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Cross-sector collaboration for Wales' national well-being

Transformative action in communities of practice

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Cross-sector collaboration for Wales' national well-being:

Transformative action in communities of practice

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Abstract

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 aspires to generate action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being through cross-sector collaboration. Yet this aspiration faces the twin challenges of reconciling diverse interests and including both ecological and human-centric approaches to well-being. Therefore, the main aim of this research was to understand whether and how cross-sector collaboration can include diverse interests in pursuit of national well-being.

The large body of literature on cross-sector collaboration predominantly focusses on the management of either interpersonal relationships or interorganisational arrangements. A key finding across both approaches is that some sectors or organisations' interests tend to dominate because of the exercise of power in diverse forms. Theories of governance networks are divided on whether these power dynamics can be changed. Although cross-sector networks have the creative agency to develop a culture that equally includes diverse interests, prevalent societal beliefs and practices perpetuate hierarchical control in favour of selective interests. The strategic-relational approach offers a way to bridge this divide but requires further development of governance theory to explain how reflexive rationality might be created in networks and how reflexively rational networks interact with societal culture.

Therefore, my research question was: Whether and how can cross-sector collaboration transform power relations to support action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being in Wales?

I took a critical-realist approach to identify the real effects of hidden power relations and opportunities for transformation. Based on the critical and relational principles of action research, I designed a systemic enquiry to co-produce critical awareness and actionable knowledge with my main research partners, Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board ('the PSB') and North Wales Wildlife Trust. I helped to establish two core research groups as critical-relational communities of practice (CoPs) and compared their experiences with those of the PSB and wider streams of enquiry across regional and national levels in Wales.

The critical-relational systemic enquiry revealed how a hierarchical and individualised culture constrained the PSB's capacity to negotiate consensus and risked it losing legitimate authority over its well-being objectives. In contrast, the core research groups managed to negotiate consensus on joint action, based on a conscious and critical belief in reciprocal interorganisational relationships. Through an abductive dialogue between the data and existing knowledge, I developed a theoretical statement of the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration embodying three main arguments. First, cross-sector collaboration can transform power relations by creating reflexive rationality in the network and its meta-governance. Second, reflexive rationality can be created in networks by developing them into critical-relational CoPs. Third, the critical beliefs and practices of CoPs can change power relationships between networks and societal culture through a dynamic strategically adaptive process of cultural embedding.

I conclude that my research partners and others who engage in cross-sector collaboration can generate action directed at ecologically sustainable national well-being by developing and sustaining reflexive rationality. Reflexive rationality can be developed by (re)shaping cross-sector networks into critical-relational CoPs that create a culture of dialogue amongst diverse perspectives, critical reflection on practice and shared ownership and leadership. Reflexive rationality can be sustained by extending the negotiated consensus in interactions with changes in societal culture and structures associated with the Well-being of Future Generations Act.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AR	Action Research
AS	Area Statements
BCUHB	Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board
BIONET	Northeast Wales Biodiversity Network
Brundtland Report	United Nations report to the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1997
CAB	Cyngor ar Bopeth/ Citizens Advice Cymru
CCW	Countryside Commission Wales
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CGR	Collaborative Governance Regime
CoP	Community of Practice
CPP	Community Planning Partnership
CS	Cwlwm Seiriol
CTA	Community Transport Association
CVC	County Voluntary Council
ENRaW	Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
FGCO	Future Generations Commissioner's Office
FWAG	Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
GIG/ NHS	Gwasanaeth Iechyd Gymru/ National Health Service
GIS	Geographical Information Systems
GP	General Practitioner
GTA	Grounded Theory Analysis
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
LAC	Local Assets Coordinator
LL	Living Landscapes
LNP	Local Nature Partnership
LSB	Local Services Board
NNRP	National Natural Resources Policy
NPB	National Public Bodies network
NPM	New Public Management
NRW	Natural Resources Wales
NWWT	North Wales Wildlife Trust
OWC	Our Wild Communities project
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PMN	Public Management Network
PSB	Public Services Board
PSE	Participatory Systemic Enquiry
PWC	People and Wildlife Committee
QGIS	Qualitative Geographical Information Software
RPB	Regional Partnership Board
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

SAR	Systemic Action Research
SMNR	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources
SoNaRR	State of Natural Resources Report
SP CoP	Social Prescribing Community of Practice
SRA	Strategic-Relational Approach
SROI	Social Return on Investment
SSIR	Stanford Social Innovation Review
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
SVC	Social Value Cymru network
SW	Sport Wales
The Environment Act	The Environment (Wales) Act 2016
The PSB	Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board
The Social Services Act	The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014
The Trustees	NWWT Council of Trustees
The Well-being Act	The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
TSPC	Third Sector Partnership Council
TSRC	Third Sector Research Centre
TSS	Third Sector Scheme
TSSW	Third Sector Support Wales
UN	United Nations
WAO	Wales Audit Office
WBP	Wales Biodiversity Partnership
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Associations
WEL	Wales Environment Link
WHO	World Health Organisation
WLGA	Wales Local Government Association
WTW	Wildlife Trusts Wales

Glossary

Accountability	Rewards and sanctions which create answerable relationships between organisations (political accountability) or to a higher authority (hierarchical accountability)
Biodiversity emergency	Also termed 'ecological crisis', the loss of biological diversity and species across the world as a result of human behaviours
Boundary spanning	Reticulist skills which form connections amongst collaborating partners, combine their core competencies and form connections with external stakeholders
Climate emergency	The impact humans are having on the climate through the emission of greenhouse gases
Collaboration	Joint action and coordination of plans of two or more independent organisations
Collaborative process	The internal conditions of the network which affect interpersonal relationships and the formation of human capital
Community of practice	Self-organising, non-hierarchical systems for knowledge exchange, co-learning and joint planning or decision-making amongst specialists from multiple fields or sectors purposed towards harmonisation of plans and the development of human capital and relationships
Cross-sector collaboration	Joint action between public and third sector organisations that includes diverse interests in pursuit of national well-being
Ecology/ ecosystem	A dynamic complex of plant, animal, and microorganism communities and the non-living environment functioning as a functional unit
Ecological resilience	The scale, biodiversity and connectivity of habitats that contributes to the capacity of ecosystems to recover from disturbance
Ecosystem services	The benefits humans derive from ecosystems
Environment	The natural world, including plants, animals, humans, and physical features
Governance	The coordination of sectors of society through cross-sector collective decision-making that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative
Facilitative leadership	Skills developing interpersonal relationships, enabling mutual understanding of the contribution of different agencies and sectors, and developing convergent goals
Human capital	Benefits accruing to individuals, organisations and networks from knowledge creation, peer learning, collaborative skills development, networking or decision-making influence

Interorganisational arrangements	The institutional design for deciding on collaborative action, including regulatory, normative, cognitive and imaginary elements
Interpersonal relationships	The quality of relationships amongst people including the extent of trust, commitment, interdependence, respect, power balance and inclusiveness
Meta-governance	The higher-order governance of governance networks whether directly (by meso-level governors) or indirectly (by societal culture and structures)
National well-being	The combined social, economic, cultural, environmental, psychological and governance domains that contribute to the quality of the lives of citizens of a nation
Negotiated consensus	Agreement on joint action directed towards a long-term project in which each collaborating partner's interests are integrated
Neoliberalism	Adherence to a market centred political economy that places markets and individualised responsibility at the heart of visions of the common good
Network (or governance network)	A stable body of dependent but autonomous organisations from multiple societal sectors who form an institutional framework to negotiate diverse interests and define problems, visions and plans that will contribute to policy and the public good
Network culture	The regulatory, normative, cognitive and imaginary aspects that make up interorganisational arrangements for a collaborative network
New Public Management	Managerial practices directed towards accountability to a hierarchical authority
Performance outcomes	The range of expected outputs of a governance network, including policy
Private sector	Organisations operating primarily for profit
Public sector	Organisations wholly or mostly funded directly by national government and whose governance is directed by government
Reflexive rationality	The dialogical, pluralistic and heterarchic negotiation of consensus on long-term collaborative action
Regime of mutual gain	Sets of implicit or explicit principles, rules, norms and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area
Relational communication	Forms of communication directed towards improving interpersonal and interorganisational relationships
Social capital	Bonding, bridging and linking elements which create relationships between organisations and sectors

Sustainable development	An approach to progress that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Also known as the 'Brundtland definition'
System	The interaction of multiple aspects of societal life
Third sector	Organised bodies whose activities are for a purpose other than for profit and directly or indirectly benefit citizens of a nation. Also known as the voluntary sector or non-for-profit sector

Chapter One Introduction

Cross-sector collaboration for national well-being

'We hope that what Wales is doing today the world will do tomorrow. Action, more than words, is the hope for our current and future generations.'

Nikhil Seth, Head of Sustainable Development, United Nations (29/04/2015)

This often-repeated declaration by Nikhil Seth at the launch of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 inspired my focus on action in this research. Seth stated this global aspiration at the 2015 international conference of the Regional Governments for Sustainable Development Network, hosted in Wales (GIG Cymru/NHS Wales, 2016). His statement reflects the pioneering nature of the Act to put sustainable development into law (Pigott, 2018), with national well-being goals that echo the United Nations (UN) global Sustainable Development Goals (see United Nations, 2015). The urgency of the call for action and extent of the ecological crisis was made clear by an early participant in this research from his standpoint as a Board member of the statutory body in Wales with responsibility for the environment, Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

> As a species, we have lost sight of the fact that this is our habitat. It's our environment – we are so dependent on the environment to survive we have been divorced from that and there are no strong messages telling us that. So, if you look at the state of nature, we are not doing things right. So, from a wildlife perspective while we have looked at declining birdlife, we've got declining swifts, we have got declining quality of our natural environment so, fundamentally, we have to do things differently, because what we are doing isn't working.

(Board Member, NRW, 23/06/2017)

I experienced the excitement around the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015 (from here on, 'the Well-being Act') as I was working on my master's dissertation in 2012/13. Investigating with Isle of Anglesey County Council (North Wales) how to communicate about sustainable development with diverse groups, I began to attend consultation events on the Well-being Act's preparatory White Paper (then referred to as the 'Sustainable Development Bill'). I recall a sense of building momentum, with enthusiastic discussions around tables and a noisy atmosphere. Then, from 2013 to 2016, I worked with small and medium-sized businesses and voluntary organisations as a research officer with a European Union funded project at Bangor University (North Wales). I found growing interest in the Well-being Act and a willingness of many organisations to participate actively in research and change their aims and work programmes. However, conversations during my master's and research post revealed a sense

of frustration. Officers and councillors at Anglesey Council pointed to a lack of action of public bodies on issues related to sustainable development and third sector infrastructure organisations in Gwynedd and Anglesey complained that public bodies did not understand voluntary organisations' contribution to societal challenges. These conversations inspired me to investigate whether and how the Well-being Act could motivate action to deliver its aspiration of sustainable development. My experience as a research officer encouraged me to take a collaborative approach to research with organisations, to enhance both my participation in the research partners' work and these partners' participation in co-creating knowledge through research.

In this chapter, I first explain how the Well-being Act puts the focus on collaborative action to enhance national well-being in an environmentally sustainable way. Next, I set the Act's development in the context of other recent legislation and policy in Wales, to consider its intentions regarding sustainable development and the extent of collaboration. Third, I explain the twin challenges for this research. I discuss how action that can address the urgency and extent of the ecological crisis risks being limited first, by a lack of experience of reconciling diverse interests in collaboration and second, by conflicting ecological and instrumental approaches to sustainable development. These challenges helped to orientate this research, which aims to understand the role of cross-sector collaboration in delivering the aspirations of the Well-being Act. My main objective to reach this aim was to create knowledge in a critical case study in collaboration with research partners. Introducing my main research partners, the North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) and Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board (the PSB), I explain how they developed an interest in joining me in research. I describe the geographical, social, political and organisational context for these partners' work in the counties of Anglesey and Gwynedd, North Wales. Finally, in an overview of the thesis, I set out how I address my research aims and objectives in the following chapters.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being Act's declared aim is to pursue the 'economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales in a way that accords with the sustainable development principle' (Welsh Government, 2015e, p. 1). This principle is defined as 'seek[ing] to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 5 (1)). The Act sits in the context of an international agenda for sustainable development and continues Welsh Government's history of legislation in this area (Pigott, 2018). Anna Pigott (2018) gives a detailed analysis of the

distinctiveness of the Well-being Act's seven 'national well-being goals', how they relate to this national and international context and the transformative socio-ecological future they envision. However, as Pigott (2018, p. 5) notes, the lack of legal power and budget associated with the legislation raises the question of how its aspirations will be delivered. I summarise the Well-being Act's goals here and then focus on its requirements regarding the *process* of achieving the vision of sustainable national well-being.

The national well-being goals set out diverse aspects of societal progress and portray these as contributing to, rather than an aggregate of, individual citizens' well-being. The goal of a *prosperous Wales* contributes to work opportunities and material wealth, an environmentally *resilient Wales* supports the ecological and social capacity to adapt to change, a *healthier Wales* maximises people's physical and mental well-being, and a *more equal Wales* fulfils people's potential. Likewise, goals of a *Wales of cohesive communities*, and of *vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language* improve the society in which Welsh citizens live, while a *globally responsible Wales* takes account of its effects on international citizens. In this way, the Well-being Act positions Welsh Government and its public bodies as responsible for citizens' well-being.

To achieve these goals, the Well-being Act requires public bodies to adopt five practices described as 'in accordance with the sustainable development principle' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 5 (1)). These processes are to collaborate, integrate multiple objectives, involve a diversity of people, consider long-term effects and act in a preventive manner. The capacity of public bodies to collaborate depends on their capacity to adopt the other four principles. *Collaboration* is described as, 'how acting in collaboration with any other person (or how different parts of the body acting together) could assist the body to meet its well-being objectives, or assist another body to meet its objectives' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 5 (2) (d)). Collaboration therefore requires *integration*, that is, consideration of multiple bodies' plans to maximise their contribution to national well-being. Such integration is a 'precursor to effective collaboration' and by facilitating a 'system-wide response' also enables public bodies to 'work preventatively' (Auditor General for Wales, 2020, para. 63). A system-wide response requires an understanding of the effects of policies on diverse groups of the population. Public bodies must therefore *involve* the current generation, take a *preventive* approach to consider effects across the life-course, and take a *long-term* approach to consider effects on future generations.

By establishing a new Public Services Board (PSB) for each of the 22 local authority areas of Wales, the Well-being Act reinforces the emphasis on collaboration.

> [A] reference to a "public services board" is a reference to the members of that board *acting jointly*; accordingly a function expressed as a function of a public services board is a function of each member of the board that may only be exercised *jointly* with the other members. (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 29 (3) added emphasis).

