both at strategic and operational levels. The CVS CEO chaired the Sure Start Partnership Board for many years. The first and main point of contact for Speaking Up courses (when I was the ALAC coordinator) had been the centre's Parent Forum Coordinator. She had welcomed the opportunity for learning support for the parents, and its first learner group gave an unusual and memorable group presentation at an ALAC conference. Subsequently, even though there were several staff changes within the Centre, these links continued and strengthened, and the learning was opened up to other parents attending the Centre. The

impact of this will be explored in a specific citizen case study (section 9.3) in Chapter Nine, with an interview of one of the Children Centre's staff, who herself had come up through the Parent Forum.

As mentioned, the city has a two tier administration: in addition to the County Council, it has a City Council. The CVS had worked particularly with the city's Engagement and Inclusion Officer, and had piloted Speaking Up in a joint neighbourhood forum project; but the collaboration became more significant in the context of the Take Part Pathfinder. This required the signing up of both local authorities to the local Pathfinder, which in this case was led by the CVS (in several other instances the Pathfinders were Local authority-led). The City Council's political leadership changed a few times, and when 'Communities in Control' was published and the 'Duty to Involve' became law, the council had a Labour majority. Despite its political alignment with the national government, the local Labour councillors showed, however, little enthusiasm for community empowerment. Thereafter, the Council held a Liberal Democrat majority for two years – which did support community engagement - before reverting to a Labour majority again. The local Liberal Democrat leader was one of the contributors at the Take Part launch conference, at which one of the active citizens publicly shamed the council about the appalling way she had been treated by officers – this is mentioned in the first citizen case study of Chapter 9 (section 9.1.). Within the City Council the Take Part team involved the Tenant and Leaseholder Committee in a group session.

Meanwhile, the Engagement and Involvement Officer supported the Take Part Pathfinder in kind by facilitating contacts within the council, and arranging visits for Take Part learners and joining in some of the learning activities. Its biggest role was in form of a taster session on How to Become a Councillor, run jointly with CVS, but mainly using the Council's resources (see a discussion on impact in Chapter Seven, section 7.2.2.). This contrasted with the County Council's involvement which was more nominal as a steering group member, but their active contribution was hampered by the fact that, first, the Pathfinder was concentrated on the city, rather than the county, and no longer focused on service user involvement, but active participation in general. Secondly, the Pathfinder coincided with a bid for local government reorganisation, with the two authorities (under opposing political leaderships) competing for unitary status, and the county having called for a judicial review of the city's unitary bid. This situation made direct collaboration between

officers (other than on the steering group) particularly difficult during that time. Incidentally, neither unitary bid succeeded as the Coalition government blocked this reorganisation in May 2010. However, the CVS Pathfinder team did work with the Council's school governor support unit.

Other organisations who became involved in the Take Part Pathfinder were the Constabulary, the Policy Authority (for the delivery of taster sessions for the Member of the Police Authority, which has since been replaced by an elected Police Commissioner), and the Magistrates Court and Association. The relationship with the latter had been a new partnership for the CVS and resulted in a very successful collaboration on taster sessions (Chapter Seven, section 7.2.2).

The CVS also worked with a number of voluntary sector organisations, mainly to deliver active citizenship learning, under the Take Part Pathfinder and in the form of Speaking Up to groups. One example of this kind of collaboration will be given, which illustrates how the CVS how is able to reach a wide range of groups through its networks within the sector. As mentioned in the introduction on the city, one of the larger minority ethnic groups is the Chinese community. Because of the relatively isolated and intense nature of their work within the confines of their restaurant premises, the first generation Chinese migrants did not find time, or did not have the inclination, to integrate into the local English community, so many had very low levels of English language on retirement. This caused great barriers to accessing their basic citizenship rights and curtailed their independence. The CVS had, several years ago, identified the need for ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and pioneered outreach lessons in the city, so there had already been links. Once they had retired the Chinese elders had more free time and one particular community project hosted a drop-in session to the Chinese, on some days, and to Muslim women, on another. The project's aim was not only to provide social opportunities, mentoring and support, but also to link up these BME groups with statutory services. For this purpose the CVS was asked to deliver Speaking Up, repeatedly, to the groups, including to the Chinese, with support from the drop-in volunteers in terms of translation. Three of the beneficiaries of this training responded to the call for participants and are cited in this research.

Rather than mentioning any specific groups, the point to make here is that through its networks, both with public and voluntary sector groups, the CVS has been able to offer direct training and development to a range of groups – in addition to organisational support to voluntary and community groups– which in turn strengthens its networks, helps to identify need, supports citizens voice and contributes to community development. All this is done in partnership with local organisations, who often contribute resources, mostly in kind, to these activities.

## Chapter 6 Perspectives on Active Citizenship

This chapter sets out to examine perspectives of active citizenship under New Labour's government funded programmes - as interpreted by the CVS and perceived by the learners involved in these programmes. The literature review has highlighted a range of different conceptualisations of active citizenship and, notably, the tensions created between, on the one hand, the instrumental approaches of governments hoping to promote the 'good' and active citizens that help them achieve their policies and, on the other, the belief shared by particular political theorists (especially those of a civic republican persuasion) that a healthy modern democracy requires active citizens that are not only actively but also critically engaged in public affairs.

This first findings chapter explores the range of perspectives held by third sector practitioners and adult learners in response to the two government programmes of active citizenship learning being investigated. The aim is to examine the social construction of the meanings given to active citizenship, the processes that lead to these meanings, and their consequences for the practice of active citizenship, in this context. The previous chapters have shown the term of active citizenship as being inherently vague and 'slippery', so this chapter seeks to explore to what extent practitioners and adult learners have tried to understand the term, questioned the government's take and invested it with their own reinterpretation to suit their own ends; or whether, in contrast, they have more or less uncritically reproduced the 'top-down' image and intentions of government. In other words, how successful have the state's attempts been at 'activating' and 'responsibilising' citizens (Clarke, 2005) to their purposes, in this specific context?

The first chapter starts by exploring these perspectives and contrasts them with relevant conceptualisations extracted from the literature. The most pertinent ones to have emerged in social policies of active citizenship in the UK since the 1990s (see Chapter Three) bore the hallmarks, variously, of neo-liberalism with an emphasis on responsibilisation, civic republicanism, focusing on democratic participation, and communitarianism, combining a responsibilisation with a 'moralising' agenda, emphasising the 'good' citizen active mainly within local communities. These competed with alternative conceptions which challenged some of the more traditional views: the first was based on a

feminist model that advocates a broad and inclusive model of active citizenship through community development (Lister, 1997; 1998) and seeks to recognise and enhance people's agency by enhancing their sense of citizen identity and belonging. The second represents a radical outlook, rooted in the social purpose tradition of adult education and community development, which aims to educate people for political awareness and critical engagement within a social justice agenda. Both the government's perspectives<sup>14</sup> and the competing perspectives claim to 'empower' people although, as has been shown in the literature review, this too is an essentially contested concept. Hence, the question of 'empowerment' in relation to active citizenship learning will provide the focus for the subsequent findings chapters.

## **6.1 The CVS perspective on Active Citizenship**

This section considers the approach taken by the CVS and how it reconciled the government perspectives with its own aims and values, and the compromises it struck in negotiating the potential tensions between the two. It will show how the CVS presented active citizenship to its audiences and highlight some of the differing conceptualisations expressed by individual project tutors.

The question centres on the degree to which the CVS was able to use state-funded active citizenship learning programmes in ways that were congruent with its own values and agendas. In other words, how prescriptive and restrictive were these programmes? And what were the CVS' own agendas towards active citizenship? And has its approach shaped the views, consciousnesses and behaviours of its adult learners, or did the latter counterpoise their own? Put differently, the chapter examines whether the CVS, wittingly or unwittingly, acted as a 'third arm of the state' by 'activating' and 'responsibilising' people as active citizens, or whether the organisation used these programmes to offer alternative, competing and 'empowering' perspectives that challenged the government's dominant agenda (Allen, 1997)?

Subsequent chapters will consider the question of empowerment more specifically, as part of a more in-depth examination of the learning processes and outcomes, while this

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<sup>14</sup> The primary focus here is on New Labour's conceptualisations, although some comments during the research interviews were also made on the coalition government's 'Big Society' concept.

chapter starts with unravelling the CVS perspective(s). This will be followed by the views of the adult learners who participated in these programmes.

It makes sense to consider the two active citizenship programmes - ALAC and the Pathfinder - in chronological order, in order to highlight the shifts and differences between them. As shown in Chapter Three, while both programmes drew on the same overarching policy framework, they differed in terms of emphasis and operational aspects, such as their size and political weight, management, and their timing in New Labour's time in office.

The context chapter presented the aims of the CVS. The Chief Executive (interviewed in 2012) described how, in his view, 'active citizenship' was a fitting concept to help the organisation achieve its overall purpose and mission:

'We took up the opportunity of active citizenship enthusiastically because we feel that they contribute to the core work of the organisation our Volunteer Centre, our training department, our member organisation – reflected in [the] ALAC principles, which gave us a framework within which to define and develop our activities.' (CEO, 2012)

As a brief reminder, the 'ALAC principles' were those defined in the ALAC learning framework (Take Part Network, 2006) which had framed active citizenship in a community development perspective with an emphasis on critically active and engaged citizens, promoting democratic participation, social justice, and equality and diversity. Whilst this had been endorsed by the government of the time, this emphasis reflected the views of the third sector practitioners involved, rather than that of government itself. In terms of its influence, it could have been ignored by government, but, as the subsequent TPP showed, DCLG actually returned to the framework by having asked the independent Take Part Network to coach other local Pathfinders in the use and implementation of the framework. Furthermore, the CEO also pointed out that

'[the] CVS is an organisation based on principles about engagement and empowerment. We have our strap line, 'bring together the public-private and

voluntary sectors to make a difference’, and we had lots of experience over many years of feeling that our work makes a difference to people's lives.’ (CEO 2012)

The reference to the collaborative aims of the CVS provided an overarching theme for its approach – as the implementation of the ALAC programme will illustrate. Furthermore, Chapter Ten will consider in more detail how the CVS felt that the programmes gave it an edge that set it apart from other organisations in the vicinity and beyond, and that its explicit and pro-active engagement with the active citizenship agenda helped it not only develop a specialism and expertise in adult learning but also to continue on its previously developed path in supporting and enabling user involvement.

### **6.1.1 ‘Active Learning for Active Citizenship’ at the CVS**

As Chapter Three has shown, the ALAC programme had started as a small pilot in the Civil Renewal Unit (CRU) at the Home Office in 2004 under David Blunkett, and involved the CVS from early 2005. Following Blunkett’s resignation at the end of 2004, the ALAC programme was moved, as part of the CRU, to the new Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The pilot had been developed by an academic (Val Woodward) who included Freirean-style community development principles in its outlook. Endorsed by the civil servants, the DCLG managed the programme and commissioned the ALAC hubs, based on Woodward’s recommendations (Woodward, 2004). This meant that within the ALAC programme, there was ample scope for community-based approaches to be developed. Moreover, during the time of departmental and ministerial transitions the DCLG’s management of this small pilot was rather ‘light touch’, while the Department’s new policies (initially under the helm of David Miliband, then Ruth Kelly) were still being formulated.

One key feature of the ALAC programme - which turned out to be a major advantage for all the appointed active citizen ‘hubs’ - had been the stated aim that it was to capture the existing learning practices for active citizenship learning in community-based learning contexts. Thus, it had come at a good time for the CVS to use this opportunity and the funding to roll out and expand its relatively new Speaking Up provision. The ALAC contract itself was a simple agreement and aimed for the hubs to contribute to the future learning framework by recording and evaluating their approaches with their existing user groups.

For the CVS this involved service users and carers, but the involvement of new learner groups was encouraged too.

As the CVS's Speaking Up course publicity had described, Speaking Up had grown out of the activity of advocacy and user groups that were more or less linked to the government's user involvement and participation agendas:

'[The] CVS created the accredited 'Speaking Up' course in response to a request from the local advocacy service user group for people with learning disabilities. Its aim is to train service users to make them more effective in meetings, by raising their confidence, and awareness of the issues that concern them and enable them to communicate these effectively and appropriately. [...]

The Home Office funding allowed the 'Speaking Up' course to be rolled out to other user groups in [location names] for 18 months up to March 2006. The course was developed and delivered in partnership with voluntary and community groups. Learners included carers, mental health service users, people with physical and sensory disabilities and Sure Start parents.' (Speaking Up flyer, CVS)

The lead tutor and development worker of ALAC (Tutor A, who retired in 2010) explained her role as follows:

'The basis of my work at [the CVS] was to empower carers and people who use services, mainly health or social care services, empower them to get involved and have an impact on the way those services were provided by speaking up on their own experiences and to develop a better understanding between the people who use the services and the people who provide the services.' (CVS Tutor A)

This involved developing people's confidence and effectiveness to speak up in a range of situations, to facilitate their exploration of common issues as service users and carers and to channel this into both individual and collective action. By acting as an intermediary between learners and service providers, the CVS built on its partnership with providers in health and social care and worked across the city to develop involvement opportunities for these target groups, linked to government agendas for service user empowerment and

involvement (see Chapter Three). The Speaking Up courses and involvement opportunities aimed to empower service users both individually, so they could speak up at home and with professionals, as well as collectively, by providing opportunities for group engagement with service providers. Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine will consider these outcomes, illustrated by individual case studies of learners.

It is important to note that the CVS conception was not limited to the notion of the 'participatory' citizen (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Unlike Westheimer and Kahne's definition, the term participation was viewed by the CVS as a way of collectively addressing social justice and substantiating people's rights as users of public services. The purpose was to enhance service users' critical awareness, so they would be able to 'speak up' on their own issues and agendas, and feel confident enough to assert their rights and views towards anybody in authority. This included a process of experiencing collective action, with Speaking Up learners encouraged to join user forums or engagement opportunities facilitated by the CVS.

Interestingly, even though the programme bore the heading of 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' the term 'active citizenship' was not directly applied as a label for ALAC courses, which continued with their Speaking Up or 'Making Your Voice Heard' titles and contents. The courses were simply presented under the 'banner' of 'Active Learning for Active Citizenship' for the duration of the programme, but not beyond. There was, therefore, no perceived need for an internal discussion within the delivery team about the significance and implications of 'active citizenship'. At the same time the terms 'service users' and 'carers' - rather than 'active citizens' - were maintained and remained unchallenged.

So, whilst the CVS was not required to explicitly define active citizenship under ALAC, it did so rather implicitly by self-identifying as an ALAC pilot and viewing its service users as active citizens. At the same time it was important to the CVS to emphasise that its role was to support and 'empower' people in disadvantaged situations to enable them to exercise voice, 'choice' ('choice' was particularly important for people with learning disabilities, as the second citizen case study in Chapter Nine will show) and control in relation to public service providers.

As already noted above, the ALAC agreement's targets and outcomes with DCLG were not very prescriptive, once the CVS proposal for delivery had been accepted. It mainly stipulated that around 130 learners were to be trained over a period of eighteen months, in addition to promoting the ALAC approach in the region – hence the term of an 'ALAC hub'. This involved quarterly sub-regional meetings with interested parties from the voluntary and the public sector. In addition, another part of my work as ALAC project coordinator involved national liaison and exchange of practice with the other ALAC hubs, which overlapped with the national evaluation undertaken in a community development style by Goldsmiths College (Mayo and Rooke, 2006). The combined work of the hubs resulted in the formulation of the Take Part Learning Framework (Take Part Network, 2006).

In conclusion it would appear that the ALAC experience was, at least for the CVS, positive overall, since the programme had helped it advance its own agenda and raised its profile, all the while allowing it to contribute to the development of its previously started activities. In the unique situation amongst ALAC hubs, the CVS' ALAC work probably owed more to New Labour's user involvement agenda in health and social care than to the Civil Renewal Agenda, and to the disability movements that had contributed to New Labour's Health and Social Care reform (Newman, 2011) - although Chapter Three had shown that the two were in fact complementary and flowed from the same political philosophy.

### **6.1.2 Take Part Pathfinder: tensions over competing concepts of 'active citizenship'**

The Take Part Pathfinder programme was an entirely different matter. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Take Part programme was aligned to DCLG's 2008 Community Empowerment agenda, as part of New Labour's local government modernisation. This was intended to make local services more responsive and accountable to citizens through a 'double devolution' transfer of power from central to local government and then on to citizens and communities (Miliband, 2006). The aim of active citizens was not only to hold local services to account but also to participate more proactively in governance and in the delivery of public services.

The emphasis on local governance represented a significant change of focus from ALAC, as it placed entirely new demands on the local Pathfinders. One particular challenge were the targets to deliver learning programmes on ‘civic activism’ and ‘community leadership’. What DCLG meant by ‘civic activism’ was not very clear to me, as Take Part coordinator, nor to my colleagues, so DCLG provided an explanatory list of 17 civic roles – including magistrates, school governors, councillors, and numerous roles in the justice system. DCLG’s new civic focus was however challenged by the former ALAC hubs who had been invited to deliver Phase 1 of the programme, arguing that the Take Part Learning Framework, on which this new pilot was supposedly based (DCLG, 2008a), had been about ‘civil’ (i.e. ‘community’) involvement, and that this was a key element of the Take Part approach to inclusive engagement of disadvantaged learners. The emphasis on civic programmes and targets was maintained by DCLG, however, stressing that it wanted to see a ‘progression’ of active citizens from civil to (more demanding) civic roles. The result of this negotiation was that, while the community-based practitioners in Take Part could continue to promote ‘civil’ involvement, they also had to contribute to delivering civic outcomes, which provided the ultimate measure of the programme’s success.

Moreover, the TPP programme was given a much higher profile within government, and had far more demanding targets. As the CEO explained, the targets that the CVS had devised in its initial submission to DCLG were substantially increased by the latter. In fact, the CVS ended up with having the highest targets of all the Take Part Pathfinders, possibly because its scope had not been restricted to disadvantaged target groups or neighbourhoods, unlike that of most other Pathfinders<sup>15</sup>. Nonetheless, these managerial programme constraints had direct implications for how the CVS approached the programme, as well as for what it included in its conceptualisation of active citizenship.

The programme required the appointment of a dedicated project team, and especially a project tutor (Tutor C). Her role was to develop and deliver the bulk of the learning provision appropriate to the Pathfinder, with an emphasis on civic roles and community leadership, and to increase people’s ‘feelings of influence on local decisions that affect them’ (Local Area Agreement National Indicator 4). This required the CVS to revise, not its

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<sup>15</sup> The Pathfinder’s general emphasis appeared to be raising levels of participation of disadvantaged groups or areas. The priorities of some of the Pathfinders were identified by the Regional Government Offices. Those who had been working in very deprived areas in the country did, however, struggle to engage local people in the programme priority areas (personal communication with Pathfinder staff – these difficulties were not reflected in the national evaluation report).

definition of active citizenship (the general notion of ‘participation and voice’ remained valid), but how it was to present the concept to its potential target learners.

To this end the project team adapted a diagram previously developed by another Volunteer Centre that had already operated as an ‘active citizenship hub’, and that included civic roles.



With this diagram the CVS tried to present a ‘continuum of involvement’ (in the words of the CVS CEO) ranging from informal, community based, to more formal and civic roles. The aim of this diagram was to allow learners to identify with at least one of the categories, and therefore the concept had to be easy to understand, as well as look accessible and engaging. The diagram was used widely on the majority of Take Part publicity and even as a training tool, particularly in ‘Take Part taster sessions’, to encourage learners to discuss their existing involvements and explore other roles. This, then, could facilitate a ‘progression’ from ‘civil’ and community roles towards the ‘civic’ roles demanded by the programme.

To complement the diagram, the Pathfinder team prepared a How-to Guide entitled, ‘Are you an Active Citizen?’ as part of a series of online and printed guides that provided information on a range of civic roles. This generic guide went on to explain the CVS interpretation of active citizenship, in the context of the TPP programme:

‘[c]itizens have more power than they realise. As an Active Citizen you can have a say on new developments and how things are run. This guide explains how you can get involved’.

‘Active Citizenship is about: taking an interest in your community; having your say as a resident; taking part in decisions that affect you. Above all it’s about ordinary people making things happen. You can:

- **Keep it small and local** and help your neighbours or join a community group.
- **Take direct action** campaign and lobby the council or other government agencies to change or improve services.
- **Advise and influence the system** through consultations and questionnaires.
- **Give your time** to support a local charity or public service
- **Take a lead in your community** and get involved in making decisions in your local school, council or courtroom.’ (emphasis in the original)

These categories of potential action are evidently more closely aligned with both the government’s and the Pathfinder’s priorities, but do not rule out a broader reading either. And they seem to blur the distinction between civil and civic activism, to promote the ‘spectrum of involvement’.

Taking inspiration from the literature, however, this diagram undeniably represented a truncated image of active citizenship, notably by omitting democratic and political forms of participation, or individual forms participation such as ethical consumerism<sup>16</sup>. This did not prevent the CVS from promoting participation in democratic processes with some learner groups, though, especially prior to the general elections in 2010, and with a How-to Guide on voting/electoral registration. Other Pathfinders had their own expertise in political literacy, but the CVS invited the Parliamentary Outreach programme, which had appointed trainers in each region, to deliver sessions locally. Some were delivered to voluntary groups and others to Speaking Up learner groups (the impact of this is described in the third citizen case study in Chapter Nine). Consequently, one of the categories could have been ‘voter’ for example, but was omitted, partly to avoid visually overcrowding the diagram, and partly to avoid giving the impression that Take Part was about ‘citizenship education’ which might have deterred potential learners. Keeping the terms relevant to the assumed interests of its main learner groups within the sector was a key priority for the CVS, and accessibility in terms of language was a deliberate strategy.

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<sup>16</sup> Individual participation being defined by Pathways for Participation as ‘people’s individual actions and choices that reflect the kind of society they want to live in’ to include ethical consumerism and giving to charities, for example (NCVO, 2011).

Alongside a whole range of new learning programmes, the CVS also developed 'How-to' Guides aimed at providing accessible information on a range of – mainly civic – roles, as these needed the most explaining and, most importantly, they contributed to the programme's targets. Thus the overriding perception, particularly at the CVS, was that the Pathfinder was primarily concerned with promoting civic activism. For example, a Masters student in Community Development who, as part of her action research placement at the CVS, had become involved in the delivery of TPP project alongside Tutor C, commented in reply to my question:

*'So where did you think this definition [of active citizenship] in Take Part came from?'*

'Maybe from the government agenda, the targets that we had to fill, that people feel they can influence more or people can take up governance roles, so I felt at the time it was very much about people filling lay governance roles, especially people who weren't normally represented in that system which is supposed to be a democratic system... [...] Those targets were filtered down and in a way that wasn't really community development; it was very much fulfilling the targets of the top down agenda.' (Niamh, CVS MA placement student, and subsequent Take Part programme participant).

On the other hand, having co-delivered active citizenship session with Sure Start parents, she also thought that

'... when you tell someone what active citizenship is, it's pretty much straightforward and you give examples. As we were delivering the active citizenship sessions from Take Part, Take Part has a very specific definition of what it is, the definition could be broader or a little bit different. We have loads of different examples from different areas of society, and Take Part [...] I think it's a good definition.' (Niamh)

The interpretation of active citizenship by the Take Part lead tutor, Tutor C, was primarily shaped by the Take Part team's definition. It had been her idea to use the diagram in sessions to engage learners from diverse backgrounds in an exploration of active

citizenship, so she saw the diagram as a teaching tool that enabled inclusive learning around Take Part. Her particular interest, within Take Part, had been the community leadership aspect, and one of the courses she developed was the longer 'Taking a Lead in Your Community' course.

'My own preference for what I was trying to achieve with the Take Part project was to work with people that were already involved in the community and take them to the next step as community leader, because I think there is a real need for that.'  
(CVS Tutor C)

Expressing views which had largely remained hidden had it not been for the research, her interpretation of active citizenship within Take Part was grounded in what could be described as a 'communitarian' conception of community:

'I guess the bottom line is really that it makes people more informed about community, about what community is about, how they can get involved in their community, you know, the whole thing about rights and responsibilities. What I like about the active citizenship is, you know, I want people to know their rights but also I think I equally want them to know their responsibilities. We have a huge 'I' culture at the moment, and actually, I want people to think a lot more about the 'we', you know, the whole community really, being able to do that more through all the programmes really.'  
(CVS Tutor C)

Even with an emphasis on responsibilities, this statement could be interpreted as supportive of collective interests and the common good. However, further on in the interview she added the following qualification:

'Anything that works towards [...] [people's] own self-worth and that of their community, anything like that I would like to continue working with myself. Under the umbrella of community leadership or active citizenship or social action, [...] but in a soft way, I don't want it to be a fight, I don't want... I want it to be a natural part of the community, I don't want people to think they're going to have to fight and there's going to be a protest.'  
(Tutor C)

This important qualification rather confirms her outlook as communitarian, in which a 'sanitised' and depoliticised version of community is preferred, or, put differently, one which sees 'community as policy' rather than 'community as politics' (Crowther and Martin, 2010).

Whilst tutors agreed on the promotion of social action, however 'depoliticised', the project's emphasis on civic activism did create tensions. Because of the high targets it soon became apparent that the appointed Take Part tutor would be unable to deliver them herself. Therefore, other tutors were called upon to 'badge' their courses as Take Part, so that their learners could contribute towards the targets. Chief amongst these was the CVS Speaking Up tutor, Tutor B, who had become the lead tutor for Speaking Up, and who delivered these courses with community-based groups in outreach, e.g. with Sure Start parents and BME groups. However, the Take Part 'definition' and the targets for civic activism conflicted with her open-ended, community-development approach to teaching.

'I am often reluctant to keep going back to the term 'active citizen' because I feel like I am putting pressure on [the learners] to... and what I feel I am doing is leading them, giving them the confidence, giving them the skills, and alongside that are things like having councillors come in [to the Speaking Up course], having people talk to them about volunteering. I think it's [pause], to me it's much more subtle than saying, "let's learn to be an active citizen" because I always feel like I am patronizing people when I do that. So I feel [...] stronger in my conviction [...] if I say, "well, look, we enable you to be much more active in the community and to feel more confident and to have an influence", and to feel influence over decisions that may affect areas of their life and things that they care about.' (Tutor B)

When asked about her own definition of active citizenship, the tutor replied:

'So the citizenship thing - I still don't really fully appreciate how you can encapsulate it. If someone asks you that question then I still don't have a straight answer or a full answer. I can say this is roughly what it looks like, you know. But your interpretation, your description and ideas about active citizenship is so different, you know, and I think no-one should be dismissed for having their own views either, you know, if someone feels strongly about what

they are doing. If that empowers them then that will move them up and get them more involved in civic roles, which I know is what you want us to move forward to...'<sup>17</sup> [laughs]. (Tutor B)

The tutor was justified in feeling that there was a conflict, since the motivation of learners – and the way the courses were designed and publicised – differed between Speaking Up courses and Take Part courses. With the latter, people saw the courses framed by active citizenship and attended explicitly in order to deepen or broaden their involvements, whereas the Speaking Up course was more generic and with an emphasis on personal development (see below).

It could be argued, therefore, that the problem lay in part with the CVS management of the programme, whose choices were partly dictated by the unreasonably high targets imposed by DCLG. Thus, it was easy enough for CVS managers to decide that many CVS courses had to contribute to the TPP (with the attendant registration and evaluation forms), but less so for the tutors to adapt to a change in the course focus and outcomes. This is not to say that the two course formats were necessarily incompatible, but the perceived challenges for the tutors involved were not ignored by management; in fact, these challenges probably did not come to light other than through the research interviews.

The tensions over the Take Part definition of active citizenship lingered for some time, and have since re-emerged occasionally, even though the CVS tutors have in the meantime delivered active citizenship courses through other funding streams. But in these the focus was either defined by the CVS itself or by the funder, and was generally more community-based, which felt more within the CVS staff's 'comfort zone'.

To conclude this section, the CVS' conception of active citizenship had been shaped partly in response to different government programmes, and partly by its own values and mission which promoted active citizenship in terms of participation in social action and voice. However, the organisation had not made any coordinated effort to critically explore, with staff, the government's active citizenship agendas in terms of what they entailed,

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<sup>17</sup> After clarification, the 'you' in this quote referred to the abstract, collective of 'CVS/Take Part/Government', rather than having been directed at myself as the previous project coordinator.

what they included and what they excluded, or to acknowledge the inherent tensions that emerged with the Take Part Pathfinder's focus on civic activism, for example. This had implications for the way the concept had been communicated by different tutors with their course participants. Especially, it was left to tutors to reinterpret the term and to find their own solutions to the tensions created between the government's 'top-down' and a potentially more empowering, community-led 'bottom-up' approach. Out of sight of managers, each tutor responded to this challenge differently according to their personal views, rather than in accordance with an agreed organisational perspective (which was informal and vague). In other words, the organisation's managers did not stay 'in control' of the implementation of these programmes and were more exposed to being led by the government agenda(s), thus potentially reducing the organisation's potential scope for developing and promoting its own conceptual approach, rooted in its values and mission.

The question to be considered in the next section is whether and to what extent the contested views on active citizenship held by government, the CVS or the tutors had played a role in shaping course participants' own interpretation of the concept.

## **6.2 Learner Perspectives on Active Citizenship**

This section focuses on the views of 'learner-participants' that is, people who attended either ALAC, Take Part Pathfinder or the 'Speaking Up' courses, which had run continuously as part of and in the period between the two programmes, funded by mainstream adult learning. The context from which the learners were drawn had the following implications for the interpretation of the data: first, compared with the population as a whole, the sample represents a sub-section of the population with a generally positive bias towards active citizenship involvement. The learners involved in the Pathfinder programme, for example, rated their 'ability to influence decisions that affect them' twice as high as the general population (CVS Pathfinder Evaluation report, 2011) which can be read as indicative of their greater interest in the question.

Secondly, given the broad range of attendees from varied backgrounds there are also some variations within this sample. And there were significant differences and variations between courses (e.g. between Speaking Up and Take Part courses) in how explicitly they promoted active citizenship, and in the approach taken by respective tutors.

At the start of the Take Part programme, there had been concerns among CVS staff and managers that the explicit use of the term 'active citizen' would potentially deter people. However, whether this fear was unfounded or whether the presentation of the term active citizen (via the diagram, see above) and other learner-focused approaches made all the difference, the fact remained that people were successfully recruited to the courses. The term 'active citizen' either did not deter learners or, as some interviews revealed, some simply ignored it and responded to specific course titles. Some participants recruited to the Take Part courses positively welcomed the term, even if they were to discover its meaning during the course:

'It's such a great phrase encapsulating what [the Taking a Lead course] was trying to draw from the participants.' (Clarissa)

'[The mention of active citizenship on the Speaking Up course] certainly opened my mind and made me think... also it makes me analyse more, oh, *I was doing that anyway* and I am actually an active citizen.' (Ella - multiple learner, my emphasis)

Interestingly, while Clarissa was a very active citizen already, involved in most of the diagram's categories, the second learner, Ella, did not share this level of involvement. Her particular situation will be presented below.

The section will first explore the range of conceptualisations of active citizenship, including some views about the concept in relation to people's own participation choices and motivations. It will then unpick the influences of, respectively, the CVS and the government's conceptualisations, particularly with respect to dominant discourses of citizen 'activation', 'responsibilisation' and the 'citizen-consumer', as well as highlight instances of resistance to such discourses and policies. The response to discourses will include those in relation to the Coalition government's Big Society as the interviews coincided with the time when that concept was being debated in the media.

### 6.2.1 'Active citizenship': a slippery concept?

Ruth Lister suggested that '[c]itizenship is one of those slippery terms which everyone understands at one level but about which it is difficult to arrive at an agreed definition' (Lister 1998:227). This became apparent in some of the views expressed in the interviews.

'I think active citizenship is just living your life – this is my interpretation – living your life being in contact with everyone who's around you, not just the people who are in direct contact in your daily life, but being aware of your local police force and knowing people in your local surgery when you go in there'. (Zannah)

Zannah had attended the Take Part 'How Your City Works', which focused on understanding the local public institutions and decision-making processes, and how to influence decisions. The course was delivered by an external tutor who, judging by the feedback received from three of her learners, had not made use of the Take Part diagram.

In contrast, Ella had attended not only Speaking Up but numerous other active citizenship courses which were part of the Take Part programme. After further probing of how she would define 'active citizenship', Ella added:

'Well, you know, being a part of the community and doing something to give back to the community. [...] I think there are several gradients, if you like, people who help their friends and neighbours out don't consider themselves as active [citizens], but I think they are and I think there is a lot of... not pressure as such but a lot put on people to make you think that they are only an active citizen if they are in a particular role like a school governor or magistrate.' (Ella)

Her comment reveals the tension between informal, community-based involvement which is generally less acknowledged, and formal, more recognised roles. It also lends weight to the CVS' insistence that active citizenship involvement should be presented on a 'spectrum' of forms of involvement encompassing both the informal (civil and community based) and the more formal (civic) end. Considering the social patterning of formal participation and its bias towards the middle classes who are overrepresented in civic participation, one could consider the recognition of informal roles to form part of an inclusive approach to citizenship (Lister, 1997), and therefore, of a social justice agenda.

Instead of focusing on the recognition of informal participation, the New Labour government, in the Take Part programme, primarily sought to address the 'under-representation' on the civic side<sup>18</sup>, but at least it did acknowledge (and was concerned with) this aspect of inequality.

The Take Part tutor (Tutor C) specifically attempted to use the diagram as an inclusive tool, so that those with less confidence to undertake civic roles nevertheless felt valued as active citizens in more accessible, informal activities in the community. How this was picked up upon was illustrated by one of her learners:

'My initial idea was volunteering, that was the first, and then I thought, through active citizenship, like being a councillor or something like that, but actually there is so much more. In *'Taking the Lead'* they tell you the different areas, so it's quite interesting that there are so many things you could be doing, like you can just be sweeping the snow off the street and that could be being an active citizen, visiting your elderly neighbour; it doesn't have to be something that is written down and CRB checked, you can do actually a lot of things without having to apply.' (Livia)

Alternative views were demonstrated by Speaking Up participants whose courses had not included an exploration of the concept, well before the arrival of the Take Part programme. Leonard, for example, was a retired carer and passionate about a neighbourhood approach to 'care in the community', but also involved at governance level (more about his views about this below); in contrast, Fiona had attended the course after a mental health breakdown at work and felt strongly about issues of discrimination. In these two cases their definitions were not only linked to Speaking Up but also influenced by their personal situations.

'If you want to be an active citizen my opinion is that [...] you should have some knowledge of your neighbours and if you got someone with disabilities and who

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<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the celebration of volunteering events (e.g. Volunteer Week) by governments from both sides of the political spectrum, reinforces the notion that only formal volunteering counts.

live within a reasonably close distance from you I think you should occasionally go and see them to check if they are okay.<sup>19</sup> (Leonard)

'I think [active citizenship is] about being encouraged to speak up and to stand up for your rights; how to do that and how to go about it.' (Fiona)

Other learners specifically thought of active citizenship in terms of 'relationship building'. They were people who had been working in the voluntary and community sector or were activists. Patrick, for example, was a long-term local activist, and linked his definition of active citizenship explicitly to 'making a political or practical difference' to society, which reflected his level of political awareness, and the nature of his activism (faith, diversity, social justice and sustainability issues).

'I think, for me, being an active citizen would be somebody who is actively engaged with building relationships with other people in the local community to make a political or practical difference to their well-being and the well-being of the wider society.' (Patrick)

What emerged quite clearly in the interviews is that nobody would have thought of themselves as 'active citizens' unless prompted by the Take Part programme or the research interview. For those who attended longer Take Part courses or taster sessions which explored the concept, the level of acceptance of the term was higher than those who had not. In the former context people who were already involved or felt they had a disposition towards active citizenship were more inclined to positively validating the term.

*'Do you consider yourself an active citizen, or did you before the course?'*

'Certainly before the course I wouldn't have called myself an active citizen. One of the first exercises that we did [in Taking a Lead] was in groups of three or four to write down all the voluntary work that we were involved in, and it really surprised me to see - two things: what other people do, the range of activities, but also to see what I was involved in, actually seeing it there in black and white, oh, all right,

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<sup>19</sup> In hindsight, his vision bore close resemblance to the coalition minister's idea about a Neighbourhood Watch scheme for care in the community... Sadly, Leonard has passed away in the meantime. I would have liked to have known his view on this proposal.

so actually I am doing quite a lot, I'd never put it together in my mind, which sounds a bit strange, but until you see it in front of you, because I've never seen it, it's not work to me, there is my work life, and that, I take seriously, and everything else is something else that I do. I've never taken the time to really assess it in a structured way, so that was quite eye opening. [...] Yes, before I would have said no, now as a result of that I am aware of how much more there is, and what opportunities there are and what else I could do, if only I had more time' [...]  
(Clarissa)

Another learner, who was both a youth worker and 'activist', saw the value of the term. Incidentally, she was also one of Tutor C's learners.

'I think it's a better way of putting than volunteer, really. I think it's a wider framework, active citizenship, because it explains it better as to how you can really be involved in your community. That is not just going out to helping a charity or an organisation but it is actually looking round the corner to your next door neighbour. [...] I like 'active citizenship' better because of the whole thing of encouraging people to understand a bit more about taking responsibility.' (Ingrid)

The findings on learner perspectives on active citizenship presented so far suggest that, rather than aiming for a settled definition, the value of the concept seems to lay in its ability to provoke discussions on the types and purposes of participation, particularly within a context of active citizenship learning. This reflected Tutor B's view (p141) that anybody's definition should be equally valid.

The following citizen case study highlights the importance of a broader understanding of active citizenship and how it can be used as an inclusive tool within a community-development approach (Lister, 1997, 1998).

### **6.2.2 Active citizenship for inclusion? A case study on the meaning of citizenship for women in a Sure Start area**

Feminist scholars have offered an alternative model to the traditional 'gendered' conception of citizenship, based on 'human agency as an expression of citizenship' (Lister

1998). Whereas the traditional model tends to be exclusive and elitist, with a narrow conception of the 'political' and contributing to the 'common good', an alternative, inclusive model aims to re-attach marginalised people to not only formal rights but to the *practice* of citizenship. As Lister put it, the issue is how to move from the theoretical status to the practice, from being to acting as a citizen.

'Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents.' (Lister 1998: 228)

For Lister it is essential that this is ultimately connected to a rights-based approach, and she argued that it is possible to foster a citizenship identity in excluded people which in turn encourages their participation in other domains and helps people substantiate their rights.

Amongst the interview sample for this research one interviewee was part of a Speaking Up group of disadvantaged parents in a Sure Start area, most of whom with low levels of qualifications, on low incomes and lacking self-esteem. Their specific Speaking Up course coincided with the start of the Take Part programme and hence incorporated 'active citizenship' as one of the guiding themes of this Speaking Up course.