The PSB must assess the state of well-being in its area and set joint objectives 'that are designed to maximise its contribution to achieving [the national well-being] goals' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 36 (1) (2)). These Boards' statutory members are representatives of four public bodies, namely the local authority, the local Health Board, the area fire and rescue service and the Natural Resources Body for Wales (Welsh Government, 2015e). The Board must also invite Welsh Ministers, police force, police and crime commissioners, and representatives of voluntary organisations, and seek advice from and involve other named public bodies. PSBs may merge or collaborate with each other within the administrative boundaries of the seven regional Health Boards in Wales. Figure 1 depicts the Local Authorities in Wales, and of these Gwynedd and Anglesey act as a collaborating PSB, while Denbighshire/ Conwy and Rhondda Cynon Taf/ Merthyr Tydfil are each a merged Board.
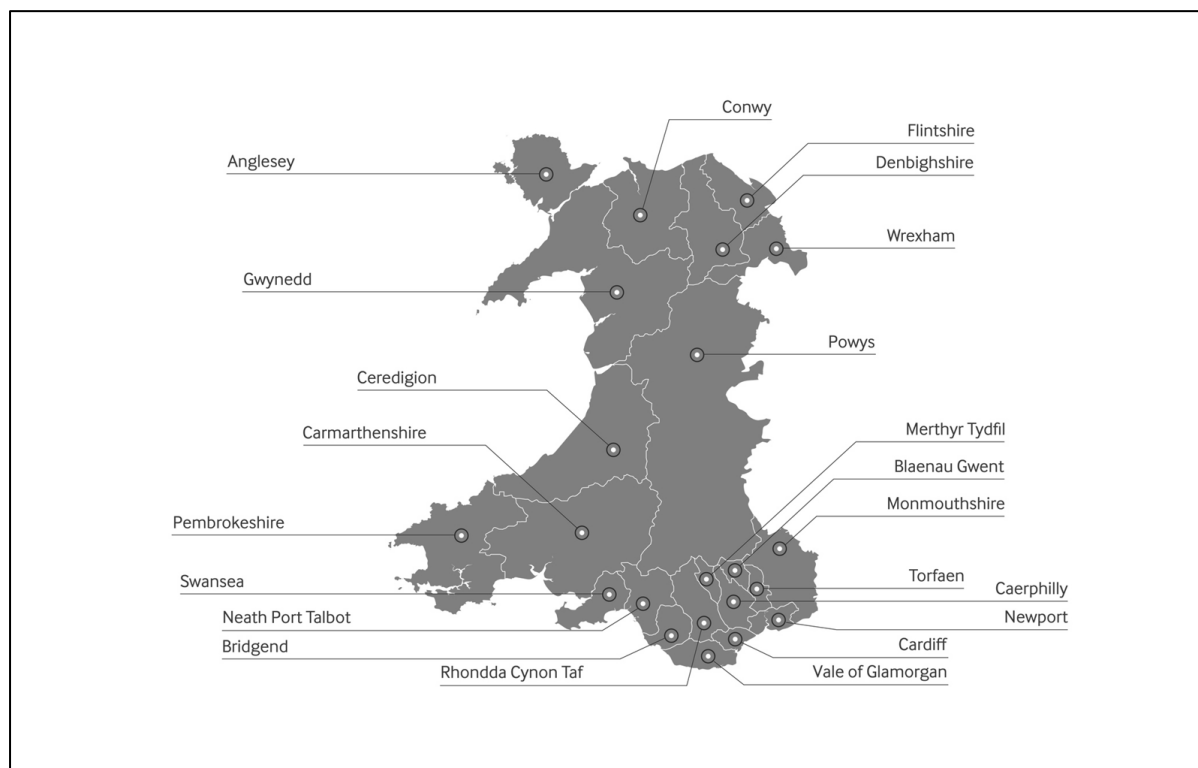
Figure 1 Local Authorities in Wales at the time of the research (2016 – 2022)

The Well-being Act establishes two mechanisms to monitor individual public bodies and a separate one for PSBs. The Auditor General for Wales assesses 'the extent to which a body has acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 15 (1)) and the newly established office of Future Generations Commissioner monitors public bodies' well-being objectives from the perspective of future generations. The PSB is monitored by the relevant local authority's scrutiny committee, which sends its reports to the Auditor General and Future Generations Commissioner. The latter may also provide 'advice or assistance' to a PSB (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 19 (c)).

The intentions of the Well-being Act

Examining the Well-being Act, its preparatory White Paper and concurrent legislation casts light on the extent of the requirement for collaboration across multiple aspects of national well-being and between public and third sectors in Wales. Here, I define public bodies as the 12 categories listed in the Well-being Act (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 6) which include Welsh ministers, local, regional and national bodies. I use the Welsh Government definition of 'Third Sector' in its statutory Third Sector Scheme (TSS), which depicts it as the organised activity of people motivated other than for profit:

> This Scheme uses the term "third sector" instead of voluntary sector [...] "relevant voluntary organisations" means bodies (other than local authorities or other public bodies) whose activities – (a) are carried on otherwise than for profit, and (b) directly or indirectly benefit the whole or any part of Wales (whether or not they also benefit any other area). (Welsh Government, 2014b, para. 1.1).

The Well-being Act's interpretation of the scope of sustainable development and the associated principle of collaboration is broad. Its definition of sustainable development is associated with an ecological approach which emphasises relationships amongst natural processes, drawing on the so-called 'Brundtland report' (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This standpoint is reinforced by Welsh Government's concurrent introduction of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 ('the Environment Act'). The latter uses the same definition of sustainable development, describing this as a state of ecological (or 'ecosystems'[1]) resilience. The Environment Act promotes the 'sustainable management of natural resources' (SMNR) and links this to the 'achievement of the well-being goals' in the Well-being Act (Welsh Government, 2016a, para. 3(2))). I therefore interpret the Well-being Act's intention as the pursuit of ecologically resilient sustainable development.

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[1] An Ecosystem is a dynamic complex of plant, animal, and microorganism communities and the non-living environment functioning as a functional unit (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, 2005, p. v)

While highlighting the environmental aspect of sustainable development, the White Paper (Welsh Government, 2012) encompasses multiple aspects of society, placing 'an emphasis on social, economic and environmental wellbeing for people and communities' (para. 1.5) as well as 'the vital importance of social justice, equality and Wales' rich culture' (para. 1.10). These aspects are reflected in the Well-being Act's requirement for each public body and PSB to 'maximise its contribution to achieving each of the well-being goals' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 3(2(a))). Therefore, public bodies must apply the sustainable development principle (and its requirement for collaboration) not only to their own strategic aims, but to their contribution to all social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects of well-being. That this collaborative principle extends to the involvement of organisations outside the public sector is clear from the inclusion of voluntary organisations in the PSB, the main forum for collaboration in the Act. Although the White Paper (Welsh Government, 2012) also recommends the involvement of private sector organisations to share good practice, the final Well-being Act gives this sector less prominence. In the Act (Welsh Government, 2015e) PSBs must *invite* a third sector representative (para. 30) to participate but only *consult* representatives of business (para. 38).

The strength of the Welsh Government's commitment to collaboration and the effect on policy and practice is evident in legislation created in the same election cycle as the Well-being Act. First, the Environment Act's principles of SMNR (see above) include promoting and engaging in collaboration and co-operation (Welsh Government, 2016a, para. 4). The Environment Act also creates links between reports by NRW[2] and Welsh Government policy. Second, the Welsh Government's focus on public and third sector collaboration is reflected in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (the 'Social Services Act'). In contrast to the Well-being Act, this Act focusses on the well-being of individuals rather than the nation and emphasises physical and mental health. Local authorities must promote the development of 'social enterprises, co-operatives, user led services and the third sector' in their area (Welsh Government, 2014a, para. 16 (1)). Part 9 of this Act requires the establishment of Regional Partnership Boards (RPBs) to enable partnership between local authorities and local Health

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[2] The Environment (Wales) Act (2016) requires NRW to prepare a State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) (para. 8), which Welsh Government must consider when reviewing the National Natural Resources Policy (NNRP) (para. 9) and in turn NRW must prepare Area Statements (para. 11) to facilitate the implementation of NNRP.

Boards. The RPB also has a duty to engage with representatives of social value partners, known as the 'regional social value forum' (Welsh Government, 2014a, para. 6.8).

The legislative environment for public bodies in Wales, therefore, has a strong emphasis on collaboration across the multiple levels of authority and fields of work of public bodies and with the third sector. In the context of the Well-being Act, I define such *cross-sector collaboration* as *joint action between public and third sector organisations that includes diverse interests in pursuit of national well-being.*

Challenges for delivery

The urgent need for ecologically sustainable development for the sake of equality as well as the planet was clear from the outset of the implementation of the Well-being Act. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its fifth assessment synthesis report just six months before the Well-being Act. It called for policies and adaptation measures at all regional and national levels, warning that '[c]limate change will amplify existing risks and create new risks for natural and human systems. Risks are unevenly distributed and are generally greater for disadvantaged people and communities in countries at all levels of development' (IPCC, 2014, para. 2.3). However, urgent action risked being constrained in Wales by twin challenges of a lack of experience of cross-sector collaboration and conflicting approaches to sustainable development. I will consider each of these challenges in the next two sub-sections.

Cross-sector collaboration in Wales

The Well-being Act's requirement for public bodies to collaborate and to include the third sector reflects a pluralist approach to public service delivery in the UK and more widely in Europe, Asia and North America (Jones and Liddle, 2011). In addition to public sector commissioning of public services from third and private sectors, this new public governance model creates a focus on strategic planning partnerships between public bodies and across sectors (Marks, 2007; Matthews, 2014). Strategic *commissioning* aims to enhance democratic involvement to improve effectiveness and efficiency but tends to focus on procurement of services from the third sector rather than their strategic involvement in planning, designing, delivering and evaluation (Jones and Liddle, 2011). Strategic *partnership working* in the UK aims to tackle complex or 'wicked' societal challenges, to improve 'economic, social and environmental wellbeing' (Marks, 2007, p. 137). However, public bodies' engagement of the third sector to create a community-based strategy is frequently found to be lacking (Marks,

2007). This is true even where the role of strategic partnerships has been increasingly embedded at different levels of government, such as in Scotland (Matthews, 2014).

In Wales, a lack of experience of integrating diverse interests through cross-sector collaboration coupled with limited guidance risked delaying action on the Well-being Act. When the legislation was enacted, Wales Audit Office (WAO) stated that collaboration amongst public bodies was 'frequently underdeveloped' and 'few partnerships have a clear focus on jointly delivering improved outcomes' (Auditor General for Wales, 2015, p. 5). In a later report, WAO stated that the relationship between public and third sectors 'has a number of weaknesses' and 'is not consistent or effective enough to deliver better outcomes' (Auditor General for Wales, 2017, p. 8).

However, little guidance on collaboration was issued from either sector. Welsh Government statutory guidance documents 'Shared Purpose: Shared Future' have a single paragraph in the core guidance encouraging public bodies to gather evidence and understand the roles of other public bodies, consider joint service delivery, and work across departments within the organisation and no reference to collaboration with the third sector (Welsh Government, 2015b). Guidance for the Public Services Boards (Welsh Government, 2015c) refers only to the circumstances permitting collaboration between PSBs.

The bodies advising and monitoring the work of public bodies and the PSB (WAO and the Future Generations Commissioner's Office (FGCO)) issued little advice. WAO focussed on continuity and accountability of partnerships (Auditor General for Wales, 2015) and enhancing public bodies and third sector groups' capacity to navigate procurement processes (Auditor General for Wales, 2017). During her first reporting period, the Commissioner published a framework to guide projects intended to deliver public bodies' well-being objectives. This framework (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, no date) encourages collaboration to include a range of stakeholders 'who may be able to bring ideas and solutions to the table' (p. 9) and the section on integration broadens the scope of collaboration to include 'connect[ing] different public policy/ strategic agendas' to generate multiple benefits (p. 8). However, despite stating the need for effective collaboration mechanisms, there is no guidance on what these may be or how to create them.

The national body to support the third sector in Wales, Wales Council for Voluntary Associations (WCVA) offered scant guidance in the early years of the Well-being Act. Although the WCVA strategic framework 2017-22 states that it will establish cross-sector links

at a national level since '[c]ollaborating with partners across sectors will be essential for achieving our vision' (WCVA, 2016, p. 3), there is no advice to other third sector organisations on how to establish links at other levels. However, the chief executive of WCVA, Ruth Marks (in a blog for WAO's website) urges 'local councils and third sector groups, supported by CVCs, [to] really focus on improving how we work together' (Marks, 2017). CVCs are County Voluntary Councils, independent of but supported by the WCVA, which coordinate volunteering and the voluntary sector across Wales. The Well-being Act names these bodies as suitable representatives of the third sector, which the PSB can invite to participate, giving them a central role in cross-sector collaboration. Guidance for *environmental* third sector organisations could be expected from NRW, the public body responsible for managing Wales' environment. NRW's guidance on the principles of SMNR (see above) simply elaborates 'collaboration and engagement' as 'promote and engage in collaboration and cooperation' (Natural Resources Wales, no date, p. 3). It gives no other explanation and two of the three case studies cited in this document do not refer to collaboration.

In addition to the lack of guidance, there are limited forums to advance collaboration amongst the third and public sectors. At a national level, the main link between the third sector and Welsh Government is the Third Sector Partnership Council (TSPC) established under the TSS (Welsh Government, 2014b). The ambition for collaboration is clear:

> Co-operation between Welsh Government and the Third Sector will promote a relationship based on reciprocity, recognising the desire to achieve the same outcomes for people and communities in Wales. This should include mutual respect for each other's ways of working, the sharing of information and a willingness to collaborate to achieve shared outcomes. (Welsh Government, 2014b, pp. 25–26)

However, apart from a commitment from Welsh Government to 'take into account a range of perspectives and contributions' and to 'mitigate any undesirable impact on the Third Sector' (Welsh Government, 2014b, paras 3.16, 3.17), there is no guidance in the TSS regarding public bodies' collaboration with the third sector. The TSPC meets just once a year (and published no minutes between 2014 and 2017, so calling into doubt even this level of engagement), suggesting it has a limited role as a mechanism for collaboration.

Interpreting sustainable development
Although the Well-being Act uses an ecological definition of sustainable development, its extension of this principle to multiple aspects of the quality of human life risks creating a conflicting approach to the environment. An *ecological* approach to the environment treats it as having intrinsic value as an intact and resilient ecological system (see for example Lawton

et al., 2010). In contrast, an *ecosystems services* approach treats the environment as a flow of benefits to people (exemplified by Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, 2005). I argue, below, that an emphasis on the latter approach without integration of the former risks suboptimal action to address the ecological crisis. I examine the implications of each approach here to understand how this risk can be mitigated in the delivery of the Well-being Act.

The national well-being goal 'a resilient Wales' supports an *ecological standpoint*, of '[a] nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change)' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 4). The references to biodiversity, ecosystems and ecological resilience reflect the approach of a review for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (in England) (Lawton *et al.*, 2010). Often referred to as the 'Lawton Review', the ecological approach expressed in this report is summarised as 'more, bigger, better and joined' (Latham *et al.*, 2013, p. 16). It is based on the key principles of resilience that ecosystems need scale, biological diversity (biodiversity) and connectivity of habitats. These principles contribute to the 'capacity of systems to resist and recover from disturbance' and have been 'developed into a broad theory, linking ecological [and] socio-economic systems' (Latham *et al.*, 2013, p. 3). The focus on resilience therefore reflects the Brundtland report's emphasis on relationships between aspects of the natural world.

The ecological approach is clear in Welsh Government's Nature Recovery Plan, its strategy to meet international commitments on biodiversity. The Plan was written by a consortium of cross-sector organisations, the 'Wales Biodiversity Strategy Board, members of which represent both land and sea managers, Natural Resources Wales, the environmental third sector, local authorities, Wales Biodiversity Partnership[3] and Welsh Government' (Welsh Government, 2015d, p. 6). The Plan places biodiversity as foundational to ecological and socio-economic systems: 'biodiversity underpins our healthy functioning ecosystems, human well-being and the economy' (Welsh Government, 2015d, p. 5). It creates a link to the Well-being Act, stating: 'in Wales we recognise that our well-being and the well-being of future generations are dependent upon the health of our environment' (Welsh Government, 2015d, p. 2).

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[3] Wales Biodiversity Partnership is a multiple sector partnership with the aim of promoting and monitoring biodiversity and ecosystem action in Wales (Wales Biodiversity Partnership, no date)

Despite this cross-sector emphasis on an ecological approach, a more instrumental approach to the environment emerges when the resilient Wales goal is read in conjunction with the other national well-being goals. The resilient Wales goal indicates the contribution of ecosystems to social and economic systems, but there is no corresponding benefit to the ecological system from the other goals. This is consistent with an '*ecosystems services*' approach which treats the environment as providing a flow of benefits to human well-being. This approach is exemplified by the Millennium Ecosystems Assessment Board report called for by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2000 and defined as follows:

> Ecosystem services are the benefits people obtain from ecosystems. These include *provisioning services* such as food, water, timber, and fiber; *regulating services* that affect climate, floods, disease, wastes, and water quality; *cultural services* that provide recreational, aesthetic, and spiritual benefits; and *supporting services* such as soil formation, photosynthesis, and nutrient cycling. (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, 2005, p. v)

The lack of reciprocal benefit to the environment in this approach is illustrated by the Assessment's summary diagram of ecosystems services with its unidirectional arrows, see Figure 2.
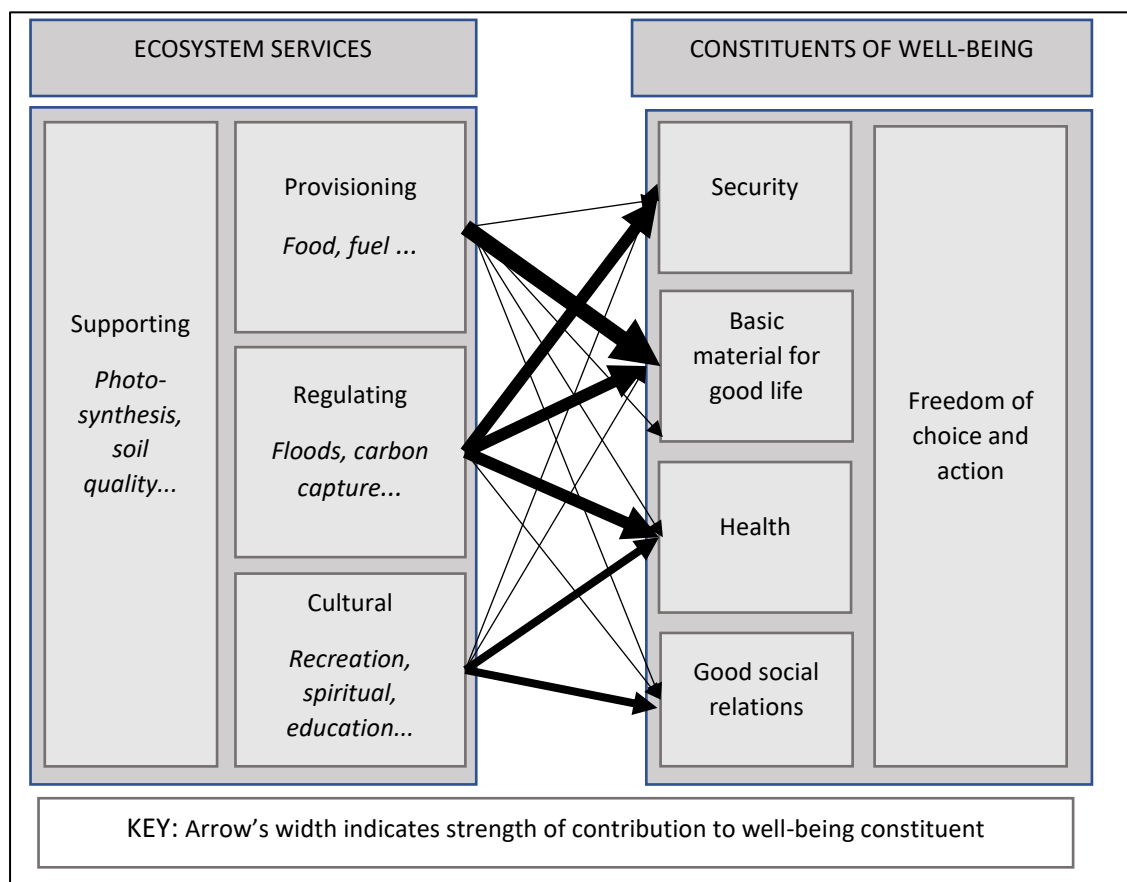
Figure 2 Ecosystem Services and Well-being, (adapted from Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Board, 2005, p. 10)

This ecosystems services approach is reflected in Welsh Government's first published National Natural Resources Policy (NNRP) linked to the Environment Act. The Ministerial Foreword emphasises the report's policies to deliver economic as well as environmental objectives. Specifically, it anticipates Wales' natural resources will contribute to capacity in supply chains, high quality produce, productivity, greater efficiency and profitability in the circular economy and green growth, and new markets for natural resources (Welsh Government, 2017a).

A corollary of the ecosystem services approach is the *capital-centric* approach (Hache, 2019). Ecosystem services are a flow from the environment to human well-being, consequently human systems deplete environmental stocks or 'natural capital.' This approach is illustrated by the national well-being indicators (Welsh Government, 2016b). The conceptual framework underlying the development of these indicators depicts natural resources as impacted by personal and business behaviours, but with no corresponding flow to represent the contribution of the environment to other domains of well-being (Seaford, 2015, p. 13).

The adoption of an *ecosystem services* or *capital-centric* approach risks sub-optimising outcomes for ecological systems relative to an *ecological resilience* approach. Reports by the Green Finance Observatory[4] explain how this risk stems from the nature of ecosystem services and natural capital as externalities or 'public goods' and their 'substitutability' (Hache, 2019, pp. 30–52). First, the degradation of natural capital has the nature of an externality, that is it incurs no direct cost to the user of ecosystem services but depletes the utility of the environment to other ecological and socio-economic systems. Therefore, in the absence of regulation or other intervention the environment will tend to be degraded. Second, ecosystem services are substitutable, that is the benefits they provide may be provided by social or economic systems. In addition, ecosystems' contribution to well-being is in many cases a 'public good', that is it cannot be restricted and therefore, unlike social and economic goods, cannot attract a fee. So, public goods tend to be sub-optimally produced in competitive markets and management of ecosystems will not provide sufficiently for well-being without intervention.

Recognising the need to negotiate these conflicting approaches to sustainable development, NRW's first SoNaR report (see footnote 2, above) combines an ecosystems resilience approach with an ecosystems services approach: 'for the first time the report links the resilience of Welsh natural resources to the well-being of the people of Wales' (Natural Resources Wales, 2016, p.

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[4] The Green Finance Observatory is a think tank analysing the market mechanisms proposed to achieve the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change and UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development (see Why GFO? – Green Finance Observatory accessed 16/04/2022)

2). Based on this report, the first NNRP policy statement maintains this combined approach to sustainable development:

> the objective of the sustainable management of natural resources is to maintain and enhance the *resilience* of ecosystems and the *benefits* they provide and, in so doing, meet the needs of present generations of people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. (Welsh Government, 2015a, p. 7 added emphasis).

To summarise, action to deliver the aspirations of the Well-being Act faces twin challenges. First, the capacity of public and third sectors in Wales to enhance the quality of cross-sector collaboration to address the urgent need for action. Second, the capacity to sustain a combined approach to sustainable development by taking action to tackle the ecological and biodiversity crises while also addressing multiple aspects of human well-being. Hence my research aim was to understand *whether and how the Well-being Act can motivate cross-sector collaboration that includes diverse interests in pursuit of ecologically sustainable national well-being*.

Research partners

The Well-being Act creates a focus on cross-sector collaboration at the local authority level, through the creation of PSBs. In the light of this, to pursue my research aim I chose to conduct an in-depth study with partners located in a PSB area in Wales. Following Flyvbjerg (2006) this approach had multiple advantages. It aimed to create the context-dependent knowledge that would help my research partners and me to develop expertise and a nuanced understanding of the complexities of cross-sector collaboration in Wales. By careful choice of partners I aimed to create a 'critical case', one which would have relevance to multiple cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). In this way, I expected to contribute to cumulative understanding of the field and to be able to test and develop existing theory. To maximise my research partners' contribution to the research and my contribution to their concerns, I designed the case study following the principles of action research set out by Greenwood and Levin (2007). I explain below (in *overview of the thesis*) how I developed the research design to enhance the critical and relational aspects of action research and enhance my self-reflexivity as researcher.

Prior to my PhD project, I had conversations with multiple public bodies and third sector organisations in the consultation events around the Well-being Act and through my work as research officer. As my interest in the Well-being Act began to focus on the twin challenges of strategic cross-sector collaboration and sustaining an ecological approach, two institutions with the capacity to create a case study with relevance to a wide range of organisations expressed

an interest in joining me in research. These were the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board ('the PSB') and North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT).

My research therefore focussed on the North Wales counties of Anglesey and Gwynedd. Statistics informing the national well-being indicators portray these local authorities as having some of the lowest and most sparse populations in Wales (Welsh Government, 2020a). However, north Gwynedd (Arfon) and the Menai Straits area of Anglesey have population densities closer to those of major urban areas in Wales. The counties have good transport links, connecting the counties with the Irish Republic, economy of North Wales and northwest England, and with Cardiff, the location of Welsh Government's main administrative activity. Economically, both Anglesey and Gwynedd have pockets of high levels of deprivation, but the North Wales socio-economic region has only 5% of the most deprived LSOAs[5] (Welsh Government, 2020b). The employment rate in North Wales is higher than the average in Wales but Anglesey and Gwynedd have amongst the highest average distance travelled to work of all local authorities in Wales. Wales as a whole has an aging population, and changes in population levels are driven largely by migration flows rather than by births or deaths (Welsh Government, 2020a). The first Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB well-being assessments show a similar trend (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2017c, 2017a). Culturally, Anglesey and Gwynedd have amongst the highest percentages of Welsh speakers in Wales (66.6% and 75.6% respectively, compared to a Wales average of 29% (Welsh Government, 2020a, 2021), being described as part of 'y fro Gymraeg' or the Welsh heartlands. The counties also include two of Wales' four World Heritage Sites. Environmentally, Anglesey and Gwynedd have large areas of protected habitat, including designated coastline, offshore and inland areas and Snowdonia National Park.

Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB
My choice of Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB as research partner was prompted by a recommendation from the Wales Local Government Association (WLGA). The PSB builds on the work of the earlier Local Services Board for the two counties, which the WLGA singled out as an example of good practice in collaboration. The PSB's Partnerships Manager became my main contact during the research, and we engaged in learning together through multiple reflective conversations. The Partnerships Manager's role is to coordinate the activity of the Board to undertake its well-being assessment and set objectives, including assisting with

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[5] LSOA Lower Super Output Area, a designated small area to assess relative deprivation (Welsh Government, 2020a)

engagement with the public and correspondence with other public bodies and networks. We were introduced by a mutual friend and initially met at a consultation event for the Well-being Act, held in North Wales in 2016. Later, she reflected on what had sparked her interest in research and recalled how PSB members across the North Wales Boards were expressing a desire to work in a different way, but that there was no clear understanding of what this would be like in practice (Partnerships Manager, 22/01/2018). As I elaborate in further detail in Chapter Five, over a period of eight months we discussed the potential research with her line manager and the full PSB. We reached agreement for me to observe the PSB's meetings, participate in some of its subgroups, and hold some focussed discussions and interviews with its members.

In line with the requirements of the Well-being Act the PSB had four statutory members: the two Local Authorities (each represented by its CEO and elected leader), local Health Board (Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, BCUHB), Fire and Rescue Services, and Natural Resources Wales (NRW). It also included the required invited participants, with invitations accepted by a representative of Welsh Government, the Chief Constable for North Wales, and the CEOs of the two County Voluntary Councils (CVC) in Gwynedd and Anglesey. Other invited partners included representatives of BCUHB's Public Health team, a large social housing association, Snowdonia National Park (Parc Eryri) and Bangor University. Many of these members also sat on other North Wales PSBs in the BCUHB area, giving some insight therefore into the workings of these other Boards. With the Partnerships Manager (employed between the two Local Authorities) and usually one or two other members of the Local Authority staff, this amounted to 16 to 18 people at any meeting, see Figure 3.
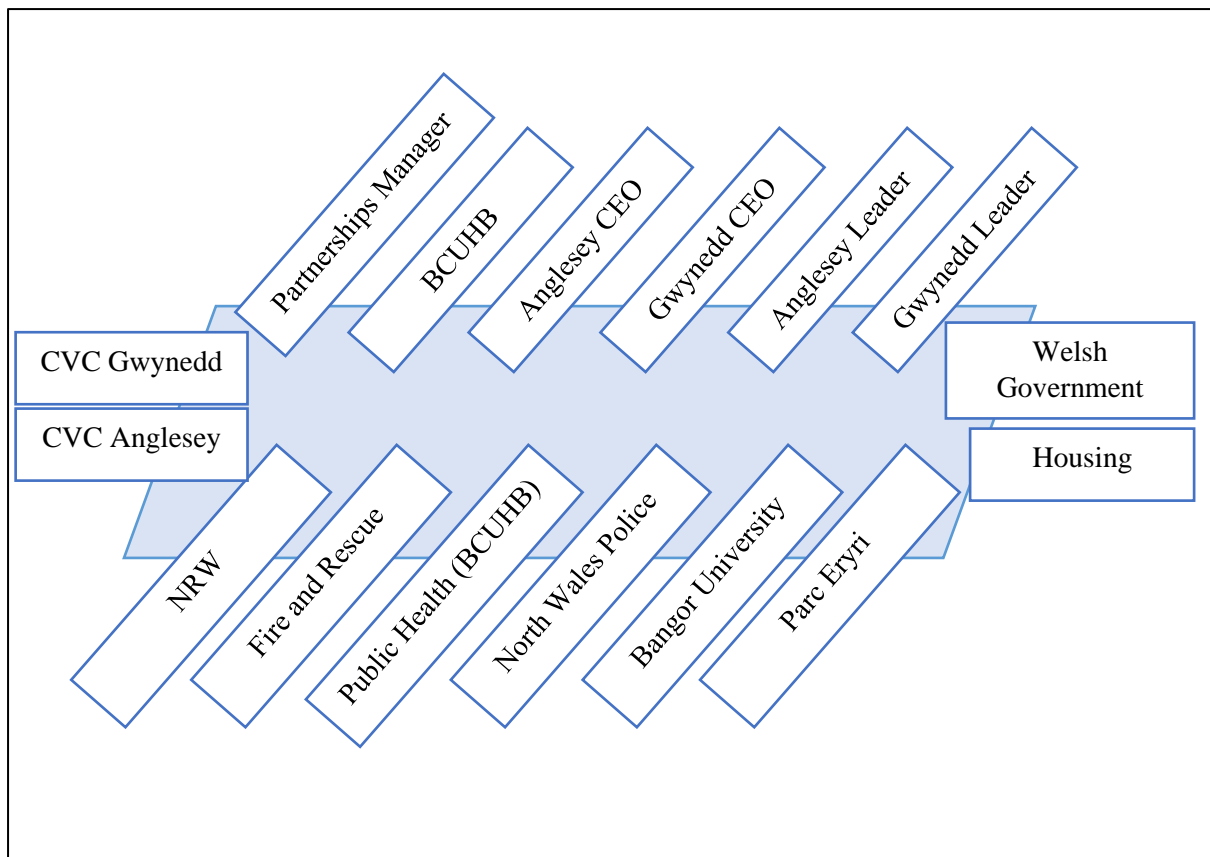
Figure 3 Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board

North Wales Wildlife Trust

My main contact with my other research partner, NWWT was their Fundraising Director, who was seeking to diversify NWWT's sources of funding and develop new partnerships. This focus followed the loss of the Wildlife Trust's main collaborating and funding partner, Countryside Commission Wales, as it was integrated into the newly formed NRW in 2013. As part of this effort, the Fundraising Director had worked with me in my previous role as research officer to identify the multiple social and economic as well as environmental benefits of NWWT conservation projects. Discussing the Well-being Act with him in 2016 he was keen to see NWWT involved in research, describing the Act as a 'strategic opportunity' for the Trust. Prior to my PhD project we discussed ideas informally with NWWT staff and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). They expressed a growing awareness of the Trust's contribution to multiple aspects of well-being. However, there was uncertainty about the anticipated effects and how to evaluate the Trust's contribution, and hesitation about engaging potential public sector partners outside NWWT's current collaborations in the field of education (Fieldnotes, 28/01/2016 – 31/08/2016). Following these discussions, the CEO gave me permission to access meetings and documents of the Trust, including volunteer groups, members' branches, staff meetings and the Council of Trustees, and to involve any staff based on voluntary and informed consent.

The Trust also agreed to contribute towards research expenses, in recognition of the hope that the research would 'be valuable to ourselves, public bodies, and also other Wildlife Trusts in Wales through the Wildlife Trust movement.' (Letter of support, CEO NWWT, 21/11/2016)[6].

NWWT is a regional environmental charitable organisation covering the whole of North Wales, coinciding with the administrative boundaries of the local Health Board (BCUHB) and North Wales socio-economic region. It draws on people's contributions to its work in multiple (and not mutually exclusive) ways, from volunteers on its reserves and in administrative tasks, members who contribute financially and take part in local branch meetings and a regional Branch forum, trustees who form a Council ('the Trustees'), and a growing number of paid staff (around 30 at the time of the research). As well as the national body, Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW), the independent charitable Wildlife Trusts have an umbrella organisation for the UK, The Wildlife Trusts (TWT) which advises and develops common policies.

NWWT owns and manages 35 nature reserves in North Wales with a variety of habitats including woodland, grassland, heathland, bogs, open water, coastal and rock, so representative of the range of habitats in Wales (Hayhow *et al.*, 2016), see Figure 4.