This learner, Ella, enjoyed the learning so much so that she subsequently seized several other funded learning opportunities available at the CVS, including Take Part and a Grundtvig course (see Chapter Seven). In the interview I had been surprised to hear her talk about active citizenship with great enthusiasm, and she explained how this notion had become the talk of her circle of friends even outside of the sessions:

'It certainly opened my mind and made me think, also it makes me analyse more, oh, I was doing that anyway and I am actually an active citizen; so it's all about the word again, the phrase active citizenship is used such a lot, now everybody within my circle of friends who have attended Speaking Up we can talk about it in this way and we know what we are talking about.' (Ella)

Interestingly, the activities she identified as 'doing already anyway' were all informal at the time – it was only much later that she was able to commit to volunteering. For her, even passing on information to others constituted an act of 'active citizenship'.

'... obviously I've been emailing and then people from CVS send me e-mails, and I think, oh, I want to do that one, and then I e-mail everybody else, who doesn't get them, so I kind of feel that I'm doing my bit there, because I'm passing it on... [...] 'I help my neighbours and things like that; but to be fair my... importance at the moment is that I have to get a degree in order to get a decent job and my family is important...' (Ella)

Also with outside friends she would explain the concept as '*being a part of the community and doing something to give back to the community*'. She then added that '*basically, often they are already doing something and they don't think they are [being an active citizen]*' and gave this example:

'One of my friends, she's, one of our mutual friends is disabled, and she always takes her out one day a week, she takes her shopping and she collects her daughter from school, and she just does it, automatically, no questions asked, not for any reward, and I'm saying to her, you are being an active citizen, obviously it's for our mutual friend, but I couldn't do all that that she does because I've got my own family, but she is happy to do that; and me telling her, you are an active citizen doing that, *she beamed to be honest, she looked so proud, she had a name for what she was doing, if you like* [...] She has a role and, if you like, the label of active citizen it's likely to motivate her to want to do it because she is valued as part of the community.' (Ella, my emphasis)

She added, '*like my friend, if you feel valued, you are more likely to continue*'. What may have contributed to the success of these parents feeling a '*valued part of the community*', encapsulated by the term, was their experience of a community development ethos at the Children Centre where they had been recruited, and which had placed great importance to widening participation (see the third citizen case study in Chapter Nine). It was therefore not an abstract notion or confined to the Speaking Up tutor, but a holistic and experiential approach that contributed to this positive perception.

Concerning the DCLG's notion of a 'progression from civil to civic activism' (Take Part Pathfinder brief, 2008), it was interesting to see that the different courses she attended also changed her own ambitions. One of her Take Part courses was How Your City Works.

*'I do have future aspirations, if you like, to become a magistrate, and I'm thinking that when my daughter starts school then I will get more involved in the school, not necessarily in a role like a governor or something but just sort of to help out or get involved generally.'* (Ella, my emphasis)

'The reason I brought up magistrates and school governors is because I [...] didn't know that a magistrate was a voluntary role, I would have thought it was paid, because [pause] I would class school governor or magistrate as a professional, you know you stereotype them in a particular category, and you never think, oh I could become a magistrate, you would think you have to take a law degree and everything. So I think the reason why I say that, is that I was always interested in law, but I wouldn't want to be a solicitor, wouldn't want to make that my career, but magistrates actually really appeals to me, and I've spoken to..., when I did a course here, the *How Your City Works*, someone came in, I forget the name now, but he was running the police authority, he used to be a magistrate, so I spoke to him, that was interesting, and he passed me on to somebody else who is currently a magistrate, and I've been e-mailing her, and she said she would meet up with me. But I also rallied her into our Speaking Up level 3 to come and talk to our group - *so I do little things like that, that's my active citizenship*. [Laughs] it's kind of for my own benefit as well, but I think the whole group should hear about it. So obviously I've been a bit naughty because I have [gone behind the back of the tutor]. It works really well because that particular lady she doesn't live in [city], but she passed it on to someone who does, and she's actually going to meet the group...' (Ella, my emphasis)

At least in terms of her perception of what she could do as an active citizen, the Take Part course (not Speaking Up, incidentally) had been successful in widening her horizon to the range of civic options available. Her eagerness to share her discovery with her Speaking Up group was so great that she even risked being perceived as interfering by the tutor. It is

not the place here to discuss how realistic her chances are to fulfil the requirements to becoming a magistrate - reflected in the chair of the Magistrate Bench's concerns that the Taster course may raise unrealistic expectations - but rather what it says about how she had come to see herself. Chapter Seven will further explore the impact of information and awareness-raising of civic taster roles, while Chapter Nine provides a citizen case study on Sure Start parents' individual and collective democratic learning and engagements.

### **6.2.3 Active citizens, community and responsibility: government discourses in evidence?**

In the discussions on active citizenship that took place during the research interviews two key themes emerged prominently and repeatedly: 'community' and 'responsibility'. As these were key themes in both the Conservatives' and in New Labour's social policies and discourses of active citizenship it is worth examining some of the views expressed in this regard.

#### **Community**

When interviewees were asked to define active citizenship in their own words, the vast majority used it in conjunction with the term 'community'. In fact, 'community' was *the* most frequently mentioned 'jargon' term in the entire learner interview data. 'Community' thus emerged as the central term of reference in relation to active citizenship both in terms of its arena – as opposed to online activity, such as e-petitioning, for example – and as a rationale or motivation for active citizen involvement.

Doing something as a way of 'giving back to the community' or to society was a prevailing theme, mentioned by many. Whilst it is not the purpose of this research to investigate people's reasons for participation in general as these have been investigated elsewhere (Pathways through Participation, 2011), some quotes are highlighted here as people's narratives and views on how they became involved provides revealing insights into the impact of social policy. This applies especially to people's responses to specific opportunities for participation, including for citizen governance, and how these were experienced – the latter will be explored in more detail in Chapter Eight (experiences of empowerment), whilst Chapter Seven looks at the impact of the learning programmes on the uptake of involvement opportunities.

*'What motivated you to become a school governor?'*

'A long-standing interest in education. [...] And...I decided to put something back in the school where my daughter was. She's left now. I've been a governor for her last year and carry on for another three. It was a desire to use the skills I had gained a long time ago, as well as interest - she'd had a really positive experience while she was at that school, *and I wanted to put something back into the school.*'

(Clarissa)

'I had this experience of being a patient, and I knew there were pressures there, the nursing staff, the commissions, all sorts, and I felt that I wanted to put something back. And the only thing I could do to put back was my body, and be[come] a member of the team.' (Gilbert)

In the above two examples there was also an acknowledgement of the difficult circumstances in which public sector workers were operating, and the sense that they could be supportive of or contribute to the service. Also, involvement is not only altruistic and can be self-serving too, including as a form of social involvement. A number of interviewees, including Gilbert, were retired and widowed, for example, whereas Clarissa was a full-time working mother and more pushed for spare time.

While the examples here highlight people's involvement with public bodies, the point that the majority (but not all) people emphasised, however, was that their sense of duty was towards the 'community', rather than as an obligation towards the state in return for rights. In fact, many insisted that involvement should *not* be compulsory, and that its value lay in its voluntary nature.

In one sense many learners thus reflected the widespread, normative view shared by civic republicans, communitarians, and policy-makers from all main factions that 'community' is something intrinsically desirable and beneficial, that quality of life can be measured by the degree of community spirit. However, the impact of globalisation, individualisation and busy working lives for both men and women means that community life has become more eroded and more difficult to maintain. In the course of their discussions with me, many

interviewees saw one of the main purposes of 'active citizenship' in the rebuilding of community, and expressed their hope that their efforts, however small, would make a positive contribution to this aim.

'I think one or two of the things that's needed, for the future in this country generally, is people talking to each other again, and caring about the person who lives next door, not going in everyday, but it's time that we started to think that, you know, money isn't everything, there is an important thing in doing some good and trying to help other people who are not as well off as you are.' (Leonard)

A practical, solution-based focus was another theme, which could be associated with localism discourses:

'Theoretically, I would say that active citizenship is being more involved in what's happening in the surroundings, in the neighbourhood around me, with the people, helping people, attending meetings of the community, and finding out what kind of gaps or disadvantages are in that part of town, *and bringing some solutions towards that.*' (Milena, my italics)

'I suppose it's just being involved in trying to make, or people say we want to make the world a better place and that's far too huge, I can't make the world a better place, but I try to narrow it down to, what spheres do I move in, in [this city], where the carers are and where people with learning disabilities are, I try to get involved in those areas, and I'm a very hands-on active person trying to make a difference.' (Marian)

### **The 'responsible' citizen**

Some people expressed normative views, which - depending on one's viewpoint - could be interpreted variably as paternalistic, expressing an ethics of care, or a sense of social solidarity towards others. The question was to what extent these views had been shaped by governmental discourses on responsibility and obligations in return for rights. This causality will, of course, be impossible to establish with any degree of certainty from these interviews. Maybe the people in this sample tended to have developed a strong sense of social responsibility (some said so, directly), based on other factors, such as family

upbringing. In this context, then, the courses or the interview provided a vehicle for these views to be aired, regardless of the specific influences the courses may or may not have had. The next cited learner was a woman in her late 20s or early 30s, who may have been exposed to New Labour's responsibilisation discourses from her late teens.

'I kind of think that if you're really a citizen you have a duty to society as well, if you're a citizen somewhere that gives you certain rights, the right to welfare, to healthcare, the right to accommodation, whatever, but actually you do have responsibilities as well and people don't always take that on board, people quite often expect to get these things, but not to put anything back in...' (Livia)

On the other hand, she qualified her statement:

'Some of it is maybe that not everybody feels the responsibility to be doing something: it depends on how you view society, like these people will just say, "well, I work, I pay my taxes, I shouldn't be doing anything else", whereas *perhaps people with a bit more of a social conscience* maybe think that I've got a responsibility.' (Livia, my italics)

By contrast, the following learner, Max, was in his early to mid 60s, and stood as a local candidate for the Conservative party.

'It was good to see [at the Take Part conference] people who've been a bit disadvantaged for whatever reason, come good, and find their feet and get to be responsible neighbours, as we said yesterday part of the Big Society - I'm not being political when I say that (!), but it's good when people are responsible. [...]

So many people don't vote for example, so it was interesting to hear people who don't vote changing and understanding why, what voting is all about and become active, and become responsible as well as active, if that makes sense to you...'

(Max, my italics)

A few learners were rather ambiguous about the extent to which active citizenship should be promoted as a 'social responsibility' (like Livia above), and whilst advocating a civic

republican or communitarian view on the importance of community, they acknowledged at the same time the pressures on people's time caused by the work ethic, the consumer society, capitalism or other societal trends.

'If we want a future generation which cares and is responsible, then we are responsible for spending some time with [our children] and bringing them up. You know, a child who never sees his mother or father except when they come home from work at night and when they go to work in the morning, they are stressed rushing to go to work, they are stressed when they come back having done a day's work, they really haven't got the time to give their child the attention they deserve. So what do they do, they go and do things that they think are right and do things which are destructive. I can't say you can blame the family, you blame society, and maybe this is possibly where the government has something through the Big Society, I don't know.' (Leonard)

'I'm a great believer in the fact that we need social interactions all the time in order for things to be reasonably balanced. I do a lot of travelling on the bus now, because I have a free pass [and the time, as she no longer works], and little things like, everybody under thirty on the bus is plugged into their music and they are just sitting there like this and I'm just thinking that you're not looking around you and you're not listening into the conversations of other people, you're not even aware of other people on the bus and I think that's really bad for the future, because people are going to be less caring about people, inevitably, because they are in a bubble.' (Verity)

There were, then, a range of views, some implicitly or explicitly supportive of government policy and others critical of it, or of the way in which society functions. Some were quick to point out that government had a role to play if it was serious about such notions as the 'Big Society', but that this would require appropriate measures to be taken, and investments to be made. Several learners mentioned that measures such as the Take Part programme were to be welcomed, compared with mere governmental exhortations that people should do more, which was deemed counterproductive. This notion was encapsulated in people's scepticism towards the Coalition's 'Big Society'.

#### **6.2.4 Resistance and counter-discourses to government policies (New Labour's and the Coalition's)**

A number of people interviewed felt quite strongly that governments should only encourage active citizenship participation rather than make it prescriptive or present it as a moral imperative. Instead, interviewees felt it was important to recognise the contribution made by active citizens (not just 'volunteers') more publicly and more widely.

What particularly incensed people was the feeling that government was applying pressure on people to get involved – what Clarke (2005) called the 'activation' of citizens. As soon as this was very obvious, it caused resistance or even indignation, even and maybe particularly in people who already gave much of their time.

'The other thing I was going to say, though, was, that popped into my head when we were talking, is that I get really cross with the current government saying that they want more people to be active citizens, Big Society, and I haven't heard in the press the fact that actually there are hundreds of thousands of people who are governors, probably tens of thousands maybe as many magistrates, guide leaders, Brownie leaders, Scout leaders, there is an army of people already doing huge amounts, and we are being bashed over the head to do more, what do they want!? I think there is a huge lack of acknowledgement of what's going on already and how vital... When I first did the governor training there were some statistics, I can't remember the amount, how much the country, the government gains, how much it saves by having volunteer governors, whereas if they had to employ people, the millions it would cost. That never gets acknowledged.' (Clarissa)

'I think especially now, obviously, when it is drummed into us, it is nice if you can come out and think, "well, it was actually my idea", rather than being told you must become a volunteer, make you a better person and help others... if it comes from you I think it's more [inaudible]... [...] Even, for example, just going to school, well what I found [is that] in my area [...] they want parents not only to get onto the governing bodies, but want them to be involved in what the children are doing'. (Zannah)

Many also acknowledged that New Labour's support for active citizenship in the form of funding of courses, such as through Take Part was a far better and effective way of promoting and enabling active citizenship. This 'enabling' approach (which is how New Labour conceived of the role of the state, generally) was contrasted with the approach displayed by the Conservative's Big Society agenda. At the time of interviewing people, opinions on the Big Society had indeed been running high, and the research was able to capture some of these views at a local Take Part Pathfinder dissemination conference. Attendees from across the sector felt strongly that active citizens and community groups should *not* be used as a substitute for public services. But my focus here is on the individual reflections of learners (rather than those held in a voluntary and community sector context) on the Big Society, even though some were interviewed in the days that had followed the event.

'I think [the Big Society] is an absolute damp squib, personally.' (Cassandra)

'I think the Coalition's view is more that everyone should do what they need for themselves, yeah, and help each other out afterwards.' (Livia)

'Big Society? For people who are out already, and for the state to keep control of everybody else. [...] They don't want people asking questions, they don't want people to take control of their own situation, [*and making changes*] and I'm cynical enough to believe that they would try to ensure that that doesn't happen, not being, making sure it's difficult to strike, shall we say. The impression is always making sure that people... to get the most out of people as possible and hope that they switch off in front of the television, sufficiently anaesthetised.' (Ruth)

Others doubted that the Coalition government 'have got their thinking clear' (Max) as 'obviously there's a lot of problems with [the Big Society policy]' (Max).

Finally, concerning citizen participation and voice more generally, one spontaneous comment emerged in the interview on the inappropriateness of 'consumerist' language that had come to replace the participative language of tenant participation and representation from the 1970s and 80s:

'At one time [Housing Association] used to have a [tenant] representative and I used to be a representative of my 40 homes. Suddenly out of the blue I got a letter, "we no longer recognise the site representatives. If you have a complaint you complain directly to the housing association". Now to me that goes against the concept of housing association tenants - they are trying to treat the tenants, they are already trying to call them residents, I have thoughts about that - but now, when the annual report came out, it was "we do this for our customers", customers this, customers that... To me you are a tenant, you are a human being, a customer is not necessarily a human being or thought of in the big wide world as a human being, *the supermarket attitude kept cropping in, we are gradually getting further and further away from the people who make decisions.* [spoken with great animation] (Gilbert)

This had been the only view expressed on the neo-liberal influence of the 'citizen-consumer' ideology, and it confirms findings from other research which likewise showed people's unwillingness to identify as 'consumers' of public services (Clarke et al, 2007). To me this comment also flags up the potential of engaging people who are active in the sector in deliberations about active citizenship (or, indeed, about any other key policy concepts) as a way of stimulating critical perspectives which could empower individuals and strengthen democracy at the same time.

In brief conclusion to this section, it was apparent that learners' views had been influenced, often to a great extent, by the way active citizenship had been presented to them by the CVS tutors in these citizenship learning programmes, although it would be difficult to separate these influences from those of the long-term governmental discourses. While active citizenship was mostly construed as participation, the emphasis tended to be in favour of the communitarian 'social responsibility' and the idea of strengthening community than in a civic republican sense of a more politicised form of participation to strengthen democracy. While Speaking Up under the ALAC programme cultivated the notion of giving a voice to those sections of the population who are least heard and represented within the public services, for example, the CVS more generally and specifically under the Take Part programme did not specifically address the political dimension of participation.

The learner views thus exposed the limitations in the way active citizenship had been presented and discussed by the CVS, that is, with the political and democratic dimension erased, most of the time<sup>20</sup>. By eclipsing this political dimension of active citizenship, and of the inclusive and empowering potential of citizenship more generally (Lister, 1997) it could be argued that the CVS had missed an opportunity to promote social justice by engaging both its staff and its learners in a more constructive and empowering dialogue on citizenship and its implications in relation to governmental strategies in welfare and community. On the other hand, the question had to be asked whether it would have been appropriate for this type of organisation, to venture into the area of political education.

Another finding was that the views of tutors and course participants were by no means identical, and the research interviews brought to the fore the range and depth of course participants' more differentiated and critical views on the topic. This further supports the argument that 'active citizenship' offers the opportunity to explore a wide range of issues of social policy whilst drawing on people's multiple and diverse experiences in their different experiences of relations with the state, and thus, to stimulate conscientisation (Freire, 1972).

Related to this is the question to be considered in the following chapters, of how 'empowerment' for active citizenship had been defined, interpreted and implemented by the CVS and its tutors, and to discover the course participants' own views and experiences on that topic.

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<sup>20</sup> I uphold this argument (of the missing political dimension) despite the fact that, prompted by the collaboration with the Parliamentary Outreach programme, Take Part had for a while offered courses on Democracy and voting. The fruitfulness of this approach (results presented in a case study in Chapter Nine) rather lends weight to my argument that the CVS could draw on the political dimension more systematically.

## Chapter 7 Learning for active citizenship: experiences and outcomes

Following the exploration of conceptions of active citizenship, this chapter examines the learning provision of the CVS in the context of the government-funded programmes and the Speaking Up courses<sup>21</sup>, its development over time and the outcomes it generated for learners. The experiences and outcomes of learners are examined as they cast a light on the different courses developed under the programmes and hence, arrive at a nuanced and contextualised understanding of these courses.

Previous chapters established that competing approaches to learning for active citizenship generally corresponded to different ideas about the purposes of citizen involvement and what is needed to ‘empower’ citizens. Broadly speaking, it is possible to differentiate between procedural, substantive, and contingent approaches to education for active citizenship (Crowther and Martin, 2009:37): a procedural approach focuses on conveying an understanding of institutional systems and procedures to enable participation (e.g. the How Your City Works course); a substantive approach adds ‘political literacy’ and ‘critical awareness’ of social and political issues to procedural understanding; and a contingent approach seeks to develop identity and belonging so that individuals feel that they have a right and reason to participate in the first place. The latter is particularly relevant to the feminist agenda (e.g. Lister, 1997) which makes the case for a broad conception of ‘the political’ (Hirschmann and Di Stefano, 1996) in order to foster a sense of citizenship identity in women and other marginalised groups.

The most important notion to have emerged from the citizenship education literature is the significance of the *purpose* of active citizenship learning and how this determines the type of active citizenship outcomes that can be expected (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). One of the tasks in this chapter is, then, to see what types of provision the conceptualisations of active citizenship at the CVS have generated, and the relevance of

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<sup>21</sup> Speaking Up was the backbone of the ALAC programme but continued after ALAC, and contributed towards the Take Part Pathfinder (with modifications, as will be seen). When delivered as an accredited course, the CVS could draw down funding from adult and community learning for Speaking Up, so it was not reliant on government funding, unlike the main courses developed under Take Part. However, accreditation requirements changed, which is why the Speaking Up course had to be adapted over time.

Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) model and assumption to an understanding of this practice.

The active citizenship learning approaches were not only influenced by the government-funded programmes but also by other contextual factors, notably adult learning policies. This was particularly the case for accredited versions of Speaking Up, which were funded under the adult learning streams and the national accreditation framework of post-16 funding, and hence, formed part of governmental policies of 'lifelong learning'. The adult learning literature has raised a number of issues in connection with the priorities of lifelong learning policies (e.g. Finger and Asun, 2002; Martin, 2001; Crowther, 2004; Ecclestone, 2004; Biesta, 2006). The main tenet was the observation that adult learning had been increasingly narrowed down from a broader, 'life-wide' perspective to an economic and individualised prioritisation of competency-training for the labour market. Adult learning had been transformed, it has been argued (Biesta, 2006), from a right to a duty for the 'lifelong learner' who, simultaneously, has lost control of his or her own learning agenda. Other influences on lifelong learning included the neo-liberal belief that the root of social problems lie in the individual character of the disadvantaged rather than in the socio-economic conditions they experience, and a humanist approach to learning. Together, these views resulted in a 'therapeutic turn' in learning which places an exaggerated focus on individual self-esteem and confidence (and basic skills) as desirable learning outcomes (Ecclestone, 2004), and as preconditions for labour-market inclusion.

The chapter is organised into four sections, following a grouping of the different types of courses to enable a nuanced insight into the different approaches developed by the CVS. Each section includes a description of the courses, followed by learner feedback and an analysis of their outcomes and experiences. Learner pathways which have led to more substantial outcomes and insights are presented in more detailed individual learner case studies. The analysis focuses on different approaches developed as part of Speaking Up (which formed the core of the ALAC programme) and the Take Part Pathfinder.

## **7.1 'Speaking Up': active citizenship or personal development?**

The 'Speaking Up' course was the longest running and most successful course at the CVS and formed the backbone of the CVS' active citizenship learning, especially in the first government funded programme, ALAC. This section traces its development over time, from its roots in user involvement to a course that became more focused on personal development, and back to active citizenship learning linked to the Take Part Pathfinder experience. The analysis of this development and how it was shaped by respective government programmes and policies is central to this thesis, and will be illustrated with learner experiences and (learner) case studies.

### **7.1.1 Speaking Up phase 1: 'empowering' service users and carers**

The original Speaking Up course had been designed in 2003 to train service users to

'(...) make them more effective in meetings by raising their confidence and awareness of issues that concern them and enable them to communicate these effectively and appropriately.' (Course information flyer, CVS 2006).

The aims of Speaking Up links directly to the issue of 'micro-politics of participation' highlighted in Barnes et al (2004:12) in which it is argued that, within public participation forums,

'[p]eople may be present, but is their way of speaking as well as the substance of what they want to say recognised as a valid and legitimate contribution to a debate about an issue of public policy?' (Barnes et al, 2004:12)

The Speaking Up courses sought to address both of these aspects, the 'way of speaking' and the substance. Regarding, first, the way of speaking, the course focused on communication and listening skills. This was contextualised to 'speaking up in formal situations' and at meetings. Additionally, the unspoken 'rules of the game' were addressed, such as personal awareness and presentation ('creating positive images'). For example, one member of the Learning Disability group recounted:

'And then we watched a video about what people wore for meetings. We had some people who wore their normal clothes, and we were saying that that is not

suitable, and then they came with some other clothes, saying, “we are ready for this!” (Mark)

To make people understand their own barriers to participation and develop ways to overcome them, the groups used visits to relevant formal meetings or forums to analyse their responses to power (‘how power works’) and to ‘feel more positive about [thei]r own power’ (quoted from CVS course flyer), allowing learners to develop strategies for overcoming these barriers to enable more effective ‘speaking up’ in such contexts. In terms of building confidence in speaking, each learner had to prepare and deliver a ten minute presentation on a topic of their choice and receive feedback. For some individuals this task was particularly daunting but it also constituted a major step in their confidence building – all the more so as the learners had to receive (and in turn give) constructive feedback to their peers. From my own observations I found that some learners at least had excelled in making presentations: at one particular ALAC conference the presentations made by some of the CVS Speaking Up learners, including one with a learning disability, put those made by public sector professionals to shame.

Regarding the second aspect raised by Barnes et al (2004), another key aim of Speaking Up was to develop the substance of the contributions made by service users and carers in deliberative forums and other participation contexts. This focused on the courses providing a space for people to ‘turn private troubles into public issues’ (Wright Mills, cited in Martin, 2003). As the tutor explained, she made learners reflect on the following questions:

‘Were the things that affected them universal experiences, were they the kind of things that other people were experiencing, were the[ir] experiences [...] symptomatic of the system, [...] or was it an isolated incident that was possibly because of the way they had responded to service provider agency?’ (Tutor A)

In this way, the Speaking Up courses provided far more than just ‘skills training’: the classes functioned as facilitators of collective action at the micro-level, helping people to identify common issues to take up with providers, for example, and to develop strategies for collective action. The latter was expanded by the CVS Speaking Up tutor through the Learning to Involve project (see section 5.3. in context chapter), which provided

opportunities to practise and therefore embed communication skills in individuals, whilst also channelling user voice to providers directly, in participatory spaces created jointly with providers.

#### **7.1.1.1 *Speaking Up Phase 1: Learner case studies 2 (Leonard and Verity, two carers)***

The interview sample included a number of learners whose empowerment journey at the CVS had started with a Speaking Up course delivered by Tutor A between 2003 and 2007. Each had a different motivation for attending.

Leonard, a retired man, had been caring for his wife who suffered from Parkinson's disease for many years and was in his late 70s/early 80s. His escape from the pain of being a carer of his terminally ill wife was to help other people, and from his experiences he derived a strong sense of purpose for wanting to improve the lives of people with disabilities and that of their carers. To this end he had been active at trustee level in local and national disability and carer organisations, and was also engaged with statutory agencies. He was, therefore, attending the courses in order to enhance his abilities as an existing active citizen. As he explained his motivation:

'My aim at the time was to become a better speaker and to be able to explain my ideas better, to learn, if you like, how to behave and the essentials in a chairman's job, or being a public speaker.' (Leonard)

Although he was a retired hotelier and did not lack confidence, he explained that what he needed to learn the most to meet these new challenges was:

'[c]onfidence, I believe, confidence was one of the main things. Confidence, and when to make a point and how to make a point and how to make sure that it's understood by everybody in the room.' (Leonard)

In response to my comment in the interview that it was hard to imagine him not being confident, he said:

'If you'd talked to me about ten years ago, and you'd told me that I would speak in front of 150 people and the chief executives of the health service, I would have said "don't be ridiculous" [...]. Today it doesn't matter, I just stood there in front of the audience, it was easy and if people asked questions, I didn't find any difficulty, and I don't find any difficulty now in speaking in any of these situations, or answering anything.' (Leonard)

'I also did a... , do you remember there was a meeting of the NHS board on July 6, and they did a programme on dying, what is needed and what [...]; I did quite a long article that I read out at that meeting. They are playing the recording of it again at the next one in November.' (Leonard)

His practical focus on improving his effectiveness was also evident in the knowledge he acquired from another CVS course tailored for carers. This City & Guilds pilot was called 'Learning for Living', and ironically, it was supposed to be online learning. As the carers were mostly elderly and required help with the IT the CVS was able to justify face to face sessions. Learning about IT was very useful to Leonard to support carers more effectively, and the fact of having had a carer focus allowed him to increase his knowledge.

'What also improved my general knowledge and ability to help people was a course I did for twelve months, it was the City & Guilds carers course, [...] it was partly computers as well [...] And that was an invaluable course, it really was, I attended that right through, and I got my pass at the end, I was very pleased having done that *and it gave me an enormous amount of knowledge as to what to do to help other carers* and how to put them at ease with what they were doing.' (Leonard, my emphasis)

The tutor explained how the informal discussions between carers had enabled them to identify common needs 'over the coffee table' and led to them developing action as a result.

'... then they would sit there over coffee talking about their lives as carers and [Leonard] suddenly - and others - saw opportunities to support those people. So it was bringing people together and sharing experiences that enabled them to make those choices, and other people also, they would be able to say, "I'm in my caring

role, this happens to me or this doesn't happens to me", and therefore someone else would say, "well, did you try this, did you try that?". All that, it was pretty much over the coffee table and beyond, a lot of them started to talk and meet outside, so much so that they started writing books and putting things online, and all sorts of things that came out of that.'(Tutor B)

In contrast, Verity had not had time to be involved in carer representation as up to the day before the course she had occupied a full time position as tax inspector. As her retirement included being a full-time carer for her 93 year old mother she felt she was looking for some support in her new role.

'I didn't [do the course] because I was in any way lacking in confidence speaking up or finding out what benefits we were entitled to - I just came really because I was a carer and I was just interested to meet other carers and I suppose I wanted to find out what was available for carers.' (Verity)

Compared to Leonard, she benefited very differently from the course. Her priority had been how to cope as a carer, rather than becoming actively involved outside of the house (she saw herself as an active citizen through individual actions and taking part in public consultations). For her, 'coming on the course was part of my looking after myself', and sharing experiences with people in similar situations was 'comforting'.

'As a carer, I felt quite isolated, I drew a lot of comfort from it, from the situation some of the others were in, and from the tutor, who was superb. [...] There are degrees of caring, aren't there, and some of the people on the course were in far worse situations than I was. [...]

Yes, as a carer [...] I drew a lot of comfort [...] from the situation some of the others were in [...]. [The course] did give you the self-esteem and recognition that you were actually doing a difficult job.' (Verity)

### **7.1.1.2 *Speaking Up learner case study (3): a journey from invisibility to 'community leader'***

The following individual citizen-learner case study is one of several exceptional learner journeys that stood out in terms of their transformational value and the diversity and complementarity of different forms of learning outcomes. It also illustrates key elements shared by different courses, such as the social nature of learning, progression to further learning, links to practice, and the role of social movements. It also challenges some of the assumptions made in the literature concerning the reservation towards confidence and self-esteem as learning outcomes (Ecclestone, 2004), and about how learners can navigate the learning opportunities open to them to suit their own, unpredictable, and constantly evolving aims.

Ruth had started her learning at the CVS as a carer with a Speaking Up course in 2007. The course was delivered by Tutor A. Although professionally educated, Ruth had arrived at the Speaking Up course with an exceptionally low level of confidence. After getting married she had become a rather isolated housewife and mother, and even her volunteering as a sacristan in her church was chosen so as to allow her to keep a profile. Then her husband had developed alcohol-induced dementia (it could be assumed that his alcoholism may have been a factor in her disempowerment, although she was not explicit about this), and she found herself in the particularly challenging role of being a mental health carer. Somehow (probably through a doctor's referral) she had found her way to a support group for mental health carers from where she was referred to Speaking Up by a carer support worker:

'The first course, Speaking Up - I mean I only got referred to this because my husband became ill, and from that I was eventually referred to the community mental health team, they referred me to the Mind Carers Support, and it was through them. [The worker there] had been sent information about Speaking Up. So the course I went to was in [2007, my correction, based on learner records].

I was terrified. I thought I couldn't do it, it meant going to a new place, with people I didn't know, a group of people, and I can't do groups, I didn't know what was expected of me, I was very frightened altogether, I was thrust into this situation'.

*'But you saw it as an opportunity as well at the time?'*

'I was used to doing what I was told. [Laughs] and I went because [the worker] said, "go". And I found that with every session there were a number of struggles.'

(Ruth and interviewer, in italics)

The extent of her shyness was corroborated by her fellow course learner, Verity, who cited her as someone who was in need of confidence building (unlike herself):

'There was one lady, who had a PhD, and she was very nervous, she could barely speak in the group'. (Verity)

The tutor perceived that the key initial challenge for her was to be made to feel comfortable in the group, to come to trust others, and thus to gradually rebuild her self-esteem. As another learner put it, 'it was a very protected and very safe environment' (Marian), which, with gentle coaxing by the experienced tutor, were key factors in helping her restore her social confidence and interpersonal skills.

'[The tutor] was so kind, so careful. [...] We helped each other, and [the tutor] was facilitating with that, but she was very skilful about it, and she could see when someone was getting off the point or a bit dominant or something and steer things back again. She just looked after us and nourished us and encouraged us to grow, really.'

(Ruth)

Another key factor was that by being in a small group of peers, that is, with people who faced the same situation and challenges, people shared issues and common concerns, and were able to support each other. This also enabled a reflection on their common conditions and on the external factors that contributed to their disempowerment. Inevitably, people also compared their respective caring situations. As cited above, Verity had found this to be a great source of comfort.

After the first stage of confidence building and with feedback from others Ruth realised her own progress. This encouraged her to consider further courses, this time of her own volition:

'Well, that course finished halfway through the summer and by the end [...] we had a break, and I found that I could look back and see, "well, I think I've come a long way", and I hadn't realised as I was going along, but then I was thinking, "oh, I can do this sort of thing". So when the next course came along, and the next one, so I thought, "well, yes, I can do it.'"

*'And did other people recognise the change in you?'*

'Oh, I think so; they saw it before I did'

*'Did they feed it back to you?'*

'Yes, yes. In the [carer] support group, and the church as well. I felt I was standing a bit taller, not quite assertive yet' [laughs].

*'... But not hiding away either so much?'*

'Not hiding away so much.'

(Ruth, and Interviewer)

Four years later Verity still remembered Ruth's remarkable transformation:

'She just blossomed, it was incredible. [...] And she'd become involved...'

(Verity)

After the Speaking Up course Ruth, along with several other learners, attended other classes for carers and a carer support group.

'Over the next year I did various courses. [...] Each one was incremental... I met people that I had met before, and gradually coming here [to the CVS] and recognising people, and gradually my world expanding a bit, and finding places were no longer new to me.' (Ruth)

Through this participation in the relatively similar and familiar environment of carer groups, Ruth consolidated her confidence gains and found new opportunities. In her case she discovered that her initial handicap could be turned into an asset in her role as Chair of the Carers' Forum.

'In the end I was chairing the Carers Forum [for 18 months] and being able to give back what I've been given to begin with, which was enormously important for me, I didn't think I had anything to give, to anybody...'

*And in which ways did you give back?*

'Just by knowing that I can chair meetings and I can make feel people relaxed and welcome, and newcomers would recognise how they were feeling, because I'd been through that, and to be able to reassure them, at the Mind and the carers support group.' (Ruth, and Interviewer)

The recognition of her skills and the turnaround in her confidence led to important outcomes in the private domain. Notably, she was able to deal with the immediate challenges she had to face when her husband's health condition deteriorated and she needed to assert herself in her negotiations with statutory agencies:

'I was looking after my husband on my own, it would have killed me, the frustrations were so... because of his dementia he didn't have an insight, but fortunately, as I said, well, what happened, [...] *and I said*, "look, I'm not prepared to do that personal thing", and he had to go into respite care [...] and he just ended up never going back home again [...]. [And] as a result of all that I had to sell the home just to clear the debt and everything; stuff to deal with - *without this preparation I wouldn't have been able to do it* because I wouldn't have known how to ask for help, where to go, or been brave enough, to be assertive enough to say I'm in trouble, I need help, what do I need to do. I wouldn't have done that.'  
(Ruth, my emphasis)

A third outcome for her was that shortly after her husband had been taken into full-time care, she successfully applied to a part-time job, about which she commented:

‘But again that experience of applying for another job and I may not be [there] for ever, but that experience of doing a CV, and the preparation was in itself helpful, even though at that time I didn’t think I would get to do that kind of thing.’ (Ruth)

Her own conclusion about her multiple outcomes in the personal domain, as active citizen/ community leader and employee were as follows:

‘Although my paid employment is only part-time nevertheless I’m fully employed in these different areas [of involvement], and I feel that my life is very rich actually, and fulfilled. [...]

I’m interested in what’s going on [...] I’m aware of things, and I do what I can in the areas I find myself, I’m not ambitious, but with the... not the work situation, but with the different groups of people I spent my last years, I’m a sort of leader, actually, and I feel that I have responsibilities and I take them seriously, and that means enabling other people to grow, as well as to use my gifts for the benefit of others in the community I live in’. (Ruth)

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the Speaking Up course did turn some individuals’ lives around, as witnessed in some of the research interviews. This is how Ruth summed up the centrality of not only the course but also its core concept of ‘speaking up’ which can be applied to so many different domains of life:

‘And for me the Speaking Up course was what began it, and everything else followed from that, but it’s somehow finding a way of getting there and staying and listening and being taught that it’s okay to speak up, you don’t have to apologise for it, and to explain to anybody why to do it and being given the tools to do that, and then the directions to follow that up further, it has really happened to me...’ (Ruth, my emphasis)

In this way, speaking up can be practised in a variety of places, whether at home, in the (usually) safe spaces of participation in a voluntary sector support group, and then expanded to other domains, with people in power situations. Ruth cited one such example

of having challenged a father who had been shouting at her daughter unfairly, she found, in the changing rooms of a public swimming pool, after a tournament. This was not long after she had started Speaking Up and had, in her own words, surprised herself.

I want to conclude this case study with Ruth's definition of empowerment, which I think is particularly apt.

[Empowerment] has a lot to do with being articulate, having confidence. I felt being visible, and I come back to that because *I had the experience all the years that I was invisible*, I was kicked around, not physically but I could be an object or 'thing'; and empowerment is about nothing in-your-face but being there, being entitled to be there and being entitled to contribute, it's like taking a place at table. It's being accepted and able to contribute, if you are kept down, you can't, you're not yourself and you're not anybody else either.' (Ruth, my emphasis)

The section will consider the next phase of the Speaking Up course.

### **7.1.2 Speaking Up phase 2: personal development or active citizenship?**

Following on from its original purpose and design the 'Speaking Up' course evolved partly to reflect the constantly changing criteria for accreditation and partly by the choices made by the tutors who developed the courses in response to their perception of learner needs. In response to the growth of Speaking Up courses prompted by ALAC a new tutor (Tutor B) was recruited to deliver the courses. Although working closely with Tutor A, Tutor B developed Speaking Up with different learner groups such as with parents at a Sure Start Centre, primarily women. After Tutor A's retirement in 2010 Tutor B became lead tutor for Speaking Up and in 2012, Team Leader for Learning and Development at the CVS.

Speaking Up was fundable independently from projects on account of its accreditation. The level of accreditation was initially only pre-entry level and level 1 (equivalent to less than 2 GCSEs), and within this, the courses needed to be adapted frequently to fit new funding criteria. The accrediting body was the National Open College Network (NOCN) which focused on learner outcomes and in this way allowed to adapt the course content to each learner group. Accreditation operated in the form of learner portfolios, which were

externally verified. The course comprised a set number of 'guided learning hours' per unit, with each higher level of course requiring a greater number of units.