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[6] Appendix 1 Letter of Support
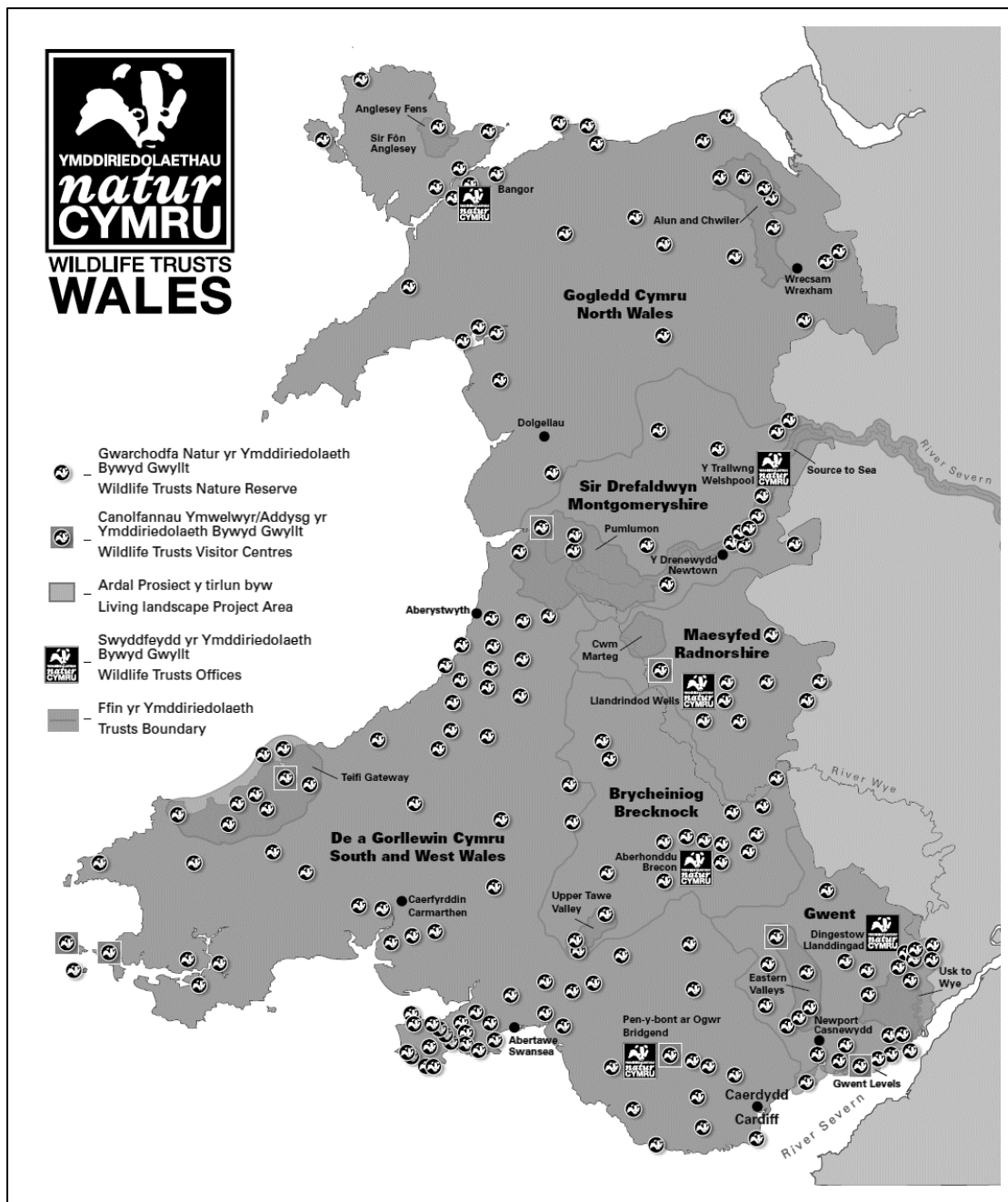
Figure 4 Wildlife Trusts and nature reserves in Wales (https://www.wtwales.org/who-we-are/your-local-wildlife-trust)

NWWT employs three main strategies to deliver its strategic aims of caring for wildlife, working for nature's recovery and bringing people closer to nature[7]. Its strategy of *Reserves management* takes a traditional ecological approach to conserve the stock of species and habitats. The Trust's *Living Landscapes* strategy focusses on enhancing ecological resilience by joining habitats at a landscape scale, reflecting the Lawton Review principles discussed earlier. The newest strategy of *People and Wildlife* takes an ecosystems services approach to

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[7] NWWT strategic aims Our mission | North Wales Wildlife Trust, accessed 23/03/2022

encourage people and local communities to take part in nature-based activities for their well-being benefits. These strategies therefore reflect the main ecological and ecosystems approaches to sustainable development explained earlier in this chapter.

The twin challenges of the research were emphasised by the PSB's concerns about the unfamiliar practice of cross-sector collaboration and NWWT's focus on ecological sustainability. These concerns and my research partners' characteristics therefore had the potential to create a case study of relevance to multiple public bodies and environmental third sector organisations. In Chapter Two, I explore in more detail how we developed a common language to develop pragmatic research questions for the research partners and an overall question based on the conceptual questions emerging from my literature review. For the PSB, the research question was expressed as: '*how can PSB members collaborate in a way that adds value to the work of their individual organisations?*' NWWT expressed their concern as: '*how can NWWT sustainably maximise its contribution to national well-being while at the same time increasing the focus on wildlife?*' I expressed my overall research question which aimed to answer these concerns as: '*whether and how can cross-sector collaboration transform power relations to support action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being in Wales?*'

Overview of the thesis

My aim in this research was to understand whether and how the Well-being Act could motivate cross-sector collaboration that includes diverse interests in pursuit of ecologically sustainable national well-being. This had two supplementary aims, first to enhance my research partners' expertise in cross-sector collaboration and second, to contribute to the field of knowledge and develop existing theory. My objective to achieve these aims was to create an in-depth case study by engaging in collaborative research following the principles of action research. In this chapter I have explained the need for this research to guide urgent action directed at moving Wales towards an ecologically sustainable state. In the following chapters I explain how I conducted action research in collaboration with the PSB and NWWT to address the research aims and objective.

My first step towards my objective was to review the existing literature in the field of cross-sector collaboration. In **Chapter Two** I explain how my review strategy contributed to my objective in two ways. First, by improving the knowledge of my research partners and myself of the main concepts and challenges of cross-sector collaboration. Second, by building my research partners' confidence in and commitment to a participatory approach to research by

co-developing questions expressing their specific concerns. The chapter develops a meta-interpretation of the literature which depicts cross-sector collaboration as a system with interacting conceptual categories of interpersonal relationships, interorganisational arrangements and power relations. It concludes that the exercise of power constrains attempts to build interpersonal and interorganisational relationships in cross-sector collaboration. In addition to the research partners' questions, the chapter poses four conceptual questions about the effects of power.

Arising from these conceptual and research partners' questions, my second step was to review theories in the broader field of network governance. In **Chapter Three** I explore the growing divide between theories of governance as either the exercise of power which perpetuates dominant interests, or the democratic inclusion of diverse interests which transforms cross-sector power relations. I explain how a strategic-relational approach bridges this divide by creating a focus on the capacity for creative reflexive agency in cross-sector networks and in their higher order, or 'meta' governance. I show how the current lack of understanding of the conditions to develop reflexive rationality creates ambiguity about the power of the Well-being Act to motivate action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being. Addressing the research question, I formulate my theoretical statement of the contingent power dynamic of cross-sector collaboration which I developed abductively through a dialogue between theory and practice with my research partners. This focusses on the creation of reflexive rationality in communities of practice and the wider embedding of critical beliefs and practices in a strategically adaptive process to change the power dynamics of meta-governance.

The focus of the statement guided my research approach and methods. In **Chapter Four** I explain how my critical-realist approach and critical-relational action research design enabled me to develop a critical understanding of power and a relational approach to collaboration. The critical approach enabled me to infer changes in the dynamics of power from changes in culture and structures. The relational approach developed an interpretive understanding by creating a dialogue between diverse perspectives on cross-sector collaboration. I explain how my critical-relational approach extended the scope of the research to include a Wales-wide systemic enquiry. This enhanced the diversity of perspectives and developed both critical awareness and practical knowledge with my research partners.

The critical, relational and systemic elements of the research design meant I needed to take a reflexive stance to ensure each aspect contributed to the others and to consider my own

influence on the research. **Chapter Five** explains the evolving research design and multiple methods I used to support this reflexive stance. It explains my approach to data analysis and how this grounded my developing theoretical statement in the primary research. I set out how I developed five 'streams of enquiry' in a Wales-wide approach and how two core research groups and the PSB formed cross-sector networks through which to explore and develop collaborative relationships. I explain how I optimised diversity and participation in the research by creating interactions between the streams of enquiry and employing a range of action research methods. I discuss how developing a reflexive stance in the core groups created a culture of a critical-relational co-learning network, or 'community of practice' (CoP).

Chapters Six and Seven show how I fulfilled my objective of undertaking an in-depth case study. They discuss the findings of my action research with the two core research groups, the PSB and the Wales-wide enquiry and explain how I developed my theoretical position by building on and extending existing literature and governance theories. **Chapter Six** focusses on the action research with the first core research group between September 2017 and June 2018. It shows how the group's initial focus on a grassroots concern about the management of road verges for the benefit of wildlife developed into a strategy to develop community assets with benefits to public health and diverse community groups' interests. Through the detailed description of the road verges group's discussions and action, the chapter demonstrates how these participants created a CoP and became co-researchers by critically reflecting on their experiences with collaboration. I reflect on my meta-interpretation of the literature to analyse the characteristics of the core group which enabled them to enhance each other's interests. I draw on my review of governance theory to analyse how the group's experiences and the wider enquiry revealed the exercise of power through wider societal culture. I explain how I inferred a change in the dynamic of power from this interpretive and critical understanding.

Continued constraints on my co-researchers' collaborative action led us to seek to embed the new strategy and reflexive culture more widely in their organisations. In **Chapter Seven**, I explain how I helped to establish a second core research group which focussed on a strategic context of social prescribing. I give a rich description of the social prescribing group's efforts to develop a shared vision and to plan joint action between May 2018 and June 2019. I contrast these co-researchers' experiences with those of the PSB over the longer period of February 2017 to June 2019. Drawing on the wider streams of enquiry, I describe events associated with the Well-being Act which indicated changes in the culture and structures in Wales. I reflect on the existing literature to analyse the differences in culture of the core group and PSB and how

they interacted differently with the wider changes in Welsh society. With reference to governance theory, I show how this systemic interaction develops current understanding of the relationship between internal network culture and its external meta-governance. I conclude the chapter by explaining how the evidence substantiates my theoretical statement.

The final chapter of this thesis, **Chapter Eight**, reiterates the urgent need for collaborative action directed towards an ecologically resilient state of national well-being. I summarise how the previous chapters have contributed to the aims and objective of the research. I answer the overall research question and my research partners' pragmatic concerns by explaining the conditions under which cross-sector networks can sustain diverse interests in collaborative action which supports ecologically sustainable national well-being. I discuss how the thesis contributes to the field of cross-sector collaboration by addressing the conceptual questions arising from my meta-interpretation of the literature. I explain how the research design contributes to governance theory and practice by reconceptualising communities of practice and the relationship between cross-sector networks and their external societal environment. I conclude this thesis with a reflection on the extent of change created through this action research and possible avenues for future research to support cross-sector collaboration towards ecologically sustainable well-being at a wider societal scale.

Chapter Two Literature Review

A meta-interpretation

Introduction

In the opening chapter, I argued that cross-sector collaboration is critical to whether the aspirations of the Well-being Act might be realised. However, that chapter highlighted twin challenges: first, a lack of experience and guidance for public and third sectors on cross-sector collaboration and second, conflicting approaches to the treatment of the environment, either as an ecological necessity or as a resource for human benefit, in pursuit of the Well-being Act's aim of sustainable development. A desire to work in a different way but uncertainty about these challenges motivated two main partner organisations, North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) and the Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board (the PSB) to collaborate with me in research. My analysis of the Well-being Act's requirements informed our focus on cross-sector collaboration.

A first step in conducting action research in collaboration with these two organisations was to jointly form research questions that would address their immediate concerns. This meant I needed to develop my understanding of the large body of academic literature on cross-sector collaboration and of the research partners' professional practices and experiences. This chapter explains how I developed a participatory approach to the literature review that developed our mutual understanding and created three, increasingly abstract layers of synthesis. The first section explains the rationale for my review strategy of 'meta-interpretation' with a participatory approach, in which the research partners' meetings and our discussions, as well as conceptual questions arising from the developing synthesis, guided the process of literature review. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three Parts.

Part I of the meta-interpretation begins with the discussions with the research partners which defined the research area. It then synthesises an initial round of literature to form an overview of the main concepts and matters arising in cross-sector collaboration of the type envisaged by the Well-being Act. The literature depicts cross-sector collaboration as a system with interacting dimensions of interpersonal relations, interorganisational arrangements and the wider societal environment. Part I ends with a discussion of the conceptual questions that arose from this initial synthesis, the issues that were raised during my participation in my research partners and other meetings, and how these conceptual and practical issues guided the search for literature.

Part II increases the level of conceptual abstraction by drawing out the contrast between accounts of collaboration as the management of either interorganisational arrangements or interpersonal relationships, or the exercise of power. The studies reviewed highlight the conflict between hierarchical forms of accountability which impose a dominant partner's interests on collaborative decision-making and political forms of accountability which include multiple interests in a negotiated consensus. Part II finishes with an account of the meetings with my research partners and how they led to the formation of pragmatic research questions focussed on negotiating the tension between hierarchical and political accountability.

In Part III, I increase the level of abstraction by turning to the range of theories underpinning the approaches in Part II. This Part theorises the contingent dynamics of power relations and how these can shift from exerting hierarchical control to supporting emancipatory practice. I identify the limitations of past and current literature to guide the research partners' action or answer their research questions.

I conclude this chapter by setting the subject of cross-sector collaboration in the wider research field of governance theory, in preparation for the development of a theoretical frame and overall research question in Chapter Three.

The review strategy

To understand the main concepts and issues which are pertinent to cross-sector collaboration, and to understand the research partners' fields of professional practice, I looked for an approach that would incorporate both academic and professional knowledge, provoke research questions and remain open to the possibility of theory-building if the review revealed a gap in this area. Conventional approaches to systematic literature reviews take a linear approach with pre-defined research questions and parameters for the search strategy (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006, pp. 27–56). Even where there is encouragement to 'take account of stakeholders' views' this is assumed to be at a stage prior to the literature review (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006, p. 31). However, this review needed to define research questions by building my and the research partners' understanding of the uncertainties presented by collaboration and the Well-being Act. I therefore needed to involve my partners in the review process, jointly choosing issues to guide the direction of the search.

I searched for review strategies designed specifically for the synthesis of qualitative studies, anticipating that much of the literature would take this form, but remaining open to the inclusion of relevant quantitative studies. Although aimed at research in health-related fields,

Barnett-Page and Thomas' (2009) critical review of methods to synthesise qualitative research provided a useful overview, raising several factors for consideration in the choice of review strategy. Their summary of a strategy called *meta-interpretation*, although regarded at the time of publication as a 'fledgling approach' (Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009, p. 5), met my requirements. Later work has confirmed the value of meta-interpretation as a systematic process that 'goes beyond a summary of the data and attempts to build upon the literature to create new, higher-order constructs' (Xiao and Watson, 2019, p. 100).

To address multiple issues in the synthesis of qualitative research, Mike Weed sets out seven 'fundamental features' of meta-interpretation (Weed, 2008, p. 23), which I incorporated into my review strategy as follows. First, I became an '*active interpretive agent*' in the process of review. Just as the interpretive studies I included in the review sought to maximise differences in perspectives to understand how meanings are mediated by beliefs and values (Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009), I actively sought studies to add to the diversity of standpoints in the synthesis in a 'celebration of differences' (Weed, 2008, p. 16). Second, this process meant my synthesis of the reviewed literature constructed '*an interpretation*' but not the only interpretation or perspective on cross-sector collaboration.

Third, the emphasis on maximising difference to understand how context affects interpretation led to the '*ideographic*' formation of inclusion criteria. To maximise diversity, I did not select studies based on a prior consideration of what was important or confined to a narrowly defined methodology. Instead, I played an active role in the selection as well as interpretation of studies, determining inclusion rather than exclusion criteria. Fourth, my criteria for selection were based on studies' relevance and diversity, which I determined according to a '*theoretical sampling*' approach (following Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach, like that of grounded theory, created iterative rounds of review. I began by selecting a small number of studies to develop 'theoretical sensitivity' and maximise the variation in studies' contexts (Weed, 2008, p. 19). Each further round contained studies that addressed questions arising from previous rounds and issues arising in my research partners' experiences, refining ideas and increasing the level of abstraction of the analysis. Fifth, this approach placed the focus on '*meaning in context*', to select studies that maximised the diversity of contexts and emergent meanings. These contextual differences included the research sites, but also the academic conditions including the time of the study, prevailing theories, political context, and methodological and disciplinary context (Weed, 2008, p. 20).

Sixth, the focus on contextual meanings meant that I used the authors' own '*interpretations as the "raw data"*' for my synthesis. This avoided problems with access to primary data, loss of contextual background, and the 'triple hermeneutic' of adding my interpretation to that of the original researcher and participants (Weed, 2008, p. 21). As these interpretations are explicitly reported in studies, they are readily available for others to access, contributing to the integrity of the review. Finally, I formed a '*transparent audit trail*' to enhance the 'trustworthiness' of the synthesis (Weed, 2008, p. 22 citing Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). In this chapter and its associated technical document[8], I explain the reasons for the choice or exclusion of studies, give a summary analysis of each iteration of the review and explain the process by which concepts for further sampling were chosen. I summarise these choices in the form of a 'statement of applicability' which draws the boundary of applicability of the meta-interpretation (Weed, 2008, p. 23).

In summary, Mike Weed sets out the process of meta-interpretation as a cycle of stages based on the central principle of inductive theory building which synthesises meaning in context, has emergent criteria for inclusion and exclusion of articles, maximises variation and employs theoretical sampling to reach saturation of concepts (Weed, 2008, pp. 23–25). Figure 5 illustrates the key stages and principles of meta-interpretation in a simplification of Weed's (2008) own diagrammatic representation of the process.

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[8] See Appendix 2: Search strategy and criteria

Stages

- Identify research area
- Identify initial illustrative studies
- Thematic and context analysis
- Conceptual issues
- Review inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Iterative search
- Write meta-interpretation and emergent insights
- Statement of applicability

Principles

- *Inductive approach*
- *Maximum variation*
- *Meaning in context*
- *Emergent*
- *Theory building*
- *Theoretical sampling*

Figure 5 Key stages and principles of meta-interpretation (adapted from Weed, 2008 p.24)

I adapted these stages to enhance the involvement of my research partners and extended the period of review into the fieldwork. Thus, as I increased the level of abstraction of the interpretive analysis, I maintained the relevance to these partners' concerns and professional practice. My choice of cross-sector collaboration in the context of the Well-being Act *identified the research area* rather than initial hypothesis for the literature review, 'like the commencement of a grounded theory investigation' (Weed, 2008, p. 23). To *identify a small number of initial studies*, I sought 'expert input' as recommended by Petticrew and Roberts (2006, p.51 citing Reeves et al., 2002), requesting reading lists from a more experienced researcher. From these lists, I chose seven articles to maximise variation of provenance, publication and research context (the inclusion and exclusion criteria are detailed in Appendix 2). *Thematic and context analysis* of this initial round of studies focussed on identifying the main concepts and matters arising in cross-sector collaboration and familiarising myself and my research partners with the terms commonly used. *Conceptual issues* arising from this broad overview formed *inclusion criteria* for the second round of review, with studies selected according to their relevance and to maximise the diversity of perspectives.

The principle of diversity applied not only to the selection of literature, but also to my perspective as reviewer. To be reflexive about my own inclinations and assumptions (about the desirability of collaboration and the contribution of the environment to well-being, for example) I benefitted from juxtaposing my views with those of others. All the time I was reviewing literature I attended my research partners' and other organisations' meetings held in the context of the Well-being Act. My observation of and participation in these meetings helped me to understand the main matters concerning them about cross-sector collaboration. Explicit discussion of the developing literature review with these partners added to the diversity of perspectives and enhanced our mutual understanding of the academic concepts and professional issues. Thus, the second and subsequent searches in the *iterative cycle* were informed by the conceptual questions arising in each round as well as by the experiences of the research partners.

I have created a transparent audit trail for the meta-interpretation through the combination of Parts I, II and III of this chapter, the reflective conversations with my research partners, and technical appendix. The three Parts of this chapter summarise the *meta-interpretation and emergent insights*. Appendix 2 details the search criteria in each round of review and lists the literature I selected, including the theories drawn upon in Part III. The conclusion to this chapter forms the *statement of applicability* of the meta-interpretation within the wider field of governance theory.

PART I The main concepts of cross-sector collaboration
Identifying the research area

In the early days of the Well-being Act the main research partners, NWWT and the PSB, were hopeful that it offered a strategic opportunity and a chance to work in a different way. On the other hand, their lack of capacity to act collaboratively and the Act's ambiguous treatment of the environment caused each organisation to hesitate. Our introductory conversations led to the partners' agreement to take part in this research, and I began to attend their meetings and sought opportunities to attend other forums meeting in the early days of operation of the Act.

Key individuals at the partner organisations helped me to understand their main preoccupations and experiences of cross-sector collaboration. The PSB Partnerships Manager (Fieldnotes, 09/11/2016) emphasised the PSB's attention to the organisational arrangements for their joint work. She explained how the PSB had held a series of meetings and workshops since the Act came into force, in April 2016, solely to agree their Terms of Reference. These discussions had not gone into any detail on the requirement to collaborate. For this, amongst other issues, the

PSB planned to draw upon the practical experience of lead officers in each organisation to support the representatives on the Board (who were mainly at Chief Executive level or similar). A workshop with lead officers was planned for January 2017, nearly a year after the Act came into force. At NWWT, the Fundraising Director and project managers spoke of the need to work with public bodies but were focussed initially on finding ways to evaluate multiple outcomes of their projects, in anticipation of the requirements of funders and other collaborating organisations (email correspondence, 08/2016–10/2016). Their concentration on physical and mental health outcomes was further encouraged by a literature review from the University of Essex on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts (the UK umbrella organisation). The review made recommendations to public bodies and third sector organisations to take account of the public health and community well-being benefits of nature-based interventions (Bragg *et al.*, 2015). Elsewhere a cross-sector network in North Wales, Social Value Cymru (SVC) was established by the county voluntary councils in September 2016. There was agreement in an early meeting of that network that the Well-being Act and Social Services Act[9] in Wales afforded its members the opportunity to work together to influence local decision-making. Again, however the focus of SVC's meetings was on understanding how to evaluate projects rather than planning collaborative action (SVC rolling minutes, 12/2016).

The first round of review showed how these preoccupations with organisational structures and evaluation processes were explained by studies of the factors affecting cross-sector collaboration.

Main concepts: Complexity

Two widely cited[10] literature reviews were my starting point for the meta-interpretation. Each defines collaboration in a way that is consistent with the requirements of the Well-being Act, although they are markedly different from each other. The first review defined collaboration as 'the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately' (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006, p. 44). The second 'meta-analytical study' defined collaborative governance as 'a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or

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[9] See Introduction Chapter for a discussion of the Social Services Act
[10] According to Google Scholar citations index, accessed 07/07/2021 (Ansell and Gash, 2008) has 5977 citations to date and (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006) 2689 citations

implement public policy or manage public programs or assets' (Ansell and Gash, 2008, p. 544). Combining the former emphasis on joint action with the latter on collective governing, means these reviews cover a broad spectrum of the literature on collaboration without extensive overlap. Indeed, apart from a single reference in Ansell and Gash (2008) to Bryson and Crosby's much earlier work (a book on leadership, published in 1992), the two reviews do not cross-reference each other and have only two references in common.

Despite this distinction, each article depicts cross-sector collaboration as a diagram of multiple factors, grouped in various categories. Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) present an 'organising framework' for the study of these categories and factors (see Figure 6).
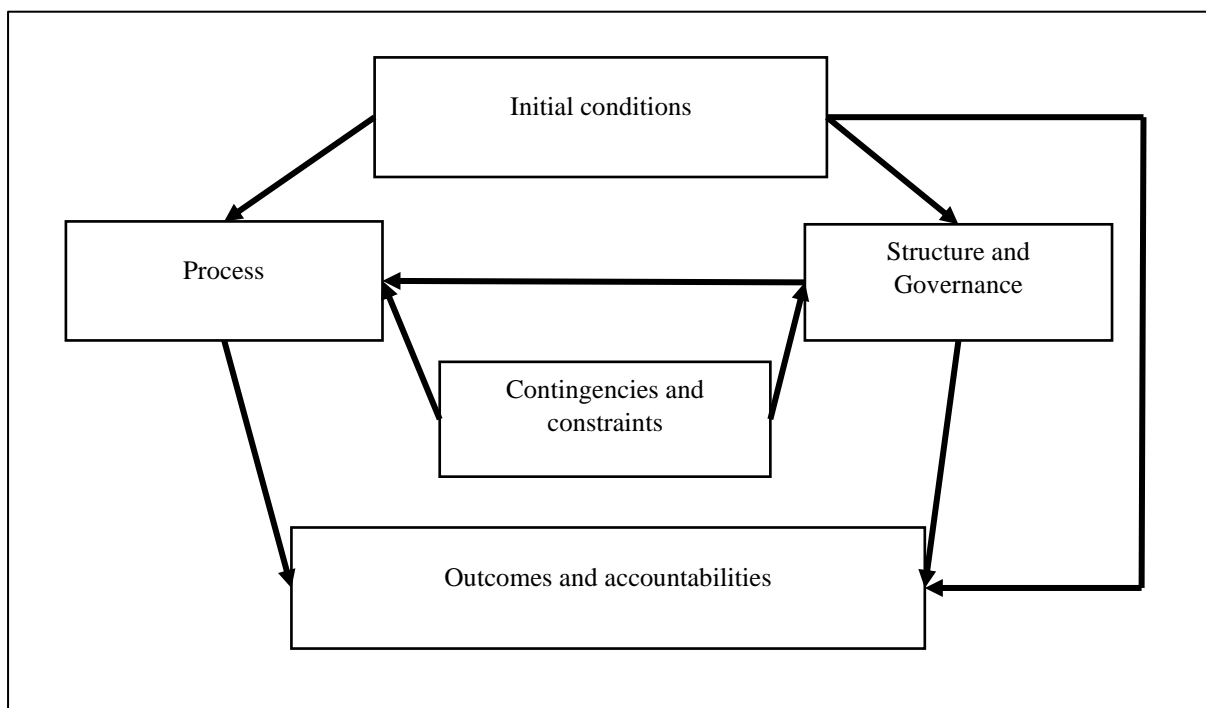
Figure 6 A framework for understanding cross-sector collaboration, (adapted from Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006)

In the diagram, the authors use arrows to imply influences *amongst* these categories but do not justify the implied causation in the text except for the 'contingencies and constraints.' Instead, they focus on the interaction of factors *within* each domain to make propositions about the anticipated additional benefits, or 'public value' from collaboration compared to single sector working. Their proposition rests on the argument that combining the logics of the different sectors (encompassing multiple aims such as cost efficiency and meeting diverse needs) leads to a sense of contributing to the common good. In turn this creates a 'regime of mutual gain' defined as 'sets of implicit or explicit principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures

around which actors' expectations converge in a given area' (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006, p. 51 citing Krasner 1983).

The authors make a series of propositions about each category in the framework. The *'initial conditions'* that motivate collaboration include the presence of convenors to bring people together and a belief that single sectors cannot fully address particular social challenges. The *'process'* of collaboration responds to the quality of collaborators' relationships with each other and with external organisations and their consequent capacity to access resources. The choice of *'structures and governance'* depends on the purpose of collaboration, and this relates to the environment at the time of formation as well as the aims, values and logics of the member organisations. On the other hand, *'contingencies and constraints'* which include 'the type of collaboration, power imbalances among members, and competing institutional logics within the collaboration' (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006, p. 50), affect other domains through their mediating effects on levels of conflict, trust, leadership and legitimacy of the relationships amongst collaborators.

The review of collaborative governance by Ansell and Gash (2008) supports many of these propositions, producing a similar diagrammatic depiction of a contingency model of cross-sector collaboration, see Figure 7.
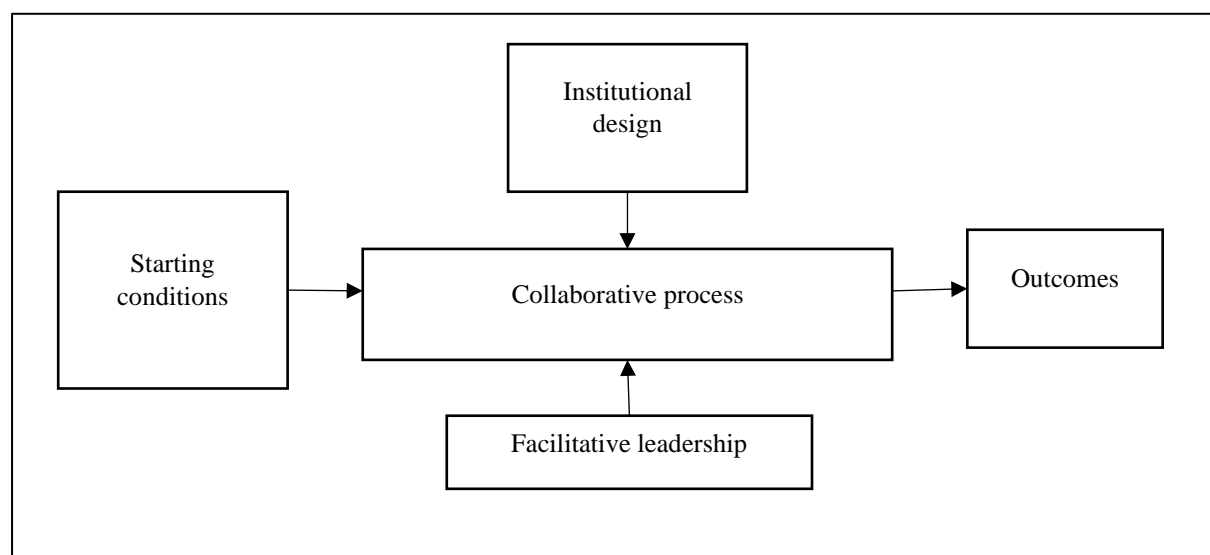
Figure 7 Framework of collaborative governance, (adapted from Ansell and Gash, 2008)

'Starting conditions' reflect the earlier review's 'initial conditions', *'institutional design'* contains many elements of 'structure and governance', and the *'collaborative process'* has a similar focus on the quality of relationships and the regime of mutual gain or decision-making process. The mediating role of 'contingencies and constraints' of the first model are reflected

in Ansell and Gash's (2008) finding that *'facilitative leadership'* also mediates the effects of power imbalance, resource asymmetry and weak interdependence by establishing good communication processes and relationships of trust.

Both articles emphasise the complexity of the collaborative process, in terms of 'feedback effects' amongst the categories as well as within them (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006, p. 44). Ansell and Gash (2008, p.4) describe how they felt 'overwhelmed by the complexity of the collaborative process.' However, and partly because of this complexity, both reviews are limited in their capacity to guide cross-sector collaboration. First, there is difficulty in distinguishing and defining inputs, process and outcomes for accountability purposes. In the first 'framework', the authors accept that they rely on the assumption that changes in each domain can be traced to 'specific actors and interventions' (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006, p. 51). Secondly, the 'contingency model' (Ansell and Gash, 2008) has no start event or dynamic interaction of factors over time, so is better described as a typology. Thirdly, as Ansell and Gash (2008) acknowledge, their review does not demonstrate a proven link between the domains of cross-sector collaboration and the outcomes, as few comparative studies of alternative processes are available.

Main concepts: Interpersonal relationships
Both literature reviews identify the quality of relationships as a key aspect of collaboration despite not emphasising this in either diagrammatic framework. Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) argue that the quality of trust, management of conflict and power balance are important for the collaborative process and that 'contingencies and constraints' affect each domain of collaboration *through* their effects on these qualities. Ansell and Gash (2008) also recognise the effect of *each* domain on the quality of relationships and hence on the process. 'Starting conditions' influence the quality of the collaborative process through their effect on 'distrust, disrespect, and outright antagonism' (Ansell and Gash, 2008, p. 550) and on the sense of interdependence, balance of power and commitment. 'Institutional design', the ways the collaborators organise themselves, affects the sense of legitimacy and inclusiveness. The 'collaborative process' itself is argued to have a cyclical, self-reinforcing nature which 'depend[s] on achieving a virtuous cycle between communication, trust, commitment, understanding, and outcomes' (Ansell and Gash, 2008, p. 558).

These qualities of trust, respect, interdependence, power balance, commitment, legitimacy and inclusiveness therefore emerge as a central focus for cross-sector collaboration. However, the articles do not explore the possible links between these interpersonal relationships and the

outcomes of collaboration. It is not clear whether or how these qualities change the effects of other domains of factors on collaborative processes and outcomes.

Main concepts: Communities of practice

Addressing the link between internal processes and outcomes, the next article in this initial selection also reflects the complexity discussed above and broadens understanding of the purposes of collaboration. The article extends an earlier 'systematic, qualitative grounded theory' study of collaborative administrative networks (Agranoff, 2008, p. 322) which investigated the challenges for public managers of 14 such Public Management Networks (PMNs) in the US central states. The selected (2008) article goes into greater depth than the earlier study, to examine networks' performance. It links the internal processes that facilitate shared learning in networks with their outcomes through the production of 'human capital' (Agranoff, 2008, p. 329).

The author defines PMNs as 'formal and informal structures comprised of representatives from governmental and nongovernmental agencies working interdependently to jointly formulate and implement policies and programs, usually through their respective organizations' (Agranoff, 2008, pp. 322–323). Agranoff's (2008) study finds that where these diverse network infrastructures enable non-hierarchical knowledge exchange amongst technical specialists from multiple sectors or fields, they form 'communities of practice' (CoP). Agranoff (2008, p. 333) defines these as 'self-organizing systems that share the capacity to create and use knowledge through informal learning and mutual engagement', building on earlier work identifying these professional knowledge exchange communities (Agranoff, 2008, p. 327 citing Thomas 2003). Whereas the reviews (above) place the qualities of interpersonal relationships as central to the collaborative process, Agranoff (2008) treats trust, a sense of belonging and shared vision as outcomes of the formation of human capital in the CoP.