In response to learner demand Tutor B expanded the Speaking Up course that was initially accredited at entry level and level 1 only, into a level 2 and 3 (although the latter being equivalent to A-level was more difficult to get funded under the lifelong learning government policy<sup>22</sup>). I was able to examine the workbook that the tutor had compiled for the course in 2012 comprising sections for the learners to complete and materials for tutors. This gave me as detailed insight into the course. The following is an analysis of the main changes that were observed, including the shift of emphasis from the original Speaking Up to one that had become more explicitly focused on personal development. This was particularly noticeable at level 1, which, back in 2006, had been the only course for carers and included, as was seen, elements of analysing power. Here, however, the level 1 course (30 hours) included two main units, 'Developing confidence and self-awareness' and 'Demonstrating speaking and listening skills', and the outcomes were presented as follows (CVS website, 2013),

'On this course learners will:

- Explore stress and how to manage it
- How to set and implement effective goals
- Explore feeling confident in social situations
- Explore strategies for effective communication
- Be able to present ideas and information effectively
- Be able to participate in a variety of group discussions'

Despite having been framed as aiming 'to empower individuals to make a difference in their own lives and to the area in which they live' (echoing Take Part), the course at level 1 did not make *any* further references to active citizenship or citizen voice in its outcomes (see above). Thus, the emphasis had shifted from enhancing collective service user 'voice' and participation to personal development. Additionally the course workbook contained multiple instances of 'responsibilisation' (Clarke, 2005): for example, learners had to show

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<sup>22</sup> The thrust of government policy in adult learning was to address the UK's 'skills gap', prioritising 'basic skills', which translated into funding being almost entirely concentrated on people with no or a low level of qualifications, generally below level 2 which corresponds to GCSE grades A-C or Key Skills level 2. This means that in order to be fundable, courses have to have a minimum number of learners that fulfil these criteria.

how they were '*managing their personal behaviour*' in social situations: for example in one activity learners were asked to reflect on what constitutes 'appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in social situations'. The word 'power' did not appear anywhere in the course workbook, whose activities could easily be read like a manual for the 'reflective subject' (Giddens, 1991) – if not Foucault's (self-)disciplined subject - and culminated in a 'personal development plan' which concludes with the following 'life-long learning' exhortation:

'Now you have attended the course, what specific further development needs have you identified and how will you ensure these development needs are met?'

(CVS Speaking Up Level 1 workbook, 2012:33)

At level 2, however, the course did include an element of active citizenship in addition to several units on personal responsibility. The 2012 workbook nevertheless framed even aspects like assertiveness in terms of one's own responsibility ('discuss how [your] behaviour influences the way people perceive you') and decision-making (stressing 'the rights and responsibilities involved in decision-making and being assertive'). Only the unit on presentation skills resembles the approach and tone adopted in the original course. The level 2 course additionally incorporated the following units:

- 'understanding diversity'
- 'understanding personal and social responsibility', and
- 'understanding the rights and responsibilities of citizenship'.

The latter included human rights, the legislative and electoral systems, an exploration of three civic roles ('a school council representative, a local councillor, an MP') and the difference between 'personal choice and community responsibility'. The reflection at the end of this unit asked learners to write about the following topics and questions:

'your role [in] a democratic society. Do you feel you have a better understanding of what that role is, and how you can be most effective in that role?

Do you consider yourself to be an active citizen? If so, what sort of activities do you take part in [?].

*If you don't consider yourself to be an active citizen, how do you plan to change that?* (CVS Speaking Up Level 2 workbook (2012, pp 107, 108), my emphasis)

It is interesting to note that the 'active citizen' has been included, as well as references to a 'democratic society'. This could be attributable to the influences of Take Part and the Parliamentary Outreach courses. However, it is hard to overlook the normative tone in these workbooks with a tendency towards promoting a 'responsible' citizen (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004); even community participation is presented here in terms of being a social responsibility. The course does not appear to use the CVS Take Part diagram (I did check this with the lead tutor of Speaking Up, who confirmed that she had not used it). But I was particularly concerned with the assumption it expressed in the last of the above workbook exercises about the importance of having to become an active citizen, which seems to contradict Tutor B's reservations about imposing any top-down definitions (section 6.1, p141) and her commitment to an open-ended, community development approach to empowerment (see also next chapter).

By encouraging solutions to 'empowerment' in terms of 'management of the self', this approach bears all the hallmarks of the 'therapeutic culture' trend in lifelong learning (Ecclestone, 2004) which is 'concerned with helping people, especially marginalised individuals, to cope and survive rather than to understand and challenge the structures that oppress them' (Crowther and Martin 2009:40).

On the other hand, the 2013 online presentation of the *Level 2 course* (22 half-day sessions) promised more explicitly to explore 'societal issues in greater depth', adding:

'This is an opportunity to develop assertiveness and conflict management techniques, improve your speaking and listening skills and understanding of body language. Look at the bigger picture, by exploring *political issues* such as citizenship, human rights, democracy, diversity and the law.

These issues affect everybody so understanding the way we are governed is the first step to making real changes on local and even national levels.'

(CVS website, accessed 19 July 2013)

As this constituted a marked change to the 2012 learner workbook (at level 2) from which the term 'political' was entirely absent, I asked the tutor how this change in emphasis had come about. Her explanation (by email in 2013) was that she acted in demand to learner requests, who, although they find these aspects challenging, 'really enjoy that aspect of the course', and added: 'I am sure it has nothing to do with my recent reading "Radicalizing Learning – Adult education for a just world"!!!' (Tutor B).

#### ***7.1.2.1 Speaking Up: a learner case study (4) on personal development and self-determination***

For many learners Speaking Up was their first CVS course which led to further learning and development. This case study explores the learning journey of Ella, who lived in the Sure Start area and arrived at the courses as a parent with two young children. Her long term objective was to develop qualifications, and while she had access to free learning she had started an Open University degree.

She had come across the Speaking Up course at the Sure Start Children Centre, where 'it was advertised on the door'. She added: 'It wasn't very well advertised, actually, it was a bit vague' but after having found out more about it at an Open Day event she decided to give it a try. The free crèche offered by the Children Centre allowed her to attend while her youngest was not yet attending school. Part of her motivation was to address a personal development need:

'I'm a relatively confident person, but I do have a lot, sort of, personal and self image problems, so I did want to do it to build up myself and my self-confidence, being able to talk in situations like this, I mean formal interviews and talking to professionals, which I always feel kind of intimidating. So that was one of my aims.'

(Ella)

What she had not mentioned in the interview was the immediate impact of Speaking Up: it had given her the assertiveness to sort out an unsatisfactory relationship with her partner by ending the relationship. Such impacts of learning on personal life are not uncommon, particularly as a result of women gaining greater assertiveness and control over their lives.

But first and foremost she was interested in expanding her knowledge in anything connected to her educational development. As pointed out by Andersson and Laginder (2013:109),

‘Self-confidence is strongly related to the feeling of being knowledgeable, well-informed and competent whatever the subjects are. Giving the opportunity to study is in itself a characteristic feature of a democratic society.’

Thus, already enrolled at the Open University, she appreciated the further opportunities for learning provided by the CVS, where she subsequently undertook a training qualification, various IT courses, a Grundtvig Learner Workshop on Active Citizenship, and several Take Part courses.

‘It just opened my mind to new perspectives [...] I found that when I was doing Speaking Up a lot of my social sciences work had some kind of transition with what we were learning, so it just all came together, and I found that since doing further courses at the CVS they had them overlapping and continu[ing], and it's really good - it gives a broader picture and expand my knowledge a bit, *so it's got me more where I want to be.*’ (Ella, my emphasis)

As described in Chapter Six above, Ella's courses coincided with the Take Part Pathfinder and other active citizenship courses at the CVS. For her, this topic played a big role in her identity (see Chapter Six): even though at the time of the interview she did not have time yet for any formal volunteering. The notion of herself as an active citizen by passing round information in her community, for example, gave her recognition and strengthened her self-belief and confidence, encouraging her in her personal and social development. Fryer (2010) termed it the ‘sense of identity and belonging’, which he felt was intimately connected to, and a necessary step in, the development of citizenship. It is important to stress that it is the combination of support and development through learning, the confidence and identity gained, and the opportunities this opened up to her own agency, which enabled her to move forward in a way in which she felt in control. It gave her the confidence to seize opportunities such as the one she mentioned in her interview –

incidentally highlighting how useful guest speakers can turn out to be for course participants:

‘It was the Take Part [HYCW course]... where the [university service user research] group came to talk, [...] there’s going to be a follow up [...]. My daughter had a rare form of meningitis when she was a baby, and I want to try to join a medical research on the off-shoot of this particular strain – even in Great Ormond Street they didn’t know much about it - and trying to get some funding for that and [this group] is going to help me with that sort of thing. Again, that was something that was in my head, *but I never thought it would be a realistic thing to do, and that was from going on a course here, to be able to do something about that.* So it all follows on, doesn’t it? You go to one group and you find interest in another group and they introduce you to another group, and that’s what’s lovely about it, [coming] here...’ (Ella, my emphasis)

A project worker at the Children Centre, interviewed as a ‘stakeholder’, cited the following example as an outcome she had observed. Despite the anonymity it is likely that she was referring to the above learner.

‘Certainly one of our parents has loved all the training, it has been a real journey for her, she has begun to map out where she wants that journey to take her, whereas before she didn't have the confidence to think, “well, what can I do, things are very different for me”. She felt that she had lost her identity a bit, but through all the CVS training she has had she picked up a lot of skills that she was afraid to share before. And now she is mapping out her future that is a really positive one and that can really help her children. The confidence that she has grown is passed on to her children and it has been lovely to watch.’

(Stakeholder, Children Centre staff member)

For Ella, the planning tool she was given on the Speaking Up course had been particularly valuable, enabling her to keep track of her evolving plans. As pointed out in the above course description, personal planning had become an important element of the Speaking Up course. When asked about ‘empowerment’ she highlighted this aspect of the course:

'In my understanding, empowerment is the confidence to basically fight through what you want to do and what you say you want to do, and I feel that this can be with anything, not just active citizenship. [On the course] you are introduced to SMART goals, to make a purpose, specific, measurable, obtainable, all that, so if you think of a purpose and that's what you are going to do, so the empowerment is that you continue with that goal that you set yourself and with the active citizenship, whatever that is [...] for me it's mainly confidence to follow through what you set out to do...' (Ella)

From this confidence and sense of feeling in control, other outcomes took shape, thus translating the subjective personal development outcomes into agency. As Chapter Six has highlighted, for this learner, the identity as an active citizen has played a key role in her journey.

To finish this section on Speaking Up, the main outcomes for the majority of learners were increases in confidence and assertiveness and improved communication, but also greater autonomy and self-determination. The latter should be seen, however, not merely as becoming independent of state services, but as a way for individuals to be able to consider and take the necessary actions to seize a range of opportunities to them. Whilst the learning was not the only element, and many consolidated their initial Speaking learning with additional courses and practice, it would appear that the Speaking Up course had played a crucial part in their initial development (another poignant individual, citizen case study is given in Chapter Nine, section 9.1.) It also showed that they were able to control their learning for their own agendas (Biesta, 2006), and how their aims and aspirations expanded as they gained confidence and explored new opportunities. Active citizenship, for some but not all learners, was both a means towards other goals and an end in itself.

The accessibility and multi-purpose applicability of Speaking Up – for personal development or for active citizenship – helped to engage people from many different backgrounds in learning. For many, regaining confidence in speaking up constituted a crucial 'building block' in their development, opening doors very widely in some cases:

'Speaking Up particularly was quite influential because it went on for over a year; I learnt so much...[...] and that let me on to the other courses [...]. Once I did the

Speaking Up course I've known more about the Take Part programme at the CVS, so that kind of opened my learning, with courses coming up...' (Ella)

'And for me the Speaking Up course was what began it, and everything else followed from that; but *it's somehow finding a way of getting there and staying and listening* and being taught that it's okay to speak up, you don't have to apologise for it, and to explain to anybody why to do it and being given the tools to do that, and then the directions to follow that up further.' (Ruth, my italics)

The effect of the courses on individuals, particularly on parents in the Sure Start area, was not lost on the Labour MP who had met with several of the women, including, but not limited to, the group's visit to Parliament (See case study three in Chapter Nine).

'The positive impact I have observed of Speaking Up on those taking part has been truly incredible. I have never come across a programme that has had so much transformative power. For many of the people I have spoken to who have done the course, it has literally turned round their and often their family's lives. What a great example of a low cost but extremely high value social programme!'

(Local MP, cited in CVS Learning programme, 2011-12)

## **7.2 Take Part Pathfinder learning programmes and their outcomes**

The Take Part Pathfinder programme comprised a number of courses<sup>23</sup>. Their aims had been given as the increase and widening of civil and civic participation (with an emphasis on 'civic'), to develop 'community leadership' and to generally 'increase the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions that affect them' (DCLG, 2008c). The different courses developed by the CVS Pathfinder can be grouped into the following three categories: longer Take Part courses ('How Your City Works' and 'Taking a Lead'), short Take Part 'civic taster' sessions, and tailored group sessions. Lastly, some generic

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<sup>23</sup> To clarify the meaning of the plural of programmes: while there was only one Take Part Pathfinder programme at the CVS, it comprised a wide range of individual 'learning programmes' (the term used by DCLG) or courses.

outcomes, common to the different courses offered under the Take Part Pathfinder programme are also being highlighted.

The distinction between shorter information sessions and longer courses matters because the question arose whether the government's pressure to deliver high targets (both for delivery and for learner outcomes) may have affected the delivery of active citizenship learning and the outcomes that could be – and were – achieved within these constraints. As the literature in social policy has emphasised, New Labour increasingly tightened programme constraints in the third sector under the influence of managerialism and 'projectivitis' (Milbourne, 2013), so this nuanced analysis provides a valuable instance of verifying these arguments in an empirical setting.

### **7.2.1 Take Part civic role taster sessions**

One of the main innovations in terms of active citizenship learning at the CVS had been prompted by the Take Part Pathfinder's requirement to promote civic engagement and increase people's influence as citizens. This led to information ('How-to Guides') and courses to increase information about opportunities. A number of short 'civic taster' sessions were devised; most of them in partnership with relevant public agencies who provided expert input and sometimes co-delivered the sessions. The majority of participants attended them mainly in order to, as the title indicated, find out 'How to Become a Magistrate/Police Authority Member/School Governor' (etc). The sessions aimed to be practical and accessible, and with experts on hand, they gave learners the chance to ask questions. The following quotations explain the value of these short courses:

'Yes I'd recommend [the magistrates course]; it genuinely was good and informative. [...] I liked the fact that it wasn't all theory, that there was a practical bit with the button pushing and discussion. I always like discussing things, and I just liked to find out more about it before I actually decided to apply.' (Cassandra)

'I thought I'd go and find out about magistrates, and that was an excellent session, really good, most interesting, very charismatic speaker [a Magistrate], excellent, yeah, I actually put in an application and visited the courts for three days, as you

should. Yes, absolutely captivating, that one. The closing date is around November, this year and they invited me to the first interview sometime in January.’ (Marian)

*‘Which part or aspect of the session did you find the most useful to help you decide whether to apply?’*

The sentencing exercises and the feedback from the magistrates in attendance. It was particularly helpful to be able to talk to them during the session and *get a feel for what it would require* and what the [magistrate] training would be like. [...] I thought the sessions worked well, with the opportunity to ask questions at the end and meet others who were interested in doing the same thing. There was enough to stimulate questions without going into too much detail for those who did not wish to pursue things further.’ (written feedback to researcher questions by an unlabelled learner; my emphasis)

An important aspect of the civic tasters was their interactive nature. The feedback from learners was unambiguous: people from all backgrounds not only preferred this method of finding out about such complex roles in more detail (the magistrate’s role, and eligibility criteria for becoming one, are commonly misunderstood), but also to decide whether to pursue their interest further – and some would otherwise not have applied.

‘You see, after I’d been on the course I went ahead and researched it more and at that point I looked at the Magistrates Association website, *afterwards*, but I wouldn’t have done it I think without the course, the course was very helpful.’

(Cassandra)

‘Because you can read it on the Internet, you can read it on a piece of paper and you can read it in a book, but sometimes you miss a bit or you don’t understand, and that point can be made [at a taster session] and it can clear up a lot of problems.’ (Martha)

One of the learners I had contacted as part of a follow up of the magistrates who had been appointed, explained how a Take Part course brought the role to her attention in the first instance. The information was provided by email.

'[Magistrates] was mentioned on the final session of our Take Part course [Taking the Lead] as one of the avenues to pursue on completion if we were interested. [The taster] made me think that I had something to offer despite my age (63) and made it very clear what was wanted. Without this session I would not have applied this year and would then probably have left it too late given the cutbacks.'

(Learner, via email)

Apart from informing course participants about civic roles the taster sessions also contributed to civic knowledge, providing another, contextualised but more in-depth aspect of 'how the systems work'. Several learners mentioned this benefit and how they had subsequently used and shared this information in their active citizen roles.

Similarly, the 'How to Become a Councillor' produced some unexpected outcomes. It enabled participants to increase their understanding of local democracy and the role of the local councillor. The one-off taster (which I attended) was delivered in partnership between the CVS and the local authority, at the council offices, involving the Council's Member Services Officer and the Community Engagement Officer. It even used existing information materials, and yet, without the impetus of the Take Part Pathfinder, the local authority would not have run such a session. Furthermore, the course was fully booked and had been advertised widely including in the local paper and to community contacts of the Engagement Officer. It attracted a wide range of people including some who were new to the CVS, and who subsequently attended other Take Part events. The first part covered the procedural aspects of how to become a councillor, and for the second part an experienced local councillor had volunteered to discuss her views with course participants. The presence of the councillor attracted some participants to the course, such as this activist from a community organisation:

'Because I have a lot of dealings with my city councillors and the city council as well, [...] I also wanted to understand... it's very easy for me to find the things they do wrong and find fault but I wanted to find out why sometimes they make those decisions and what's behind it.' (Hugh)

Another learner who went on to participate in several other Take Part courses articulated a similar rationale for active citizens to use this knowledge as a condition for involvement:

‘Like the local councillor workshop - I don't think I will be applying any time soon - but I think it's good to find out how it works and how your community works, and to understand it better. Because I think *it's really hard to be active and engaged in your community [...] if you don't understand how it works.*’ (Livia, my emphasis)

Incidentally (but highly relevant to the wider debate) it is possible that some of the participants’ own agendas at this fully booked session may have emerged all too ostensibly – since the session ended in a very lively debate with the councillor who was criticised by some vocal participants for not engaging her constituents more effectively - a very topical discussion central to New Labour’s Community Empowerment at the time, which stood in stark contrast with the position of the local Labour party towards community engagement and the sharing of community leadership. Unfortunately, the ‘success’ of this session may have deterred the council from repeating it under the Pathfinder, and for a while.

However, writing in September 2013, it would appear that the How to Become a Councillor session is to be repeated twice in Local Democracy Week as a joint venture between the CVS and the Council, one at the CVS and another at the Council<sup>24</sup>.

In sum, shorter civic courses may have enabled individual citizen involvement although this research is unable to ascertain how much they contributed to actual increases in involvement, let alone address issues of under-representation in civic roles. To find this out would require a long-term, systematic follow up of participants. However, it can be argued that their value lay more in the contextualised civic knowledge they provided, which, as some learners argued, underpins active citizen confidence and ‘empowerment’.

### **7.2.2 Longer civic courses (How Your City Works and Community Leadership)**

Aside from shorter civic courses, two longer courses were especially developed under the Pathfinder. The first was ‘Taking a Lead in Your Community’ (TALIYC), aimed at increasing community leadership, and the second was ‘How Your City Works’ (HYCW) - with

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<sup>24</sup> The influence of the CVS CEO on the majority Party at the Council may have had something to do with the revival of the course...

additional funding from the Regional Empowerment Partnership<sup>25</sup>. Both consisted of eight half-day sessions on the local institutional systems (local government, health, police, education) and the exploration of how people could engage with these systems more effectively. HYCW covered more ground (local government, education, police, health, third sector) and in more detail, and aimed

- 'to enable citizens to feel more able to influence decisions made in their local area;
  - to provide them with information and skills [...] to be better equipped to take up roles in local decision-making bodies
  - to signpost progression routes into governance roles on the local community'
- (HYCW CVS course information, 2009)

It could be argued that the HYCW course was more orientated towards the *individual* citizen, whereas the TALIYC course was explicitly aimed at 'community leaders' and supporting collective action in the community. Both courses included visits to institutions and guest speakers. In addition, TALIYC organised a question and answer panel session with local decision-makers, at which learners asked questions they had prepared in advance. The following learner described both the course and her motivation for attending:

'So Take Part, it was a course held over [...] eight weeks of weekly meetings where we covered a range of activities looking at informing us about how local government worked, how the voluntary sector interacted with [...] local government and *how we could use the opportunities to further our particular interests and causes*, and giving us a range of tools to be able to do that. And as well as just information there were also very interactive sessions where we went. We had a session where we had various speakers, a local MP and someone from

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<sup>25</sup> To develop the How Your City Works programme additional resources were indeed required: despite generic formats available, the information had to be thoroughly researched to make sense to the local context, before being turned into engaging and interactive learning activities, with visits to local institutions. The programme consisted of 2 sessions on local government, one each on police, health, education and the voluntary and community sector. The tutor's knowledge of the city impressed several learners, none of whom had guessed that she was not even a local resident. Unfortunately, if the CVS were to run this course again it would have to update most of the materials since public institutions change so often.

the police, [...] a question-and-answer session, which was great, [and] a tour round the local council offices. [...]

*I was new to the committee of the [community group] so wanted to put myself in a stronger position to be able to contribute actively and fully, and not just being sat there, doing nothing, and more generally I wanted to be more involved in the third sector, so it gives me a grounding and some basic information to be able to do that, more confident.'* (Clarissa, 'Taking a Lead in your Community' course)

Clarissa, despite her full time work in the civil service, was involved in a wide range of volunteering roles, including as trustee and school governor. She did point out that her involvement was only possible because of the flexibility in her work and having a supportive employer (a government department). She found out about the course from a meeting with the CVS Chief Executive at which she had sought constitutional advice for her group.

There was no doubt for her that the knowledge she gained from the course increased her confidence:

*What did you most value about the course?*

*'I think, I found it fascinating to find out a lot more about how the city and local politics works, because I was very... started from a very low knowledge base there, I found that particularly interesting, and that's something that I've taken away [...]*

*I think it's given me more confidence, that level of understanding now will give me the confidence that when an opportunity comes along, that yes I can do something about that, I've got that knowledge base there to use as a springboard.'* (Clarissa)

The theme of increased knowledge about institutional systems linked to the confidence for citizen agency (whether for personal or collective interest) was quite strong. *All* those who had been on the longer Take Part courses referred to this aspect.

Next I consider the case of Milena who had attended 'How Your City Works'. This young health professional from Eastern Europe worked full-time in the NHS. Her time for active citizenship was therefore limited, and like Clarissa above, she regrettably missed a few sessions. It was on a community interpreter course that she found out about Take Part through a short 'Take Part' taster presentation given by the Take Part tutor. This sparked her interest, which she followed up and, after attending the course taster, she was thrilled to have been accepted on the course. As she said, 'as a foreigner I have to say that even though I have been here for nearly six years it's always very valuable for me to get the information about how the city works, the country works' (Milena). Apart from the insight into the effectiveness of the community outreach on behalf of the Take Part team (on a Sunday, when the interpreter course was held) I noted a change in Milena's motivation. First she explained what had initially attracted her to the course:

*'On the [HYCW] taster session we got the information about the whole course, what would be involved with each session and I decided, "gosh, that's a brilliant course" and I wanted to get this information and it was free and it was the main reason why I attended because I wanted to find out about these things. I did not know the CVS before, I knew about [citizens advice, located in same building], but with my future plans as community interpreter, I decided that this information would be useful for me and my community, and friends, and clients.'* (Milena, my emphasis)

At the end of the interview she mentioned the possibility of her raised aspiration:

*'I did it for the knowledge, and I did it because I would like to maybe become more influential, maybe to become a city councillor, or a governor, to have this, I wouldn't say role, more the power to influence the upper structure.'* (Milena)

Motivations for learners on these courses also varied substantially. Not all had an existing community interest, however. For those learners who had less well defined community involvements the courses offered opportunities for personal development, including with a view to enhanced employability.

'I think, the fact that [because] I had been [living] away from [the city] [I wanted] to refresh my information. Also the fact that I wasn't working for a little bit, I was just doing a bit of agency work so I had [...] time to kill, and *I needed to also put my confidence up a bit*, because I wasn't in a very good place, where I'd been knocked back [...] from a couple of jobs, and I really wanted to back myself up for when I got going again.' (Ingrid)

'I was going through the [CVS Take Part] website looking at all the different courses, and I have been referred to it by someone from the youth offending team, and this lady said it's really good and there are a lot of courses offered. *I didn't even know this place existed*, so I got onto the website then and saw the courses on there, and thought, "wow" [...]. I came onto the course for, like I said, to meet new people [...], and to be able *to use my time wisely*, which sounds really boring but because [...] rather than staying at home and just getting upset that I can't get into employment at the moment even though I'm trying, I would rather just build up my own personal CV, not only to show people but for me to expand on just general knowledge.' (Zannah, my emphasis)

In the case of 'Ingrid' who was a trained youth worker and committed to social and community values, the course helped her refresh her sense of purpose and identity, whilst local contacts reconnected her socially and as an active citizen, thus strengthening her sense of belonging and identity. This had been her stated aim following her return to the city:

'And for me it kind of encouraged me, and *it kind of confirmed* [...] *how I was a social activist myself*, with lots of things that I've been involved in myself, [and] just talking through a lot of my own work as a youth and community worker. [...] I met some lovely people and it actually *helped me to network* with a couple of new people, to gain some more contacts which was really helpful too. [...] I did find out a bit more about how I could be involved [...] *how to be more effective*. [...] Definitely, it's really boosted my confidence and it's really informed me about what else is going on in [city], to refresh and re-inform [me].' (Ingrid, my emphasis)

Zannah shared similar needs except that she seemed clearer about the employment she wanted to (and did eventually) obtain. She seemed very organised and was one of a several learners who had brought along their course portfolio to the interview. She was very proud of having kept this information so diligently, despite having been teased for it by co-learners, as she used everything she could towards increasing her employability. But for her it was the knowledge the course gave her that she commented on mostly:

‘It’s something, especially the part about politics itself, just how it works, the very basics, even if you don’t want to follow ever into politics<sup>26</sup> itself, it’s going to impact on your life because all the parts that we did, the education, the police, the authorities, they were all things that we could say, “oh, if only we’d known”. [...]

*‘It is incredible how much doing something like that [i.e. the course] empowers you just from an extra bit of knowledge. You might never even have to use it but knowing extra things like who to go to if something happens, or if you can’t get through one-way how to go through a different channel.’* (Zannah, my emphasis)

‘Because I’ve been on the course [How Your City Works] I learnt that I can talk to my MP about it, and I thought that if I don’t get satisfaction from my MP I can approach any MP who’s interested in that. That’s useful information to know about, I wasn’t aware of before. It is useful to know that, if something is really upsetting you, to try to improve the situation.’ (Niamh)

So it would appear that, from whichever perspective people were approaching the knowledge relating to ‘how the system works’, those who attended these session because of their interest in or curiosity about civic knowledge all stated how more confident and ‘empowered’ (in their own words) they felt as a result of gaining this ‘extra bit of knowledge’ and understanding. It did not even have to be comprehensive but it gave learners the ‘basics’ and a starting point to know where and how to access more information. Course handouts were in this respect a much valued source of reference.

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<sup>26</sup> It was interesting that she should mention ‘politics’ and ‘how it works’ – but I am not sure what her interpretation of it was, and forgot to ask in the interview...

From a research point of view the outcome might appear as less robust, given that it was *subjective* empowerment (Forrest, 1999), rather than substantiated by action. But it must also be borne in mind that the interviews took place only months, or at the most, a year, after the course. And even if interviewees had slightly exaggerated the positive impact of the course, they talked very convincingly and with great enthusiasm about how much they had enjoyed and valued this civic information, in part due to how it had been presented.

Tailored information on relevant local public services also featured in the Speaking Up sessions. A Speaking Up course run for a BME group generated similar feedback about the potential usefulness of this kind of knowledge:

‘Before we attended the course, if we were stuck, then we were stuck, we would not have known an alternative through the local council etc. We have a better idea of where to seek help, to pursue the matter further.’ (Mr Chow)

This showed how the Speaking Up course at this stage included information relevant to ‘speaking up’ and was tailored to the specific needs of a community group.

### **7.2.3 Tailored group sessions: building capacity and providing access to learning to disadvantaged individuals and groups (learner case studies 5 and 6)**

Take Part learning was also offered to groups in a tailored format. By making use of its own network and of the partnership with the local authority, the CVS was able to approach individual active citizens and community groups including some that the CVS had not previously worked with.

One area of interest to the CVS had been tenant groups, and the Take Part Pathfinder partnership with the local council allowed the Take Part team to be introduced to the council housing tenant and leaseholder group. The negotiations with this group were rather lengthy and resulted in only one session. The group comprised mainly older people who seemed to have been re-elected year after year. Their meetings were held at the council in a very formal style. Moreover, their chairperson appeared to be playing a rather dominant role which somewhat inhibited the participation of the other representatives on

the committee. The topic that was finally agreed with the group was a session of how to run 'effective meetings'. As a research invitation was sent to anybody registered on either a Take Part or a Speaking Up programme, one of the members of this group, Graeme, had come forward to be interviewed. The session had been his only CVS or Take Part course attendance, although he had participated in other training sessions that were organised for the group by the council.

Graeme was a retired porter who had worked in the NHS all his life and moved to the city after retirement, where he lived by himself. He described himself as 'quite a private, shy person', and he spoke very quietly indeed. He was a popular and dedicated volunteer on four days of the week. As the Take Part training was offered to the group he was happy to join it.

'We came along in a group. I am quite a shy person, you know, and I hope to be able to speak out better, to have the confidence to speak out. I've always been quite ashamed with myself. I'm a lot better than I used to be. I didn't tend to ask questions, but I speak up a bit more now.

*What contributed to this change?*

I suppose, coming to this meeting [training session]; I learnt how to approach things, there is a right and wrong way about approaching things. [...] [And] if you have a question, not being afraid to ask a question. But, ehm.... I'm a lot better now than I used to be, the last meeting we had, I've been asking questions – through the chair - and I'm getting more confident.' (Graeme)

I was unable to assess the impact of the training on this group's dynamic, but the very fact of the session having been agreed on this topic (not without some difficulty) clearly signalled the feeling in the group that their group dynamics needed to change, and thus constituted a challenge to the chairperson. Regarding Graeme, however, without his active citizenship involvements he is unlikely to have accessed such adult learning for his personal development alone, and it was interesting that he used it for the purpose of addressing his personal issue with his shyness, about which he was so embarrassed. The course, then, provided in effect a form of contextualised 'speaking up' training within the safety of the group, and benefited him both personally and as an active citizen.

Belonging to voluntary and community groups of all kinds thus offered 'non-traditional' adult learners the chance to participate in learning. Similarly, a retired Chinese couple (interviewed jointly) attended Speaking Up because it was offered to their BME Elders group:

'The tutor came into the [Chinese Elders] group and explained what the course was about, and we decided to join then.[...] Most of us [Chinese] we were working in the kitchen, just working, not going outside, not mixing with others outside.' (Mrs Chow)

The couple enjoyed the learning, although they admitted that since they were retired they thought they might not need the information as much as they could have done before retirement, for example, in dealing with suppliers or the local council. In terms of the group, however, they commented that it had '*brought the people on the group closer*' (Mrs Chow). According to another Chinese interviewee who supported the learning as a mentor, the session delivered in English (with language support from Bao) had helped people feel more confident in their everyday life, and more autonomous.

'Some people if they didn't have the basic [language skills] and they didn't have the confidence to go out, and they needed their family, their children to get out, to go outside shopping something. Now they can do it by their own.' (Bao)

Take Part also offered several other tailored group sessions, in each case helping the group to clarify their purpose and action plans, and at times addressing confidence issues of its group members. The point to make here is that, while such training could be considered as constituting organisational 'capacity building', it is nevertheless essential for enhancing collective action, as a group and for individual members. It also has the potential to make the group more inclusive, and simultaneously enhance an individual's confidence and participation. Improving groups' effectiveness is thus essential, including to the quality of the participation experience they offer, which in turn can either undermine or sustain individual participation (Pathways through Participation, 2012). Tailored adult learning for groups, therefore, has a key role to play in enabling and sustaining active citizenship.

### **7.3 Generic course outcomes: the value added by the social dimension of learning, and by networking (learner case study 9)**

Whilst the analysis so far has aimed to present outcomes associated with distinct courses, a number of outcomes were common to all the CVS learning programmes examined here. Some of these elements have already been mentioned above, such as different aspects of confidence building through social learning. The social dimension is of particular interest here, as it has additional implications for active citizenship outcomes from a social purpose perspective, firstly, by enhancing collective action, and secondly, by providing opportunities for democracy learning (Crowther and Martin, 2009).

The learning created connections that linked people to others and to existing groups or networks, and in many cases it helped them identify new collective needs or ideas. In this way, the collective learning facilitated the emergence of new projects or initiatives (e.g. Leonard, in section 7.1.1.1 above, who identified the difficulty for carers to access support from statutory services). Even in the age of social networking, people often feel the need to physically meet in the first place. Ursula provides another individual learner case study which illustrated how personal outcomes are imbricated with collective outcomes, and in turn can bring about beneficial outcomes for society.

For Ursula having met people on the CVS citizenship courses who shared her interest in recycling was essential in not only building her confidence but also to realise her own ambitions ('I would love to be part of a local project. I've got a strong feeling about quite a few things, like public transport, recycling...'). She had two barriers which the courses helped her to face up to and overcome: first, her experience and the realisation that her lack of assertiveness had often let her down in terms of not being taken seriously by others, and secondly, the connections with like-minded people to team up with on the kind of projects she was particularly keen to pursue. After several CVS courses, having started with Taking a Lead, she undertook further Active Citizenship learning at the CVS, focused on 'social action' projects (British Council programme). This enabled her to find recognition and get involved with fellow active citizens who shared her aims. In the following she mentioned one co-learner with whom she ended up collaborating on an award-winning recycling project:

'I think I am more assertive, not in all ways and not immediately but I do believe [that participation in the courses] has changed me. For example the Waste Not Want Not event that [co-learner] from the Active Citizens course did. [...] I've been involved in that and I work with waste [...], so I have been supporting that a lot and passed on some good stuff that would have otherwise gone to landfill, probably. [...]

So because I have really talked with [the same co-learner] it is just great to have these relationships. [...] I feel that I am taking more of these issues out than in the past. I've got these strong ideals but without the assertiveness it's actually me paying for what's happening and that's the way I have been for some time. I've always held these ideals but then I've let myself down by not realising my own power to see things through.' (Ursula)

In this sense, the courses helped her develop her 'power with' other people, and significantly enhanced her citizenship agency and collective action. Her contribution (including her lorry, which had been useful for transporting items) added to the success of these events. The recycling project mentioned above won a countywide recycling award in 2013 – albeit under the name of her colleague, as she evidently still prefers to stay out of the 'limelight'.

#### **7.4 Interim discussion of Chapter 7 findings**

This chapter explored the contributions to active citizenship learning made by the range of CVS courses, and how the programmes had taken shape over time. Two main findings emerged: first, the development of the active citizenship courses (in their various guises) at the CVS had been influenced by the ALAC and Take Part Pathfinder government-funded programmes in significant and surprising ways. Significant, because without this stimulus and the injection of central government resources, these courses would not have come to fruition and thus been given the chance to develop into major and distinct initiatives, at least at the local level. Surprising, because in spite of greater government interference in shaping the orientation of programmes, the explicit active citizenship element had been allowed to flourish in spite of the CVS' previous reticence to embracing the concept (as shown in detail in Chapter 6). This, however, has deepened the extent of the exploration

of active citizenship by learners and encouraged a wider range of outcomes than would have been possible with this government impetus.

Secondly – and related to the above - another key finding was the insight gained from the intrinsic value of the variety of active citizenship learning approaches which were shown to have satisfied different and diverse learner needs both in terms of the level of learning ('where learners were at') and in terms of purpose (what drew people to a course, and what they used it for). One important outcome was that learners' goals and ambitions ostensibly changed over time, with growing confidence and as their horizons for agency opened up, thus enhancing their 'freedom as the capacity to participate effectively in shaping the social limits that define what is possible' (Hayward, 1998, in Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001:72). The Speaking Up learner case study of 'Ruth' (section 7.1.1.2) provided a particularly striking and powerful example of a course having led to significant personal transformation in terms of the enabling of active citizen agency and the formation of a citizen identity, with positive impacts in the private domain, for employment, and for community participation.

The extent to which the learning was explicitly focused on active citizenship varied from course to course and in response to learner demand. Interestingly, the Take Part programme added new aspects of active citizenship to the menu of courses and prompted the development of new course content that not only contributed to active citizenship outcomes but was also later 'recycled' at the CVS in other learning contexts. There was a contradiction at the heart of the Take Part Pathfinder programme, however, since, on the one hand, it had the effect of broadening the scope of the learning into new areas of involvement, but on the other that scope was curtailed by the Pathfinder targets, forcing tutors to deliver a greater number of shorter and more superficial 'taster' sessions at the expense of longer and more substantive courses. Also, the funding was hardly sufficient to develop in-depth and sophisticated course content, hence the influential *How Your City Works* course having required financial input from another government Community Empowerment programme.

What did emerge from the analysis was, particularly, citizens stressing the importance of understanding institutional and democratic systems to ground their practice of citizenship in a variety of roles. Previously, these aspects had been given less attention by the CVS,

and even professionals in the sector had limited access to this kind of 'strategic' information which formed part of the professional knowledge usually resting with a (predominantly male) elite of top-tier managers in the local voluntary and community sector (i.e. Chief Officers of the larger local charities and community organisations). Interestingly, it emerged that despite its supposedly 'procedural' nature (Crowther, 2004), the civic knowledge in the form of information on opportunities and basic understanding of civic and civil<sup>27</sup> institutional structures and decision-making processes had given learners the confidence they needed to engage as active citizens at a higher and more influential level, whether in pursuit of personal or collective aims. Ultimately this understanding would increase their chances of influencing local decisions or accessing resources (information or funding) that would underpin the effectiveness of their involvements.