Human capital is characterised by knowledge creation, peer learning across disciplines, collaborative skills development, networking and political or decision-making influence (Agranoff, 2008). The characteristics of human capital form *personal* benefits of collaborative skills which also deliver the *organisation's* outcomes of enhanced learning, increased capacity and access to resources, the *network's* outcomes of a forum to share ideas and resources, and *wider social* outcomes of knowledge, resources, policy and projects. The author argues that CoPs facilitate human capital when they are supported by organisations and networks to form a community with a sense of belonging. This includes support to work across disciplines, form

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community infrastructures and develop systems for sharing information within the community and externally.

The qualitative data from the study of PMNs selects 22 projects to demonstrate how the development of human capital produces these outcomes (Agranoff, 2008, pp. 329–332). Regardless of the purpose of the PMN to take joint action or to formulate policy, each produced shared learning and knowledge; 'it is the exchange of human capital and learning that is fundamental to all networks' (Agranoff, 2008, p. 330). The author gives an example of a rural community network (in Shenandoah, Ohio) which brought together professionals from the fields of finance, engineering, legal departments, health, rural development and manufacturing. A long process of interdisciplinary knowledge exchange produced a solution to the challenge of providing rural drainage systems. The solution was viable technically, met legal and regulatory requirements, was feasible to construct, attracted funding and was piloted (Agranoff, 2008, pp. 328–329). This case illustrates the article's central argument that 'human capital' when used in a 'free-flowing, non-hierarchical way' maximises creativity and flexibility towards solving a problem (Agranoff, 2008, p. 329).

Whereas Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) refer to the conditions leading to converging expectations, or shared mission as a 'regime', in Agranoff's (2008) analysis of CoPs this regime is a process rather than a static set of conditions. Therefore, I use the term '*collaborative process*', following Ansell and Gash (2008) and Agranoff (2008) to describe the internal conditions that affect both the quality of interpersonal relationships and the formation of human capital. I propose to use the term '*interorganisational arrangements*' to describe the institutional form of the collaborating group – in anticipation of a broader category of collaborative arrangements that encompasses the CoP amongst others.

Main concepts: A system framework
The articles reviewed so far have categorised the complex factors affecting cross-sector collaboration and emphasised the concepts of interpersonal relationships and the production of human capital in the CoP. To explore the relationships between these categories and concepts, I turn next to a system-like[11] 'framework for collaborative governance' (Emerson, Nabatchi

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[11] These authors do not define 'system'. See, for example (Jackson, 1991) for a discussion of the development of hard and soft systems thinking and critical systems thinking. What they depict is a system-like interaction of multiple aspects of societal life that are not well-defined but have resonance with daily experience, i.e., the 'wider system', the 'regime' and the interpersonal and inter-organisational 'dynamics', or relationships.

and Balogh, 2012) which draws upon the reviews considered above and Agranoff's wider work on collaborative networks.

The 'integrative framework' groups the multiple factors affecting cross-sector collaboration in three 'nested dimensions' of internal 'collaboration dynamics', the 'collaborative governance regime' and 'system context' (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012, pp. 1–6). The article focusses on the internal dynamics, driven by interacting factors of 'principled engagement', 'shared motivation' and 'capacity for joint action' (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012, pp. 10–15). The authors argue that the communicative and relational process of *principled engagement* develops a sense of shared purpose which enables the resolution of problems and conflict. They identify the essential elements of this process as inclusive, fair and balanced representation of interests in discourse. Such discourse enhances *motivation* and the qualities of interpersonal relationships of 'mutual trust, understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment' (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012, p. 13). The collaborative group's *capacity for joint action* emerges from the interaction of the communicative and interpersonal processes with the interorganisational factors that Agranoff (2008) identified as producing human capital; that is, the 'institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources' (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012, p. 14). The authors argue that institutional structures are responsive rather than hierarchical, leadership adapts to the needs of the group, knowledge is co-developed, and resources are acquired through exchange amongst the network members.

Thus, interorganisational arrangements and interpersonal relationships interact to enhance collaborative capacity. However, Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012) provide limited insight into the interaction of these internal dynamics with the wider system, confining themselves to describing the environmental, legal and socioeconomic influences and constraints on collaboration. Although the reviews discussed above give more detail on the nested dimensions, they too are limited in their capacity to explain the interactions between them. Bryson, Crosby and Stone's (2006) review lists the external factors that *initiate* collaboration including resource dependencies, wider institutional norms, public policy challenges, and facilitative factors such as influential individuals. However, they do not discuss how these different factors *affect* the governance arrangements, internal processes and outcomes of collaborating networks or potential feedback effects. Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 555) consider how facilitative leadership can build interpersonal factors and how institutional design facilitates collaborative relationships. However, they do not discuss the influence of the wider system on these institutions nor on the capacity of leadership to enhance relationships.

Like all these reviews, Agranoff (2008) also focusses on the effects of *internal* processes and arrangements on outcomes rather than focussing on the effects of the *external* societal context on processes and institutions.

Main concepts: Linking mechanisms

To understand how the wider social environment interacts with the interpersonal relationships and interorganisational arrangements, I consider next three studies from different perspectives. The studies examine the conditions for collaboration from the standpoints of meta-governance, which is the management of governance networks, (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) and alternatively, of third sector organisations (Mohan, 2011; Macmillan, 2013). They point to three mechanisms of accountability, funding and social discourses that emanate from the wider social environment to influence organisational structures and internal processes.

Eva Sørensen and Jacob Torfing have co-authored multiple articles in the field of democratic governance as long-standing colleagues in the School of Governance at Roskilde University, Denmark. They define[12] collaborative 'governance networks' as:

> A stable articulation of mutually dependent, but operationally autonomous actors from state, market and civil society, who interact through conflict-ridden negotiations that take place within an institutionalized framework of rules, norms, shared knowledge and social imaginaries; facilitate self-regulated policy making in the shadow of hierarchy; and contribute to the production of 'public value' in a broad sense of problem definitions, visions, ideas, plans and concrete regulations that are deemed relevant to broad sections of the population. (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 236)

This definition adds qualitative detail to the action or policy-focussed definitions of earlier articles in this chapter by incorporating the qualities of interpersonal relations as a characteristic of networks, with its reference to conflict and negotiation. It adds detail to the 'public value' or first, second and third order effects identified by Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006). It offers a broader category within which to locate the CoP as an institution distinguished by its rules, norms, and 'social imaginary' (or worldview) as well as its capacity for shared knowledge. The article's focus on meta-governance, which the authors define as 'higher-order governance transcending the concrete forms of governance through which social and economic life is shaped, regulated and transformed' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 245) helps explain how wider societal processes affect the internal relations and procedures of collaboration.

Sørensen and Torfing (2009) argue that this higher-order management of collaborative networks is aimed at achieving dominant European norms of effectiveness and democratic

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[12] I explain this definition in greater detail in Chapter Three (*democratic network governance*)

processes. The authors propose four tools of meta-governance through which to achieve these twin and potentially conflicting aims (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, pp. 246–247). Each tool focusses on a different aspect of the collaborative process and organisational arrangements. 'Network design' affects the membership and institutional procedures whereas 'network framing' is a discursive technique that constrains the goals and legal and financial legitimacy of the network. 'Network management' focusses on the collaborating group's relationships and resources, while 'network participation' is direct involvement in the group to influence the policy agenda. Despite the difference in focus, each tool makes the network accountable to a higher authority. Network design and framing are directed at determining the choice of network members and defining '*the basic parameters*' for the network's interaction with policy, whereas network management and direct participation are employed 'when the networked policy output strays too far from *what is deemed acceptable* by the meta-governors' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 247 added emphasis). Meta-governance therefore operates directly and indirectly through a mechanism of accountability to affect the internal processes and interorganisational arrangements of collaborating groups, the central nested dimensions of the system framework.

Papers from the Third Sector Research Centre[13] (TSRC), a leading organisation in academic research into the third sector in the UK, reveal two further mechanisms linking the wider system and the collaborative process. The two working papers selected for this review relate to its first funding period and draw on a qualitative longitudinal study (Macmillan, 2013) and quantitative work (Mohan, 2011) on third sector organisations in the context of the concurrent political initiative 'Big Society'[14]. Critically examining this concept from the experience of third sector organisations, the working papers show how social discourses (and counter narratives) link changes in government policy to the motivations for and practices of collaboration and how funding acts as a mechanism to constrain the role and capacity of the third sector. They therefore demonstrate the effects of meta-governance, specifically the use of tools of 'network

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[13] The Centre is located at University of Birmingham and has operated in a series of funding phases, the first running from 2009 to 2014 and since then with continuing support from the University and a range of partners. See https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/tsrc/about-us/index.aspx accessed 11/07/2021

[14] The Big Society initiative was launched by the Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition Government in the UK in 2010. Prime Minister David Cameron called it 'a huge culture change...where people, in their everyday lives[...] don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face...but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities.' It focussed on people, businesses and charities undertaking tasks historically associated with government, and was set in the context of 'the biggest budget deficit in the G20'. It portrayed a role for government to enable social action, public service reform and community empowerment. (Cameron, 2010).

framing' which 'seeks to determine the political goals, fiscal conditions, legal basis and discursive story-line of the networks' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 246).

Third sector organisations respond pragmatically to the multiple and conflicting ways the collaborative project of Big Society is portrayed by government and national media (Macmillan, 2013). In their pragmatic response, third sector organisations align themselves with the government's portrayal of Big Society and with or against others in their sector, positioning themselves to take advantage of funding opportunities. Thus, they voluntarily take part in collaborative arrangements but are at the same time constrained by government control of the conditions for their joint action. This empirical data bears out the assertion that meta-governors use a combination of 'technologies of agency' and 'technologies of performance' to shape the conditions for collaboration (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 246 citing Dean, 1999). The former technologies create collaborative networks of (ostensibly) free and consenting actors, and the latter retain public authorities' control by constraining the operating environment, including access to resources.

First meta-interpretation and further questions

In my review of the first round of literature, I used the framework of a system to explain the main concepts of cross-sector collaboration and their interactions, forming an initial synthesis and meta-interpretation of the literature. Conceptually, the system of cross-sector collaboration is described as *complex* and *non-linear* with interacting factors located in multiple domains. Adopting various terms from the literature, I described these domains as the *collaborative process*, *interorganisational arrangements* and *wider societal environment*. The system of cross-sector collaboration is expected to deliver a range of *performance outcomes*. Within the collaborative process *facilitative leadership* supports *communicative* and *relational practices*. These practices interact with *interpersonal relationships* to form characteristics of trust, respect, interdependence, power balance, commitment, legitimacy and inclusiveness. Interorganisational arrangements form an institutional culture of rules, norms and worldviews. These institutions are agued to support a communicative and relational collaborative process and generate *human capital* where they facilitate the formation of *communities of practice*. Linking the wider societal environment to the institutions, processes and relationships in cross-sector collaboration are *meta-governance* mechanisms of *accountability, social discourses* and *funding* streams. Establishing the accountability of collaborative networks to a higher authority both directly and indirectly influences the internal processes and interorganisational

arrangements. Social discourses and funding streams motivate collaboration but can also constrain the capacity for joint action.

The initial meta-interpretation thus helped me to understand the research partners' concerns about cross-sector collaboration. The complexity of interacting factors and effects of funding, prevalent discourses and accountability to constrain choices over joint action explained the partners' uncertainty over adopting new ways of working. However, the literature reviewed was limited in its capacity to guide collaborating partners' action, prompting conceptual questions for further exploration. In addition, my participation in the research partners' meetings and other forums identified experiences that were not adequately addressed by the broad concepts set out in the system framework. I explore next how these conceptual questions and experiential issues formed the search criteria for a second round of literature review.

Conceptual questions

The reviewed literature emphasises the importance of relational communicative processes and shows how external management affects the interorganisational arrangements and processes of collaboration. However, it is limited in its capacity to explain how collaborating partners establish beneficial internal dynamics and conducive interorganisational arrangements, and whether and how they can change the effects of external management. I focussed on understanding two aspects of these interacting dimensions.

The first aspect was the interaction of the external system and outcomes with internal dynamics and organisational arrangements. The reviews of literature (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006; Ansell and Gash, 2008) and study of PMNs (Agranoff, 2008) imply a flow from internal processes to external outcomes. Other articles reviewed posit a variety of expected outcomes that motivate collaboration, including expectations of effectiveness and democracy (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) and averting the effects of funding cuts (Macmillan, 2013). The first aspect to explore was therefore how these external conditions and expectations of outcomes affect the relational and organisational aspects.

The second aspect was the interaction between interpersonal relationships and the other domains of the system. Communicative processes within interorganisational arrangements of a CoP are shown to enhance interpersonal relationships and collaborative outcomes. However, it is not clear how wider societal influences affect the development of a CoP or how communicative processes are established. Neither is it clear whether and how these internal

relationships can affect the interorganisational arrangements or the expectations of external management.

Incorporating these issues, I posed the conceptual question to guide further literature review, '*how do interpersonal relationships and interorganisational arrangements interact with the anticipated outcomes of cross-sector collaboration?*'

Research partners' experiences

Building on our introductory conversations which identified the research area[15], I began to participate in some meetings of my research partner, NWWT and continued to discuss my research with the Partnerships Manager of my other partner, the PSB. At the same time, I undertook the first round of the literature review. As the review continued into its second and subsequent rounds, I received permission to attend the PSB meetings, continued to participate NWWT's meetings and negotiated access to other organisations and forums. In this way, I sought opportunities to observe relationships and processes within collaborating groups, the organisational arrangements and the wider social and political context, guided by the main concepts in my review of the literature. I explain in greater detail in Chapter Five how the principles of systemic action research guided this participatory approach. At the end of the first round of review, these regular meetings provided opportunities to understand how the research partners' everyday experiences related to the system framework of cross-sector collaboration. As my relationship with each research partner and these wider networks was in its early stages and at different levels of development, I did not have an opportunity for a formal discussion of the literature review to the same extent in each setting. However, reflection on these meetings and discussion with some members of the groups raised issues for further exploration.

To help me understand the PSB's approach to its first well-being assessment, the Partnerships Manager invited me to attend a community-based discussion of the draft assessment that she was largely responsible for organising (Partnerships Manager, 23/11/2016). Despite a clear desire to engage the public, this session, and others like it were poorly attended, although the Partnerships Manager claimed greater participation in an online survey. At the meeting I attended, a member of the public suggested Councillors should speak on behalf of the wider public rather than hold such engagement events. Staff attending from public bodies were interested in how the PSB would operate, especially how they would set priorities, how these would be scrutinised and how they would work together to achieve them (Fieldnotes,

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[15] See Chapter One for discussion of these conversations

23/11/2016). There was no opportunity to discuss the findings of the literature review at this small event, but the Partnerships Manager suggested I also talk to the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) representative on the PSB as an enthusiastic member who understood the ecological concerns of the research partner, NWWT. I succeeded in arranging a meeting very early in the New Year due to less pressure on the NRW manager's diary at that time of year. As I had not previously had discussions with this member or yet attended meetings of the PSB, I decided not to formally refer to the literature review, but to keep the conversation open and explorative. Our conversation showed her focus at the PSB was on forming ideas for joint activities, rather than on strategic assessments and plans. She explained how being present in the same room as other public bodies was helping her to understand how the work of NRW related to that of others. As she discussed her work at NRW, her focus was on public use of natural spaces rather than their ecological qualities. Although she was able to name current collaborative projects with some public bodies, she was not able to state any with NWWT or other environmental third sector organisations (PSB_NRW, 04/01/2017).

To help me understand NWWT's approach to working with other organisations and their main concerns as a charitable body, the People and Wildlife manager invited me to a committee comprising a trustee, staff, members and volunteers (PWC, 05/12/2016). This People and Wildlife Committee (PWC) was in the process of clarifying its role as an advisory forum for the manager and the emphasis was on the contribution of members and volunteers as a source of ideas and help. Much of the meeting consisted of a series of project updates. These included frequent references to partnership working with private sector organisations, community groups and public bodies (mainly schools), but with a focus on seeking new sources of funding to continue the activities. To aid our discussion of the system framework of the literature review, I shared a nested diagram of personal relations, organisational processes and wider social influences that I had created. I asked the members to suggest a project where the Trust collaborated with others and the immediate suggestion was 'Living Landscapes.'[16] As we discussed this strategy, I made notes on the diagram making sure the members saw what was being written so that they could question or change it. Later comments reassured me that the group had found my approach helpful, '[a]t our last meeting we had a lady preparing for her Doctorate and I was impressed with the way she was going about it' (PWC email correspondence, 18/03/2017). Our discussion drew attention to the lead role of the Wildlife Trust in collaborative projects, the tendency to work with other, smaller voluntary groups rather

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[16] See above, pp.18 - 19 for an explanation of People and Wildlife and Living Landscapes strategies

than public bodies, and the importance of good leaders to motivate people to work together. The constant need for funding was coupled with a tendency for collaboration to be limited to the exchange of funds from a larger public or private sector organisation in return for specified work from the Wildlife Trust.

I continued to attend the cross-sector forum, Social Value Cymru (SVC) to understand a broader range of organisations' experiences of collaboration. The second meeting (SVC, 01/12/2016) continued the emphasis of the first on the use of evaluation in third sector organisations, with a focus on SROI (Social Return on Investment). It reiterated many of the issues arising in the PSB and NWWT meetings. A project case study encouraged the use of co-production, the involvement of people directly in designing and delivering their own social care, claiming that this was 'a transfer of power to the individual.' Evaluation was regarded as helping public bodies to decide which organisations and projects to 'commission' (which was later explained as contracting and funding). I was given the opportunity to introduce my research, which I did by tailoring a presentation and discussion to the main topic of the meeting about how this cross-sector forum could potentially influence policymakers to take social value into account when commissioning third sector organisations. Although this restricted direct discussion of the literature review, it helped the research be relevant to the forum's concerns. The ensuing discussion raised concerns from public bodies about being able to trust the information they received from the third sector, concerns from the third sector that they were not included in decision-making forums and a general need to keep in touch and understand each other's work better. As I explained my research relationship with the NWWT, the commissioning officer for social care from a local authority realised the potential to commission environmental groups to deliver activities to enhance physical and mental well-being. This seemed to be a novel idea to the group's members, and they invited NWWT through me, to attend future meetings to become familiar with their work.

From these discussions, I identified six practical issues for further search to add to the conceptual issues already identified from the first round of review. First, the desire of both sectors to increase citizens and volunteers' participation and engagement. Second, an understanding of the pressures on public bodies to achieve greater outcomes together than individually. Third, the tension between strategic planning and focussing on practical joint activities. Fourth, the exchange of resources between larger and smaller organisations and the associated evaluation and commissioning process. Fifth, an apparent lack of familiarity within each sector and across sectors of other organisations' strategies and activities and opportunities

to work together. Sixth, the role of leadership in the collaborative process. In the second Part of this chapter, I synthesise literature that helped explain these issues as well as the conceptual question raised by the articles reviewed in Part I.

PART II Managerial and power accounts of cross-sector collaboration

To search for articles that explain the linkages between domains of the system framework, I focussed on the issues arising in the research partners' meetings and other cross-sector forums. My underlying assumption here was that the system is like an ecological system, in which each part affects the others and experiences are the emergent effects of the interactions of the linking mechanisms and domains of the system. This second part of the literature review[17] therefore includes articles that address both the conceptual questions and practical issues identified above. It also includes other literature reviewed during the period of fieldwork in response to issues arising in the research partners' and others' experiences (Chapters Six and Seven clarify the context for these latter issues).

I organised the literature into three conceptual categories to explain how the dimensions of the system of cross-sector collaboration are linked. I grouped the first two categories as *managerial accounts of cross-sector collaboration* and divided them according to the focus of management. In the first category, the articles reviewed focus on the effects of the *management of interorganisational arrangements,* using formal rules and institutions to facilitate collaboration. The second category consists of articles which shift the focus to the *management of interpersonal relationships*, by developing qualities of trust, commitment and the integration of diverse interests. The third category of articles form *power accounts of cross-sector collaboration*, explaining the mechanisms linking the domains of collaboration as the exercise of power.

Managerial accounts of cross-sector collaboration

A growing recognition of the multiple interacting factors that contribute to complex social problems has provoked a managerial approach to motivate and coordinate collaborative action across sectors of society. This cross-sector approach is clearly in evidence in the field of public health (Davies *et al.*, 2014; Plough, 2015; Afzal, Witherspoon and Trousdale, 2016). More generally in local government and public administration, the managerial approach extends from motivation and coordination to include management of diverse aspects of collaborative capacity (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). The approach aims to change cultural values in society

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[17] See Appendix 2 for a full list of the literature reviewed

to greater interdependence by motivating and enhancing the capacity of organisations to collaborate across sectors, and by facilitating mutual understanding, trust and commitment.

In the field of public health, practitioners and the research community in both the UK and the USA draw on work by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to argue that management of cross-sector collaboration can remove barriers to improving health by increasing the level of interdependence. Addressing the multiple and interdependent social, environmental and economic determinants of health requires a shift in culture from individual treatment to a shared responsibility for health (Davies *et al.*, 2014; Plough, 2015). WHO analysis of these wider determinants 'acknowledges the key role of social cohesion and collaboration in health improvement' (Davies *et al.*, 2014, p. 1891). This cultural shift to interdependence can be achieved through management and national leadership to coordinate action and monitor outcomes, coupled with extensive dialogue to engage people in improving population health (Davies *et al.*, 2014; Plough, 2015). The shift is aided by managerial tools including the systematic mapping of stakeholders, formation of collective goals and creation of measurable indicators to 'demonstrate progress and accountability' (Afzal, Witherspoon and Trousdale, 2016, p. A212).

Beyond the context of public health, successive UK governments have chosen forms of collaboration to address other areas of policy which require action from multiple sectors (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, pp. 56–79). Helen Sullivan and Chris Skelcher's analysis of area-based regeneration programmes in the UK and elsewhere identifies four motivations for collaboration: achieving a shared vision of society, maximising access to resources, maximising influence over policy and delivery, and resolving conflict. At a macro-level, government has significant control over collaboration through policy, funding and legislation, but this is countered by the capacity of collaborating partners to influence interorganisational arrangements and processes (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 79). This capacity stems from the 'skills and attributes', 'culture', and 'strategies and processes' that support 'effective joint working' (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 99). These attributes pertain to the individuals involved as well as to the organisations they represent. Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) introduce two interrelated forms of management of these capacities, focussed either on interorganisational arrangements for collaboration or on interpersonal qualities.

At the 'meso' or interorganisational level, collaborative capacity is constrained by conflicting practices and cultures which create different levels of authority and power, differences in

values, and differences in the kinds of resources contributed (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, pp. 110–112). The authors' analysis shows these differences can be overcome by diverse levels of management (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 112). At a *strategic* level, the emphasis of management is on partnership structures that support the development of a shared vision. At the *governance* level, the focus is on joint management of performance and accountability. *Operational* and *practice* capacity are enhanced by managing practical processes and activities to facilitate joint planning and delivery of programmes. Although capacity building is relevant to all sectors, there is a particular emphasis in their empirical examples on enhancing *community* capacity. Hence, management of each level of capacity pays specific attention to inclusion of communities and the use of communication or information strategies (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, pp. 112–116).

At the interpersonal or 'micro' level, leadership plays a central role in facilitating interpersonal relationships of mutual trust and commitment (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, pp. 100–105). The authors use the term 'boundary-spanner' (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 100 citing Alter and Hage, 1993; Friend et al., 1974) to describe the skills which enable leaders to create a network of partners, understand their diverse perspectives and negotiate amongst them. In a similar way to the call for a mapping tool (see Afzal, Witherspoon and Trousdale 2016, above), the authors link this capacity for relationship-building to the capacity to 'understand how different partners can contribute to achieve shared goals' (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 100). This awareness of diverse contributions also includes the need to understand how partners are affected by the constraints and opportunities of their organisational contexts (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 100).

Sullivan and Skelcher recognise the location of the 'micro-politics of leadership and interpersonal relations' within 'meso-levels of governance structure' which also respond to 'resource dependencies' in the wider environment (2002, pp. 135–6), thus depicting the nested domains of the system framework of cross-sector collaboration in Part I of this review. However, their focus is on how these nested relationships motivate continued collaboration, rather than how they affect each other. In addition, although the authors recognise resource dependency as emanating from the wider environment, they do not consider other macro-level factors. To understand these multiple interactions, in the following two sub-sections I focus first on literature that examines the *management of interorganisational arrangements* and then on that related to the *management of interpersonal relationships*.

Managerial accounts: interorganisational arrangements

Conceptualising cross-sector collaboration as a system in Part I of this chapter, I described *interorganisational arrangements* as one of its three domains, defined as the institutional rules, norms and values or worldviews guiding the collaborative group. Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) put forward five tiers of management of these inter-organisational arrangements – at strategic, governance, operational, practice and community levels. From the literature review, I found an emphasis on the governance level with a focus on accountability and a reliance on this mechanism to enhance the other levels of collaborative capacity. However, collaborative accountability requires negotiation of shared goals amongst diverse and potentially conflicting interest groups, creating an inherent tendency to impose hierarchical control rather than negotiation of joint action (Checkland *et al.*, 2013). Such hierarchical forms of control serve to shift risk to the third sector, exclude communities from the accountability and decision-making process, and result in a loss of trust and commitment to collaboration (Milbourne, 2009). Despite this strong tendency to exclusionary practices, there is evidence that the hierarchical imposition of strategy is contingent on the focus of local management practices on either hierarchical priorities or political accountability to communities (Matthews, 2014).

At the governance level, impact assessment, outcomes evaluation and joint performance measures are variously employed as techniques to establish accountability (Amirkhanyan, 2009; Wernham, 2011; Mattessich and Rausch, 2014). The assumption underlying each technique is that it enhances mutual understanding, identifies convergent interests and mutual benefits and therefore motivates and coordinates collaborative activity. Whereas impact assessment causes non-health partners to 'take health into account' in their plans to avoid *detrimental* effects on health (Wernham, 2011, p. 947), outcomes evaluation motivates closer collaboration by identifying mutual *benefits* (Mattessich and Rausch, 2014). In public administration of a range of services in multiple jurisdictions in the USA, *collaborative* performance measurement combines both approaches, to involve both sectors in negotiating evaluation criteria and cooperating to achieve them (Amirkhanyan, 2009). Through this process, mutual exchange of information improves procedures, performance and management practice (Amirkhanyan, 2009), thus contributing to collaborative capacity at operational and practice levels as well as at governance level.

Despite the potential for these forms of accountability to enhance collaborative capacity, each risks failing to support a strategic vision, coordinate action or enhance community capacity if partners are reluctant to include others to develop mutual understanding and identify synergies.

While 'competition' models of contract management focus on efficiency and hierarchical or bureaucratic procedures, 'collaboration' models rely on the negotiation of 'convergent' goals rather than prioritisation of 'self-interest' (Amirkhanyan, 2009, p. 526). Outcomes evaluation requires extensive cross-sector exchange of information, improved access to methods of evaluation and better 'relationships and communication links' between organisations to support the growth in cross-sector work (Mattessich and Rausch, 2014, pp. 1973–1974). These conditions are challenging to achieve, with monitoring officers reporting 'conflict and frustration' in their efforts to manage the multiple forms and methods of evaluation, attributed to a 'lack of training, capacity, internal infrastructure, and resources' (Amirkhanyan, 2009, p. 536).

The risk that accountability measures are reduced to a checklist (Wernham, 2011) and fail to coordinate joint action is exacerbated by the multiple and conflicting directions of accountability in collaborative arrangements. The complexity of managing the ensuing interdependencies is evidenced in the case of reforms for health and social care in England (Checkland *et al.*, 2013). Despite policy aims to create collaborative Clinical Commissioning Groups[18] (CCGs) with autonomy from government, the need to include diverse perspectives creates a 'complex web of accountability relationships' which risks reasserting hierarchical control (Checkland *et al.*, 2013, p. 9). Mirroring the distinction between competitive and collaborative forms of performance management, CCGs are subject to both 'managerial' accountability which is the external imposition of criteria, and 'political' accountability which involves negotiation amongst partners over expected outcomes (Checkland *et al.*, 2013, p. 3). Conflict between central government priorities and the interests of the collaborating partners and their service population risks a return to hierarchical control, as evidenced in the early days of CCGs by the widespread imposition of 'significant conditions backed by legal directions' by the Secretary of State for Health (Checkland *et al.*, 2013, p. 5).

This web of accountabilities introduces a turn in the literature to the inherent inability of managerial approaches to enhance cross-sector collaboration and instead to exacerbate conflict. The greater the diversity of interests and the broader the agenda for action, the greater the conflict in collaborative networks, thus undermining the reciprocity and trust needed to mediate and coordinate diverse interests (Davies, 2005). As governments assert hierarchical control to

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[18] Clinical Commissioning Groups are groups of primary care physicians with responsibility for commissioning (purchasing) services for defined regional populations and were established in England under the Health and Social Care Act, 2012 (Checkland *et al.*, 2013).

ensure accountability, despite their intention for networks to be 'decentred, autonomous and inclusive' they further undermine the trust, diversity and dynamic nature of networks (Davies, 2005, p. 325). Hierarchy is therefore an inevitable and self-reinforcing consequence of managing collaboration by a focus on accountability. Taking the case of New Deal for Communities[19], Jonathan Davies (2005) traces the innate conflict in collaborative networks to the origin of the concept of network governance in neo-conservative and New Labour reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. These reforms established market principles of competition rather than collaborative principles of trust as the central organising mechanism, accompanied by common managerial practices often termed 'new public management' (NPM), featuring

> 'the *transfer* of private sector principles to the public sector to promote efficiency; *privatisation* of public utilities and contracting out as a 'milder' version of privatisation; *agencification* to institutionalise the distinction between policy and implementation; *competition* through the introduction of quasi markets into the public sector to provide consumer 'choice'; *decentralisation* where functions are transferred to lower tiers of governance to promote responsiveness; and *citizen empowerment* where consultation/accountability mechanisms are established' (Davies, 2005, p. 315 citing Kjaer, 2004 original emphasis).

The effect of such market-based approaches to create conflict between hierarchical and negotiated forms of accountability can be seen in the examples of 'Pay for Success' initiatives in the USA (Liebman, 2013) and local area 'commissioning' in England (Milbourne, 2009). As Sullivan and Skelcher (2002, p.114) identify, without the sense that their perspectives are being considered, delivery organisations 'will begin to question the value and contribution of the collaboration.' In addition, the accompanying competitive and outcomes-based funding processes shift risk to the third and private sectors (Milbourne, 2009). In a snapshot case study of commissioning of health and social care services from community-based organisations in England, Linda Milbourne finds that a 'continuing emphasis on competitive contracts and centrally driven frameworks *undermines* collaborative work and community trust' (Milbourne, 2009, p. 277 added emphasis). The non-negotiability of performance targets and pressure to create economies of scale exclude smaller third sector organisations from grant processes and strategic planning meetings. Consequently, the 'power to determine the rules of engagement continues to reside with mainstream agencies, effectively marginalising the interests of small community organisations', changing the relationship between third sector and state (Milbourne, 2009, p. 290).

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[19] New Deal for Communities was an economic regeneration policy organised through cross-sector networks at the time of the New Labour government in the UK, 1997 - 2010

It is not only smaller organisations that are affected. Studies of collaborative strategic partnerships in the UK repeatedly find that the voluntary sector and communities in general are excluded from decision-making processes (Marks, 2007; Matthews, 2014). Examining Local Strategic Partnerships[20], Linda Marks (2007) finds these partnership boards exclude the voluntary and community sector, making them unaccountable to communities and ineffective in tackling the multiple determinants of health. The 'tensions in governance arrangements' arising from conflicting directions of accountability are evident (Marks, 2007, p. 145). The requirement to meet national priorities conflicts with decentralised decision-making, while inclusion of the third sector in a participatory-style conflicts with the accountability of representative democracy. The result is a lack of mutual understanding which constrains the coordination of cross-cutting issues (Marks, 2007). Expectations of enhancing inclusivity through a strategic managerial approach (Marks, 2007) are contradicted by the experience of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) in Scotland which instead create a culture which systematically excludes community groups (Matthews, 2014). Like Davies (2005), Peter Matthews traces this culture of exclusion or 'strategic cultural domain' to the historical roots of a corporate management approach in local government focussed on problem-solving (Matthews, 2014, pp. 456–459). The linear problem-solving style conflicts with the 'cyclical, deliberative process' needed to take account of communities' interests (Matthews, 2014, p. 460). Local communities' exclusion is exacerbated by pressure to act at a local authority scale to address multiple social problems and by public bodies' use of technical language rather than common or vernacular expressions, distancing them from the lived experiences and daily realities of communities (Matthews, 2014).

Despite evidence of a strategic cultural domain, Matthews (2014) finds that it is not a pervasive influence on CPP members' worldviews. He concludes with the contrasting example of one Local Authority which evaluated existing local projects and then 'made strategic decisions based on forecast possible funding and *engaged* community groups and partners' (Matthews, 2014, p. 466 added emphasis). However, the Local Authority's control over budgets raises the question of the ability of third sector organisations to engage in strategic action. A lack of operational resources for third sector partners constrains their capacity to act strategically by structuring their environment and aligning action with the dominant corporate culture (Silverman and Patterson, 2011; Matthews, 2014). Hence, resource dependency sustains

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[20] Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) were established in England from 2001 as collaborative mechanisms to address community regeneration and health inequalities at a Local Authority scale

hierarchical control. In their study of advocacy organisations in the USA, Robert Silverman and Kelly Patterson (2011) argue that diversification of funding enhances the capacity of non-profits to act strategically. Increasing the proportion of funding from a support base enhances the organisation's accountability to this base to counteract pressures to reduce advocacy in favour of programme activities (Silverman and Patterson, 2011). However, the authors implicitly acknowledge the continuing hierarchical power over non-profits' action, in their call for central governments to lead the way in 'legitimization of advocacy activities' to 'nurture a culture of advocacy' across sectors by setting the example of explicitly funding advocacy as well as programme activities (Silverman and Patterson, 2011, p. 449).