This finding could represent a new insight into the power relationships between active citizens or the voluntary and community sector and the state: while the state tends to exploit the 'local knowledge' of communities by involving them in local governance, it fails to recognise the importance of such institutional knowledge to local communities and active citizens. However, the findings here seem to suggest that active citizens find their lack of understanding of institutional structures 'disempowering', thus nipping in the bud any attempts to influence and make demands on the state. This lack of knowledge is further undermined by the frequent reorganisations of public sector bodies, and even changes of personnel within public agencies<sup>28</sup>. Instead, the state has set up formalised representational structures of the 'third sector' within local governance which dilutes, 'tames' and incorporates (Taylor, 2012) the demands of the sector by streamlining it, as part of efforts to 'rationalise' such interactions. Infrastructure organisations in turn may collude in this governmental control by being funded to participate in sector representation, thus giving them the advantage of access but at the same time weakening their own 'advocacy' and that of voluntary and community sector groups who may be more distanced from these structures (Milbourne, 2013).

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<sup>27</sup> Part of the 'civic' knowledge included information on the structure of the voluntary and community sector and its representation within local governance.

<sup>28</sup> At one ALAC hub meeting, in response to a complaint made by a community sector person that the constant reorganisations within public services made it difficult to keep track of which officer is responsible for what, the County Council (Adult Services) manager for carers replied, in jest, 'so the tactic works, then!'.

Following on from this, one could more cynically argue that it is in the interest of government to keep citizens in the dark about the workings of the state, by and large, and that local governance is not only diluting accountability for decision-making at the local level but also constitutes an effective technique for controlling and excluding claims being made on services – both by individuals (e.g. carers accessing vital support) or groups. Whatever one's conclusion, the active citizens in this research who took part in courses on *How Your City Works* felt that the knowledge and understanding these courses conveyed strengthened their ability to make a valuable contribution to their community or group, particularly if they were in a leadership or trustee role.

The following chapter (Chapter Eight) will consider the pedagogic approaches of these programmes in greater detail, and the extent to which they contributed to – or inhibited – the 'empowerment' of active citizens. The findings from this chapter, together with those from Chapter Six and Eight are further discussed in section 8. 3.

## Chapter 8 ‘Empowering’ pedagogies for citizenship outcomes

‘When I criticise manipulation, I do not want to fall into a false and non-existent non-directivity of education. For me, education is always directive, always. The question is to know towards what and with whom it is directive. [...] I don’t believe in self-liberation. Liberation is a social act. Liberating education is a social process of illumination.’ (Freire, in Shor and Freire, 1987:109)

While the previous chapters started the presentation of the findings of the empirical research with an analysis of citizenship learning processes at the CVS and the content and the development of courses, this chapter critically examines in detail the pedagogies deployed. The chapter seeks to answer the overarching question of this research which is to establish to what extent the CVS approaches merit the label 'empowering', rather than merely amounting to the 'activation' and 'responsibilisation' of 'active citizens' (Clarke, 2005). As already discussed, empowerment is a highly contested term, including in adult learning. Not only does it depend upon one's conceptualisations of 'power' both generally (Lukes, 2005) and contextualised to active citizenship learning (Freire, 1970; Gaventa 1999; 2004), but different types of outcomes are prioritised by different schools of thought. Some theorists, for example, emphasise that learning should enhance agency and self-determination (Benn, 2000; Biesta and Tedder, 2007), while others add to these outcomes learners' active participation in society and democracy (Fryer, 2010; Crowther and Martin, 2009; Andersson and Laginder, 2013). More specifically still, the proponents of adult education for social purpose stipulate that the purpose of empowerment should be consciousness raising and the development of critical abilities, and as far as 'agency' is concerned, this should be extended to citizens as 'political actors' (Martin, 2001) rather than, as promoted by neo-liberal policies of lifelong learning, as economic and consumerist actors (Finger and Asun, 2001; Biesta, 2006). Moreover, 'political' participation, it has been argued, should be approached with a broader perspective, in order to include informal community-based activities which are deemed more accessible to women and other disadvantaged groups (Hirschmann and Di Stefano, 1986; Lister, 1998), but without neglecting the political dimension (to the pursuit of collective interests (Mouffe, 1992;

Lister, 1998; Cornwall, 2008). These considerations thus link the empowerment debate back to the debate about citizenship.

This chapter, therefore, explores the pedagogies of citizenship learning at the CVS tutors in light of these competing theories. In a first step it examines the approaches of tutors and their stated and unstated pedagogic intentions, and then contrasts them with learner perspectives on empowerment. This dual approach allows studying the interplay between tutors' pedagogies and outcomes for learners (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Indeed, one of the key questions underpinning the enquiry in this chapter is whether and to what extent the pedagogies at work have shaped, structured or possibly restricted the outcomes experienced by learners (top-down) or whether, on the other hand, learners' own expectations and aims for attending the courses may have influenced the tutors' pedagogical approaches (bottom-up, learner-centred). After these two steps the chapter ends with a discussion of findings. Also, as in the previous two findings chapters, the analysis differentiates between the different types of courses delivered at the CVS under the umbrella of 'active citizenship learning' in order to arrive at a nuanced, contextualised and therefore meaningful interpretation of the pedagogies.

## **8.1 The tutor perspective on 'empowering' pedagogies**

The literature on active citizenship learning has focused the attention on the central role of the tutor and her outlook in defining the empowerment of active citizens through adult learning. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) found in their research of citizenship education in a secondary education setting in the United States that the *purpose* given to the learning by the tutor very much determined the kind of outcomes that can be achieved by their learners. Freire (1970) also believed that teachers can never be neutral: inevitably, whether consciously or unconsciously, they have to take sides, that is, either on the side of the oppressor or of the oppressed. Following these theoretical (and, in the case of Westheimer and Kahne, empirical) insights, applied to the context of citizenship learning this positioning is expressed in the way a tutor conceptualises 'active citizenship'. This links back to the analysis undertaken in Chapter Six about the conceptualisations of citizenship, but in this chapter, the focus is on the pedagogies.

The two previous findings chapters have so far explored, respectively, how notions of active citizenship were developed and promoted through the CVS courses and governmental learning programmes, and how these courses were harnessed by learners to achieve a range of outcomes. These findings revealed the presence of complementary and competing agendas and their evolution over time, for example showing a shift of focus of the Speaking Up course from user involvement and empowerment to an increasing preoccupation with personal development, detached from active citizenship considerations. Then, under the influence of the government's Take Part Pathfinder programme the CVS' initial interpretation of active citizenship was challenged and required it to expand its remit in this area to include other domains of active citizenship involvement that were more in tune with the then New Labour policy priorities of Community Empowerment (DCLG, 2008a). The CVS tried to counterbalance the government's emphasis on civic involvement by giving greater recognition to informal community roles in an attempt to promote social and citizenship inclusion through active participation and a greater sense of identity and belonging (Lister, 1997, 1998; Fryer, 2010).

### **8.1.1 The original 'Speaking Up': a pedagogy for participation?**

The approach developed by Tutor A before, during and after ALAC until her retirement in 2010 had laid the foundations for the CVS pedagogical approach as encapsulated in the Speaking Up course. However, the course itself was never fixed in stone and the essence of its methodology – and the key to its success – was that it could be (and was) adapted to the needs of each individual group of learners. Thus, the learners themselves also played a part in the course's development. The overall purpose had been described by the first tutor as follows:

'The basis of my work at [the] CVS was to empower carers and people who use services, mainly health or social care services, [to] empower them to get involved and [to] have an impact on the way those services were provided by speaking up on their own experiences, and to develop a better understanding between the people who use the services and the people who provide the services. (Tutor A, 2010)

On the one hand, the course supported a collaborative approach with service users, congruent with the CVS ethos of partnership working across sectors (see context Chapter Five). On the other hand, the tutor argued that

‘I really wanted the course to be a wake up call for them to let them know that as carers they had a powerful voice, well, a voice that could be powerful.’ (Tutor A, 2010)

A ‘powerful voice’ meant that people were able to more confidently express their views to those in power, whether in the private or the public sphere. In this sense the courses, therefore, contributed to overcoming powerlessness (Gaventa, 1999), as well as to fostering democratic abilities (Andersson and Laginder, 2013). Chapter Seven gave some poignant examples of the transformative power of Speaking Up in this regard (see also a further citizen case study in section 9.2).

Having established the aims of the courses, I will now consider the aspects of the learning in terms of methodology. The methodology that was developed applied – inadvertently rather than by design<sup>29</sup> – the principles of Freirean pedagogy, in that it was essentially learner-centred, experiential and linked to action (Thomson, 2002). First of all, the Speaking Up classes gave learners the space to reflect on their situations. In a group of carers, for example, the tutor asked learners in an ‘icebreaker’ activity to identify their issues for caring. Such collective reflections and the sharing with each other of their issues enabled learners to ‘turn their private troubles into public concerns’, in Wright Mills’ famous phrase, which was the basis for the involvement of service users and carers, reflected in the alternative course title for Speaking Up course for carers, ‘Making Your Voice Heard’.

Linking the learning to practice was an aim shared by the Take Part tutor (Tutor C), several years on from the ALAC programme, when this tutor took Take Part learning to a group of Sure Start parents.

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<sup>29</sup> By ‘inadvertently’ I mean to point out that the tutors adopted Freirean approaches without necessarily having been influenced by the writing or ideas of Freire, in the first place.

‘With the kind of programmes that we have.... What I try and do - and I did that with the [Children Centre] Parents’ forum - is, say “ok, let’s do four sessions for a reason, let’s not just do four sessions randomly [...] so you can take the learning from those four sessions and put it into practice - so let’s look at what it is that you want to try and achieve”. So I do try and do that where I can, making sure that the learning results in something. So with the Parent Forum we were able to do that to a degree and with the Taking a Lead exactly the same. The first session is, “ok, what’s the community initiative or community project that you are going to apply all this learning and networking to?”’ (Tutor C, 2010.)

This approach requires people to come to the session with a collective social purpose or a connection to a group, or alternatively, by sharing a common condition (such as being a carer or service user), the classes enable them to identify such concerns. Linking the course to action emerged therefore as a key point to empowerment learning, but it cannot always be assumed to precede a group of learners. In the case of the initial Speaking Up courses undertaken with carers and service users, the tutor (Tutor A) was concerned that learners might not be able to benefit from the courses sufficiently unless they were able to put into practice the new-learnt skills. This had prompted her to seek out involvement opportunities with health and social care agencies, so that carers and service users could practice speaking up at first hand. The effectiveness of this approach – linking learning and action - was such that the tutor devoted much of her time to the development of 'speaking up' opportunities, linked to or following on from the course.

‘The carers were coming back from these meetings [with staff at the hospital] really empowered because they were able to answer questions; that’s what the matrons were told: to ask the carers questions. So this was a fantastic double whammy: it was giving the carers the opportunity to speak and it was giving the matrons, the medical staff, the confidence to actually involve, really involve.’  
(Tutor A)

Learning was thus on 'both sides of the equation' (Anastacio and Mayo, 1999; Gaventa, 2004). From the point of view of the learners, it allowed them to build their confidence in situations that were new to them, expanding their boundaries of action (Gaventa and

Cornwall, 2001: 72). The two key factors in this were that these situations were at once challenging, yet supported through preparation and teamwork, as this learner explained:

'When I'd done the Speaking Up course, [the tutor] involved me, "oh, could you be part of that team, we're going to deliver some training to health care professionals and mental health people", and that was terribly scary, but because you were part of the team - and to start with she just gave you a tiny slot in the day's training, so it built your confidence up, that helped as well, getting used to... like you are there in your capacity as a carer to tell the people who are there what you do, you then go in, yes, you're nervous, but you've got a defined role, and you're part of the team, and [the tutor] was there smiling at you appreciatively in the audience, and you had a trembling carer sitting on either side of you, and when you've done that a time or two, that again is a very empowering thing to do...' (Marian. my italics)

Practice linked to learning allowed users and carers to gradually overcome their barriers towards 'people in power' and to reflect on the perceived differences in power. Learners brought back their experiences from these situations, and the tutor reinforced the notion of the validity and importance of their voice and perspective - in other words, their citizenship rights, especially within a participative policy context (see Chapter Three). This information was shared with me when I worked alongside Tutor C long before the research started. Later on, however, I had no evidence as to whether the revised Speaking Up courses continued the explicit analysis of contextualised power relations, especially after the Speaking Up course had become disconnected from user and carer involvement practice.

In her role as Development Worker for Learning to Involve (the post-ALAC user and carer involvement project run in collaboration with public agencies, see Chapter Five), the Speaking Up tutor was able to use her power to steer situations into certain directions. In one example she provided, Tutor A had been asked to support a group of parent-carers (parents of children with disabilities) that had developed a seemingly intractable, conflictual relationship with Social Services (I am uncertain whether the request came from the authorities or from the parent-carer group). As the tutor explained, the situation had '*deteriorated really badly*' after these parent carers had '*not been listened to by the providers*', and '*become very 'angry', 'getting bolshy, firing off negative emails, having very*

*poor conversations with key service providers.'* When she arrived at the group she listened to their grievances and then saw her task as giving the people in the group the tools '*for turning things around, and getting them to think about what they could do (differently)*' to '*get involved effectively*'.

As part of the solution that Tutor A developed with the providers and the group, was to '*develop an accredited course that was to train [the staff] who worked with people with learning disabilities*' (Tutor A), building in carer awareness by engaging carers in the design of that model. The ideal situation she strived for was for carers and staff to learn together, as '*it would help them to work together as colleagues, [and] it would also mean that the carers would understand the providers more and the providers would understand the carers more*' (Tutor A). Depending on one's viewpoint, this could be interpreted as promoting the incorporation of dissenting voices, or alternatively, as '*working on both sides of the equation*' (Anastacio and Mayo, 1999). This example also serves as a reminder of the organisational boundaries within which the tutors were operating, i.e. within those of the CVS. Had the conflict described here been exacerbated by the tutor, then this would have risked damaging the reputation of the Speaking Up courses and possibly also of the CVS as strategic partner with the statutory sector.

This example also illustrates the relational nature of 'empowerment' and its potential implications within the wider 'field' of power relations (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The CVS had to negotiate the third sector- public sector interface, which, as Chapter Three has shown, had been the object of governmental scrutiny and interventions, raising the question of the potential incorporation of Third Sector Organisations under New Labour and the restrictions this imposes in terms of 'advocacy' and voice (Taylor, 2007; Milbourne, 2014). In other words, whatever 'empowerment' would be associated with these learning interventions would inevitably be circumscribed by the learning provider's organisational constraints and the wider policy context.

Returning to 'empowering' methodologies at the CVS, one finding early in the Speaking Up course was the extent to which some of the learners were disempowered by their situation. As one carer pointed out, (and this would not apply to carers only but also to other service users or people from disadvantaged situations):

'I think that unless somebody has been a carer it's difficult to understand just how lacking in confidence and lacking in self-esteem the person probably is, because yes, I was a qualified teacher, I got years of teaching behind me, and yet looking after my [severely autistic] son and being constantly criticised [by statutory agencies] in the way I was being a parent [...] had reduced me not quite to being a wreck but perilously close to it.' (Marian)

The recognition of this powerlessness and lack of confidence was the reason for another key feature developed by CVS tutors, that is, their emphasis on inclusive, accessible and non-intimidating participation activities by which *all* learners in a class can be involved. As Tutor A pointed out, the aim is to 'make sure that everyone in the group is participating, nobody free-rides, nobody is left out'. This included activities through which every learner could contribute their existing knowledge, and for the course to build on that knowledge.

'One of the main things with teaching on all the Speaking Up programmes is to get people to initially understand how much they know already.' (Tutor A)

### **8.1.2 Speaking Up 'phase 2': A change in direction?**

Even though inclusive and participative teaching practices were shared by all courses at the CVS, generally (which the CEO referred to as a tacit 'way of doing things in this organisation', CEO, 2012), the development of the Speaking Up course took a turn, however, when it became detached from service user involvement. On the one hand, the expansion of the Speaking Up course allowed it to reach new learner groups, but on the other, this required the tutor (in this case, it was mostly Tutor B) to adapt the course to new learner groups and their requirements. Tutor B insisted that this meant an even greater need to set course aims not only for a whole group, but to take into account individual learner requirements.

'I feel very strongly about not having to set the bar at a certain height and say that "you must aim towards these things", because it should be important to put the foundations in for each person and those foundations will be different. [...] A lot of them will need only one or two blocks and they're off, because they have that confidence in themselves so it's just reminding them that it's there. Some of them

have never really had it and that takes more blocks to get them up to that level of saying “my views matter”. And that’s a big part of it, I mean, for many.’ (Tutor B, 2010.)

Tutor B described to me the different steps and key features of her pedagogical approach in a follow-up interview I undertook with her in 2012:

‘[With] the first two sessions, [it] is very much about me setting/providing an environment in which they feel safe. I’m not entirely sure myself how I make this work! [...] I have to very quickly try and assess who is in that room. ... some [of her former] learners I know a little about them and their history.’ (Tutor B)

Reflectivity is a staple of adult learning, and it has been argued that all learning, however informal and embedded into everyday life, involves reflection (Biesta and Tedder, 2007). As Tutor B put it:

‘An effective tutor will always enable people to reflect and to support one another. The reflection has got to be constant, because the idea is [not that] you get to the end of the course and you reflect, but it's got to be almost every day, every session, but it is done through lots of different tasks. It might be one-to-one. It's one of these things that I do naturally, but you can't always put it into words. You sense a group.’ (Tutor B)

According to Tutor B this required a *‘style of teaching [that is] about constant awareness; where [the learners] are going, how the group is feeling and how the outside influence is impacting on them’*. As can be imagined, this places high demands on the tutor, as Bob Fryer acknowledged:

‘[T]o meet learners’ needs, interests and priorities, and [to] facilitate the full expression of their identities and sense of belonging [...] is extraordinarily challenging. [It] require[s] the exercise of supreme professional and technical skill [...] as well as strict adherence to the highest standards of ethical practice’.

(Fryer, 2010:213)

Furthermore, the CVS tutors emphasised the importance of encouraging peer learning, mutual support, as well as learners' individual and collective reflection. Groups were mostly composed of a mix of participants who were at different stages in their personal development, from those 'ready to move into work or adult learning' to those who 'can just about get themselves through the door, and it takes enormous effort to do that' (Tutor B). This diversity of learner can be used creatively to enable people to learn from and support each other:

'Th[e learners] see other people in the group who maybe after the second or third session share something about their history [...]; so they are seeing real examples not just hear about case studies [...] but to have someone sit next to them who says that "three years ago I was this, this and this, and now look at me", they are seeing this real-life case study in the group...' (Tutor B)

Peer learning and support of this kind evokes Freire's 'dialogical' learning processes, in which reality is constructed by learners, with their knowledge, and facilitated by tutors, which stands in stark contrast with conventional 'banking education' in which the knowledge of the powerful is taught through learning by rote and given curricula.

Tutor B also emphasised the 'practical' dimension of the learning, referring to reflective 'tools' which she was using, including personal planning tools. She felt that these were important to support personal development in the long term, as they enabled learners to use these techniques beyond the course, thus making their learning more sustainable.

'There is also a very practical side to it and that gets forgotten sometimes, the idea to try to encourage [learners] to think of these as new practical skills they're learning, so it's not just about having a good chat and feeling better [...] but also saying, "what is it about that that makes you feel better?". We talk about *stress management*, [...] And it's great if you can then facilitate them to get onto a level 2 [Speaking Up] and then advance their learning. Because then we can explore more effectively *the social responsibility that comes with... but they got to be able to be self aware in order to get to that point*. If they can't see why their confidence is improving, beyond the fact that they went on a Speaking Up course, they've got to understand what it was about that that worked for them.' [...]

‘Goal-setting - some people don't like it and it raises eyebrows, for some reason it has a very negative image, but one of my missions is to change that, because you can see how effective it is, how it works. [One learner] was very sceptical but she now sees that it does work, because you can move forward and you can use this appreciative enquiry idea, that works very well and what is it about that that actually worked and put that skill and knowledge and methodology, or whatever you want to call it, into your next goal. And people do.’ (Tutor B)

From a critical perspective this approach seems to bear the hallmarks of the ‘therapeutic turn’ of lifelong learning policies (Ecclestone, 2004; Biesta, 2011) which encourages individual(ised) self-reflection and the self-management of one’s condition of disadvantage, at the expense of learning for citizenship (Martin, 2003). However, this undeniably therapeutic approach was particularly targeted at level 1 learners, that is, at people who were more likely to be affected by, and had internalised disempowerment for a variety of reasons. As the tutor had previously explained, the aim was to lay the foundations for further learning and development, eventually reconnecting people to active citizenship, when they were ready to engage in social action.

Importantly, as well as courses, the CVS provided links to other services, and through information, advice and guidance on opportunities people were to be signposted to volunteering (e.g. with Volunteer Centre staff speaking to learners in the group) and to further learning and various forms of active citizenship. Tutor B felt it was an integral part of the learning provision:

‘What happens sometimes is that the learners go on courses like the British Council<sup>30</sup> or Grundtvig<sup>31</sup> stuff, which they would never have done before, it’s somehow... it is the skills, it is the knowledge, it is the personal self-esteem, but it’s about the provision that the CVS make with the variety of opportunities [...] I think that, again, what we come back to with Speaking Up... the signposting is really

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<sup>30</sup> The British Council Active Citizens programme was one of the outcomes of the Take Part pathfinder, in that the emphasis on active citizenship and the tutor capacity in this area prompted the CVS to apply this programme – it did so in three/four consecutive years.

<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the CVS had been successful in a bid to the EU Grundtvig programme (Adult learning) for a Learner Workshop with the title: ‘Active Citizens in Europe speak up and take part’ with learners from six different countries. Two Sure Start parents – including Ella - joined this international group.

important, and our information and guidance element, which we're raising the profile of as well, because [...] not all tutors are [aware of it], so we have to address that at the moment, how to improve that. So that we can really say to people that learning doesn't just have to be about learning a skill, it doesn't have to be employability skills, it could be Grundtvig [active citizenship course] which, on the face of it, "what am I going to learn, social solidarity<sup>32</sup>?" - how does that mean something to someone whose perception of learning is a classroom or a topic, or a qualification or something... but actually saying, "what this does is it gives you more opportunities and increases your self-esteem and it gives you options". [...] so we don't empower and enable these wonderful people and then don't give them anywhere else to go with it...'. (Tutor B, 2010)

The CVS approach in this case was therefore not limited to personal development, much as it was acknowledged to be important to 'lay the foundations' for each person, as Tutor B had put it. By giving people the tools to develop confidence and take greater control of their lives (including through 'stress management') the intention was to increase their capacity for agency, which learners could then take forward according to their own intentions and preferences. The CVS brokered opportunities for volunteering and active citizenship through its information and services, its networks and partnerships and, when it was able to, through specific targeted courses such as those provided by the Take Part Pathfinder, European funding or the British Council. For some learners the ultimate aim was to develop employability and enter paid work, and many used volunteering towards this aim. Given the increasing difficulty of accessing appropriate learning and support to enable individuals to make the first steps in this direction, the courses provided by the CVS were able to make a unique contribution in an environment that was less formal and intimidating than could be found by the state or its contracted employment or training agencies. The CVS's ability to take its fully-funded Speaking Up and similar courses to community and self-help groups (Tutor B was working with a drug and alcohol recovery group at the time of the second interview) enabled these opportunities to reach disadvantaged groups directly, through community outreach.

### ***Learner-centredness or critical pedagogy?***

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<sup>32</sup> The reason why social solidarity was mentioned here is because of the title and aim of the project, which was shaped jointly with European partners under the banner of active citizenship learning.

One of the key questions for this chapter had been whether the course formats and practices left any room for the development of critical abilities and the ‘conscientisation’ of learners. Tutor B gave several examples of how learners introduced their own topics and issues for discussion, now and then, spontaneously, around which questions of ‘speaking up’, of power, or of people choosing to take action did sometimes arise. Significantly, the tutor stressed that such topics were raised by the learners, rather than imposed by her. The following longer interview extract explains her approach (somewhat imperfectly) by way of an actual example.

‘I feel that if we are going to use the word “speaking up” or personal development then within that there's got to be a strand of enabling people, because the whole empowerment thing, it goes hand in hand. You have a right to a voice, whether that's within the family and so on, but you also have the responsibility to read, to listen, to be informed in as many ways as you possibly can, and it can be a real challenge for people and some people will grasp it quite quickly and some will quite literally turn away from it, because they find it very difficult and threatening when it gets to the point of being critical, whether they have the power or the right to challenge things. And even now working with people that I've known for some time [...] *I still hear them not wanting to challenge what they perceive as authority*, and it takes a long, long time...[...] for example, on the most recent courses, we had the example of the Police Commissioner [elections], ... because we talked about speaking up [...] *we talked about the power of information and the lack of it*. It was really interesting because, the first time I thought, maybe we shouldn't go down this route because it just came up in conversation, but *as I let it go [on] and let the conversation run* there were obviously people in there who had some significant knowledge around it [...] and others hadn't even heard about it, and they explained the situation, and they said, “this is wrong, we should've known about it”.

So we have fun with it and there is humour there, particularly at level 1, *because I don't want people to feel kind of dragged down with the weight of the responsibility or anything, but just to enable them to think, “ooh...”*. And we often just choose a topic of something that's in the news and say, “what do we know about it?”, how do they know, what about the person who wrote it, were they having a bad day when they wrote it? Journalists are human beings and they're not

always right and they don't always have all the answers - have they researched it properly? And all that stuff that is in the newspapers at the moment, anyway, out there, is indicating that they're definitely not very professional. I think that in itself makes people think...'. (Tutor B)

Tutor B stressed that the above example occurred on a level 1 course, whereas at level 2 Speaking Up incorporated elements of 'social and political issues' and democratic awareness, the emphasis of which had grown over time, in response to learner demand (see Chapter Seven).

There was, however, some variation between the tutors' individual skills and responses, which was highlighted to me through an incidence of discrimination I had come to observe when I attended the Taking a Lead 'question and answer' panel session, run by Tutor C. She had helped learners prepare their questions in advance, but on the day, one learner made a hair-raisingly discriminatory remark (blaming sexual harassment of women on homosexuals) that, to me and visibly to others, came quite as a shock. At first, nobody on the panel (least of all the chair, the CVS manager of learning and development, or the CVS Chief Executive) challenged this person until eventually a representative from a feminist group did. After this incident I shared my concerns with the CEO in my participant observation report of the session, pointing out that the CVS had potentially breached its equality and diversity policy obligations, and done so in front of statutory and voluntary sector agency partners. He promised to take the matter up with the tutor's manager, but failed to do so, and in the end no follow- action was taken to address the issue.

Bob Fryer (2010:213) had pointed out that tutors needed to apply 'the highest standards of ethical practice' which they have to balance with a learner-centred, empowering approach. But, in my interview with Tutor C which preceded this incident, she stressed that, for her,

*'... the bottom line is that I want people to have a good experience, I want them to learn, but I also want them to have a good experience, so they will come back to other things or they will go out there and say "actually do you know about this, and it works really well".'* (Tutor C, 2010, my emphasis)

This was to some extent all the more surprising as in the same interview Tutor C had explained how a unit on equality and diversity in the teaching qualification she was then undertaking had made her reflect on her motivations for teaching:

‘Basically, um, it follows a career path around providing and creating equal opportunity, I mean that is the bottom line; most of my career decisions have been based around creating equal opportunities for hard to reach people.’ (Tutor C)

It shows that ‘equality of opportunity’ can be understood from a variety of perspectives including a neo-liberal, conservative one, or critical theory one which raises awareness about the conditions and causes that create and sustain inequality. This tutor’s more conservative outlook also seemed to chime with her stance on active citizenship as being primarily about social responsibility and community leadership, involving ‘activism without the fight’ (Tutor B, 2011, see also Chapter Six).

The revised Speaking Up (2012) accredited programmes however, had the principles of diversity and equality firmly embedded in the form of learner activities, reflective diaries and learning outcomes. Tutor B stressed the importance of this and gave an example of how she challenged prejudice and learner ‘naivety’ (as critical pedagogues would put it) but within an empowerment framework. In the following illustration the learners, who were parents at a Children Centre, had been discussing newspaper articles which they had brought to the class:

‘[the learners] need to look at things from different angles because so many of them will read one article in a newspaper and then their decision is made. But that’s a lack of experience and a lack of education and [...] yes, we all do it from time to time. And what I try and do is to look at an article or a story and see what are the different views, what does this bring out in people and say, “look, these are only people writing these, it is their view”, so we try and break it all down and say “look, it’s an opinion - you read it all and then you form your opinion and that’s based on your values and judgments as well, and of those around you”. *It’s giving people that confidence to say “hmm, I’m not sure I need to learn more or I need to go away and read a book or I need to...”*’

*I don't patronize them, [not] even if I think their view is misguided; I will let them go with that view but I will ask them for alternative ones and leave it at that. It's an art in a way, because some people are so fragile that if you just said, "no, not really", as simple as that, it would completely [spook?] them you know because they have the confidence to say something and then someone has just said, "hmm, no, I don't agree with that". It's how the tutor balances that and says, "that is a very good opinion but if you think about it in this light then you could also..." So it's leading them down different paths and also, interestingly, having a sense of humour is very important, it's essential.'* (Tutor B (2010), my emphasis)

At the same time, she asserted that she challenged the views of learners, especially of those who tended to buy 'red top' papers, which resulted in raising their critical abilities:

*'So, you know, they have educated themselves into appreciating how blinkered, and how controlled their views are. Equally, they don't have to believe what their husbands believe or their partners. You know this has been a real part of the feedback.'* (Tutor B, 2010)

For these learners, the consequences of having asserted themselves in their private lives led to such changes that the tutor felt a responsibility for following this up with sessions on 'managing change', saying, *'[i]t is all very well to empower someone and say "go out there and, you know, be strong"...' (Tutor B, 2010)*, but it had to be followed up with more learners and support (Lister, 1998).

In sum, the provision of the CVS aimed to be learner-centred, responding to the needs of sometimes very disadvantaged learners, some of whom could just master enough confidence, as Tutor B put it, *'to bring themselves through the door'*. Regarding these learners, tutors were convinced that it would have been inappropriate to place any expectations on them, such as to 'challenge authority' or existing power structures, considering 'where the learners were at' in their personal development. On the contrary, they felt that such attempts could backfire and alienate learners. On the other hand, once they had developed sufficient confidence, learners were actively encouraged to take their learning further, including through the CVS provision and courses with explicit aims and active citizenship content, or by being signposted to volunteer-involving organisations.

Thus, apart from fostering agency and self-determination for private ends, adult learners were treated as citizens and social actors by being connected to social movements, opening up relevant opportunities for collective action (Martin, 2001).

## **8.2 'Empowering pedagogies' from the perspectives of course participants**

My research interviews aimed to give people the opportunity to talk about their course attendance in a semi-structured way and to reflect on their motivations, expectations, lived experiences, and outcomes. This included questions targeted at finding out how they had experienced the course pedagogies and any associated 'empowerment' in connection with the learning. Thus, the question '*was there anything that surprised you in the way the courses were run/delivered?*' elicited relevant reflections and comments in which interviewees commented on what they had liked or disliked about the courses, and what aspects of the teaching approaches had specifically worked for them. I further probed interviewees on the topic of 'empowerment', asking them to define the term in their own words, and to explain whether the courses had in any way contributed to their personal empowerment or to that of their group, and if so, how. Bearing in mind that the interviews were semi-structured, the actual questions were adapted to ensure their relevance to each interviewee's individual situation and course attendance.

### **8.2.1 Learner experiences of the courses: what they enjoyed and how it worked for them**

My interview data analysis used NVivo for coding participant responses. This method allowed the grouping of responses into 'categories', which helped to identify the most frequently mentioned reasons learners had given for their enjoyment of the learning<sup>33</sup>. These were, in order of significance, the tutor, the informality of learning, the social nature

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<sup>33</sup> Learners fed back their experiences of the courses as almost invariably positive. The only exception had been a few learners who felt that their course had not met their specific need at the time, and their explanations showed that these reasons were not linked to the CVS pedagogies. The only negative experience mentioned by a learner had been 'comments made by other people' which occurred on a magistrates taster session. As it turned out, I later met the individual who was most likely the source of these comments, having met him for a potential interview and found him so disagreeable and prejudiced that I did not want to engage him in a research interview. He himself commented that he felt out of sink with the CVS ethos, and did not attend any other courses.

of the learning combined with learner-centred facilitation ((providing opportunities for cementing social skills and for dialogue), relevant course content and participative, interactive sessions. Many of these elements were found to be overlapping, particularly in the learner feedback, as will be seen in the quotes given below.

By far the most commonly cited reason for a positive course experience and successful learning was the tutor. Tutors were abundantly praised for being ‘supportive’, ‘encouraging’, ‘patient’, ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘skilful’ in managing the group, delivering content effectively and engagingly. These comments applied to all four tutors involved in delivering these programmes. Some learners appreciated the fact that the tutor acted as skilful facilitator of learning, drawing on and valuing learners' own knowledge, experiences and views, instead of 'lecturing them'. One learner pointed out how she *‘really enjoyed, you know, [the tutor] was learning from me and I was learning from her [...] a bit as well’* (Ingrid). Others commented on the contrast with the 'bad teaching' they had experienced either at school or on work-related training courses, or even with other community-based, third sector trainers (see Learner Case study 3 in Chapter Nine). The quality of the tutor, the attention they paid to all learners and their teaching/facilitation skills were cited as the main reason for their course retention and completion, as well as for their continuing learning at the CVS.

‘The main memory is from [tutor]. She as a person was very, very nice and charming and she was able to convey masses of information quite effectively. [...] But if it’s a good teacher there that makes a difference.’ (Gethin)

‘I think the way [the sessions] were delivered made them so informative. I think [the tutor] was really good at *making them so accessible for quite a lot of different kinds of people from all different walks of life*, and I think that's what [so] positive. She is a character herself with lots of different experiences and skills which was really good.’ (Ingrid, my emphasis)

It would appear that the relationship between teachers and students bore ‘Freirean’ characteristics of reciprocal learning and a focus on learner’s skills and experiences:

'...but also how [the tutor] shared her experiences as being an activist, a social activist and for me it kind of encouraged me, and it kind of confirmed, for me, how I was a social activist myself, with lots of things that I've been involved in myself.

I really enjoyed, you know, she was learning from me and I was learning from her, you know, a bit as well. [...] She enjoyed using a bit of my skills to bump up the groups and backing her up.' (Ingrid)

After praising the tutors for their ability to involve people, and for their caring (but not patronising) attitude towards individual learners, the second most frequently and spontaneously cited factor had been the informality of the learning. This applied to the general course atmosphere ('welcoming and friendly', in the words of learners) and to the style of teaching. As explained previously, an atmosphere of informality was deliberately created by the tutors to enable all the learners in the group to relax and enjoy their learning. Given the voluntary nature of these sessions and the very low confidence levels of some of the participants, tutors explained to me how essential it was for them to put *all* course attendees at ease and to support their active participation in group activities. When faced with particularly reserved and shy learners, tutors made a special effort to find ways of bringing them into the group's discussions, step by step, and if necessary by reigning in the naturally more dominant voices. This approach contributed to building an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect which in turn facilitated open discussions and dialogue, with learners working together and supporting each other.

The majority of learners appreciated the social aspects of the learning, particularly the opportunity to meet and have discussions with people from different and diverse backgrounds. Amongst those aspects people also found inspiration from others, particularly as active citizens, sharing their experiences:

'I think the thing that surprised me - maybe it shouldn't have surprised me - that the people, the other people on the course all had such passion and such fantastic things that they were involved in and that they wanted to do; it was great to meet up with people like that and I hadn't had the opportunity through any of the other voluntary work I've done in the past, I never met a group of people like that

before, so that was... maybe it shouldn't have been a surprise, but it was for me, that was really positive.' (Clarissa)

'It was [an interesting mix of people]! We had the ones who didn't always agree, so it was good that that happened, to have those sorts of people too. We had some real discussions. [...] If you're having fun and getting to know people that are also wanting to learn something too, that they agree or disagree in the discussions, that's neither here nor there, the fact that they are respectful and fun [in an enjoyable sort of environment [...] and the groups are held really well, it's done in a professional way and everyone can enjoy it and is encouraged.' (Ingrid (HYCW and Take a Lead))

'By working in small groups, groups of two or three, the views of the other two people, it's nice to interact, you could disagree without falling out, it's very interesting. [...] People were comfortable to express what they thought without being silly.' (Martha, magistrates taster session)

'Also meeting the people was massively inspiring because other people's roles in their lives is really inspiring.' (Ursula)

The pedagogy frequently consisted of highly participative group activities in which learners had to interact with others either in one to one situations (e.g. by talking to the person sat next to them), in small groups or with the whole group – often one following on from the other, in gradual steps. Such social learning interactions provided social and 'communicative' experiences (Habermas) which, it has been argued recently (Andersson and Laginder, 2013), intrinsically constitute a form of democracy learning. In this form of learning, people 'learn' (or re-learn) to *'being better able to express [their] opinion, collaborating and listening to other people's views'*, with such spaces allowing the *'exchanging [of] everyday experiences and [...] forming [of] opinions and [...] informed decision[making]'* (Andersson and Laginder, 2013:111).

Informality, then, was a crucial precondition for inclusive learning, which was all the more relevant in light of the great diversity of learners in some groups, particularly in active citizenship courses. Informality is not easy to achieve, however, and I was particularly

struck by an example of where this had been achieved very successfully with a group of no less than seventeen very diverse learners from seven different European countries (from the Baltic to Turkey) on a CVS course on active citizenship funded by the EU. An analysis of numerous photos taken over the course of five days showed the drastic change in the learners' body language from day one, when it was still somewhat guarded (some also had only basic English skills) to subsequent days, when the photos showed people relaxed and smiling, and visibly comfortable in the group (I also met them in every evening, seeing how they had bonded as a group). This atmosphere helped to overcome social and cultural differences, as commented upon by Ella who attended the course with a colleague from the Sure Start group:

'I was surprised at the amount of quite high professionals that were on the course. I didn't really know what to expect [...]. That was probably the one I was most apprehensive about [...] but I was pleasantly surprised that everyone was just lovely, and everybody spoke English even if for some it was basic. I thought that was amazing (laughs).[...] but having that experience from many different countries gave it a completely different view or perspective.' (Ella)

The feedback from the programmes investigated here pointed to similar experiences. The following quotes were from very diverse learners:

'It was a nice group [...], I felt very content to be there, and it was interesting to do group exercises and to discuss things, we had laughs, and I thought it was a nice ambience'. (Gethin)

'I [liked the fact that] it was informal, no computers, and there weren't even that many handouts or anything, being given simple things to do, even just something like talking to the person that sat next to you, which, I couldn't do [...], but it was all right because the encouragement was there.' (Ruth)

'We think it was quite useful and quite relaxing as well, very enjoyable course; nothing serious but relaxing. That manner of learning, made the learning a lot easier, happier too'. (Mr Chow)

What may be surprising was that the sense of informality of the learning had applied to accredited courses as well. At the Children Centre, for example, despite time constraints on the sessions that were dictated by crèche opening times, Tutor B allowed the women to chat to each other for a while before gradually getting down to the course tasks ( I observed this once and was amazed by her patience and skill in this regard). An interview with a project worker at the Children Centre stressed how fundamental this had been to engage and retain these particular learners, since, as busy mothers they had precious little time to themselves or to socialise without their children, outside of the home. A comparison with a non-CVS trainer made one of the Children Centre's staff realise just how valuable this CVS approach had been, and which, on account of their prior experience with the CVS tutors, they had come to take for granted:

‘There has been other [non-CVS] training that we have had that has been very prescriptive and it really hasn't worked. [...] It was very good training but the approach with the trainer coming in – it was really challenging for the group *because they were used to the flexible training from CVS*. This time there [wa]s no talking and it was really uncomfortable for people, and as much as this [tutor] gave us some really good information, her facilitation of the group was awful and we wouldn't have her again for our parents because *it had undone quite a bit of work that had built that team and it was a bit scary really*. That was an example of how not to do it for the needs of our Parent Forum at the time.’

(Stakeholder, Children Centre staff member, my emphasis)

In the context of their research on study circles, Andersson and Laginder (2013:115) found that their *‘participants talk about the study circle in terms of a free zone. Others stress the free time, i.e. an opportunity for personal growth. Individuals thus achieve power over the use of time and over their lives’*. The concept of the courses as a ‘free zone’ away from people’s obligations was very much at the heart of the empowerment through Speaking Up classes, particularly for people with caring or parenting responsibilities. Thus, one parent-carer (i.e. a parent of a child with disabilities) said that the courses

‘... took me completely out of my normal environment, and gave me confidence, made me feel like an individual, instead of being my son’s mum, for 12 years I’ve

been his mum, and a housewife; the course gave me the opportunity to be me.'

(Marian)

Just as with the Speaking Up courses, the CVS placed a big emphasis on the contextualisation of the Take Part 'civic courses' to the local participation environment, with course content tailored to relevant information. Had the civic courses lacked this local dimension, they would probably have failed to engage people as successfully. Whereas here, even the potentially duller topics such as 'which council was doing which services' were made interesting because of the participative nature of the delivery:

'And we were given information on which council was doing which services [...] it was another game for us to guess, if we had problems, where to go for particular issues for example lighting or waste. A lot of people were unclear about it. So it was very, very good...' (Milena)

'It's practical, particularly the 'How Your City Works', we had visits, and it gets you actually in the community. I mean I lived in [city] all my life, I think I've been to the police station once when I was caught shoplifting or something, it's not somewhere where you think to visit, so it was really interesting; the library and things like that, I've gone there with my children but it's a different aspect, a different side to it, it's definitely the kind of hands-on and getting stuck in there type of approach.' (Ella)

This focus on experiential learning added not only variety to the learning but meant that people could practise their skills. One Many learners said how much they had enjoyed the visits to local public institutions and meeting officials and politicians:

'What I did find with the Take Part course was, it wasn't just about how things work and where to go in [city], but the whole approach about how you put forward a question to politicians and these kind of things, and that was what I was really interested in because wherever you come from, that's going to be useful. [...] I think also going off site, seeing the library, seeing just the way of being adults and being very relaxed about things that are very complex. So that's why it worked for me.' (Zannah)

‘As well as just information there were also very interactive sessions where we went, we had a session where we had various speakers, a local MP and someone from the police, and we had a question-and-answer session, which was great, we had a tour round the local council offices. So a wide range of activities and giving us information and tools that would enable us to become more confident to be able to take up a particular interest and activities forward.’

*What aspect did you most value about the [How to Become a Councillor] course?*

‘Obviously I enjoyed [the discussion with the local councillor] more than the other things, the other things were more ordinary, what you might have expected.’

(Max)

There is ample evidence, then, that the learning pedagogies involved key elements that can be traced back to the traditions in adult education which advocate informal, community-based and learner-centred approaches, within a democratic and egalitarian ethos. At the same time, as the preceding section focused on the tutors has shown, there were no automatic guarantees that such principles were always realised, but, as this section has shown, the approaches practised at the CVS were very popular with learners from a wide range of backgrounds, who experienced these pedagogies as 'empowering'. The next section is honing in on the contested notion of 'empowerment'.

### **8.2.2 Learner conceptualisations of ‘empowerment’**

The CVS approach to teaching also closely reflected learner definitions of empowerment. Empowerment, as the literature has shown, can be understood both as a process and as an outcome (Hur, 2006). Learners described empowerment in both terms. One of the difficulties in presenting the data in this section is that definitions of empowerment were often intertwined with course experiences, and hence, some quotes may be repeated.

Many learners equated empowerment with outcomes such as self-determination and autonomy, which in turn enabled or enhanced their personal agency. Learners were

adamant that the pre-requisite for agency was to gain individual confidence and self-esteem, which the courses helped them acquire in various ways.

‘I think a lot of it is boosting confidence and actually not so much teaching skills, as making people realise that they have actually have got them, but don’t know how to use them. [...] and also be able to practise skills and speaking. Once you’ve done that in a safe setting and practiced a little bit you can use those skills in everyday life, maybe, and once you’ve done that and you’re confident enough to go out and use them, that makes you feel a lot more confident. [...]’ (Livia)

‘I think it is about giving [people] the confidence to believe in themselves and for them to go forward. During the [trainer’s] course we were told about *signposting* people and I think some of it has to come from the individual because they have to want to do something, but I think then it is making them feel valued, giving them the information that they need and then allowing them to grow, almost.’ (Zadie)

‘In my understanding, empowerment is the confidence to basically fight through what you want to do and what you say you want to do, and I feel that this can be with anything not just active citizenship. You are introduced to SMART goals [...] so the empowerment is that you continue with that goal that you set yourself and with the active citizenship whatever that is [...] for me it’s mainly confidence to follow through what you set out to do...’ (Ella)

These quotes directly corroborate some of the techniques and tools used by the tutors, such as valuing people's existing knowledge and skills, enabling their personal planning, practising skills in a safe environment, and generally building their confidence and self-esteem. The latter was particularly important in level 1 courses, such as Speaking Up.

As far as empowerment for active citizenship was concerned, learners felt that there was a role for ‘*empowerment in the sense of more information, and more understanding about how things work*’ to increase people’s confidence to take an issue forward, to ‘*know who to speak to, [and] what to do, because you are starting from a higher level.*’ (Clarissa). This applied to learners from all educational backgrounds and regardless of their experience as active citizens so far. The comments illustrated the sense of powerlessness that many

people experienced vis-à-vis public institutions and democratic decision-making structures (and their representatives), and hence, the exploration of these aspects, of people's rights and the role of officials, as in the 'How Your City Works' course, were very highly valued.

'It is incredible how much doing something like that [course] empowers you just from an extra bit of knowledge. You might never even have to use it but knowing extra things like who to go to if something happens, or if you can't get through one way how to go through a different channel.' (Zannah)

'I'm not necessarily interested in being [a magistrate], but I'm interested in understanding some of the things about it, because the more knowledge you have, the more when you're making decisions, you can make a more reasoned decision.'

(Hugh)

Apart from an understanding of the institutional systems, learners underlined the importance of learning the appropriate communication skills, both generically, and, more specifically, in dealing with officials. A previous quote had highlighted the usefulness of *'the whole approach about how you put forward a question to politicians'* (Zannah). As another learner put it, very succinctly and generically,

'[t]o have the empowerment comes in being articulate and being able to put across a message.' (Ruth)

In this sense, the embedding of presentation skills practice, the observation of formal meetings, the involvement of guest speakers from statutory agencies, or as in the Take Part courses, visits to institutions, were essential in this regard, giving learners the tools and skills they required and could apply to a local context. This was particularly useful when it was combined with greater knowledge on where to go for relevant information, so that people were better equipped to make requests or claims, or to influence matters for themselves or for collective interests.

Thirdly, empowerment was also defined as being given the opportunity to practise and to learn from mistakes, with emphasis on access to support. Empowerment, for Hugh, was:

'...being able to do something and try and deliver on that *and being supported*'

(Hugh, my emphasis)

'For me it means being able to stand on my own two feet and make my own decisions, and whether they be good or bad being able to follow up with the consequences as well, but *having the support as well.*' (Zannah, my emphasis)

In many respects the learners construed empowerment as a process of learning with support, particularly in relation to practice. One of the learners who took a more sceptical approach to 'empowerment' as a concept (another, Ingrid, also found it a bit 'plasticky'), thus thought it would be more appropriate to refer to empowerment in terms of training and encouragement:

"'Empowered" means that you are giving something above the normal... it gives you a kind of a boost, an extra fifth gear or something like this. [...] I much prefer 'trained' or 'helped' or 'encouraged' so that you can better express yourself, or something like that.'

*'Do you think there's something overblown about it?'*

'Yes, I think it's making claims, I don't think you can empower, not in that sense, you can help.' (Max)

This confirmed the idea expressed by others that empowerment was seen as having to come from the individual and achieved by them, and that all that can be done from the outside is to provide people with the appropriate support, the 'tools' and the opportunities for developing through practice. The context of practice or the purpose for which this was achieved did not matter, for most; however, for those learners for whom active citizenship learning and participation had played a big part in their development, active citizenship as an identity and as practice were included in their conceptualisation of empowerment. This applied particularly to people who had come from a disadvantaged position. For them, the chance to participate and 'take part' in the community, through active citizenship, gave them a stronger sense of belonging and identity and was associated with their empowerment. The recognition of people as active citizens and

members of the community (Lister, 1998; Fryer 2010) seemed particularly pertinent to these learners and corroborated the CVS ethos. It was summed up poignantly by one parent from Sure Start (not interviewed, but quoted from a CVS radio show transcript) and Ruth, who after years of social isolation had become involved in carer groups and forums as a result of her Speaking Up course.

'... because I've been off work for quite a long time before I did this course, I didn't think I fitted in anywhere, I just sort of went on my own daily routine; but now I feel like I am actually important and that I can give something back to the community and become an active citizen if I feel like it. It's just empowering, it makes me feel important, I've sort of grown a new identity and it's getting bigger and bigger every week, every time I go. It's not just about building your confidence and self esteem, it's making your voice heard, it's understanding how to make decisions in your society and community; getting involved nationally and globally and understanding about diversity. If someone asked me before I wouldn't have had a clue and it's so broad, the amount of knowledge behind it, is just absolutely fantastic and also developing personal skills for yourself, so it covers a lot.'

(‘Abby’, Radio show transcript, 2010, my emphasis)

‘Empowerment is [...] nothing in-your-face but [...] being entitled to be there and being entitled to contribute; it's like taking a place at table. It's being accepted and able to contribute. If you are kept down, you can't, you're not yourself and you're not anybody else either.’ (Ruth)

In sum, definitions of empowerment from a learner's perspective clustered around the interlinking themes of firstly, autonomy/self-determination/ control over one's life, secondly, confidence and self-esteem, and thirdly communication skills. There was great emphasis on having access to support, on being given appropriate opportunities to participate, whether as an active citizen or in any other way, and to be given recognition for one's identity, abilities and contribution made as a member of society.

Finally, Max was one of a minority of learners to explicitly link the concept of empowerment to power, expressing scepticism about the extent of power held by individual decision-makers:

‘Empowerment to me suggests that you have the power to change things to whatever, and I don't think you necessarily would have power to do this and that. I mean, as a councillor, if I get to that exalted role, I won't have the power to do things, I have the ability to have an input into things, but that doesn't mean that I will succeed, you know, so power can give the wrong impression, that you can actually... you would have the ability to attempt to change things but you won't necessarily have the power to change them, that's what I'm saying.’ ( Max)

It is one of the main conclusions in this thesis that such reflections, in this case confined to the research interview, could have contributed invaluable to more explicit discussions on power and active citizenship, and hence, to more radically 'empowering' conversations amongst citizens.

### **8.3 Discussion**

This section discusses the findings of this and the two preceding chapters, as they each explored different facets of the CVS approach to active citizenship learning.

#### **8.3.1 Weighing up the evidence**

Before discussing the significance of the findings in terms of the literature, I want to comment on the robustness of my analysis. This chapter has foregrounded the views of learners and tutors, triangulated by my own observations, knowledge and textual analysis of project and course documentation. I felt it was important to present the findings in the voices of participants, wherever possible, at the same time as weighing up the evidence from different sources. Although operating in an interpretivist rather than a positivist epistemological framework, I have looked at the data in terms of consistency across the sample – whilst also paying attention to inconsistencies and ‘anomalies’ – using the same interview question format, but adapted to individual learner situations. As a result I have found, overall, high levels of consistency within the learner sample and, by and large, between the accounts of learners and tutors.

Given the relative diversity of the learners and the courses the within-sample consistency may be more surprising. It suggests the importance of, and similarities between, the

underlying pedagogical approaches that learners had found useful across the different courses. The congruence between learners and tutors is encouraging too, although it could have been induced by the positive bias of learners towards the provision they had been asked to comment on, at the CVS premises. At the same time it could be seen as confirmation of the internal validity of findings and strengthen the evidence of 'what worked' for the people concerned.

It also has to be acknowledged that the tutors appeared to be, on the whole, reliable in their descriptions and explanations, as backed up by third party feedback (learners and external stakeholder) and by my own observations. For a start, they did not make big claims about their achievements. I was also able to observe the effectiveness of their methods, in some instances, including how the informal learning environment and a flexible approach were conducive to engaging learners in meaningful and constructive dialogue, and on topics of their own choice. The power of participative learning also came across in the documentary evidence, such as photos I viewed from a class of learners, which showed the effectiveness of participative and inclusive learning to help people relax and feel valued in a group and thus overcome their barriers to social interactions and to learning.

The multiple research methods had enabled insights which enhanced my interpretation of the interview data by examining it more critically. For example, the observation of one Take Part course event had served to highlight an important ethical issue which had arisen from the lack of classroom supervision and the implicit trust placed in tutors who were seen as 'delivering' programmes (and thus, targets) well. This made me re-examine my interview with the tutor more closely and put one of her statements in a new light. This observation was also crucial in that it exposed the flaws in the organisation's implementation of equality and diversity policies and procedures, and hence, management weaknesses in the face of problematic situations – even after having raised this issue with the Chief Executive.

Similarly, a reading of course workbooks was able to reveal, if not an entirely different dimension of the Speaking Up courses, but a rather more pronounced emphasis on the normative character of tutors' conceptualisations of active citizenship, as well as of the

'therapeutic' turn observed in lifelong learning (Ecclestone, 2004), that I had not picked up from the interviews (although the evidence had been there all along).

I felt that I could trust the learner feedback for the same reasons as the tutors', in that nobody made exaggerated claims of what they had gained from the courses. They definitely communicated their enthusiasm and enjoyment of the courses, but were also clear about the limits of the impact of the courses, and the sometimes 'subjective' nature of outcomes, i.e. a feeling of empowerment, rather than having led to observable actions. Those learners whose course experiences were less 'successful' in fulfilling their expectations, were able to say so too, with explanations, in the interview.

Regarding the more substantial outcomes, i.e. where 'empowerment' had led to significant personal changes or agency, their authenticity could be corroborated either from my own observations or from third party observations, which included tutors, external stakeholders, work colleagues or other learners. It was also useful to have had cross-sample feedback where learners had attended the same course or class. Moreover, the feedback from the Sure Start Children Centre staff member who had participated in courses herself and observed the impact of the learning on many individuals and groups over the space of several years, was particularly valuable in giving an in-depth and long-term insight into the outcomes, pedagogies and context of the CVS learning programmes, and even provided a comparison of pedagogies practised by another provider.

### **8.3.2 The significance of findings**

For assessing the impact of active citizenship learning programmes the literature suggested that relevant indicators for their empowerment potential are provided by both the purpose and the process of the learning (including the pedagogy). The literature also suggested different definitions of empowerment, ranging from procedural to substantive approaches, which my analysis will differentiate. Critical pedagogies, based notably on Freire, have further outlined the central role taken by the tutor and her commitment to a social justice agenda, with Westheimer and Kahne (2004), with their direct correlation between the teacher's conceptualisations and the type of citizenship outcomes for learners in a school context. Others argued that citizenship education is intrinsically connected to learning about politics and democracy (Giroux 2002; Martin 2003; Crowther

2004; Fryer 2010), adding another dimension to the analysis. One of the challenges here is to be aware of the political and ideological nature of differing definitions of empowerment. In response to the above questions, and contributing to the overarching research question, the conclusion of my findings will consider to what extent the scope, content and nature of these programmes were determined by governmental parameters and priorities, or left to the CVS and its practitioners to influence for the benefit of the empowerment of their learners.

### ***What type of active citizenship?***

The first question was to understand what type of active citizenship the programmes effectively promoted. This was related to conceptualisations and typologies discussed in the literature review. The main distinction, as was seen, hinges on whether the learning encouraged merely 'active' / 'participative' and 'responsible' or 'dissenting' citizens (Allen, 1997, Crick 2000, Fryer 2010). Dissenting, critical or 'social-justice oriented' (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004) citizens require a level of political understanding and 'critical thinking' which enables them to analyse situations within the wider context of power and to take action aimed at addressing issues of social justice and equality. By understanding the political nature of government-sponsored agendas of active citizenship and their alternatives they would develop the ability to make an informed judgment about the nature, forms and purpose of active citizenship itself (Allen, 1997).

In this regard, the findings presented so far suggest that the CVS programmes and their tutors *did not*, on the whole, seek to challenge the prevailing model of active citizenship promoted by government, or at least, to do so in a limited manner. Instead, programmes such as the original Speaking Up course prepared service users and carers for more effective as well collaborative engagement in 'invited spaces' created by the state to improve services as part of New Labour's modernisation agenda (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007).

Within this context, however, the courses and the supported involvement practice were nevertheless able to play a crucial role in *empowering* service users in three ways. First, people directly affected by services but not used to engaging critically were given the confidence that they had a right to 'speak up' to providers, whether in a private, individual capacity or collectively. Secondly, they were encouraged to join groups in which they could

develop collective a voice and formulate their own agendas for action around shared issues. Thirdly, together with the tutors they contributed to making existing participatory spaces and experiences more democratic and accessible, including through peer support. Without such learning and support these participations would undoubtedly have been less effective and even risked *disempowering* the individuals involved, as demonstrated abundantly in the participation literature (e.g. Barnes et al 2007; Durose et al 2009). Part of efforts to improve the existing practice resulted in initiating for learning to take place on 'both sides of the equation' (Anastacio and Mayo, 1999; Gaventa 2004). This was the remit of the Learning to Involve project which was a direct consequence of the efforts started with Speaking Up, expanded on under ALAC, as the CVS was able to harness policy drivers for user involvement, empowerment and 'civil renewal'. At the same time as there were collective benefits in terms of shaping public services, the individuals also gained skills in this formal participation context which they were able to transfer to other domains and the purpose of collective action as directed by community interests rather than by the state. Such case studies will be further illustrated and examined in the next chapter.

With the Take Part courses the CVS adopted a compromise with the government's vision of active citizenship by rebalancing the latter's accent on 'civic activism' with its own emphasis and recognition of 'civil' and community involvement. While this in itself did not substantially challenge the government's communitarian conception of active citizens, the findings have shown how people benefited from the recognition they received in this way for their informal activities, and how this confirmed their identity as 'active citizens' and 'full members of the community', which in turn increased their sense of belonging and identity as citizens. As Lister and others had argued, these identifications form the basis for wider citizenship agency and allow the substantiation of rights through collective action (Lister, 1997, 1998; Crowther 2004; Fryer 2010).

At the same time the analysis of the tutors' approaches and of course documentation revealed a decidedly 'communitarian' stance on active citizenship – which, as has been shown in the literature review, has its implicit limitations. In my view the CVS and its tutors unwittingly colluded with the New Labour government in promoting a normative, moralising, and 'responsibilising' interpretation of active citizenship, with the concomitant tendency to depoliticise both citizenship and 'community' (Taylor 2003; Crowther and Martin 2009). This was done with the best of intentions, however, and in tune with the

CVS aims and purposes of encouraging and widening social, community and civic participation. Moreover, a communitarian stance seems to have resonated with many learners, given their views on 'social responsibility' and the interest of only a small minority in political issues. Whether this could be interpreted as evidence of successive governments' successful rhetoric or whether such discourses chimed with the wider public is open to debate or further research, but the point to make here is that the courses seem to have reinforced these discourses. And by not subjecting these definitions to critical discussion, both amongst the CVS staff and with learners, the programmes failed at least partly the criterion set by Garth Allen, Bernard Crick and others of educating people to make more critically informed choices about their active citizenship in a broader conception that encompasses a political dimension and 'political literacy'.

### ***Facets and dilemmas of 'empowering' pedagogies***

The second question concerns the extent to which the pedagogies involved in these programmes can be said to have been 'empowering' in spite of the more stringent criteria, and if so, according to which definition of empowerment. The aspects examined here are, first, connected to empowerment construed as 'overcoming powerlessness' (Mayo, 1997; Gaventa, 1999), the second relates to empowerment as defined by critical pedagogy, and the third to feminist approaches.

This chapter's evidence showed how courses such as Speaking Up were developed (rather than merely 'evolved', as one tutor uncritically put it) in response to the needs of learners, and the extent of their powerlessness observed by tutors in many of their learners. It was decided, therefore, that the first step towards citizen agency had to be in the form of building confidence and self-esteem. The analysis of external causes and conditions of disempowerment were considered secondary by tutors, although in some cases such issues were sometimes discussed with learners (e.g. 'unrealistic expectations placed on carers', mentioned by one learner). Apart from this, the methods adopted by the CVS tutors were generally congruent with the central concepts of radical adult learning to 'democratise' the learning relationship (Foley 2001). This involves a learner-centred methodology, based on a deep respect for learners and their life experience (*'to begin where people are and discover with learners where it is worth going'*, Head, 1997, cited in Foley 2001) and indirect teaching, in which the teacher assumes an enabling function and learners take ownership of the content of their learning. Reflectivity, dialogue and an

emphasis on collective learning were central to this process, as were experiential learning and 'praxis' (learning, action and reflection). The examples cited by all three tutors were testimony to this approach, with variations depending on the length of the learning and on whether the course was directly linked to citizenship *practice*.

In terms of addressing the powerlessness of active citizens, the Take Part courses also made a contribution by helping people overcome barriers vis-à-vis the complex and sometimes impenetrable and frequently changing institutional environment of public authorities and democratic knowledge. In this regard, people felt 'empowered' in their capacity as citizens, when courses increased their 'civic' knowledge and therefore gave them the confidence to engage with and challenge these institutions or processes for individual or collective purposes - if they so wished. It is worth restating that these civic courses had been initiated by New Labour's Take Part Pathfinder Programme, and thus satisfied a demand that may not have been obvious to the CVS previously. On the other hand, in the context of Take Part, one might be justified in asking whose responsibility it should be to provide such information, and whether the promotion of some civic roles, for example, should be left to the third sector or to public sector agencies to address. Identifying barriers to participation and citizen influence had been the government's stated intention with the Take Part Programme, but the subsequent change of government policies and the public sector cuts abolished any hopes of continued funding by local agencies –and, as it turned out, local people were not willing to pay for such courses themselves. Nevertheless the feedback from active citizens confirmed the value of courses for adults promoting civic knowledge, which is also partly recognised in the critical adult education literature as being of importance to citizen agency.

A more radical understanding of empowerment, by contrast, goes beyond a mere procedural understanding of 'how the system works' and aims to increase the willingness and ability of citizens to engage in political arguments with a view to challenging the status quo and its in-built social inequalities (Crowther 2004). This requires 'political literacy' and 'critical thinking', the defining features of 'social purpose' adult education or 'critical pedagogy'. As was seen in the previous chapter, civic republican influences in ALAC, prompted by Crick, had already attempted to introduce political literacy to the CVS, but without much success (and incidentally, Crick's equivalent recommendation for the citizenship curriculum for schools were not fully implemented either). The question was,

however, how appropriate political literacy would have been for some of the learners, depending 'where they were at' in terms of their general confidence, interests and educational background and aspirations. Tutor B (2012), for example, cited an instance of learners having raised the topic of Police Commissioner elections in a level 1 course, commenting that because of it having been a level 1 course, *'I was slightly reluctant to get too deep into it'*, to avoid alienating other learners in the group. The longer level 2 Speaking Up course, by contrast, subsequently offered an exploration of *'societal issues in greater depth [and] political issues such as citizenship, human rights, democracy, diversity and the law'* (CVS course information, 2012). Moreover, the Speaking Up group of parents at the Children Centre had engaged in learning about democracy during the Take Part Programme and with additional input and support from the Parliamentary Outreach programme (see also learner case study three in Chapter Nine), as a result of which learners got involved in the 2010 elections and discussed the outcome of the election results from their perspective of parents (informal communication from Tutor B).

From a Freirean perspective the tutor has the responsibility to teach in a way that is *'challenging learners, encouraging them to be rigorous, serious, critical - even uncomfortable - in their search for knowledge'* (Roberts, 1998). Tutor B had cited a pertinent example of working with learners in this way, in this instance, how to approach received opinions more critically, e.g. those printed in the red top press. Here, the tutor explained how she sometimes challenged learners in the context of an advanced Speaking Up course (level 2 or 3) by getting them to research issues and discuss their findings in the group the following week. This provided evidence of the courses fostering 'critical thinking' in a manner appropriate to the learners in a group, but was not applied more widely or systematically in all citizenship learning programmes. Tutor B also expressed her awareness of her power in the classroom when she stated, *'I am in a position to enable people to go out and see things in a different way'* (Tutor B, 2012) and her determination of *not* wanting to use this power to further her own interpretation of social and political issues (this is all the more relevant as I had noticed in one of the interviews that some learners considered her as a role model). Instead, her aim was to give people the confidence to articulate and express their own views, to be able to discuss these with others in a respectful manner and in dialogue, and to be prepared to revise their viewpoints. These clearly represented vital democracy skills and attitudes. It also showed that this tutor, at least, had taken responsibility for the inherently 'political' purpose of

adult learning, promoting values of social justice, diversity and equality, alongside critical abilities that were able to challenge 'common-sense' in the Gramscian jargon.

Crucially, not all tutors had been able to, or felt comfortable with, challenging their learners in this way. The Take Part Tutor C, for example, was overtly more concerned with a consensual approach both in terms of her own view on 'community activism' and in her dealings with learners. I had been able to observe the consequences of her reluctance to challenge learners in a quasi public situation which put the CVS in breach of its equality and diversity policy. Furthermore, Tutor C's view that '*I don't want people to think [that as community activists] they're going to have to fight and there's going to be a protest*' is undoubtedly inimical to a Freirean perspective, as it limits the extent to which people might consider their willingness to change the world around them more fundamentally (even if Freire himself remained somewhat evasive about the form of political activism for social change he advocated, see Finger and Asun, 2001). Until the research interview brought them to light, such personal views which played potentially a significant role on citizenship outcomes, were not even apparent to the organisation's managers, who were more concerned with the Take Part programme achieving its targets (see Chapter Ten).

The question is whether the differing degrees to which the CVS tutors demonstrated their political commitment as tutors – i.e. their willingness to refer in their teaching to underpinning social and political issues – would ultimately have led to different citizenship outcomes in their learners (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). The evidence is tenuous in this respect, since to a large extent the learner outcomes were contingent on the values and priorities they brought with them – compared with the more limited experiences of active citizenship in the adolescents that were taught in Westheimer and Kahne's research in schools. Chapter Nine will explore in more detail whether some learners did challenge the status quo as 'change agents' as a result of the CVS courses and the involvement practice they triggered.

However, it is important not to lose sight of another conceptualisation of empowerment as applied to active citizenship, developed by feminists such as Lister (1997, 1998). This perspective considers that the main priority for community-based approaches is to foster an 'inclusive' sense of citizenship in terms of citizen identity and belonging, and with an

emphasis on participation and agency. For this both citizens and communities need to develop the basic foundations:

‘The emphasis on building up confidence and self-esteem is important in thinking about how community development work can help people to develop as citizens. But it needs resources, including training resources, to help people to realise their potential and the capacity-building not just of individuals but of whole communities.’ (Lister, 1998: 231)

A feminist perspective also considers an inclusive approach to the notion of what constitutes ‘political’ participation, again, scoping the definition broadly by including social actions at the community level, within reach of disadvantaged people and directly relevant to their lives. Nevertheless, for this too, people need to develop skills and abilities to exercise democratic citizenship, in particular the ability to look beyond an individualistic perception of ‘needs and rights’ and to consider the needs of others. Undoubtedly, the CVS learning provided significant opportunities in this respect, engaging learners in democratic and dialogic practices in the classroom across all courses. At the centre of this stood the concept of ‘dialogue’, defined in the Take Part Learning Framework as *‘the process of conversational encounter and exploration with others that enables critical analysis of the world’* (Take Part Network, 2006:93) Several learners have commented on the debates and discussions they enjoyed having in the classes (and beyond) with a variety of views being held, and the whole having been enabled by a respectful atmosphere. By learning both to express themselves assertively and by actively listening to a plurality of points of views the courses provided opportunities that are not only essential to democracy (Andersson and Laginder, 2013) but are also becoming rare in an increasingly diminishing public sphere (Habermas, mentioned in Fryer, 2010).

Another dimension inherent in the learner-centredness of the CVS courses (*‘basically the learners are the ones who run the show’*, in the words of Tutor B) is that they provided important ‘free zones’ (Andersson and Laginder, 2013) or ‘spaces’ for citizens to come together for their own purposes, and directed them to other spaces to follow on from the learning – albeit broadly framed by the targets of the funded programmes or accreditation bodies. As Tutor B put it, the courses gave expression to learners’ *‘personality, designs, ambitions, enthusiasm and imagination’* (Tutor B) by allowing them to shape the content

of their learning. The idea that *'education should be organised and defined by the needs and interests of the people - as organised social movements or as small groups of individuals'* has been argued as *'resting on democratic ideals'* (Laginder et al, 2013:3), and described as an increasingly rare occurrence in the current context of lifelong learning policies centred on 'learning for earning' (Martin, 2001; Biesta, 2006).

Despite the various constraints and pressures inherent in the government programmes, and the fact that the CVS did not actively seek to challenge the prevailing participatory model of active citizenship promoted by government, it is my view that this research brought to light evidence that the CVS courses had also been able to 'empower' people as citizens, and to do so, by and large, within a democratic framework for inclusive citizenship. The nature and extent of the 'empowerment' however depends on one's definition, and was variable depending on the type of course, its context, learner group and especially on the tutor. Most of the time, the courses contributed to democracy learning, directly or indirectly. Even where the courses focused on the basic foundations of confidence, self-esteem and communication skills, they enabled learners to assert themselves in a variety of social contexts and for different purposes. For some, this represented a major achievement in their own eyes; for others, the increased confidence enabled them to participate as active citizens in a variety of contexts; for others still, who started from a higher level of confidence and experience, the courses enhanced their participation as active citizens. For the majority of learners the courses 'expand[ed] their boundaries of human action' (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008), in their chosen sphere.

To provide further corroboration of the above arguments, it now remains to see whether and to what extent learners were able to translate their learning and empowerment into transformative action within the wider context of citizen involvement and participation. Particularly, whether the learning prepared people to act as 'critically engaged' citizens (Crick, 2001) and as active citizens prepared to not only engage with but to change the world around them with the aim of promoting social justice (Crowther, 2004).

## **Chapter 9 Empowerment through learning and participation: active citizen case studies**

The previous chapter suggested that the empowerment of active citizens requires more than just classroom learning (Fryer 2010). Even where the CVS courses had succeeded in fostering an 'active citizens' identity and a sense of purpose for 'taking part', the process of empowerment did not stop there. Significantly, the next steps of citizen agency took place outside of the 'very protected and safe' environment of the CVS, as two learners had termed it, which brought the risk of the actual experiences not meeting the expectations that may have been raised by the CVS or by policy makers. Once citizens were active in the real world of the participation arena, additional and new obstacles could have acted to deter participation, as research has established (e.g. Barnes et al, 2007), not only to be found in 'invited spaces' but in community-led spaces too. Given the voluntary nature of involvement it is understandable that people are prone to renouncing their community or civic endeavours if they no longer experience their participation as enjoyable, meaningful or effective (Pathways through Participation, 2011). Furthermore, local or organisational circumstances of otherwise similar participation structures (e.g. Children Centres) vary widely across different locations.

This chapter, therefore, examines active citizen experiences in the specific local context of participation in order to assess how external factors provided by both the national policy context and by their local realisation either enhanced or counteracted the empowerment journeys started by the CVS courses. The Speaking Up courses offered particularly valuable empirical insights in this respect enabling the assessment of long-term impact on previous learners compared with the more recently completed Take Part courses. The factors that were of particular interest here were those related to 'opportunity structures' (Tarrow 1994, cited in Barnes et al 2004) created by New Labour in the public sector and in the third sector. Indeed New Labour policy not only encouraged active citizen participation by creating a wide range of citizen engagement opportunities with the state but also gave support to specific communities to build their capacity for engagement at the grassroots (e.g. 'People First' user-led groups for people with learning disabilities). However, the

extent to which the predominantly 'invited spaces' (Cornwall, 2008) actually put power into the hands of citizens continues to be debated (e.g. Gaventa, 2004; Barnes et al 2007; Durose et al 2009). Amongst the limitations identified in the British participation context were the weakness of the participation framework in the UK and its contingency on local political will (Gaventa, 2004), the lack of clarity in the purpose and remits of participative processes (Cornwall, 2008), and the institutional domination of these processes (Barnes et al., 2004 and 2007). The aim for the case studies in this section, therefore, was to re-assess the reality of participation from the perspective of active citizens in comparison with some of the previously carried out research studies in similar contexts and to identify both positive and empowering developments as well as remaining barriers.

As the research straddled the period before and after the change in government in 2010 and the beginning of a period of financial austerity initiated by the Conservative-Liberal Coalition, the experiences reported here may also highlight any differences in policies between governments, and provide early indicators on the impact of austerity on participation. The long-term assessment of the impact of the Coalition government's policies on active citizenship lies outside of the scope of this research, however.

The chapter examines three case studies of individual and collective experiences of active citizen participation initiated by the CVS learning programmes. They aim to discover the extent of 'empowerment' especially of 'critical' active citizens who are able to challenge the status quo; and whether and how their participation was sustained. The case studies also seek to draw out the various factors at play in determining the quality of experiences and outcomes. In contrast with the previous chapters, the case studies focus on interviewees who became change agents in their respective spheres of involvement and who achieved significant personal and collective outcomes.

The first individual case study is of a carer who had risen up through Speaking Up and Learning to Involve before taking on local government in order to realise a 'fully inclusive playpark' for children with disabilities on council-owned land. This case study illustrates empowerment as self-mobilisation (Cornwall, 2008) and how one woman was able to overcome local institutional resistance to active citizen empowerment.

The second individual 'citizen' case study is also connected to Speaking Up, not only in its guise as a course but rather as forming the core purpose and activity of the empowerment and participation of a young man with learning disabilities. Here too both the national (central government-driven) and the local policy context emerge as key factors in determining the extent of empowerment that can be achieved locally. It also considers the impact of dwindling public funds in support of ambitious long term policies for the realisation of citizenship for some of the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and excluded groups in society, the important part played by appropriate support and by people's agency in realising their self-emancipation.

Finally, the third citizen case study takes place in the setting of a government-created, 'invited' space (or 'manufactured civil society', according to Hodgson 2004) of parent involvement in a Sure Start centre, supported by CVS active citizenship courses. This case study also provides an illustration of how political literacy and democracy learning can be undertaken successfully with disenfranchised people by starting with their everyday concerns and issues and matching learning with meaningful opportunities to make their voices heard, not only in local governance but also in political processes more widely.

These three examples of active citizen engagement undoubtedly represent the most poignant and impressive examples of empowerment within this research. Interestingly, all three involved engagement with the state and thus offered valuable insights into the potential of public policy, particularly that provided by New Labour through its support of active citizenship. The analysis draws on comparative examples of empirical research in the participation literature (e.g. Barnes et al 2007; Durose et al 2009) and on theoretical models of power and empowerment (e.g. Lukes, 2005; Cornwall 2001; 2008; Gaventa 2004) which are further expanded in the chapter's discussion section.

## **9.1 Citizen case study 1: From 'Speaking Up' to self-mobilisation**

This case study looks at how Marian, a parent-carer who started as a timid Speaking Up learner gradually developed into a 'self-mobilising' citizen and 'activist' whose determination and commitment brought about tangible outcomes for children with disabilities and their families. More than just an active citizen, Marian can also be seen as representing a typical example of an 'every-day maker' (Bang and Sørensen, 1999:326),

described as representing a new form of political identity that involves 'strong self-relying and capable individual[s]' who are

'engaged in politics, but not [...] for the sake of keeping the state effective and responsive. [Instead, their] self-confident civic engagement [is] oriented towards coping with common concerns in day-to-day life.' (Bang and Sørensen, 1999:326)

Marian's particular concern which inspired her activism was rooted in her experience as a parent-carer of a severely autistic son. The constant battles with the authorities for services for her son wore her down to the extent that it undermined her confidence completely:

'I think that unless somebody has been a carer it's difficult to understand just how lacking in confidence and lacking in self-esteem the person probably is; because yes, I was a qualified teacher, I got years of teaching behind me, and yet looking after my [severely autistic] son and being constantly criticised [by statutory agencies] in the way I was being a parent; it was completely uncharted waters for us, we didn't know what we were doing, [and this] had reduced me not quite to being a wreck but perilously close to it.' (Marian)

With a small group size and an informal and nurturing learning environment that was deliberately arranged for this Speaking Up group, Marian was able to gradually restore her confidence. The obligatory short presentation to the group at the end of the course provided her with her first opportunity to educate people about autism, and constituted a pivotal point in her journey:

'I remember the last thing we had to do was to stand up and do a 5 minute presentation on something that really ticked our boxes; I did it on what it's like being the mum of an autistic boy. And I did that because so many of the older carers didn't know what autism was, because even though the condition existed, it had only recently come to prominence as a condition and they were genuinely curious and that helped enormously as well. And having done one [presentation], I thought, "well, I can do this, in such a positive, encouraging environment". Looking back it was a very protected environment, a very safe environment. But that's

what you need when your self-esteem, your confidence is so low; it needs a very gentle approach.’ (Marian)

After the level 1 Speaking Up course the tutor persuaded Marian to join the team of carers to deliver training to service providers as part of the ‘Learning to Involve’ project.

‘When I’d done the Speaking Up course, [the tutor] then involved me, oh, “could you be part of that team, we’re going to deliver some training to health care professionals and mental health people”, and that was terribly scary, but because you were part of the team, and to start with she just gave you a tiny slot in the day’s training, so it built your confidence up, [...] and doing this tiny bit of training and gradually we got more confident, we were [...] encouraged [...] to take a bigger part in the day, which we did, and [the course tutor] was so talented and encouraging, just giving you little steps, making you grow in confidence.’ (Marian)

Marian also joined the local carers network and attended support meetings over a number of years. Apart from socialising again, it also led to her first independent, ‘self-mobilised’ involvement:

‘At one of the carers’ support groups, a mum of a boy with Aspergers syndrome [...] stood up and was saying how desperately worried she was about her son to get on the wrong side of the law. I thought, “this is silly, maybe they need training of some sort”, so I contacted the Police and asked them what training they gave their officers with regards to autism. I guess this was a foolish thing to do because they asked, “would you like to come to do it for us?” I was too scared to do it on my own, but I went to the National Autistic Society meetings and I got chatting there with somebody and [...] although we were both terrified we decided that it was a very important thing to do, and that we would do it together. We started off doing it together, but after 18 months [my colleague’s] health gave out then I continued doing it for another 4 years.’ (Marian)

To support her with training Police staff, she took the opportunity to enrol on a City & Guilds *Train the Trainer* course at the CVS, which, although that one was more ‘intimidating’, ‘hard work’ and ‘not nearly as enjoyable’ as Speaking Up, she found it very useful as she ‘learnt a lot’ and was able to update her teaching qualification.

The idea for her next big project arose from having talked to 'other people with similar problems' at an event. This highlights the vital role played by self-help and community groups not only for providing support but also for sharing common concerns and developing strategies for action. In her case it also pointed to the difficulty of locally finding groups that are appropriate to the specific and evolving needs of disabled children 'transitioning' to adulthood.

'I did *Train the Trainers* and then I was involved in the Police, and was going to the carers support group. That was pretty much all I did as well as being a parent. Then I got involved with the Mencap society, and as my son was getting older, and nearing adult services, it was a specialised area [and] we felt it was important to try to move with carers who had problems similar to our own. The National Autistic Society local branch had stopped functioning, and we were kind of in limbo. A lot of the parents at the carers support meetings had elderly people they were caring for. When I joined up with Mencap they too had got elderly carers, their children probably in their 30s and 40s.

Very early on when I was involved with them I went on to a day conference; it had occurred to me, because with my own son going to playparks was very, very difficult because there wasn't a lot of equipment that was suitable; that set me thinking *whether other people found similar problems*, or whether it was just me, so I grabbed the AOB, about a hundred people there, and I said, "look, it sounds like a strange question, but how many of you go to playparks?" They looked very shocked, and I said, "well, why don't you go?", and they said, "because the equipment was too small", and they were scared, they didn't like to feel like being a goldfish in a bowl.

And it coincided with the National Lottery funding play parks. It kind of went on from there, I realised there was this huge need, and I kept being told for about three to four months, "you know, it's a brilliant idea, but it will never happen". I'm a very active person, and I had my confidence boosted so I thought I could actually make it happen. I was very naïve: I had never filled out a bid for anything, it was

quite daunting. And then, working with the City Council: I was so naïve, I had no idea what I was taking on.'

*'But you were determined?'*

'I was wondering whether this was actually too much for me. But there was this huge need that drove me on.' (Marian)

The interview did not go into the details of her experiences with the local council, as she knew that I was already familiar with it. But it is important to mention the actual experiences of people like Marian in the context of 'active citizen' power. As she explained above she was driven by a steely determination. This was just as well, because after having raised half of the money required from the National Lottery and the other half from dozens of grant trusts, she had to get approval from the local council for the lease of a small corner of a council-owned park. However, at this stage she met with resistance from one particular manager of parks at the council who seemed just as determined to put any possible obstacle in his reach to block this project. In a previous (non-recorded) interview she told me that she suspected this man to be misogynistic and resenting the idea of a woman 'coming out of nowhere' and making demands on his department. It seemed a full-out battle and Marian had told me that her tactics was to '*never take "no" for an answer*' in her dealings with the council. Eventually, with support from local councillors and from people in the higher echelons at the council who must have realised what an asset this facility would be for the city (the site was located within easy access from the motorway and could attract families to the city from far afield), the playpark was given the go-ahead. The playpark has since proven to be a resounding success, and, as the first fully accessible playground in the country, Marian was frequently contacted by other groups and local authorities in the country asking for her advice. The playpark was finally opened by the council in 2009, which now assumes its part of its maintenance (a great part being played by volunteers, first and foremost Marian herself), whilst the play equipment continues to be funded through privately-secured grants or sponsorships.

Marian was convinced that without the Speaking Up course she would have been able to take on this huge project, which led to her subsequent experience of dealing with officials, and enabled her to have the confidence and skills to challenge local officers with such

determination. As a result of her battles with the council and the successful realisation of her project, her relationship with officials had changed:

‘I find having done the playpark project, people in social services and the local authority they treat me with considerable respect now, and they realise that I'm not a loose cannon, and I try and be sensible and work with people. I think when I set up initially with the playpark project they thought, “who on earth is this unknown, completely barking woman, who could cause all kinds of problems for us?”, and the playpark is now two years old and I work very closely and positively with the local authority, and I think they now regard me as a sensible asset.’

(Marian)

Despite now being considered ‘a sensible asset’ there was no risk of her being ‘incorporated’ by the authorities. Not only did she have the courage to expose the failings of the council at a Take Part conference organised by the CVS and elicit a public commitment from the Assistant Chief Executive for lessons to be learnt from her experiences, but she continues to actively work for the interests of people with disabilities.

‘It’s not so much my son; people are saying that I'm doing it for my son, but I'm not, he's well looked after. But it's particularly for people who can't fight back themselves. I like to be the voice of people who haven't got a voice, and thanks to the course I went on I seem to have a very loud voice!’

(Marian)

She also felt strongly that it was important for people with disabilities and their families not to adopt a ‘victim syndrome’:

‘I think [my success of the playpark] empowered other people, because they look at me and I'm just a mum, an ordinary mum because that's what I am, who just had a vision and who was determined, and I say to them, “if I can do it, I have no special qualifications at all, you could have a similar vision, it could be something completely different, and go for it. Don't sit around waiting for other people to do it, because nobody will... ”. I think, with carers, that's particularly true, because it's such a burden to have caring responsibilities, but also [...] a lot of them do lack in confidence and that's the danger that there is a sort of victim process; *but it is*

*possible with some help and encouragement to break out of that victim syndrome, and become active and positive.'* (Marian, my emphasis)

However exceptional a person Marian may be, despite her vigorous denial, it is clear that the CVS courses provided the necessary 'help and encouragement' for her to become an active citizen after many years of having been disempowered as a parent-carer, and to have been given a new identity ('the courses allowed me to be me!'). This citizen case study also underlined the importance of *relevant* local third sector groups and support networks at various stages of her development and project work, not least with a registered charity who were the official grant holders of the play park money. Interestingly, these experiences seemed to have been sufficient in equipping her with a full range of leadership skills that were required for her successful battle with the council.

The more depressing insight from this story is the confirmation it gives to concerns that despite discourses and policies promoting citizen 'participation' centrally, the reality of even the best intentioned and least threatening of constructive projects (as opposed to opposition to authority plans) plays out against the background of significant power differentials (power of officials, of men over women, etc) in which active citizens invariably find themselves in a weaker position. Additionally, as Gaventa (2004) argued, regardless of central policies supporting 'localism' and 'community empowerment', the 'power' of active citizens is highly contingent on the local context, on the willingness of local decision-makers, and on the strength of community groups. Whilst more robust 'legal and statutory frameworks' (Gaventa 2004) may provide part of the answer, the suspicion is that it would take a general and sustained culture change to 'empower' active citizens in the long term.

## **9.2 Citizen case study 2: active citizens with learning disabilities becoming change agents**

'All people with a learning disability are *people first* with the right to lead their lives like any others, with the same opportunities and responsibilities, and to be treated with the same dignity and respect.'

(Valuing People 'vision', Department of Health 2001/2009)

'To be fair I think most staff who work in learning disabilities are there because they want to empower people, they want to support people, that's why they're there.'  
(County Officer, Strategic Lead for Learning Disability, 2011.)

'And I'm very pleased what the Speaking Up course seems to have done for people, it seems to have made one or two people I know more confident.'

(Mark)

This citizen case study examines the empowerment journey and outcomes of Mark. Mark is a young man with a moderate learning disability who has become a very effective advocate for people with learning disabilities. His involvements were manifold and ranged from volunteering to working with the state. At some point he was even a county employee. This, then, is a citizen case study that looks at what can be achieved when people from all backgrounds and abilities are given appropriate support for participation, and the impact of that participation on both their personal and active citizen development. The background against which his experiences played out also provides a valuable insight into the public participation policy in this area and into the roles played by, respectively, the central state, local officials and community groups. Mark's emancipatory journey as an active citizen and advocate was intimately linked to New Labour's Valuing People (2001) strategy and its public sector modernisation agenda (see Chapter Three, section 3.2.2.2) Without wanting to go into unnecessary detail, the Valuing People 'citizenship' vision for people with learning disability set the framework for participation and thus enabled Mark's active citizenship practice. As explained in the introduction to this section, the respective influence of both central government drivers and the local institutional context were going to be of interest to this case study as setting the parameters for the empowerment of active citizens with a learning disability.

In the previous chapter several learners had been quoted as stating that, in their view, empowerment requires support and encouragement, opportunities for practice and the recognition of one's contribution, which together create a virtuous cycle for personal and active citizen learning and development, and the strengthening of a citizen identity. Mark's support started with a Speaking Up course at the CVS – in fact, he attended the first ever Speaking Up course there in 2003. From then on his empowerment journey was enmeshed

with further support from the third sector as well as from the public sector, linked to his engagement.

The analysis draws on interviews with Mark and with a relevant external stakeholder in form of the adult services manager of learning disability at the local authority who had played a key role in his development and engagement and had previously worked as advocacy worker at the CVS. Her job title at the time of the interview had been 'Strategic Lead for Service User Involvement for Learning Disability Services', abbreviated below to 'Strategic Lead'. Furthermore this interview data is triangulated by my own observations of Mark over many years, having seen him in action repeatedly in various contexts including when he gave presentations at conferences.

When Mark arrived at the CVS after he had finished his full-time education at the FE College he was already involved in an advocacy and service user group for people with learning disabilities. His reason for attending the Speaking Up course was thus linked to his involvement in the local service user group, the latter also called 'Speaking Up' (from which the course took its title).

'The first week I didn't know what [the Speaking Up course] was. But then we went to one of the meetings' - [*As part of the course?*]- 'Yes. We went to the Council chamber at County Hall where we had the meeting [with the] Service User Regional Forum. The group had a chairperson who was actually on the course and one or two people on the management committee were on the course.'

(Mark, [interviewer in italics])

Although he had attended the course eight years previously, Mark still remembered parts of the course such as practising presentations, reflecting on 'life-changing experiences' and preparing to speak up at meetings. He particularly enjoyed making presentations, which is how he got involved with the local Learning Disability Partnership Board. This Board was set up to implement New Labour's 'Valuing People' strategy (DoH, 2001) and brought together service managers in health and social care as well as people with learning disabilities, families and carer representatives (see Chapter Three). The purpose of the group was to give strategic directions to the development of services, covering '*a multitude of things, like housing, employment, citizenship, health, transitions, etc and*

*[Mark] had been involved in any work that came out of that board.'* (Strategic Lead). She then went on to explain the reach of the Board's remit and why Mark was particularly suited to working with it.

'The other thing about the Partnership Board is that, because it came through the Department of Health [...] it works for people with a learning disability and their families, not just people who receive services, so under that board and with the help of people like [Mark] we were able to set up projects that actually would help everybody with a learning disability, rather than those that the Council for instance have to pay a service for, which is really, really important. [Mark] doesn't have services from the Council, so he was able to take part in that as a voice for people, obviously for people who have services, because he has friends who have services. It's quite a wide agenda he's been involved in.' (Strategic Lead for Learning Disability, 2011.)

In the following Mark described how he had become involved in the Partnership Board, and in how his presentation skills helped him gain this particular role.

'Because I got involved in another group at the same time, a smaller subgroup, to look at [...] people having more choice and control; and we then had to give a presentation to this Partnership Board meeting. [...] Myself and one of the people who was on the course and [the County Strategic Lead], the group had met and they asked for someone to do a presentation to the board, and I volunteered. [...]

I also went to many other Speaking Up group meetings [the local user group]. I got to know quite a few people. In 2006 it was decided that the Partnership Board, they would be interested in having a Learning Disability Co-chair. They did a vote, and I actually went for it and managed to win. I co-chaired every meeting since. And I've also been able to work in the office, and I've also met people like the Head of Learning Disabilities, in various posts...' (Mark)

Mark was rightly proud of his position at the Board which, as the Strategic Lead pointed out, *'could be considered his biggest achievement'*. For two years he was on the county council payroll (part time), but after the money for the Partnership Board had run out, he

continued the chairman's role on a voluntary basis. When I asked the County Officer about what she thought were Mark's greatest achievements, she replied:

'... something like this chairing: we never had a co-chair of a board before with a learning disability. Like I said, it's a strategic board, it's right up there, and [Mark] has done it fantastically, and I think that's one of his achievements. [...] I think he's achieved something fantastic at presenting; really good at training [...]. And also, I think he's become a more independent person through doing this type of work, I think he's more confident, he does more for himself than he would have before, and I think that's to do with the work he's been doing.' (Strategic Lead for Learning Disability, 2011)

The outcome of greater independence would be considered an important 'empowerment' outcome from the point of view of user movements, particularly for people whose freedoms had in the past been severely restricted. It was also built into New Labour's Valuing People strategy (see the quote at the top of this section).

Another key area of his skills was as trainer. When I asked him about his various active citizen involvements Mark mentioned a number of examples of his activity as trainer:

'I've had a bit of training, and I actually helped to lead training as well. [The CVS advocacy worker] and [the Strategic Lead] did a training called Words and Symbols<sup>34</sup> [and Pictures, WASP], because some people have trouble understanding big words, and prefer words and pictures. And it was the course to get people to help do that, and I did one. And I ended up being asked whether I would be able to help with it, and I helped with that for a while until recently. I may do it again but I'm not sure what is happening at the moment. Then I did some more training for working with people with higher support needs through [Strategic Lead]. Then I also got involved through [same officer]; I met someone at the county [council] who was involved in direct payments, and helped him co-chair these road shows; and I've also spoken at the ALAC conference. And also... while we sorted out the direct payments, we decided to put some training together to make people aware

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<sup>34</sup> 'Words, Symbols and Pictures', known as WASP, is a tool used to make communication accessible for people with learning disabilities

with learning disabilities and we set up this course. And we did a pilot course with some people we knew, and then did about five courses in various parts of [the County].’ (Mark)

Thus, Mark had become a key asset for adult care services, who were able to involve him in the implementation of numerous measures, both as volunteer and an employee<sup>35</sup>. I have personally observed Mark give presentations on several occasions, and at one of these – the ALAC conference he mentioned – he was particularly impressive. Not only was he able to stand up in front of an audience of about a hundred people in a conference hall and speak fluently for about ten minutes about his active citizenship, but his presentation was superior to those made by some of the other speakers on that day, including one council officer. Whilst Mark had the advantage of rarely feeling especially nervous, the preparation skills learnt from Speaking Up and subsequent practice clearly paid dividends in such situations.

Apart from his personal talents, however, the keys to his success had been regular access to training and manifold opportunities for practice – and the better he got the more requests he received.

‘I think [Mark] has gained in confidence greatly, and I think part of that actually has been with the courses he's been on, because he's very interested in doing any type of training, absolutely really, really enjoys it, and I think he learns a lot of skills in that way, which he has been able to transfer. He does training for [the council]; he also does training for various other groups, where he gets a payment for that. But I think those skills have come from other learning he's done throughout the years as well. [...] [P]articularly training [...] and co-chairing [...] are quite difficult [w]ithin the area I work in, lots of people haven't got [these skills and] wouldn't be comfortable to get up and do training. [Whereas Mark] would sit down with me and we would go together, he would make suggestions about which parts he wants to present in. [...] (Strategic Lead for Learning Disability, 2011)

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<sup>35</sup> The Strategic Lead explained that before becoming a council employee, they had explored together the impact of pay on his benefits. Maintaining benefit entitlements, alongside an additional income, can be a real issue for people who otherwise rely on benefits most of their lives.

Some individuals, such as the County Lead Officer also provided essential support, positive feedback and encouragement. Part of this officer's approach to empowerment was to tailor the support, as she explained here, in order to foster autonomy and independence.

'Yeah, the support is clear with people with learning disabilities to get them to really feel comfortable in speaking out and going along to things like meetings and being able to participate in meetings, so people need the right type of support to do that, that's very important. [Mark] learns very well, so his support, well he actually asks for it now, it's a lot less than it used to be four years ago, he feels that he's happy to go to places on his own, he would take his notebook and write down, and then he would come back and tell me all about it. *His support has been a lot less in the last few years because he feels so much more confident.* Also he would go with other people and get a train and bus on his own, which he didn't do a lot about 6 to 8 years ago. So now he's quite confident in getting the bus [across the county] to go to the People First offices and work with the guys out there and coming back, so that's been really positive for him.' (Strategic Lead, 2011)

Peer support in the form of cooperation with others was also very much encouraged. Mark was one of the people who shared their knowledge and skills with his peers across the many groups he'd been involved with. His ability to use public transport gave him greater flexibility to meet up with other user groups independently of support from professional staff, and to travel with peers. Their mobility allowed a greater circulation of new projects and ideas amongst different user-led groups, and their collective action.

Out of such community-based collaborations sprang a number of new ideas and initiatives. One more recent development for people with learning disabilities has been a police training initiative in the wake of several tragic cases of 'Hate and Mate Crime'<sup>36</sup> which saw vulnerable people with learning disabilities, and sometimes their carers, die as a result of sustained bullying or exploitation and taunting by pseudo-'mates'. The aim of the training was to raise awareness of police staff in dealing with people with learning disabilities appropriately and correctly identifying the symptoms of these crimes. Mencap has set up a police pledge called 'Stand by Me', but there still is a need for training local police officers. At the level of the Constabulary in this area, which spans two counties, Mark became

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<sup>36</sup> See: <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2010/sep/14/learning-disabilities-mate-crime>

involved in a Coalition for action against hate crime with user groups and projects from across the region. People with a learning disability were trained to qualify as trainers before going on to roll out training for police and social care staff across the Constabulary's two counties. Without the alliance of grassroots groups across the whole geographic area their proposal would not have been taken seriously by the Constabulary<sup>37</sup>.

One essential element of service user involvement is a network of community-based groups; this gives access to information to people with learning disabilities, and to discuss issues and 'options' without which the notion of service user 'choice' would be meaningless for many. Such groups often act as a social support for people who face social isolation, particularly in remote rural areas (one of the reasons why they are so vulnerable to 'mate crime'). However, local authority budget cuts further reduced the already patchy coverage of such groups across the county – yet such groups rely on funding for the professional support needed to function effectively. Unfortunately, Mark's local group was among those that had to close down, only a few years after it had become independent from the CVS under the New Labour government's support for 'user-led groups'.

'I became more involved in [the local] 'Speaking Up' group<sup>38</sup>. I was secretary for a while and in 2009 the group stopped and went with [county-wide] People First group we had become quite friendly with. And we had an office down at [...] the quay, which is no longer there, due to the recent cutbacks.' (Mark)

In fact, several comments that Mark made in the course of this interview touched on the issue of funding cuts which seems to have affected the most vulnerable people the most. The first mention concerned the CVS 'Safe Hands' supported volunteering group which used to be supported by the local authority until about eight or nine years ago when it cut its funding. Since then, because of the value of the group to people with support needs, to their carers, and to the service it provides to its member organisation, the CVS has funded it out of its own reserves<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Based on information obtained from a presentation of the project at a conference

<sup>38</sup> As a reminder, Speaking Up was also the name of the local learning disability service user group.

<sup>39</sup> At the latest update the group had started to charge for its services as part of an income diversification strategy

'I work for Safe Hands, which is an administration/clerical charity [at the CVS] and we've done Christmas cards to help raise money, funds and that, because the group had very nearly closed before I joined, I remember making a copy of a paper cutting about the closure of the group in the office.'

'I tried with [the local] college, because they were stopping some courses, but I don't think we were too successful. They stopped the course [in 2006]. I think they were trying to save money, they had no money.'

'I still co-chair the Partnership Board, but I'm going to be doing it in a different way, because they can't afford... because my role is temporary, I can chair it, but it would probably be voluntary. [*Were you paid at the time?*] I was paid but because with these cutbacks, they don't know what's going to happen, at the moment.'

[NB. The funding has since stopped]. (Mark)

In this way Mark was able to contribute to collective outcomes for his community. When asked about these achievements he mentioned the following.

'With one group we found that there was talk about the local Mencap centre was possibly closing, and we contacted some people and managed to secure it.[...] And when we did the [Hate Crime awareness] training, one of the people in [the bus company] got involved in the course, and in fact I've been helping, been trying to see if we could make the bus timetable accessible, but that's taken a backseat at the moment.' (Mark)

It may sound trivial, but making the bus timetable accessible is another small yet significant step towards removing barriers for people with a learning disability, in turn increasing independence and the ability to socialise (social isolation tends to be very high in this group). It also gives an example of Mark's ability, and his confidence, to 'seize the moment'.

To conclude this citizen case study, regardless of Mark's exceptional talents the key points to make are that his involvement would not have been possible without adequate support and resources, nor the skilled and empowering support from professionals in both the

voluntary and the statutory sector who could assess when it was safe to let people like Mark travel or exercise his active citizenship independently. In return, he was able to give enormously as an active citizen, most of the time on an unpaid basis. Moreover, he did not act in isolation but frequently collaborated with peers, thus empowering others. Also, as a busy volunteer he stayed in touch with other people with greater support needs than him, which maintained the 'representativeness' vital for his advocacy work. Finally, New Labour's Valuing People strategy provided a key policy driver that enabled progress to be made to the lives of people with learning disabilities, especially by making public services more 'responsive' to people's individual and collective needs. All these elements proved to be important for Mark's (and others') meaningful empowerment.

Even if, on balance, there still is a long way to go to realise the aims of the Valuing People strategy for full, substantive citizenship for people with learning disabilities, some progress has been made, and Mark played a not insignificant part in it, locally. One is justified in asserting that people like Mark will be needed for some time. Luckily, he seems to thrive as an active citizen, and when I asked him, 'what would make you feel even more empowered?' his answer was, simply:

'Probably being able to continue speaking up in front of people.' (Mark)

### **9.3 Citizen case study 3: From Sure Start to Parliament: Parents 'speak up' and make their voices heard**

'The importance of community development lies not only in what it achieves in terms of practical outcomes for disadvantaged communities but also in the process of involving the members of those communities in working for change and the impact this involvement can then have on those individuals' capacity to act as citizens.' (Lister 1998: 229)

The third citizen case study is an illustration of the CVS' contribution to learning for democracy in a disadvantaged part of the city, at a Sure Start Children Centre (which operated out of two centres in adjacent wards). It focuses on the impact of active citizenship learning as part of a community development approach that was also linked to

public participation provided by the Centre as part of its statutory set-up. In light of the existing literature on Sure Start Centres, this provided a particularly salient example of empowerment in a 'manufactured civil society' context (Hodgson 2004) as well as an example of community-based, learner centred and contextualised 'political literacy' learning for parents in a part of the city characterised by low electoral turn-out.

The first step of this learning approach was a succession of Speaking Up courses. Prompted by the demand by previous learners at the Children's Centre for more advanced courses, the CVS tutor developed a longer, Level 2 Speaking Up course. This course was delivered over a period of almost a year (minus the school holidays), to fit around the crèche times of the Sure Start centre. As was seen in Chapter Seven, section 7.1.2., building on the confidence developed at level 1, Speaking Up level 2 included units on diversity, personal and social responsibility and active citizenship. The latter also included elements of 'social and political learning'.

The running of this level 2 course coincided with the Take Part Pathfinder and was able to benefit from the new connections made by the CVS through this national programme. One of these was the Parliamentary Outreach programme, which came to deliver information sessions locally, including to this group of learners. It has to be clarified that any guest speakers or special sessions always required approval by the members of the learner group. This is interesting, then, because the majority of learners in this group had not previously voted, and were generally disadvantaged in terms of education and income, many with low levels of confidence. As one of them explained: *'because I've been off work for quite a long time before I did this course, I didn't think I fitted in anywhere'* (Abby, radio transcript).

This citizen case study is divided into two sections: the first considers democracy learning within the participation framework provided by the Sure Start centre, and the second considers the democracy learning and practice outside of the centre.

### ***Sure Start centre: a 'community space' for democracy learning?***

The Sure Start programme was New Labour's flagship programme that sought to reduce poverty by improving the life chances of children in disadvantaged areas through the provision of support for children in their early years (under five). Parent involvement in the

centre was one of its principles, but how successfully this was implemented greatly varied from centre to centre. Other research on Sure Start centres showed less satisfactory levels of parent involvement, arguably because the centre had been a 'manufactured civil society organisation' (Hodgson, 2004) or because of the way the parent participation had been set up (Barnes et al., 2007). These studies offer interesting parallels for the present case study.

One of the key aims for this Sure Start Centre was to enable parents to play a central role in the centre's decision-making. To this effect, a Parent Forum was set up to enable parents to develop a voice and to be represented at the Sure Start multi-agency board. This was one of the key differences with other sites studied: the Sure Start site in Barnes' study (Barnes et al, 2007), for example, had adopted the model of an elected parent representative to the board. Unsurprisingly, the researchers found that, as the representatives lacked organisational grounding, they were acting as individuals and struggled with being recognised by the professionals on the Board. Here, in contrast, the members of this Parent Forum made joint representations on agreed issues to the board, which not only had accepted them but according to the CVS CEO who chaired the meetings, their presence managed to change the style of the board meeting to become more accessible.

Another important difference was that, from the beginning the Parent Forum's coordinators sought the help of the CVS to deliver relevant short courses tailored to the changing needs of the group, as its membership was regularly renewed. Topics included, for example, how to work together as a group, how to do 'active listening', valuing other people's opinions, 'behave at meetings' (in the words of the Sure Start Children Centre Participation Team (staff) member). The added value of the learning to the Parent Forum was recognised by people within and outside of the centre:

'We have a very well respected Parent Forum here, and actually a lot of people come to our forum for their opinion, because they are seen as a good model because of the training they accessed, the skills they developed, the way they present themselves as a strong voice for the community. Regardless of individual opinions on that forum, when they are a united voice on an issue, and it might not be their own it might be something else in the community, they make positive changes.' (Children Centre staff member, 2012, my italics)

The centre's staff were committed to a community development ethos, and provided real opportunities for parents to shape the activities at the centre. Making explicit references to the 'skills they developed' from the training, the staff member cited several examples of parent voice both within the Children Centre, and outside, on matters of concerns to parents.

'Parents will volunteer at different levels in the centre here, or even within the Parent Forum, [and] any contribution they make, whether it is e-mailing in a comment about whether services are meeting their needs of a particular group in the community, we see the value in that. [...]

And any changes that happen at the centre, parents are at the heart of the decision-making. They don't always get the answers they want but being part of the process helps because they can see what the challenges are so they can help us make informed decisions. When those decisions come up, for example the group stopped due to staff cut-backs, actually, the Parent Forum have had the confidence to come forward and were able to come to us, to an operations meeting with staff and managers, and said, "you can't stop this group because it brings you new parents, it provides social bonding for parents". All the things that they raised actually changed and we changed our timetable [of services] back then. You know, without that confidence and feeling valued that they could participate in that, we would have lost that group altogether and that would have been a big loss.'

(Children Centre staff member, 2012)

Having learnt and practised effective communication skills had served the collective interests of parents, as the team member went on to explain:

'They also have the confidence and felt knowledgeable enough to be able to say *why* it makes a difference, so it wasn't just a case of saying, "we are outraged and you need to put it back", but actually a constructive conversation, to say *why* it was important, and you couldn't argue with that then because their points were really valid and because of the relationship we have with them it was really valued and acted on. I don't think that happens everywhere, so I think that is a good

example of how strong those parents feel and they weren't talking for their own gain but for the community.' (Children Centre staff member, 2012)

Furthermore, being treated as valuable members of the community – according to this source – contributed to their citizen identity and, in turn, increased their confidence and agency, at all levels. The following quote is from the CVS radio show with two Speaking Up learners from level 2 as guest speakers, talking about their course experiences:

'... because I've been off work for quite a long time before I did this course, I didn't think I fitted in anywhere, I just sort of went on my own daily routine; but now I feel like I am actually important and that I can give something back to the community and become an active citizen if I feel like it. It's just empowering, it makes me feel important, I've sort of grown a new identity and it's getting bigger and bigger every week, every time I go. *It's not just about building your confidence and self esteem, it's making your voice heard, it's understanding how to make decisions in your society and community; getting involved nationally and globally and understanding about diversity.* If someone asked me before I wouldn't have had a clue and it's so broad, the amount of knowledge behind it, is just absolutely fantastic and also developing personal skills for yourself, so it covers a lot.'

('Abby', Radio show transcript, 2010, my emphasis)

The Children Centre's Ofsted report also commented on the level of involvement of parents at the centre, and the positive effect it had had (part of the inspection includes interviews with parents).

'Staff are particularly effective at empowering users, the majority of whom report significantly increased levels of confidence due to their contact with the centre. The courses users attend have a considerable impact on improving their life chances. For example, they state that their attendance on the 'Speaking Up' programme has 'broadened their horizons' and has given them opportunities to 'refocus their life'.

Users make a strong contribution to improving the quality and suitability of the services they receive as they are fully involved in the management of the centre.

They report their desire to 'give something back' to the community and are inspired to offer their services within the centre as a direct result of their positive experience as service users. A very well-coordinated volunteer programme ensures they are well trained to enable them to make a positive contribution.'

(Ofsted report, Children Centre A, 2010)

This level of engagement with its reach into the community was in many ways how the government intended the Sure Start centres to operate, as a 'bridge between 'bottom-up community responses' and the 'top-down broad policy agenda set by government' (Robertson, 2001, cited in Hodgson 2004). However, at the same time the Sure Start Children Centre - and with it, the voice of parents – also suffered from the restrictions placed on it by New Labour's 'command and control' style of governing from the centre, which continued despite rhetoric promising less state interference (Aspen and Birch, 2005). In fact the Children Centre Participation Team member was the first to express her frustration at seeing that the community voice, much as it was valued at the Centre and even at County level, was ignored in more strategic decisions that were made 'higher up'. This included constraints linked to the Sure Start programme's changing priorities and its targets, but also levels of bureaucracy which prevented the Centre from working as flexibly as it would have liked. Thus, local groups of parents that grew out of its activities 'organically' could not use the Centre unless they met the latest Sure Start priority targets.

In spite of these limitations it is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that this Sure Start Centre, unlike some other examples reviewed by research elsewhere, was able to provide plenty of support, encouragement and opportunities for parents to develop in a myriad ways:

'I think part of the role in the Parent Forum is giving them a chance to find out about what goes on, giving them a bit of space with the childcare, and that's been important for them, and to be able to do something for themselves, and choose what they get involved in or not get involved in. They have really gained in confidence, they have felt useful, they have gone on to become volunteers or governors at their local school; and as their children get older we have had quite a few parents go and get jobs, quite a few working in the centre here as well, and others have returned to learning and have done completely different courses to

what they thought, career paths. For others it is giving them the confidence in their own lives to make changes where things haven't been right, like relationships.'

(Children Centre staff member, 2012)

This corroborated the feedback I had from Ella and the tutor about how the parents had benefited from the centre and the opportunities it gave them. Incidentally, this included the staff member interviewed, who herself had started as a volunteer in the centre before becoming a paid employee later on. Ella too had finally been able to get a much coveted volunteer position at the centre and paid work at the local school.

### ***The 'political' engagement of Sure Start parents***

The Speaking Up Level 2 course for Sure Start parents coincided with the Take Part Pathfinder programme and the run-up to the 2010 elections, which enabled it to exploit new opportunities for 'democracy learning' and 'political literacy'. Apart from inviting the local councillor and other officials as guest speakers, the group also undertook visits to the courts and to other public institutions which had been facilitated by the connections made through the Take Part programme. The Parliamentary Outreach programme in particular had connected with the CVS through the national Take Part Network, and their regional outreach worker had delivered several sessions to both community groups at the CVS as well as to the Speaking Up group at the Children Centre. One of the outcomes had been an invitation to the Houses of Parliament, arranged and hosted by the Outreach programme and supported by both the Sure Start Centre (financially) and by the CVS (in kind) whose staff accompanied learners on their trip to London<sup>40</sup>. The visit to Parliament was a definite highlight for this particular group: not only did they vote as a result and share their new-found enthusiasm for voting with their family and friends, but it generally kindled their interest in politics.

'Before, there was no way I would vote, I just thought it was boring but now my vote makes a difference to me, to my children and to my community. On the course we were all non-voters, not really understanding what politics meant, never watched the news, now I'm a news fanatic, GMTV News, Six O' clock news, Ten O'

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<sup>40</sup> The group included nine Speaking Up learners and one additional parent from the Parent Forum. One of the 10 parents who attended had never been to London before.

Clock news, it's just sort of took over my life; I just love knowing about everything. Newspapers, now, every article I cut out and take it to the course, put it in my folder.' (Abby, Radio show transcript, 2010)

Apart from voting, the parents became involved in various other democratic processes, which meant that their influence as parents extended beyond the confines of the centre. In fact, they became advocates for not only the centre in general, but specifically of the learning provided there by the CVS (in conjunction with the centre, which was important in terms of both location and childcare availability). Thus, they submitted written evidence to the Parliamentary Select Committee on Sure Start in 2011 (facilitated by Parliamentary Outreach and by the CVS); they met with their MP, at Parliament and locally, and they participated in a series of conferences linked to the Take Part and the Community Empowerment programme. Combining their passion and their communication skills, they made memorable contributions as speakers in small teams (repeating their initial success from the ALAC conference in 2006), which several of my interviewees fed back to me as the highlight of this local conference run by the CVS.

The previous chapter already mentioned Ella and her personal development. She and some colleagues had become particularly active in the run-up to the elections, scrutinising the parties' manifestos in their course ('Sinead' commented critically, and with great foresight, on the radio show in 2010: *'The only problem is that the manifestos are just a list of what the party would like to do when they get into power. What they say in the manifesto isn't necessarily what they're going to do when they get into power, it's just a rush list so they could change their manifesto when they get into power.'* Radio show transcript). Ella set up a blog in which she challenged all the main candidates (whom she called 'party councillors') to spell out their policy on welfare and low pay in response to her concrete situation or 'scenario' based on her family situation (text extract in the original version):

'Dear xxx party councillor: I have a scenario I'd like you to consider, please bear in mind when reading this that I have not previously voted and although favour your party at present am still undecided as to a suitable candidate. This scenario I am about to disclose is personal to my circumstances however affects many families

and therefore is relevant to your manifestos and will directly affect my vote and others as this letter and responses will be available to view online. [...]

There followed a detailed exposé of the financial situation of the ‘benefits trap’, and finishing thus:

‘When I was working a 40 hour week I earned less than on Income support, there is something fundamentally wrong with this picture. The present system has many advantages for disadvantaged families however once a part of the governmental support system it is very difficult to break free from the cycle. There are many individuals and families who work really hard in paid employment yet struggle to support their families and there is little or no help to support them with mortgages, home repairs, childcare, prescriptions etc.

*Obviously I am not expecting you to change the system aside from not having the power to do so, it would be highly unrealistic to expect such a thing* however my message I hope is one for you to consider particularly when writing the manifestos as well as how you intend to promote your party and win my vote.’

(Ella, email and blog, unedited text, my highlights)

Regardless of the faults one could pick in her tactic and understanding of government (notably, its power to change the welfare system!) her initiative is a remarkable achievement for someone previously disengaged from politics altogether. It also illustrates that there must have been discussions within the group about her ‘scenario’ which helped her identify ‘personal troubles’ as a ‘public issue’ worthy of consideration by politicians, and state her arguments so clearly and persuasively; and not least the fact that as a potential voter, she felt entitled to raising this issue in the first place.

The different groups of learners at Sure Start (of which there were many, over the years, at both two Children Centres) were passionate about the value of the Speaking Up courses. In an email to her MP, Ella raised the issue of the threat to the funding of the Speaking Up course – which, to be precise, did not concern the course funding as such but the accompanying childcare at Sure Start, which the latter could no longer afford to fund.

'So opportunities like the Speaking up course are crucial for educating individuals through likeminded groups about having a voice in society [...] I want to raise awareness to you about the need for groups such as ours in and around [city], particularly for mothers with children *as finding courses with free childcare facilities is rare and courses that particularly raise our awareness of politics in non jargon terms.*

*Through discussion with our partners and children we can help educate our nation to give people the knowledge that we are the power behind the vote which will determine our future Prime minister and thus affect the way our country is run.'*  
Ella, email to local MP, February 2010 (my italics; original text)

Another parent also felt strongly about how the Speaking Up course had turned her life around and that of her family. After the group had met with the local Labour MP at the Houses of Parliament he invited various third sector women groups in the city for a 'Listening event' with the Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband. The Sure Start parents were invited as a group, but, unfortunately, due to a broken down car, only one of their group was able to attend on the day. Luckily, I was able to observe this informal event.

The event demonstrated this learner's confidence and timing in an improvised and unpredictable context. This ex-learner had had the courage to stand up at the appropriate moment and address the Opposition Leader in front of an audience of voluntary sector professionals, speaking clearly and persuasively about the impact of the Speaking Up course on her life. Then she answered the politicians' questions equally confidently. After the plenary she went up to Ed Miliband to talk to him more, and he suggested to her to consider becoming a local councillor. She was then featured in the local BBC broadcast and appeared in the local newspaper. Her intervention was described in a press release prepared by the CVS and held up as an example of what learners could achieve (anonymised version):

*'Speaking Up Learner Presents to Labour Party Leader*

In 2011, Speaking Up learner [K] gave a presentation to Labour Party leader Ed Miliband and local MP [name] about her personal development through the Speaking Up courses [as] part of a meeting [...] about the impact of budget cuts on

local women. [K] explained how the funded Active Learning programme [*sic*] had inspired her to take an interest in local democracy, to find new employment and the positive impact her learning had on her family. [...] She expressed her concerns that government spending cuts would affect the local Sure Start centres who are able to offer free childcare during Speaking Up sessions, and thus allow the learning programme to reach families and communities who could not otherwise benefit.' [etc] CVS press release

In the words of the local Labour MP who hosted the visit:

'The positive impact I have observed of Speaking Up on those taking part has been truly incredible. I have never come across a programme that has had so much transformative power. For many of the people I have spoken to who have done the course, it has literally turned round their and often their family's lives. What a great example of a low cost but extremely high value social programme!' (Local MP, cited in CVS Learning programme, 2011-12.)

## 9.4 Discussion

'For a long time we supported people for whom volunteering doesn't come easily and we provided extra support [because] our belief is that everybody has something to contribute and can volunteer. [...] And we have raised our expectations of volunteers and they have raised expectations of themselves, to develop themselves through opportunities they didn't have previously, and to being recognised for being able to do that.' (CEO, 2012)

### ***Weighing up the evidence***

The case studies drew on different sources of evidence, including interviews with the active citizens at the centre of the research, and with external stakeholders who were familiar with the individuals and the specific context of their involvement. This was supplemented by my own observations of individuals as well as by documentary evidence.

Given their professional role in engaging active citizens in their organisations, the stakeholders interviewed for the second and third case studies would naturally have been

positively biased and thus might have exaggerated the claims about the extent of the empowerment and achievements of these groups or individuals. This potential bias was mitigated – and triangulated - however, by my own knowledge and observations. In terms of the outcomes they stated, I did not feel that either had made hugely inflated claims. I was cautious, however, and looked for third party evidence to triangulate their claims, for example via the Ofsted report of the Children Centre.

Moreover, my analysis in this chapter focused on understanding the factors that contributed to or inhibited empowerment at the local and national level. The two ‘officials’ (bearing in mind that the Sure Start staff member was officially employed by a charity) were able to contribute invaluable insights into these specialist areas. It was also clear from both the Sure Start Centre and the Learning Disability staff that they were genuinely committed to empowering the people they worked with (being ‘on their side’, in Freirean terms).

The interviews gave these officials the opportunity to be critical, albeit somewhat cautiously, despite my reassurance about the extra steps I had taken to anonymise the data. All the same, the county member of staff spoke more guardedly about the changes to the engagement context post-2010, but was also unable, at that moment in time, to predict how it would develop.

### ***Discussion of findings***

If there is a consensus in the literature concerned with democracy learning and citizenship education, from Tocqueville onwards, it is the idea that citizenship practice plays an invaluable role for the development of civic virtue and competences, not least of which having the confidence to engage. But, as Mansbridge (1999) explored in her essay ‘On the idea that participation makes better citizens’, this knowledge is more intuitive than empirical in the political sciences, and ‘research on this topic has the intrinsic difficulties of trying to measure small and subtle psychological effects’ (Mansbridge, 1999:319). As this qualitative research study is primarily about such ‘small and subtle’ effects, I believe that it – and the citizen case studies in this section in particular - make a valuable contribution by providing evidence for the added value of participation in conjunction with tailored learning, to enable the civil and political participation of disadvantaged people in particular.

Despite the criticisms of and well-founded reservations towards the outcomes achieved in 'invited' spaces of public participation (Gaventa, 1999, 2002, 2004; Cornwall, 2004, 2008; Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; Taylor, 2007), at least in terms of 'power shifts' and influencing decisions that [a]re anything but 'skin-deep' (Brannan et al, 2007:188) there has also been recognition that these spaces provide valuable opportunities for citizens to assert their own power through agency, and thereby they offer a route to social inclusion, as argued by one prominent academic critic of participation, Andrea Cornwall:

'Public involvement, then, can help address the feelings of alienation, and lack of entitlement or belonging that breeds civic disenchantment. It offers a way of (re)integrating the disenfranchised and socially excluded' (Cornwall, 2008b:21)

Whilst 'empowerment' itself remains a contested term, both civic republicans and radical proponents of social change emphasise that, for active citizens to be 'empowered' requires critical awareness and the ability to question and challenge the status quo - to be 'critical' as well as engaged citizens (Freire, 1970; Lister, 1998; Crick, 2001; Gaventa, 1999; Martin 2001; Crowther 2004; Lukes, 2005), and to overcome their own powerlessness (Gaventa, 1999; Mayo, 2004). The findings from the previous chapters suggested that both respondents and practitioners shared a belief in the effectiveness of a multi-stage approach to citizen empowerment, starting with general confidence and gradually gaining an identity as active citizens (Lister, 1998) through a process of collective learning and action. For some, the empowerment journey does not stop there, however, and with continued and more challenging forms of engagement they may consciously develop into social and 'political' actors (in the widest sense) equipped with the critical abilities necessary to 'make sense of the world and [the commitment to] change it for the better' (Crowther 2004:135).

I would suggest that all three active citizen case studies in this chapter have provided concrete examples of different ways in which individuals have been 'empowered' in the above sense, and developed into critical and critically engaged 'active citizens'. Both Marian and Mark, for example, not only challenged the 'disabling' and discriminating status quo for people with disabilities, but also demonstrated their own potential to become change agents by using the opportunities for learning and participation to

overcome their own barriers - the first from the position of being *'just an ordinary mum of a boy with Aspergers'*, and the second associated with learning disability. The extent to which they thought of themselves and their actions as 'political' is debatable, given the generally narrow definition of the term. I imagine that the concept of the 'everyday maker' (Bang, 2005) - political action through practical measures for local change – would probably be a more fitting description for them both and their perception of themselves. In the third citizen case study, various groups of Sure Start parents took action in defence of the services they felt were important to them and to other parents in their community, not least of which access to the type of adult learning provision that empowered them<sup>41</sup>.

Other academics commenting on empowerment have drawn attention to the vital role played by social movements and voluntary and community organisations for engaging people from dispossessed groups in collective action, lending them power and influence that they would otherwise lack (Kabeer, 2005b; Mayo, 2010). As Freire (Shor and Freire, 1987: 108 and 109) pointed out, much as independent critical thinking and autonomy are necessary, empowerment with a view to social transformation is not possible unless it is of a collective nature. In this respect both the courses and the community spaces they were connected to provided the impetus and support for collective action. Marian and Mark may have taken prominent roles as individuals but were always actively involved in local community groups, from which they drew their inspiration and support. The Speaking Up classes fostered the awareness of learners from different positions of disadvantage to realise that by sharing their experiences they could 'turn private troubles into public issues'. It would be hard to imagine that Ella would have taken her frustrations about the benefit trap and low wages to the MP candidates in an open online forum without having first discussed this with her friends on the course; or for any of the Sure Start parents to have campaigned for the continuation of Speaking Up classes in the Sure Start setting; and Marian would not have been aware that people with autism can easily get into scrapes involving the police, or that she was not the only one to have felt that playgrounds were woefully inadequate for children with disabilities, and that adequate play provision caused the social isolation of entire families.

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<sup>41</sup> At the time of writing, a new campaign led by another learner group than those mentioned here was brought to my attention: this time it was in the form of a petition to the local authority against cuts to adult learning, arguing that 'by cutting money to provide opportunities for adult learning people are being denied the chance to develop their full potential and therefore become fully engaged active citizens.'

A second key finding from these three active citizen case studies is the role played by the 'political opportunity structures' (Tarrow, 1994, cited in Taylor 2003, 2007) that New Labour's community empowerment and governance policies provided. In spite of the acknowledgement that New Labour's policies were riddled with internal inconsistencies and contradictions, mixing neo-liberal, citizen-consumer oriented approaches with the communitarian moral discourse of the 'responsibilisation' of citizens, and 'colonising' civil society with the shift from government to governance (Habermas, in Finlayson, 2005), these case studies showed that these policies, however flawed and imperfect, provided nonetheless invaluable engagement opportunities. This was especially the case for the disadvantaged groups considered here: For people with learning disabilities, for carers and service users, and for parents in Sure Start areas, New Labour opened up new opportunities for voice and participation, some of which inspired by decades of campaigning by social movements. Without these policies and the congruence with claims by social movements, and the support measures that accompanied the policies (including resources for user-led groups, learning and facilitation), it would have been unlikely for these policies to have had the same success in engaging people from excluded and underrepresented groups.

But these qualifiers also point to a number of limitations inherent in New Labour's active citizenship policies which became evident in practice. The first point to make is that the national empowerment agenda set by the New Labour central government was unevenly supported by local officials: whilst the officers in the learning disability citizen case study (Mark) had been fully supportive of changes to institutional cultures and practices, Marian's activism did not meet with the same enthusiasm in her local authority, at officer level. Judging from the literature of research into citizen governance, the phenomenon of 'unwilling' local officials and their 'zero-sum' approach to sharing power with citizens seemed to have been all too common and tended to be partly explained by the successive changes in the relationship (and balance of power) between local and central government at the hands of successive governments since the 1970s (Barnes et al, 2007; Durose et al, 2009) and the phenomenon of de-professionalisation (Mayo et al, 2007).

The second limitation became evident when the support measures for community spaces, independent groups and learning (including the active citizenship programmes studied) started to be cut back as a result of austerity measures following the 2008 financial crisis.

While New Labour had been on the whole supportive of both community and user groups, the change of government in 2010 had been followed by deep cuts to the public sector which in turn impacted on the voluntary and community sector. Given such constraints on public budgets, support for activities such as engagement has in many cases been deemed 'inessential'. However, community and user-led groups rely on financial resources in various ways. The viability of such groups has therefore become increasingly jeopardized, with the smaller voluntary and community groups being the most at risk (Alcock, 2010). Hence, the local Speaking Up group that had long been supported by the CVS before setting up independently when 'user-led' groups were in vogue with the New Labour government, folded in 2010 and left a temporary gap. Local participants with a learning disability now have to travel further to find a support group, which some may neither have the resources nor the ability to undertake. For such individuals this means not only losing voice and active citizenship opportunities but also a vital part of their social life. For participation policies it means that support for active citizens to meet informally at the local level forms a critical part of the 'true cost' of participation, without which public participation risks being meaningless or unsustainable (Andersson et al., 2007).

These active citizenship case studies thus provided further evidence for the respective roles played by civil society organisations and government policies. I would also argue, along with Foucault's 'governmentality' theory, expanded on by Rose and Miller (1992), that the third citizen case study in particular showed that hybrid 'governance' spaces such as the Sure Start Children Centres can be far more complex and promising spaces than has previously been suggested (Hogdson, 2004; Barnes et al, 2007). Here it would seem that newly 'activated' citizens combined their cooperation in the Centre's 'invited spaces' with challenges and resistance developed outside of these spaces (although it is arguable whether the 'parent forum' supported by the Children Centre's community development professionals could be said to be within or outside of the state – an example of the blurred boundaries between the two?). In terms of governmentality, I would suggest that this citizen case study in a Sure Start Children Centre showed that, as invited citizen governance spaces and under the influence of governmental measures, they have been more socially *constitutive* than *controlling*; that resistance is always a possibility as 'subjects' are not passive but active players in the relational fields of power. Indeed, the parents have, as result of the active citizenship interventions and involvement opportunities, been mobilised and acted collectively on 'political' issues that were directly

relevant to them, and expressed opposition to government discourses (e.g. on welfare 'dependency') and policies (e.g. priorities of adult learning). At the same time this provided evidence that marginalised groups such as disadvantaged women *can* be politically engaged as long as it is on their terms and directly relevant to their lives and, of course, adequately supported.

After showing a more nuanced and positive assessment of the government programmes and associated policies of active citizenship learning and participation, the next question to be addressed in the following chapter ponders the impact of these programmes on the CVS itself. Notably, whether and to what extent the CVS itself had been able to negotiate its status as governmental 'partner' with the critical awareness needed to guarantee its independence.

## **Chapter 10 The impact of government programmes of active citizenship learning on the CVS**

This chapter examines the government-funded active citizenship learning programmes in terms of their impact on and significance for the CVS as a third sector organisation. Could these programmes be seen as New Labour having used third sector organisations as a 'third arm of the state' (Wiggins, 2011, citing a Labour MP) or was the relationship a two-way 'partnership', as New Labour had described its intentions towards the sector, more generally (Finlayson, 2003)?

This chapter, then, considers the programmes as constituting contextualised examples of the changing relationship between the state and the voluntary sector, between ALAC in 2005-6 and the Take Part Pathfinder in 2009-11<sup>42</sup>. The differences between the programmes, described in various parts of the thesis so far, may take on a wider significance, in the changing policy context of New Labour's evolving 'third sector' policy over its three terms in office.

Chapter Three picked up on the special significance of the voluntary sector in New Labour's Third Way project (Blair, 1998; Finlayson, 2003) by supposedly representing an alternative to the commercial logic of the private sector on the one hand, and the bureaucracy of the public sector on the other, and evidence of New Labour's distinctive 'social' commitment. As a result of government's encouragement of sector organisations to become partners in policy-making and in the delivery of public services, the income and size of the sector grew to unprecedented levels (Alcock, 2010). Paradoxically, however, it is argued that, while New Labour may have recognised the sector's 'distinctive' character and 'value-driven' ethos, it did not trust it to deliver as partners (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013), judging by the rigorous contracting and accounting regimes it imposed. In other

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<sup>42</sup> I am aware that programmes such as the Take Part Pathfinder were to be delivered 'in partnership' between public and third sector organisation. This does not, however, diminish the pertinence of the problematic raised by governments recruiting third sector organisations in the delivery of their policies, thus extending the boundaries of the state, as well as blurring the differences between sectors, and the effect this was having on the sector as a whole and individual organisations.

words, New Labour (along with other neo-liberal governments in the West) supported third sector organisations only if they were prepared to become more 'business-like' and 'well managed' (Newman and Clarke, 2009:58) according to managerialist norms.

For third sector organisations, this meant that the new opportunities for delivering and shaping policy<sup>43</sup> had to be weighed up against new challenges. These included the risk of 'mission drift' as a result of following the funding and undertaking activities that were not part of, or essential to, an organisation's aims; linked to this, it entailed a loss of independence through increased reliance on state funding; and finally, as mentioned above, there was the risk of 'isomorphic' adaptations associated with public sector contracts and a managerialist culture, which could impact on how organisations came to function and operate (Milbourne, 2013).

The CVS experiences of the two programmes are considered consecutively in the light of the above, as well as their lasting impact on the organisation and its capacity to sustain the active citizenship learning programmes independently of both central and local government funding.

## **10.1 Experience and impact of the ALAC programme**

With the Active Learning for Active Citizenship (ALAC) programme the CVS had been able to develop and expand an area of work which, at the time, consisted of little more than an accredited course that had been running for about a year, delivered only locally. By accrediting the course with the National Open College Network (NOCN) it gave the CVS the opportunity to offer the course for free and, despite regular requirements to adapt some of the course criteria to maintain eligibility for funding, it allowed a degree of flexibility to adapt course contents to each learner group<sup>44</sup>. As the 18-month ALAC programme had set out to scope and capture different community-based approaches to active citizenship learning, the Speaking Up course became one of the approaches that were later described in the ALAC/Take Part (as it was renamed by DCLG in 2006) Learning Framework (Take Part

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<sup>43</sup> The Take Part Network, for example, was regularly invited to meetings at DCLG with senior civil servants, between 2006 and 2010, presumably to contribute its views to policy formation or implementation. The CVS was one of the network's members and took part in such meetings.

<sup>44</sup> NOCN accreditation was based on learner outcomes, and assessment was in the form of the verification of learner 'portfolios', compiled during the course, mostly in the classroom.

Network, 2006). Amongst the national ALAC network of regional hubs, the CVS Speaking Up course was unusual insofar as it had developed out of a combination of advocacy projects and user groups, on the one hand, and of new opportunities for citizen participation with the public sector, on the other. As the Chief Executive pointed out, Speaking Up brought together several strands and 'departments' within the CVS:

'[Active Citizenship learning] started off as a specific project with a specific member of staff with a single responsibility to deliver activities against a funded opportunity<sup>45</sup>. We then developed that into joining up the other activities in the organisation and brought in the training department, how with active citizenship we can develop the learning element in the organisation, and we can contextualise active citizenship in a way which met the needs of the programme and the work of some of the departments, so we related it to volunteering, to the work of the mental health inclusion group and carers support<sup>46</sup>.' (CEO, 2012)

The ALAC programme thus brought financial resources that were used to '*develop the learning element*' further whilst expanding the provision and enabling a greater number of disadvantaged service users and carer groups across the county to 'speak up' and to participate in collective action and user engagement. Apart from course delivery, the programme placed relatively few demands on the organisation. My role as coordinator had included liaison with the hubs and the evaluation activities, whilst the tutors (Tutor A, later joined by Tutor B) focused on the delivery of courses and local development work in the voluntary sector, initially. To some extent, this division of roles reflected and reinforced the tutors' low level of interest in the theoretical, conceptual side of the 'pedagogy' that informed the 'Take Part approach' and was captured in the Take Part Learning Framework. The tutors asserted (unreflexively and without fully acknowledging the diverse external pressures or their own priorities) that their main interest and focus lay in the development of the learning programmes in response to learner need (see Chapter Seven). Monitoring was minimal and the evaluation took the format of a self-evaluation, undertaken in a user-friendly, bottom-up approach based on community-development

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<sup>45</sup> The CEO referred to my EU project work which had introduced active citizenship learning into the organisation, initially connected to 'learning for integration, learning for active citizenship' for refugees and asylum seekers.

<sup>46</sup> In this specific quote he forgot to mention learning disability advocacy.

principles, with an emphasis on staff and learners exchanging experiences and ‘learning’ from the evaluation (Mayo and Rooke, 2006).

At the same time the programme's status as a national pilot did confer some kudos to the CVS and helped it profile its Speaking Up course. For example, its learners participated in regional and national ALAC events which also attracted interest from decision-makers in statutory services, or at least from those officers in charge of user engagement<sup>47</sup>. Thus, the CVS benefited from ALAC through increased recognition of its Speaking Up course, as the main tutor commented:

‘And the fact that the Speaking Up programme now has such a fantastic reputation and people ask about it and it’s become identified with [the] CVS - when you think of the small beginnings that we had way back in 2003, you know, and how the whole thing has grown...’ (Tutor A, 2010)

The CVS, then, had been able to use the ALAC programme to further its own aims of establishing an existing activity, at very little cost to itself – in fact, it could be argued that there had only been benefits. This was in no small part due to the aim of the programme which had been to scope and capture existing practices in the voluntary and community sector in a 'bottom-up' way rather than 'top down'. As was seen in Chapter Three, this did not mean that ALAC was disconnected from any policy agenda, on the contrary. But the CVS had paid more heed to New Labour's service user participation rather than the 'civil renewal' agenda as it applied to communities more generally.

The greater impact of the programme on the organisation in terms of strategy and how it related to active citizenship had been through its participation in the formulation of the Take Part Learning Framework. As the CEO saw it:

‘The ALAC principles [...] gave us a framework within which to define and develop our activities. [...] it also framed our annual reports over the last three years, in the focus of active citizenship, so it becomes apparent when [people] read the annual

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<sup>47</sup> I remember the comments made at these events that the higher-up decision makers who should have attended them in order to realise the importance of this work, did not come – as is often the case, with these being the most ‘hard to reach’, from a third sector perspective.

report that it's done within the framework or context of active citizenship, whether it's the service to our members or volunteer centre.' (CVS CEO, 2012)

Additionally, through its role in the Take Part Network the CVS became connected to this aspect of government policy which eventually led to its inclusion in the first phase of the delivery of the local Take Part Pathfinder programme. The relationships with members of the Take Part Network from the community sector or universities also provided the opportunity for involvement in the Take Part research cluster, and this present doctoral research collaboration.

It was regrettable, however, that due to ministerial changes, the Take Part campaign to roll out this learning approach that the DCLG had promised did not materialise, due to departmental changes, and that the Take Part approach transferred to a government department that was not, according to one senior civil servant, 'interested in learning per se'. Thus, despite central government efforts to 'join up' departments, and an ALAC cross-departmental steering group, the Take Part good practice was unable to influence mainstream adult learning agendas. At the end of ALAC the Take Part Learning Framework was left hanging at DCLG's Community Empowerment Division, awaiting further policy impetus. When a new policy framework had eventually been formulated in form of the Community Empowerment agenda, the Take Part approach was made to fit this new agenda, but in this 'top-down' policy process some of ALAC's broader outlook had been lost.

Meanwhile at the local level, the CVS had been able to find alternative funders for its Speaking Up approach in the form of local statutory sector agencies, drawing on New Labour's user involvement agenda in public sector modernisation. This too, as it turned out, was not sustainable, and the funding was discontinued after four years, in 2010. As to the impact of the Learning to Involve project it would require further research to find out whether the 'good involvement practice' promoted under Learning to Involve did at all survive subsequently in the reconfigured local government context post 2010<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> As in other locations, after 2010 local government services were increasingly contracted out, and in the form of larger contracts that made it easier for private sector companies to deliver, rather than voluntary sector agencies (Alcock, 2010; Milbourne, 2013). Whether any private service contractors would have participated in programmes such as Learning to Involve is debatable but on the whole, doubtful.

## 10.2 The Experience and impact of the Take Part Pathfinder

Compared with the ALAC programme, the Take Part Pathfinder differed substantially and in a number of important ways (see Chapter Three). As a government pilot it was more significant both financially and in terms of policy, but it also bore the hallmarks of New Labour's increasingly centralised 'command and control' style of governance (Finlayson 2003; Milbourne and Cushman, 2013).

As I have already explained the genesis of the programme in connection with the policy background in Chapter Three, my focus here will be on how the programme was experienced and its consequences for the CVS.

The Take Part Pathfinder had been one of the policy measures initiated by the Department for Communities and Local Government under the leadership of Hazel Blears and linked to the 'Community Empowerment' agenda which intended to reconnect citizens with local government and 'governance' (Newman, 2011). The aims of the programme overlapped with the priorities and targets of the National Indicator (NI) framework for Local Area Agreements, local cross-sector partnerships for the strategic delivery of local public services on the basis of which central funding allocations were made. For example, all Pathfinders were selected on the basis of their Local Strategic Partnership having signed up to National Indicator (NI) 4 in its local area agreement. NI4 was to measure the 'percentage of people able to influence local decisions'. This became one of the benchmarks for evaluating this programme, despite questions about the meaningfulness of this kind of indicator in the 'Place Survey'. Another was NI 7, which measured the 'participation of underrepresented groups' in civil society.

Although the senior civil servant from the Empowerment Division at DCLG who oversaw the Take Part Pathfinder (indirectly, as it was managed by CDF) may have confused the National Indicators (the main indicators for the Pathfinder had been NI 4 and NI 7), the gist of his observation is what matters here:

'And going back to the Hazel Blears era, that's quite one of the differences between ALAC and Take Part, the emphasis in Take Part on... a partnership with the local authorities [and] with the voluntary and community sector, that had to be

one element of it, [...] and it was also the influence of targets. Because what grew enormously over those years was the importance of targets, and that did come from Tony Blair, like NI 15, differential rates of participation, or whatever it was and those two indicators made a lot of difference over what we did as a whole and what the programmes did. So I think getting local authorities involved was one of the things that flowed from that.’ (Senior Civil Servant, DCLG, 2011)

What is more, there had been no room for negotiation. The Pathfinder was run by the Community Development Foundation (CDF), a quango<sup>49</sup> (at the time) and 'arm's length organisation' which, despite its roots in community development had also been colonised by government funding and the contract culture<sup>50</sup>. Hence, it was perhaps not surprising, then, that it failed to advocate the interests of the sector more effectively and refrained from challenging government (Milbourne, 2013) and not standing up to DCLG on behalf of the Pathfinders. As the CVS CEO explained, the target-setting had been uncompromising:

‘One of the issues was that when we first negotiated the targets we put in the application we were very clear [what] we could achieve, [but the] targets were upped and at that point we thought that we could perhaps [de]crease [them], or my view was that this was a Pathfinder, so part of it was that whether you succeeded or not was part of the learning process, and having targets that you didn't achieve might have been one of the lessons that you came out of this with.’

(CVS CEO, March 2011)

Unfortunately, his assumption may have been too optimistic, as the pressure to 'deliver' did not lessen during the programme. The targets had a number of substantive consequences for the way in which the Take Part Pathfinder was delivered, managed, monitored and evaluated. Before describing these aspects in more detail, I want to point out another issue: in order to show its commitment to partnership working with the 'third sector', New Labour had pursued the idea of a Compact, or a voluntary agreement setting out good practice guidelines for central and local government working with the third sector (Alcock, 2010). Apart from funding the development of local Compacts, a National Compact had been launched first to which all government departments had signed up.

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<sup>49</sup> Quango stands for 'quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation'

<sup>50</sup> It received a 15% management fee, which, given the size of the programmes it managed, amounted to a substantial sum.

Following these guidelines the Take Part project should have had a project set-up phase. However, DCLG not only contravened these rules by requiring the phase one Pathfinders to deliver only days after their contracts had been agreed, but after having raised this point myself, DCLG said (or pretended) to have no knowledge of the Compact. So it was, then, that the contract was signed off just before Christmas and the programme had to hit the ground running on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, with the first set of learner targets to be delivered by the end of March. This meant that new staff had to be recruited before the signed contract had been received - a risk for the CVS, not for government. Also, due to ministerial delays (John Denham had replaced Hazel Blears after her sudden resignation in July 2008), a year's worth of Pathfinder allocation had to be spent in three months (or lost). Apart from showing up the inconsistencies between New Labour's rhetoric and the realities of the relationship between the state and the third sector, this forced prompt start impacted on the way the Pathfinder was delivered and how it was perceived by other staff at the CVS:

‘When Take Part came in we [CVS staff] all were aware that it had huge amounts of money, it was a hugely important project, and [...] the managers were round it like the bees round a honey pot...’ (CVS Volunteer Centre Coordinator)

This in turn, had initially caused some tensions or at least an imbalance within the organisation, with one project all of a sudden attracting exceptional attention, and gathering its own momentum, in seeming isolation from the CVS as a whole.

Moreover, the Take Part Pathfinder targets determined the project's structure and priorities. Although the main emphasis was on active citizenship learning programmes, the action plan required the development and city-wide dissemination of 'information on opportunities for involvement' (with quarterly reports to CDF/DCLG on the estimated number of people reached). The requirement for the project to reach a seemingly huge number of people, however superficially, prompted the appointment of an Information and Publicity Officer, whose working hours equalled those of the project tutor. The emphasis on 'information on opportunities' and short 'civic taster sessions' as opposed to longer, in-depth learning suggested (and did lead to) a more superficial approach to active citizenship learning than might have been achieved otherwise.

A second consequence of the target culture was the accompanying monitoring and evaluation regime. Indeed, to be able to count learners towards the targets, each learner had to fill in forms with their personal details, including their address, educational qualifications and national insurance number. They also had to fill in an equal opportunities monitoring form and answer a series of questions about their involvement at the start of the course, and their 'feeling of ability to influence local decisions', which were to be used as the 'baseline' against which the course 'outcomes' could be measured. For every course, however short, even a 1 hour taster session, every learner had to complete these forms (which the CVS had to design) which of course took up tutor time with learners and required administrative follow-up. Additionally learners had to fill in a short (short sessions) or long (longer courses) feedback form at the end of each course or session, to indicate the 'distance travelled'. This was just the start of the evaluation proper which was partly conducted by the CVS and partly by CDF. In other words, the bureaucracy accompanying the programme was horrendous, but what the government funders did not consider (and again, CDF did not argue with them) was its negative impact on learners: such practices acted as barriers to engagement which stand in direct contradiction with the aim of the programme, the reaching of disadvantaged target groups, and the notion of the distinctive working practices of the third sector, which includes informality. These constraints had to be negotiated by the course tutor with certain learner groups and compromises had to be struck.

The other side of the coin was that, leaving aside these constraints and the need to adequately resource ongoing administrative support as part of the team<sup>51</sup>, the project did end up with a lot of project data. The evaluation was able to use this data, but in the end, apart from some basic statistical analysis, this did not lead to any in-depth or meaningful insights into the value of the provision. As is so often the case, project evaluations are limited by the funders' aims and by short-termism, i.e. measuring the effects and outcomes too soon after the interventions have occurred, which rarely leaves enough time for people to act on their outcomes. Even though this research took place a year after the project evaluation and the project completion, these limitations remained apparent in the findings and were one of the factors that differentiated the impact of the Take Part Pathfinder from that of the earlier Speaking Up and ALAC courses.

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<sup>51</sup> The CVS was unlucky with a high turnover of the administrative staff member, the corruption of databases, and other issues which affected the team morale and capacity.

But in terms of policy impact, cynical (and probably realist) voices at the CVS had wondered at the end of the programme whether the extensive monitoring and evaluation efforts would all have been in vain, given that the Pathfinder had been one of numerous projects initiated under the previous administration and therefore were of no interest to the current government and its own aims.

An unexpected – and positive – outcome of the emphasis on publicity was that it led to a significant improvement to the quality of the CVS publicity. The appointed Information and Publicity Officer introduced a new standard of publicity and visual presentation which not only contributed to the success of the project (as the project tutor had pointed out, there was a need for publicity to attract people *en masse* to the programmes) but also represented a turning point for the way the CVS presented itself from then on.

The impact of the targets in terms of the type of work delivered, with an emphasis on 'civic' rather than civil involvement had already been raised in Chapter Seven and will not be repeated here, other than to say that it did not seem particularly well thought through to expect 'underrepresented' (especially disadvantaged) people to suddenly take up civic and governance roles, however well prepared and motivated they might become as a result of courses. Raising unrealistic expectations had indeed been a concern expressed by the Magistrates Association who co-delivered the Magistrates Taster Sessions, when I presented the project to them. Judging by not only who applied to these roles, but also their feedback about the selection process makes it clear that he had a point, as the selection process was particularly 'horrendous' in the words of more than one learner.

Finally, the impact of the Take Part Pathfinder programme on the CVS had been described by the Chief Executive Officer and another senior manager as follows:

'Challenging but exciting...and fulfilling. I sent the e-mail round [to all CVS staff] and said that I was proud to lead an organisation that was taking this work forward. And I really felt that after the Take Part conference, and after the [regional] Big Society conference [...] as well, I think the fact that that we had taken the lead on this is... quite something.' (CEO, 2011)

'Yes, I think it is has been very good in the end, although logistically it's been hard work, and I think it's a real shame that we haven't got another year's funding because I think we would have been able to do some real, real work.'

(CVS senior manager, 2011)

These comments gave vent to the understandable relief they had felt at the end of what had been, for project staff and managers, a stressful time, and the 'sense of achievement' of having 'delivered' such a programme. These constituted unambiguous signs of 'managerialism' creeping in, however, whereby the capacity to deliver projects took precedence over the substantive rationales and outcomes of a project, let alone learning from it. Another comment made by the same manager reflects this type of thinking:

'I think we recruited the sort of tutor who was good for the programme, because she would deliver what was needed and engage, and she put bums on seats and did very well through that.' (CVS senior manager, 2011)

And the following rather superficial assessment of 'success':

'There have been big outcomes like the magistrates thing, like How Your City Works, like Taking a Lead, those have had high impact on people in [city].'

(CVS senior manager, 2011)

These comments lend weight to my analysis in Chapters Six and Seven that, as long as a tutor 'delivered' at the CVS, and learner feedback was overall positive, they were free to do as they liked, and managers did not question their methods. On the one hand this demonstrated trust, on the other it left room for practices that had at times been less beneficial to the organisation (e.g. Tutor C's failure to challenge a learner making discriminatory remarks, described in section 8.1.2).

Therefore it can be argued that such programmes encouraged a more managerial attitude in the organisation, which prioritised 'delivery at all cost' at the expense of in-depth approaches and post-project organisational reflection and learning. Stubbs (cited in Newman and Clarke, 2009:59) referred to this as the phenomenon of 'projectisation' or

'technocratisation', an effect of the 'new public management' culture, observed in voluntary and community sector organisations in the UK and elsewhere.

### 10.3 Discussion

The question is, then, whether for the CVS the advantages of involvement in the state-funded pilot programmes did outweigh the disadvantages. A simple answer would be affirmative and echo the CEO's assessment in the above quote on p 281. The ALAC programme has already been shown to have benefited the CVS by having come at the right time to help it expand its provision and subsequent chances of receiving continuation funding through local government<sup>52</sup>. Even with the Take Part Pathfinder, the overall balance was deemed positive ('exciting and fulfilling'), despite the managerialism it promoted, since it led to innovation and the deepening and broadening of the CVS expertise in active citizenship learning, an expansion of its local networks, and additional 'spin-offs' such as a new 'look' to the CVS publicity.

One of the issues highlighted in the recent literature (Milbourne, 2013:185) is that,

'[u]nderlying the motivation to institutionalise, resource dependency theory (Pfeffer, 2003) suggests that organisations seek to maximise their advantages in competing for funding by investing in professionalism, shared networks and arrangements (insider tactics). Adversarial advocacy is necessarily discarded as are projects that devolve power; institutionalisation and inside identity become norms, and the range of concerns represented narrows.'

An analysis of the CVS's active citizenship pilot work with the state would support such a view. The Take Part Network, for example, of which the CVS was a founding member, acted as an alliance whose members gained privileged access to policy influence and resources, as they had gained the trust of a government department. In return they shared

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<sup>52</sup> As it so happens, the local government funding for Learning to Involve did not come with much (hardly any) monitoring requirements or targets. The coordinator simply reported quarterly in a short, written report. In fact, she felt this level of monitoring and reporting went to far the other way, in that the funders were not even interested in evaluating the outcomes of this work. This prompted her support for research, to enable evidence gathering and analysis on the impact of the work, including on learners.

expertise and helped 'deliver' on the government agendas. It had always been apparent in the meetings that I attended as a Take Part Network member at DCLG that it involved a careful balancing act between, on the one hand, expressing honest views on planned measures and on the other, not jeopardizing the Network's position by being too critical. Such balancing acts led the Take Part Network (and with it, the CVS) directly to the Pathfinder. However, it had then become relatively powerless in the subsequent negotiation of the programmes' not just finer but key details. After the change in government to a new political party in power, this position was immediately lost.

Concerning the impact for the CVS more broadly, however, the final analysis has to be more nuanced. The Chief Executive felt in control over this stream of work, despite the challenges involved in the Take Part Pathfinder. He vigorously defended the organisation against accusations of mission drift regarding the work with active citizens:

'We've been accused in the past of drifting into some areas of activities where some staff or trustees don't think that that's where we should be going. "Why British Council work, why bringing people over from Ethiopia<sup>53</sup>", etc., especially as we're funded as an organisation for the people of [the city]?'.

Part of [this research] is to show that this is part of a wider framework that is fundamental to our work and why we were set up, and why we continue to exist, and why we continue to have validity and a dimension which enhances everything that we do. Some of our sister organisations in the county don't do anything of this kind, [...] or they have tightly narrowed their principles that they haven't seen the bigger picture of a need as an organisation to invest in both our members and in the general public for using the services of our members and likely to be potential volunteers for our community groups.' (CEO, 2012)

At the same time he felt that the doctoral research project would increase the understanding of and provide further evidence for the value of this stream of work, which is why he had commissioned this research:

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<sup>53</sup> Following Take Part the CVS got involved in the British Council Active Citizens programme. This has a local and an international dimension with a group of ten CVS learners having visited active citizens in Ethiopia, and hosted their return visit.

'We want to use this research to help the framework of citizenship and the role of voluntary groups and citizens in those activities, but also to re-inform us as an organisation about areas where we can develop services, now and in the future, to meet these agendas in a framework where we are in control.'

(CEO, 2012, emphasis added)

What was interesting, however, was that accusations of mission drift did not just come from the outside the organisation but from its own trustees too. This seemed to indicate that the rationale for this vision was not adequately shared inside the organisation. Indeed, CVS staff *not* directly involved in any of the active citizenship programmes commented that they had seen various programmes 'come and go', which confirmed my suspicion that, for all the 'framing' of the work of the organisation by active citizenship, over many years, and various 'project briefings', CVS staff did not have a clear understanding about this aspect of the CVS or about its significance for their own work.

'When [the] Take Part [Pathfinder] was around and previous to that, the ALAC, they more or less passed me by. There was no connection. Even though we were working yards apart, physically close but we couldn't have been further apart, there was no connection, there was no meaningful crossover as to how each could benefit from the other. [...] Speaking Up, there was a connection because there was an obvious benefit to people... (CVS Engagement Worker)

'So I think if we go back to [first active citizenship project] I had absolutely nothing to do with it, the project came and the project went. And that's how I've felt for a long time.'

*'And then there was ALAC.'* (interviewer)

'I don't even remember what that was about! [...] And I only think recently, probably since the Ethiopian trip<sup>54</sup> was I - that's when I started becoming a little bit more involved. But only to go in and give a talk on volunteering.' (CVS Volunteer Centre Coordinator)

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<sup>54</sup> This refers to the British Council Active Citizen Programme which the CVS had engaged in after Take Part. In the first year a group of learners went to Ethiopia and the CVS hosted a return visit.

This research only gives some indications on the extent to which the organisation had been affected by isomorphic pressures<sup>55</sup> and managerialism over the years, as a result of its involvement with the state, but it would require further research to ascertain whether this was because of such pressures, or whether it was contingent on the particular management style during that time. There had been frustrations, expressed by managers on a regular basis, about CVS staffing conceiving of their work only in narrow terms at the expense of the bigger picture, and the lack of effectiveness of organisational meetings and away days in overcoming these limitations.

There appeared to be a dividing line between those, at the top of the organisation, who are focussed on strategy and the vast majority of the remaining staff who merely 'deliver projects'. When dealing with complex and contested policy topics such as active citizenship, this research has shown that such separation can lead to tensions and has direct consequences for the substantive aspects of the organisation's work. For example, how the concept of active citizenship had been negotiated between tutors and learners, and the significance of this, had escaped the attention of managers altogether, but had wider strategic implications for the CVS. Tutor's reluctance to communicate their concerns or findings with managers may have been aggravated by their 'managerial' attitude towards projects and their lack of interest in more substantive issues. As the overall strategic vision of the organisation's stance on active citizenship had not been discussed or shared in the organisation, the consequence was that, to this day, understandings about what active citizenship is and represents to the organisation and its users remain vague, inconsistent and contested<sup>56</sup>.

On balance, then, the pilot programmes had been able to offer this organisation manifold opportunities for developing its expertise and networks, and to attract resources. Despite the lack of substantial continuation funding for Take Part Pathfinder activities, it had given it an advantage over others in the competition for resources, whilst also having involved other third sector organisations further afield, when given the opportunity<sup>57</sup>. At the same

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<sup>55</sup> Not just as a result of the programmes examined here, but the CVS funding as a whole has come to rely increasingly on public funding and contracts, mirroring the national trend (Alcock, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> The research interview with a CVS staff member also revealed that the resources generated by the Take Part project were not shared internally – thus limiting the potential for the legacy of the programme inside the organisation.

<sup>57</sup> The CVS had added to its pressure under the Pathfinder by managing a Regional Take Part Pathfinder, which enabled six other community or infrastructure organisations to benefit from this programme.

time, a number of opportunities had been missed, not least to capitalise on these resources, new knowledge, connections and inside, even within the own organisation.

There is no doubt that the CVS preferred to work with the state, rather than not become involved in these programmes at all. Despite the compromises that had to be struck and the challenges encountered, this was preferable to not undertaking work, especially work that delivered free training to local people. In the light of the austerity measures and new priorities for public spending since 2010, it would appear that by not having such opportunities, however controversial these may turn out to be, programmes to support active citizenship learning simply cannot take place. Without resources for learning and participation, however, active citizens are not being supported (Lister, 1998) - potentially affecting the extent and quality of active citizenship, and the strength of civil society and democracy more generally.

# Chapter 11 Conclusion

## 11.1 Research topic and rationale

This research undertook an in-depth exploration of government-funded programmes of active citizenship learning in a medium-sized local voluntary and community sector infrastructure organisation (the CVS). It filled a gap in the sparse literature on situated experiences of social policy (Milbourne, 2013) by investigating how a specific policy theme – active citizenship – came to affect the work and life of this organisation, as well as that of its service users. The research question initially decided upon collaboratively between the CASE academic partner and the Voluntary Sector partner was, ‘Do government programmes of active citizenship learning *empower* active citizens and community groups?’. As the research progressed, it became more apparent that the question should shift from being limited to matters of programme delivery and impact on participants to one in which the CVS as an organisation was to be examined as a relevant example of the New Labour’s policies towards the ‘third sector’. Examined under this angle, the experiences associated with the delivery of these programmes would contribute with a contextualised insight of the way in which New Labour had framed, implemented and redrawn its relationship with the ‘third sector’. These policies led to tensions and dilemmas for third sector organisations working in partnership with the state (Taylor, 2007; Milbourne, 2013), specifically regarding the risk of ‘mission drift’ and the loss of independence. Hence, the CEO explained his reason for commissioning this research thus:

‘... to help the framework of citizenship and the role of voluntary groups and citizens in those activities, but also to re-inform us as an organisation about areas where we can develop services, now and in the future, to meet these agendas *in a framework where we are in control.*’ (CEO in July 2012, my emphasis)

Active citizenship had always constituted a much contested topic in academic theory, but so far there has been little research on active citizenship education with adult learners in the voluntary sector in the UK. This contrasted with the citizenship education of young people, where a longitudinal study had been commissioned on the impact of the New Labour’s citizenship curriculum in schools (Keating et al, 2010). Existing literature or

research on adult learning included an exploration of the meanings of 'citizenship' through the voices of adult learners involved in community-based practice (Coare and Johnston, 2002); an investigation of educational influences on politically engaged active citizens (Kane, 2007) and on part-time adult learners in a university setting (Benn, 2000); and 'Pathways through Participation' (2011) which sought to understand active citizen participation in general. When I began my research, however, there seemed to have been little, if any, research undertaken specifically on active citizenship learning of adults in the voluntary sector, and none so far seemed to have explored the links between learning for active citizenship and lived experiences of involvement under New Labour's extensive participation policies. One plausible reason for this is the relative dearth of (explicit) active citizenship learning in the UK, with lifelong learning policies having increasingly marginalised citizenship education of adults in favour of labour-market-oriented priorities (Crowther and Martin, 2009; Fryer 2010). In this respect the relatively small-scale pilot initiatives funded by central government departments during New Labour under the guise of 'civil renewal' and 'community empowerment', and by local government through service user involvement in health and social care, were in themselves exceptional instances of such adult learning, and provided a unique opportunity to investigate how the concept of active citizenship was defined, framed and experienced in a local voluntary and community sector context.

At the same time, the research played out against the background of the changing policy environment that affected this voluntary sector organisation (through its involvements in central government pilots, and the local governance partners, in their support for citizen engagement). This became more acute after the change in government from New Labour to a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010, and the consequential austerity measures and raised a number of questions directly relevant to the empowerment of active citizens that extended beyond the classroom and into the 'real world' of citizen participation.

## **11.2 Research design and methodology**

Given its main purpose— an exploration of socially constructed meanings of policy concepts, and their negotiation between different actors in a bounded Third Sector context – the research adopted the form of a qualitative case study (Yin 1984, Stake, 2000;

Creswell 2007), within a social constructivist-interpretative ontology, an epistemological framework of feminist and critical social policy. Research activities and methodology were shaped both by the nature and the object of the inquiry and by the organisation's aims, values and practices of 'empowerment and engagement' (CVS CEO, 2012) and partnership working with local statutory organisations. This was reflected in the informal, flexible approach to interviewing, which aimed to even out potential power differentials between researcher and interviewee (in both directions!). Great care was taken to do the utmost to protect the identity of research participants, hence the anonymisation of the locality, of names and other identifiable features. The activities such as interviews and observations equally tried to 'empower' participants by providing opportunities for voice and reflection.

One of the advantages of my previous experience as project coordinator was my long-term knowledge of the local context, and who to include to gain a meaningful '360 degree' perspective on the programmes and the active citizens investigated. Thus I interviewed a total of 39 participants and 'stakeholders', of which 27 were the service users of the CVS adult learning activities, seven were staff and managers of the organisation, four were engagement professionals in local and regional partner organisations, and one was a retired senior civil servant who had overseen these pilot programmes at the central government department. The authenticity of interview data was validated using participant observation and my local knowledge, and through triangulation (mainly aimed at gaining, rather than verifying, multiple perspectives). I was keen for the voices of participants to emerge in the writing up of findings, as much as possible, through interview extracts.

### **11.3 Contribution to knowledge**

Lister (2007) has argued that citizenship is a 'momentum concept', described in John Hoffman's definition as such because it 'unfolds so that we must continuously rework [it] in a way that realises more and more of [its] egalitarian and anti-hierarchical potential' (Hoffman, 2004:138, in Lister, 2007:49). As such (Lister writes) a momentum concept 'provide[s] tools for marginalised groups struggling for political justice'. The same could be said to apply to 'active citizenship' too.

My research made an original contribution to this 'momentum concept' debate by examining the ways in which New Labour's active citizenship learning programmes had, on the one hand, operated as a form of social regulation and control, and on the other, presented opportunities for the substantiation of citizenship rights through participation and voice, and the empowerment of active citizens. Interestingly also, these 'controlling' and 'liberating/empowering' tendencies could not be seen as merely divided along a binary between the state undertaking the one, and the third sector organisations and its adult education tutors the other. Rather, these tendencies were found to be overlapping - with tensions and contradictions within as well as between sectors.

Using governmentality theory (Rose and Miller, 1992), my analysis showed that the state, while predominantly attempting to promote the type of citizens it wanted, was able to 'govern at a distance' by using this third sector organisation as a conduit through which disadvantaged people could be reached and enrolled as 'active (but not [politically] activist) citizens' (Newman, 2011) more effectively than the state was able to do. (This, incidentally, was argued as the reason for New Labour's focus on the third sector and communities).

New Labour governed through a style of 'command and control' which it implemented by instigating a strict 'target' framework imposed on the Take Part Pathfinders (and the public sector, and its partnerships with the third sector, more widely), which determined the priorities, outcomes and evaluation criteria for the programme's delivery. In less direct ways, government policies such as welfare reforms, public sector modernisation and the education and lifelong learning agendas also contributed to the state's promotion of 'active and responsible' citizenship. My research interviews had shown the impact of the programmes and of the broader social policy measures and discourses on shaping people's consciousness with regards to framing their relationship with the state (Crowther and Martin, 2009; Newman and Clarke, 2009). Adult learners and active citizens in this case study were shown to have, by and large, accepted the hegemonic notion that citizens should be self-governing, financially 'independent' and responsible in every way, for themselves and towards society and their community. They were, in short, 'activated' and 'responsibilised' (Clarke, 2005) in various ways, whether in the labour market, as lifelong learners, as active community members, in 'civic roles' or as co-producers of public services. Thus, individual learners had explained their motivation for attending these

programmes as wanting to find out 'what else' or 'what more' they could do as active citizens, or alternatively to 'fill a [problematic] gap' in their CV in order to show that they had not been idle during a period of unemployment or ill health. The compulsion felt by some to be active at whatever cost to themselves or their health suggested the power of 'third way' discourse that citizens 'could not expect something for nothing' – even if they already had contributed to the national insurance system and were out of work for reasons of ill-health or early retirement.

In this sense, in a theoretical framework of governmentality theory, both the ALAC and the TPP programmes could have been understood as 'technologies of citizenship' (Cruikshank, 1999) by which the state attempted to control the behaviour of people and address certain policy issues. My research also showed more closely how the state enrolled the CVS in this process, and how under the influence of the above-mentioned targets and lifelong learning funding regimes its practitioners 'reproduced' the hegemonic ideas about citizenship without spending much time reflecting on their meaning and implications.

Also worth mentioning is the wider organisational context, since another key factor in encouraging 'active' but not 'politicised' citizens had been the constitutional aims of the CVS as promoting social action and collaboration between the third sector and the state. The ethos of 'working with' rather than 'against' the state was particularly influential when it came to the ALAC programme in which service users and carers were encouraged to 'speak up' to service providers. Although the outcome of this 'speaking up' contributed to changes in the institutional culture of service providers in health and adult care, the CVS activities channelled active citizens' energies into New Labour's agenda of public sector modernisation (Clarke and Newman, 2001). It is not suggested, however, that this is necessarily negative - on the contrary, it could be said that these service user involvement activities, supported by the CVS to make user voice 'more effective', actually contributed to the 'more egalitarian and anti-hierarchical' potential of citizenship mentioned by Hoffman and Lister.

Another important point is that, as John Clarke expressed it:

‘People sometimes refuse to “know their place”. So in the context of New Labour strategies to modernise them, do people – in their complexly differentiated places – live up to the aims and ambitions of these strategies? Do they comply cynically and calculatingly? Do they resist or refuse?’ (Clarke 2005:460)

Indeed, while some governmentality theorists tend to emphasise the calculating and controlling strategies and powers of the state (Rose and Miller, 1992; Cruickshank, 1999; Needham, 2003; Marinetto, 2003), Foucault himself rather insisted on the free agency of individuals (Foucault, 1979). They were, he stated clearly, free to decide whether to comply, ‘resist or refuse’ the government’s bidding and/or ‘nudges’ (Leggett, 2014) – something that governments themselves are only too aware of. My findings highlighted, for example, that some learner groups - encouraged by tutors - reinvested the term ‘active citizen’ with new meanings and significance, whereas both critics and practitioners usually viewed the term with suspicion as having been invented by governments to serve political agendas (Heater, 1991; Lister, 1997). Rather than feeling coerced into doing things they would otherwise not have done (Lukes’ definition of power, 2005), a number of learners described how the active citizen ‘label’ had given them a sense of empowerment and recognition for the kind of informal acts of mutual support and engagement they were practising – including providing care support for friends in the private sphere - but for which they had never received any recognition. By adopting a very broad definition of active citizenship to include informal actions at the level of the neighbourhood and the community (Lister, 1997), this definition represented perhaps not a departure from the government’s ideal of the active citizen per se, but at least a challenge to the TPP emphasis on civic roles and governance.

The fact that all the learners who valued the label ‘active citizen’ in this way were disadvantaged or marginalised women may not come as a surprise: adding to their critique of gendered citizenship, Lister (1997; 1998) and subsequently other feminist advocates of citizenship (Young, 1995; Newman and Tonkens, 2011) had claimed that the connection between ‘identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices and a sense of belonging’ (Werbner and Yuval Davis, 1999 in Lister 2007:51) could reinforce participation and lead to more substantive citizenship. Rather than seeing citizenship merely as a status (in the liberal tradition) or as a narrowly defined practice undertaken in the public sphere (in the civic republican tradition), feminists challenge both the division

between private and public (with 'community' somewhere in between) as criterion for what constitutes 'the political' (Newman and Clarke, 2009), and the gendered conception of citizenship itself, arguing that both are exclusive, especially vis-à-vis women. My citizens' case studies of individuals and groups of women thus illustrated how active citizenship 'constituted subjects' (Newman, 2010) at the same time as it empowered them, including as political actors, 'tying social relations into the phenomenon of the political community' (Finlayson, 2003:149).

This encompassed different forms and levels of participation – or even none. For example one woman and mother of two asserted that being an active citizen was a disposition rather than conditional on one's actual participation. She acknowledged that formal volunteering was not an option for her while her two children were still young, but that this did not stop her from doing small acts like sharing information amongst peers or supporting friends, and thus she identified as an active citizen:

[The mention of active citizenship on the Speaking Up course] certainly opened my mind and made me think... also it makes me analyse more, oh, I was doing that anyway and I am actually an active citizen.' (Ella)

This was a particularly important point to be made for women especially, who can suffer from having to stretch their time even further by being asked to add active citizenship to a busy schedule of paid work (or training), caring and domestic responsibilities (Newman and Tonkens, 2011). Several adult learner interviewees pointed out that if governments would turn active citizenship into an obligation or a high expectation (e.g. under the 'Big Society'), especially vis-à-vis people with limited resources, it would risk being counterproductive and generate resistance even in the most committed of active citizens. Several people already felt this pressure and similarly to Clarissa complained: 'we are being bashed over the head to do more – what else do [government] want?' Even the CVS, as evidenced with a Speaking Up course workbook, urged its learners to first list their activities as active citizens and then asked them to answer the question: '*If you don't consider yourself to be an active citizen, how do you plan to change that?*' - a potent example of an echo of governmental 'responsibilisation' discourses.

Where there was positive identification with the notion of being an 'active citizen', this did not stand alone, however; rather it formed part of a pedagogic approach to empowerment practised by the CVS tutors. Here, my analysis drew on the empowerment literature (Freire, 1972; Giroux, 1985; Craig and Mayo, 1995; Mayo, 1997; Foley, 2001; Martin, 2001, 2003; Craig, 2007; Crowther and Martin, 2009) and critically examined the CVS practice in light of different theoretical models. The 'radical' or social-purpose tradition in adult education follows the ideas of Freire (1972) and Gramsci (1971) by emphasising the need for 'conscientisation' or fostering critical thinking in learners so that they could 'make sense of the world and change it for the better' (Crowther, 2004: 134). It argued that oppressed people need to be encouraged to view their own circumstances in a new light in order to unmask the strategies of power that oppress them which would enable them to take collective action to challenge and change these conditions. This, they argue, should motivate social purpose adult education and educators in their role to promote citizenship for empowerment, rather than merely giving people the confidence and knowledge to participate, or 'procedural' support (Crowther, 2004).

For the adult educators involved in the delivery of learning programmes at the CVS the empowerment of their learners - in what they termed a 'learner-centred' approach - was presented as their main aim, and some perceived the pressure to increase active citizenship participation emanating from these programmes to be inimical to this aim. Initially the tutors were not aware of the link between active citizen participation, identity and belonging, and its effect on empowerment, at least not until they saw further evidence through some of the learner outcomes referred to above. Instead, in the 'Speaking Up' courses, which were widely used with disadvantaged learner groups, they prioritised the self-esteem model of empowerment (Finger and Asun, 2001; Martin, 2003; Ecclestone, 2004) with an emphasis on personal development, individual confidence and social 'functional' skills, instead of 'conscientisation'. My analysis traced the tutors' focus on 'personal development' back to the influences of lifelong learning policies which governed the funding and accreditation regimes for community education, and which the CVS drew on to finance a range of courses, including Speaking Up alongside and in between the two active citizenship learning pilots.

Paradoxically, however, it was precisely the active citizenship learning programmes that ended up challenging the government's education priorities, since the focus on active

citizenship (with its specific and prescriptive priorities) enabled tutors to explore new learning contents and discover new learner needs. For example under the TPP, courses such as 'How Your City Works' or 'civic tasters' were developed in response to programme targets, but they highlighted the demand for such contextualised civic knowledge with a wide range of learners and people already active in the community and in governance. The research (as opposed to programme evaluations) revealed how important this form of 'procedural knowledge' was for people from diverse backgrounds for their empowerment as active citizens, and the unexpected ways in which people used these to empower themselves and their community groups. Elements of these civic courses found their way into the course materials of CVS programmes, but the dearth of continuation funding for these kinds of activities in the wake of these pilot programmes jeopardised their continuation. However, this was further evidence that government funded programmes of active citizenship learning *did* offer opportunities for empowerment, including in the way government had envisaged, that is, by giving people the information on opportunities and knowledge to participate, including in civic roles which arguably give citizens a greater influence on decision-making (DCLG, 2008a).

A closer analysis of the views and practice of an established CVS tutor showed how she was alternating between different approaches and adapting them to each group of learners, responding flexibly to specific situations. Thus she was able to seize opportunities for Freirean-inspired thematic explorations (Freire, 1972) and dialogue created by the learners themselves. This tutor also challenged her learners into questioning their 'common-sense' views on social issues, encouraging them to research them further, and deepening their understanding on issues they had raised themselves. In this way, a flexible and learner-centred approach to conscientisation was applied, but not systematically, under the CVS adult learning provision. This, however, was contingent on the personal inclination and initiative of each tutor, and did not form part of a coordinated approach to the induction and professional development of new tutors, for example.

The programmes therefore represented a mix of intended and unintended issues, challenges and outcomes. Thus they confirmed Foucault's conceptualisation of human agency (with the possibility of resistance) and of power - governmental and otherwise - as also being a potentially positive, or socially generative force, rather than simply a form of social control. Put differently, not everything that governments want us to do is

necessarily negative. Viewed as a socially generative force, then, the active citizenship programmes provided information and support for people which they used in various ways and to enhance their participation, whether as a 'good citizen' or as a critically engaged citizen. Indeed, by 'constituting the subject' of the active citizen and enabling these learning activities to take place, the programmes sparked the agency of the CVS adult educators and in turn that of the adult learner in sometimes unforeseen ways – for the learners themselves.

For example, while my examination of the attitudes and practices of different tutors confirmed Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) finding that citizenship education programmes are directly shaped by the teacher's/ tutor's own beliefs and values, by virtue of being *adults* the learners here were able to bring their own experiences, values and agency into the equation, and to take a role in determining their learning outcomes. Some people, in fact, were using these free learning programmes instrumentally to achieve their (evolving) aims, be they personal development, employment, active citizen participation or social. The value of the range of courses lay precisely in their mingling of personal development with the promotion of active citizenship, linked to opportunities for involvement. As the case studies of 'Ruth' and 'Marian' illustrated, this allowed some learners to become – unexpectedly - active (and vocal) citizens.

The long-term follow-up of the earlier ALAC learners – for the most part service users and carers – revealed both the potential and the limitations of such initiatives. Only a small number of carers for example got involved in collective action or user involvement with the state, and of those only a minority took their enthusiasm for social action and justice further. Amongst these, however, the case studies of individuals from different backgrounds bore powerful testimony for the transformative potential of learning, and of the role active citizenship participation (and agency) played in it. Indeed, with a succession of learning and support *over time* some individuals who were very disempowered when they first arrived were able to discover their own power (Mayo, 1997) and turn into empowered, active and self-mobilising citizens. Their achievements included challenging the status quo and taking on public officials. These achievements relied on a combination of factors, including access to formative engagement opportunities with state officials in which they 'cut their political teeth' (Cornwall, 2008), on the one hand, and continuing involvement with independent community groups on the

other. This would suggest that an empowerment model for active citizenship would ideally include the three elements, participation in 'invited spaces', networking within 'community-led spaces' and the availability of support and training (Cornwall and Coelho, 2007). As an organisation that was socially embedded in civil society, with links to public sector partnerships, and with the capacity to provide adult and community learning, the CVS thus was able to not only seize these government funded opportunities but also to realise their empowerment potential with the help of the agency of different stakeholders— staff, local partners, people prepared to become active citizens, and their organisations.

Another contribution to knowledge made by this research was through its analysis of the interaction between the organisation and the state. By agreeing to deliver government funded pilot programmes of active citizenship learning the CVS exposed itself to 'mission drift'. In fact, the CEO who had supported active citizenship at the CVS, spoke of being criticised for diverting the organisation from its constitutional aims and priorities. Another criticism could be made that it acted too uncritically, as a 'third arm of the state' (Wiggins, 2011). Here too, a more complex picture emerged, however. On the one hand, the CVS failed to submit the government definitions and priorities to sufficient critical analysis, which resulted in individual tutors and managers having had to negotiate some of the tensions that arose in its implementation. The CVS staff, from the managers to project tutors, had also at least partly internalised New Labour's 'governmental rationalities' (Rose and Miller, 1992) - a process termed organisational isomorphism (Milbourne, 2013) - whereby the CVS embedded government's way of doing things including how to evaluate its work.

On the other hand though, the CVS also used these and other programmes to give it an advantage in the competition for funding and for partnerships (Alcock, 2010; Milbourne, 2013). This strategy was at once risky and involved making numerous compromises along the way, but it allowed this organisation to not only promote itself but to give local active citizens some of the support they needed, while the resources were available.

Finally, my research contributed to the debate on the conceptualisation of power by examining the implications of these concepts for active citizenship learning. If Paul Valery was right by stating that 'politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs

which properly concern them' (quote taken from a postcard), then supporting the participation of marginalised people is important. But participatory policies alone offer very limited potential for influence, and this research contributed to the evidence that shows that the value of 'invited spaces' may lie more in the learning (and empowerment) processes they provide than in the power they give participating citizens to effect change through them. To achieve change and challenge social inequalities and discrimination it would seem that we must turn to the third dimension of power. The research showed that by focusing on the more subtle and pervasive forms of power that determine what people think and believe, active citizenship education has an important contribution to make. Not only would it bolster the agency of people who are directly affected by social inequalities and exclusions, but also, importantly, it would enable more people to challenge the hegemonic views which sustain such inequalities and exclusion more widely. By embracing third dimensional thinking (and Foucault) adult educators and project workers in the voluntary and community sector could therefore enhance the chances of 'constituting' active citizens who can make civil society more 'civil' (Evers,2010) and egalitarian (Kymlicka, 2002).

#### **11.4 Experience as a researcher**

My situation as 'insider' researcher in a CASE studentship involving collaborative research was both invaluable, interesting and challenging. It required the 'objectivation' of both my own position and of the research object (Bourdieu, 2003) using a great deal of reflectivity. This included an appreciation of other people's sensitivities towards being researched, which affected my own colleagues and external 'professional' stakeholders more than the beneficiaries of the programmes who volunteered to take part. Furthermore, the management of the research process had been shared with the Chief Executive, taking into account organisational priorities which at times conflicted with those of the research. Despite some of these difficulties and challenges the research benefited considerably from my insider knowledge and status and the access I had to contextualised information and people. Both triangulation and participant observation played a key role in validating and contextualising the data; all these aspects lead to new insights and confirmed the usefulness of my long-term insider knowledge.

My methodological choices seemed appropriate and fitted with the ethos and values of the organisation and those of the people researched (who took part voluntarily). A more participative approach would have been inappropriate given the limited staff capacity in the organisation, and the length of the project. The research interviews had been positive experiences for participants, judging by the feedback I received, and for myself.

Challenges were posed by the relatively broad field of inquiry, and by a large body of qualitative data generated that had to be analysed just by myself. While the purposive sampling approach, the size of the sample, and the grounded approach taken to data analysis did lead to consistent yet nuanced findings, this did, however, involve a lengthy and laborious analysis. These aspects could be improved in the future by adopting a narrower focus of the initial research questions and more interaction between data from a pilot sample with the literature. Part of my learning process as a 'practitioner-researcher' was, however, getting to grips with several streams of theoretical knowledge which were, by and large, new to me. Hence, when I designed the research questions with the Chief Executive this was done from a practitioner's point of view rather than in full knowledge of the literature, and the challenges these posed.

Maybe the most unexpected revelation had come in form of the discovery of a new dimension to the research once I had had time to analyse the findings in depth. I had not anticipated the extent to which the research brought to light significant organisational management practices, nor their significance in the wider context of the relationship with the state. Again, while I had been at the forefront or in the middle of these interactions as project coordinator, negotiating project specifics with government departments, colleagues or managers, I was not aware how this fitted into the academic debates in this area. However, I consider that my research made a significant contribution in this respect both to academic knowledge and in the form of practical knowledge for this and other organisations to learn from.

### **Concluding thoughts**

In sum, this research project had been an ambitious enterprise for a third sector practitioner, but one which I felt very privileged to have been able to undertake. At the CVS I had been involved in research projects, alongside project work, in the past, but not on this scale. Although I had been interested in theoretical aspects of our work, I had not

been afforded the time, within a busy office environment, to pursue this interest. Our project work had thrown up fundamental questions. And the need for deeper evidence on the significance of the CVS' work with people, and what this work enabled them to do, had been at the forefront of my own and colleagues' minds. But researching these questions had always been outside of our grasp. So this research represented not only a tremendous (and empowering) learning experience for myself but also for colleagues and the organisation as a whole. It has, in addition, whetted my appetite for further research, particularly as a contribution to the work of the sector more generally, and enabling organisations such as the CVS in question to better cope with the challenges that lie ahead.

# Appendix 1: Invitation to take part in research, letter and project information

Dear

I am contacting you because you have previously participated in one of the following courses at [the] CVS: Speaking Up, Making Your Voice Heard or a Take Part [Pathfinder] course or workshop.

Over the coming months I will be running one-to-one interviews and focus groups for a research undertaken by [the] CVS. By listening to course participants we hope to get a deeper insight into the value and impact of these courses and whether they help to 'empower' people and groups as 'active citizens'. The evidence we collect will be used to lobby local and central government to provide funding for this important support that enables people to have a voice and influence.

I enclose further information about this study, and if you are interested and want to find out more, please complete the reply slip and return it to us in the FREEPOST envelope provided. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Gabi Recknagel

[...] CVS staff and doctoral research student

## Question & Answers on the CVS Active Citizen research

**This research investigates the following questions:**

1. What is active citizenship? How do the people who were involved with [the] CVS *understand, define and experience* Active Citizenship?

We will compare your views with those of government (New Labour and the

Liberal-Conservative coalition) and academics. We believe that politicians and academics have a lot to learn from people's views, especially at this moment in time (Big Society, 'more power to local people', and all that...).

2. How can we at [the] CVS prepare people in the best possible way to become 'active citizens' in the way *they* choose?

We have developed excellent practice over the years with courses like Speaking Up, Making Your Voice Heard, and the full range of Take Part courses and workshops. We want to hear from people what these courses mean to them, how it helps them to find out about the opportunities, feel motivated and confident to become involved. We appreciate that at the end of courses you complete feedback forms - however, this research seeks to get a broader view of the medium and long term impact of your learning.

3. Does being an active citizen in [city] make you feel empowered? Empowerment of people and learners is very important to [the] CVS, but we need to understand better how people get to feel empowered. Is it the courses, the style of learning we offer, or the actual experience of involvement or speaking up that empowers people, or other factors? And, of course, what does 'empowerment' mean to people?

**I am not sure exactly what 'active citizenship' is and whether I could call myself an active citizen – can I still contribute to the research?**

Yes, absolutely! 'Active Citizenship' is not exactly a common term, and even if our learning or workshop did not explicitly mention active citizens, it was developed for a group of people who in some way or other *want to be* or *already are* 'active citizens'. For example, if you did a Speaking Up course as a service user or a carer, or a Take Part tailored session as a tenant/resident or parent forum member or community leader, etc, the training was designed to make you and your group become more effective in your active citizenship practice.

**I would like to contribute to the research, but what is expected of me?**

A: Just bring yourself... We would be delighted to hear from as many different people as possible, in order to get their different views. We would like participants to talk honestly about their experiences as active citizens and to reflect about their learning, individually or in a group, whichever they prefer. Whether you choose to attend a focus group or an interview, participation will be made easy, and we value all your contributions and views.

**I have already been involved with the Take Part [Pathfinder] evaluation – why should I help with this as well?**

It clearly is up to you how much you want to contribute. The big difference between the Take Part evaluation and this research is that this research is run independently of funders and central government. We choose the aims, the questions and methods, for example, we want to involve people in the research processes in a meaningful and empowering way.

### **Ok, so what do I get out of it?**

1. We offer a £10 gift voucher to thank you for your time and efforts, and we pay travel costs. If you need other support, please let us know.
2. We aim for participants to learn something from their contribution as much as we expect to learn from you. Reflection about your own journey and experiences can be very empowering. It usually makes people realise just how much they have achieved, as individuals or as a group.

### **What about confidentiality and feedback?**

A: All research activities will be recorded, as the basis for data analysis. All participants' contributions will be anonymous, and any quotes in the research report (PhD, academic papers etc) will be written in such a way that individuals will not be identifiable. You can mention people's names and organisations in the activities, but these will be removed during the transcript.

Each participant will be invited to contribute to the research results. The key findings will be presented back to participants a few months later, which they can discuss at another focus group or, possibly, in writing.

### **How will I find out about the final results?**

The key findings from this report will be presented in an accessible report, a copy of which will be sent to each research participant. However, this may take time, so you may not hear about the research for a while.

### **If I am interested, what do I need to do?**

If you have not already sent your reply please complete the enclosed reply slip (in the FREEPOST envelope) and we will get back to you with further information on activities and dates. If you do not fill this in, we will not contact you further.

## **Appendix 2 (a): Interview topic guide: learner interviews**

The interview was semi-structured, and the questions were adapted both in the order in which they were asked and with the phrasing.

1. Which CVS course(s) did you attend?
2. What motivated you to come along - alone or part of a group?
3. What was your personal aim – and did you feel it was fulfilled?
4. What did you most value about this course?
5. Was there anything you found surprising or challenging about the way the course was run?
6. Did the course mention active citizenship? What did you think of it?
7. What is your involvement in the community - before the course, since then? Did the course give you an incentive to do something else or different?
8. What would you say was the most important outcome of the course for you, personally?
9. Looking at yourself now, do you think of yourself as an 'active citizen'? If yes, how did this come about, If no, why not?
10. The learning we do at CVS aims to 'empower' people. What is empowerment for you?
11. Did you or your group feel empowered as a result of the course?
12. Do you have any questions for me?

Many thanks for your time and contribution

## Appendix 2 (b) Interview questions - tutors

The main purpose of this interview is to get a *tutor's perspective* on Active Citizenship Learning at [the] CVS (Speaking Up and/or Take Part), and on the impact it has on empowering people and community groups.

1. Can you briefly describe your work in support of active citizenship learning as a tutor at CVS? (brief overview, incl how long you've been doing this work - assume I know nothing!)
2. What particularly drew you to this role and to this particular topic in the first place?
3. What are your main inspirations/ sources – did you/do you get support from [the] CVS, Take Part or the ALAC framework, for example?
4. From your perspective, what do you see as the main purpose/main goals of your active citizenship teaching at the CVS?
5. What are for you the key challenges of this work?
6. What do you most enjoy about your work? - What are your proudest moments/ your greatest achievements?
7. What are *for you* the most crucial aspects of Adult and Community Learning (ACL) in terms of teaching methods?
8. Would you say that your work with learners at CVS achieves the aims set by the project/ the organization and by yourself?  
*Are your aims different from the official aims of the work?*
9. Would you say that learners become *empowered* as a result of ACL? If so, what does 'empowerment' look like, and can you give some examples of learner empowerment?
10. Do you yourself feel empowered by this work?
11. Any final thoughts or questions?

Thank you!

## Appendix 2 (c) -Stakeholder interview questions

### 1. Interview questions to DCLG civil servant

- 1 More specifically, what were for you the main differences between ALAC and the Take Part Pathfinder? Any comments on my analysis of the ALAC and Take Part programme
- 2 Did the policy shift towards Hazel Blear's 'community empowerment' change the government's vision for active citizens, compared with that of David Blunkett?
- 3 Regarding the Take Part Pathfinder aims, I have two questions: a) why do you think there was this emphasis on civic roles/ civic activism? And b) can you explain what was meant by 'increasing in the numbers of people equipped to press for change in support of community leadership'?
- 4 Did the inclusion of local authorities in TP delivery make much difference to the shape of TP?
- 5 What would you say have been the key achievements of ALAC and Take Part in terms of influencing policies, and if so, was this favouring any particular kind of 'school' of active citizenship, or any kind of approach?
- 6 Would you say that the involvement of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Take Part, since Take Part was based at DCLG, had shaped the programme? Was there a risk that without the TP network's lobbying, the VCS's role in the Pathfinder programme would have been smaller/absent compared with that of local authorities?
- 7 I have attached the main conclusions from th[is local] TPP (see below) – do any of these surprise you?
- 8 Do you think that the successes of Take Part can be drawn on to help influence policy makers in the future?
- 9 What are the main challenges for the promotion of active citizenship in the current policy context – and who are our allies in DCLG (or in other departments)?

## **2. Questions to Sure Start Centre worker - former parent group coordinator**

Tell me about your own experience of the Take Part training.

Was active citizenship mentioned? Do you feel that the use of this term is useful in any way?

What has been the impact of Take Part training on the women individually and collectively, from your perspective as parent forum coordinator? Any examples that have struck you about their developed ability to speak up, and any other benefits or issues raised?

Also, how did their 'voice' and 'action' affect the Sure Start centre, as a service provider?

Did it enhance the reach of the centre into the community, especially the more disadvantaged parents? I understand that national evaluations about Sure Start centres have been critical in places about how effectively they were able to reach those who need it the most. What is your view on this, based on your experience locally?

[Take Part tutor] had written up a case study for the Take Part evaluation which showed how her training led the group to be more effective – I attach a couple of write-ups about this and Speaking Up learning – if you could comment or expand on these, maybe?

## Appendix 3: Sample of an ‘empowerment journey summary’ - to illustrate one step in the preparation of qualitative data for analysis

(‘Yolande’ - endnotes with quotations omitted)

### Initial situation

- Described herself as ‘half a carer’ since her husband is in a home; had to go into early retirement, I guess because of her caring responsibility. Her volunteering is very important to her, and she brought along her CV which lists all her involvements, past and current; had to tailor her volunteering roles as she suffered a stroke. Volunteers in roles which fit with her needs and ‘comfort zone’ and which make use of her professional experience as a social worker in child protection, and other skills, e.g. IT skills.
- A passionate advocate for volunteering, well aware of what constitutes good practice in volunteer management, and believes it’s important to make it accessible to people, to give everyone the opportunity to find something they can do, but to do so voluntarily, not under pressure.

### Outcomes

- Much better informed about some civic roles and whether she was eligible, to help decide whether or not to pursue;
- extended her knowledge about these which she passes on to others

### Success factors

- the people who attended – a wide range, people with ‘incredible’ skills
- small group work – working in two and threes
- good atmosphere, where people felt comfortable to express their opinions freely
- being in a group also allows for someone with middling levels of confidence to learn from listening to others and the answers to their questions...!
- practical sessions which were hands-on, enjoyable and allowed to ask questions, as opposed to reading up about these roles.

### Her definition of empowerment (almost entirely in relation to volunteering):

- [indirectly mentioned]: coming to a crossroads at time of retirement and able to do something that makes people feel useful, rather than ‘on the scrapheap’; and to realise what **knowledge and skills** [even] she has got!
- Stay in her comfort zone, i.e. through volunteering, making use of the skills developed in her work life;
- Doing a range of volunteering roles, selecting the ones that fit with one’s preferences and situation (in her case, ‘ad hoc’ commitments, as opposed to 9-5)
- [as volunteer] being well supported, as an individual, leads to full commitment

### Disempowerment:

- [as carer] : the weight of the expectation of being able to cope without help, and being made to feel guilty if asking for help, or not coping

- Alienating language, e.g. 'active citizen' (for her!)
- Volunteers 'being put upon' especially in organisations solely run by volunteers, too much pressure on volunteers, including through blurring of boundaries between volunteers and paid workers, e.g. due to red tape
- Assumptions made that people have access to IT – the need to advertise for roles in various formats – local paper, phone numbers, online

Other (final) comment, observation on TP approach and its benefit to others:

- commented a lot about 'caring' and how in her opinion it has changed; idem about volunteering

Appendix 4 List of courses by participant

	Sp Up L 1	Sp Up entry L	Sp Up L 2	SP Up L3	Magis	Pol Auth	Cllr	HYCW May	TALIC taster	TALIC	Repr	Com Eng	Skill Up 4 str voic	PTLLS	Char trust	group session	British Council
A								X									
B	X Chin																
C										X '10							
D												X					X
E					X '09			X									
F																Eff Mtgs TALC	
G	X '08									X '11							
H							X										
I								X	X '10				X '10				
J						X '10											
K	X '07																
L	X '07										X '09						
M							X										
N															X '10		
O							X			X '11					X '11		
P																YVVV DFBB	
Q					X '09												
R								X									
S		X			X	X '10											
T	X Chine																
U	2012								X	X		X					X
V	X '07																
W		X '03															
X	?		X	X	X '10			X							X		
Y					X '10	X '10											
Z														X			
27	6	2	1	1	4	3	3	5	1	3	1	1	1	2	2		1

**Appendix 5: Demographic breakdown of research participants**

	Code/ Pseudonyms	Gender		Ethnicity		Disability		Age (approx) < 30	Age: (approx) 30-50	Age: (approx) 51-65	Age: (approx) >65
1. Learners	Zannah	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Bao	F			Chinese	None				✓	
	Clarissa	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Niamh	F		Wh		None	✓				
	Gethin		M	Wh		None			✓		
	Fiona	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Graeme		M	Wh		None					✓
	Hugh		M	Wh		None			✓		
	Ingrid	F		Wh		None	✓				
	Gilbert		M	Wh		None					✓
	Ruth	F		Wh		None				✓	
	Leonard		M	Wh		None					✓
	Max		M	Wh		None			✓		
	Naomi	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Livia	F		Wh		None	✓				
	Patrick		M	Wh		None			✓		
	Cassandra	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Milena	F		Wh		None	✓				

	Marian	F		Wh		None				✓	
	Mr & Mrs Chow	F	M		Chinese (x2)	None (x2)				✓ (x2)	
	Ursula	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Verity	F		Wh		None					✓
	Mark		M	Wh			Yes		✓		
	Ella	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Yolande	F		Wh		None					✓
	Zadie	F		Wh		None			✓		
Learner subtotals	27	18	9	24	3	26	1	4	13	4	5
2. CVS staff	CEO		M	Wh		None				✓	
	Senior Manager	F		Wh		None				✓	
	Tutor A	F		Wh		None				✓	
	Tutor B	F		Wh		None			✓		
	Tutor C	F		Wh		None				✓	
	Engagement Worker	F		Wh		None				✓	
	Volunteer Centre Coordinator	F		Wh		None			✓		

	3. External	DCLG senior manager		M	Wh		None				✓		
		Regional Empowerment Manager		M	Wh		None				✓		
		Children Centre staff member	F		Wh		None			✓			
		Strategic Lead for Learning Disability (Adult Services)	F		Wh		None			✓			
		Local Authority Engagement Officer	F		Wh		None			✓			
	Total, all interviewees		<b>39</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>3 (other than White)</b>	<b>38 (no disability)</b>	<b>1 disability</b>	<b>4 (&lt;30 years old)</b>	<b>18 (30-50)</b>	<b>11 (51-65)</b>	<b>5 (&gt;65)</b>

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