Therefore, although the use of accountability to structure interorganisational arrangements is aimed at identifying common goals and synergies, it tends to lend greater weight to the priorities of funders and policymakers rather than the interests of communities and third sector organisations. To redress this balance, the second category of managerial accounts has explored the dynamics of interpersonal and community relationships.

Managerial accounts: interpersonal relationships
Articles emphasising the importance of interpersonal relationships focus on forms and skills of leadership. Many argue that management of interpersonal relationships requires a combination of 'boundary spanning' attributes and facilitative forms of leadership to sustain the inclusion of diverse interests at multiple scales of cross-sector interaction (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Williams, 2013; Romzek *et al.*, 2014). This inclusivity is essential to change the dynamic of collaboration from hierarchical domination to pluralist integration (Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018). However, inclusivity is limited by divergent accountabilities, a lack of mutual understanding of the sectors and the lack of an appropriate infrastructure for dialogue (Keast *et al.*, 2004; Jones and Liddle, 2011; Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014). From the literature reviewed, I identified two related approaches to boundary-spanning leadership that facilitate an integrative approach. First, an emphasis on the development of informal types of accountability based on improving social capital and interpersonal relationships within the collaborating group (Dow *et al.*, 2013; Romzek *et al.*, 2014). Second, a focus on engaging communities and citizens to redress the dominance of central and local government in the process of negotiating multiple interests (Durose and Lowndes, 2010; Huggins and Hilvert, 2013; Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015). Of particular relevance to this research context, this latter emphasis on communities is illustrated by approaches to sustainable development that also enhance democratic participation. These approaches build communities' understanding of the

links between everyday challenges and ecological sustainability (Eckersley, 2020a). However, while relational boundary-spanning practices by 'street-level' workers play an essential role in empowering communities, sustained and systemic collaboration is constrained by the rationales of hierarchical and competitive institutions (Durose and Lowndes, 2010; Romzek *et al.*, 2014; Bartels, 2018). The conflict and power imbalance of formal accountability approaches reasserts itself in the management of interpersonal and community relationships.

Managers of collaborating entities require specific skills to cultivate the connections amongst collaborating partners and create a sense of collective purpose (Williams, 2013). In an exploratory article based on a critical literature review and the author's own empirical research, Paul Williams (2013) uses the term 'boundary spanner' to describe the skills required to manage these complex interactions. Boundary spanning forms of management draw on distinct competencies centring on the capacity to manage interpersonal relationships rather than organisational arrangements (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Williams, 2013). Such individuals use their skills of communication, innovation, negotiation and coordination to form connections amongst the collaborating partners and combine their core competencies and expertise, in short acting as 'reticulists' (Williams, 2013, p. 25). Although Williams (2013) focusses on this internal role to enhance relationships, he acknowledges earlier literature that focusses on the role of boundary spanners to also engage with external stakeholders to acquire resources and political or organisational support. I therefore define boundary-spanning as the skills which form connections amongst collaborating partners and combine their core competencies, but which also form connections with external stakeholders.

To enhance *mutual* understanding of the collaborative partners, the capacity of an individual to act as boundary spanner must be complemented by 'facilitative' forms of leadership (Keast *et al.*, 2004; Williams, 2013; Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014). The role of facilitator shifts the emphasis from service delivery to mutual understanding of the contribution of different agencies and sectors (Keast *et al.*, 2004), and from performance measures framed by a dominant interest, to forming convergent goals reflecting the public interest (Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014). To sustain responsiveness to the public and maintain autonomy from government, such leadership builds trusting relationships and a culture of respect for the diverse perspectives, interests and contributions of multiple stakeholders (Keast *et al.*, 2004; Williams, 2013; Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014). As the relational style of facilitative leadership becomes a group disposition it fosters collaborative dynamics which enhance both democracy and outcomes (Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018). Margaret Stout and colleagues (2018) argue that

forming collective leadership avoids the imposition of a dominant perspective, enhances the group's responsiveness to each other's concerns and to wider perspectives on the situation, and at the same time strengthens the capacity of each partner to assert their own interests. The group processes which facilitate this shared leadership rely on dialogue, a 'cooperative style of relating' and a 'participatory mode of association' (Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018, p. 109).

Forming a relational group disposition thus enhances interpersonal relationships, but it also forms strong bonds at interorganisational level, in contrast to the conflict that ensues from a focus on accountability. The process of building mutual understanding and trust forms social capital, which has 'bonding' elements that strengthen relations amongst similar groups, 'linking' elements that form relations between groups with different levels of authority, and 'bridging' elements that connect diverse sectors (Dow *et al.*, 2013, p. 1236). Studying the role of collaboration across sectors to facilitate climate change adaptation in the Carolinas (USA), Kirstin Dow and colleagues (2013) highlight the development of social capital and the detrimental effects of political conflict. 'Ad-hoc' networks in the third sector support knowledge exchange and problem-solving activities that build bonding inter-organisational capital within the sector (Dow *et al.*, 2013, p. 1241), in a similar way to the formation of 'human capital' in communities of practice (Agranoff, 2008). The importance of developing the skills of leaders to build such social capital is recognised in both policy and training in the UK (Bolden and Bagnall, 2009). However, without widespread cultural and political change, networks are constrained in their capacity to bridge across diverse interests or sectors, resulting in a 'lack of coordination and communication' (Dow *et al.*, 2013, p. 1242).

The interaction of interpersonal and interorganisational relationships is again seen in the effects of co-productive approaches to public service provision which maximise the opportunities for inclusion of collaborating partners (Jones and Liddle, 2011). A co-productive approach to the multiple stages of 'planning, commissioning, management, delivery, monitoring and evaluation' builds trust through the negotiation of formal and informal rules, frameworks and behaviours (Jones and Liddle, 2011, p. 158). These repeated interactions shape informal systems of self-regulating accountability (rewards and sanctions) which emerge from the reciprocal interaction of shared norms and facilitative behaviours (including communication, information sharing, shared learning and champion[21] behaviours) (Romzek *et al.*, 2014, pp. 820–823). These informal accountability dynamics support the cycle of social learning needed

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[21] Romzek *et al* (2014) use the term 'champion' to refer to those individuals who take a personal interest in pursuing a case and advocating on behalf of the beneficiary.

to 'move[e] individual organizations towards network objectives', or a shared vision (Romzek *et al.*, 2014, pp. 821–822).

However, informal accountability does not replace but operates alongside hierarchical accountability, adding to the complexity of managerial and political answerability of collaborative networks (Gazley, 2008; Romzek *et al.*, 2014). Hierarchical organisational cultures, resource pressures and differences in professional approaches lead to competition amongst organisations, undermining their ability to reach shared goals and to share resources (Romzek *et al.*, 2014). Although Barbara Romzek and colleagues (2014) caveat their findings as limited to the context of child welfare services, a similar finding emerges in participatory research in the context of reducing socio-spatial deprivation in Amsterdam (Bartels, 2018). Here, street-level workers developed the shared practices, champion behaviour and commitment that form the facilitative behaviours and shared norms of Romzek *et al's* (2014) conceptual framework. Although these led to a change in collaborative dynamics and an emerging shared understanding and vision for the local area, the involvement of wider agencies and systemic change were constrained by fragile relationships between organisations and hierarchical direction from the city authority (Bartels, 2018). More generally, Beth Gazley's (2008) case study of local service delivery partnerships in Georgia, USA, finds that government authorities exert control in informal arrangements as well as in the more formal use of contracts. There is an 'exchange of authority for formality', with public managers assuming a lead role to retain control (decision-making authority) in non-contractual arrangements (Gazley, 2008, p. 148). She concludes that 'few of these partnerships can be described as partnerships between equals' (Gazley, 2008, p. 150).

Thus, the management of *interpersonal* relationships to build informal institutions is constrained by persistent hierarchical dominance in the same way as the management of *interorganisational* arrangements by formal accountability measures. In an alternative approach, facilitative leadership focuses on improving communication with *communities*, which enhances political accountability to redress the dominance of managerial or hierarchical accountability (Durose and Lowndes, 2010). However, the range of skills necessary to intentionally empower communities, the depleted capacity of communities to participate, and conflicting rationales at differing levels of authority constrain political accountability to communities just as they limit informal accountability to collaborating partners (Durose and Lowndes, 2010; Huggins and Hilvert, 2013; Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015; Bartels, 2018).

Community engagement is argued to be essential to form a democratically shared vision and to take collective action to address social and ecological problems (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013; Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015; Eckersley, 2020a). The depletion of communities' capacity to participate in decision-making is a general phenomenon due to increasing specialisation in public and community services (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013). However, growing recognition of the interdependencies of societal challenges requires engagement that 'empowers residents to take action' (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013, p. 8). These authors argue that community engagement must enable dialogue, mutual respect and trust, shared decision making and continual reflection, (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013; Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015), thus extending boundary-spanning and facilitative leadership from partners' relationships to community relationships. This community-centred approach is evident not only in the contexts of public health and urban regeneration but also in the environmental movement globally since the new millennium (Eckersley, 2020a). Practical engagement with people's everyday challenges of living and linking these to their indirect ecological effects helps build awareness of the salience of ecological issues, to enliven both democratic accountability and ecological sustainability (Eckersley, 2020a). Such an approach goes beyond 'simply informing' to 'fully empowering' citizens, requiring a shift from information exchange to incorporating, collaborating with and empowering citizens (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013, pp. 9–10).

Empowering approaches to community engagement may be undermined by instrumental rationales as well as by a lack of skills, evidenced in a case study of urban regeneration in Manchester, England (Durose and Lowndes, 2010). Applying a framework of distinct rationales for neighbourhood[22] approaches (Durose and Lowndes, 2010, p. 342 citing Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008), the case study highlights a tension between empowering and instrumental approaches. Despite agreement at community, local government and national policy level on the neighbourhood approach as a general principle, different rationales create mutual suspicion and threaten the extent to which interactions with communities are based on non-hierarchical negotiation (Durose and Lowndes, 2010, pp. 351–355). Officers based directly in communities strongly supported 'social' and 'civic' rationales that promoted citizen participation and co-production. Yet, at a City Council level, a focus on representative rather than participative democracy and on efficiency gains meant community engagement was treated instrumentally, to disseminate information and validate council policies by consultation. The authors conclude

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[22] Neighbourhood is defined as a sub-local authority scale (Durose and Lowndes, 2010)

that the predominantly 'economic' rationale at senior levels of authority restricted the community's power in decision-making.

A similar tension between rationales at different levels of authority is seen in the action research study in Amsterdam (Bartels, 2018). The participatory evaluation method formed an intentionally empowering approach to address both the interpersonal relations of collaborating workers and limited community capacity to engage. It developed 'relational practices' of internal reflection combined with 'an interactive process driven by the situational needs […] of communities' (Bartels, 2018, p. 5). However, senior managers' lack of familiarity with the approach, competition between organisations to establish a lead role and to retain funding, and a focus on specialist practices undermined commitment to work together at street-level or to extend the range of agencies involved (Bartels, 2018, pp. 11–12). The author reflects that 'collaborative dynamics in street level work seemed to bounce back to their habitual pattern' (Bartels, 2018, p. 12).

In summary, approaches focussed on building relationships with the community, like those focussed on interpersonal relationships within collaborative groups, exhibit the effects of hierarchical domination. Thus, the conflict and imbalance of power inherent in managing interorganisational arrangements manifests itself also in managing interpersonal and community relationships. I posed a second conceptual question to guide the search for further literature, '*how can networks overcome the continual re-emergence of a competitive and hierarchical culture to sustain their political accountability to diverse stakeholders?*'

Power accounts of cross-sector collaboration

The third category of literature reviewed explains this continual resurfacing of hierarchical dominance as the effect of direct and hidden power. Power is exerted *directly* through resource dependency, reinforced by hierarchical and competitive forms of organising activity (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, pp. 122–135). The resultant changing relations alter the historical separation of sectors in the UK, reflecting a 'politically contested' and 'ideological' shift in society that ushers in more *hidden* forms of power (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 81).

Although mutual resource dependency motivates cross-sector collaboration, it also creates an unequal distribution of power during the collaborative 'life-cycle' of establishing institutional arrangements, programme delivery and partnership closure (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, pp. 122–135). Linda Milbourne and Mike Cushman's (2013) analysis of state/third sector relationships in commissioning of public services in England, finds the state has the power to

determine the interorganisational arrangements. Formalised accountability arrangements replace trust-based collaboration, imposing the dominant partner's interests and shifting risk to the third sector, hence 'normalising an asymmetry of relationships between state and third sectors' (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 487). A similar imposition of the resource-rich partner's interests is seen in third sector collaboration with the private sector (Ameli and Kayes, 2011; Bingham and Walters, 2013). The third sector adapts to take on the values and language of the private sector, while the private sector gains in terms of more efficient practices and lower costs (Ameli and Kayes, 2011). The imbalance of power constrains the third sector's autonomy and the independence of its strategic vision (Bingham and Walters, 2013).

Many authors associate more hidden forms of power with a prevalent ideology of 'neo-liberalism.' Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop (2013, p. 170) distinguish ideology and social imaginaries whereby the former gives advantage to specific 'ideal and material interests' and the latter is a simplification of the world that enables people to make sense of and act in society. Neoliberalism is described as the adherence to 'a market centred political economy' that privileges competitive forms of coordinating cross-sector activity, supported by practices of NPM (Davies, 2005, p. 317). Emerging from this neoliberal position is the promotion of a 'plural' state 'where multiple inter-dependent actors contribute to public service delivery' (Jones and Liddle, 2011, p. 158). The trend to pursue market-centric approaches to pluralism is evident in Europe, the USA and even the radically different socio-economic context of China (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller, 2008; Jing and Savas, 2009; Milbourne, 2009).

The consequences of neoliberal, ideological pluralism for the roles and relationships of sectors are illustrated by a selection of articles in the Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR), an edited journal of the Center for Social Innovation (USA). Private and public sector involvement of non-profit organisations in joint activity results in pressure to adopt corporate managerial practices of outcomes evaluation and a centralised infrastructure (Eccles and Saltzman, 2011; Kania and Kramer, 2011; Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant, 2012). This pressure is reinforced by resource dependency and budget cuts which shift the non-profit's focus from its strategic mission to financial survival and create a subordinate status for the third, and to some extent public sector relative to the private sector (Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant, 2012; Bradley, Orr and Rapson, 2017).

Some commentators see the normative rationale and accompanying managerial practices of neoliberalism as 'hegemonic.' The effects of hegemony to disguise power can be seen in Schmachtel's (2016) study of the micro-relations of collaboration in the context of education in Germany, which critically places the locally situated narrative in the wider systemic context. Hierarchical control 'depolitize[s] participation' by concealing conflicting interests, thus obstructing critical awareness of the effects of social structures and stabilising the prevalent neoliberal ideology and practices (Schmachtel, 2016, p. 464). The rhetoric of cross-sector collaboration as a managerial challenge thus creates a 'rationalized myth' of partnerships which conceals their inherent conflicts and capacity to exert power (Schmachtel, 2016). Similarly, in their further analysis of state-third sector relationships in England under the UK Coalition Government (2010–2015), Milbourne and Cushman (2015) find neoliberal pluralism underpins the pervasive portrayal of cross-sector collaboration as a managerial process that creates collaborative advantage or added value. The shift in risk and responsibility to voluntary organisations, however, undermines the third sector's trust in public bodies and increases dissent, replacing negotiated consensus with compliance with the imposition of institutional arrangements (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013). This acquiescence with neoliberal 'discourse and behaviours' masks the ways they confer advantage on dominant interests, a hegemonic situation (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 466).

Compliance with prevalent hierarchical accountability and other NPM practices is further explained as the outcome of isomorphic (or homogenising) pressures to adopt them (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). Expectations of professionalisation and commercialisation coupled with resource dependency, funding constraints and competition promote homogeneity (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). Such conformity constrains the third sector's capacity for innovation and its accountability to the public (Jones and Liddle, 2011; Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013; Milbourne and Cushman, 2015).

The power of resource dependency and isomorphism are additionally explained by their interaction with processes of 'governmentality' or self-regulation. As contracts and hierarchical accountability become widely established, they form a discipline of targets and sanctions that becomes assimilated and embedded within voluntary organisations as 'the way things are done' (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 474). This 'culture of compliance' further constrains the potential for innovation and is reinforced by a self-censorship that restrains third sector agencies from reporting problems or direct advocacy, for fear of losing funding or

legitimacy. In this way, governments extend the 'governable terrain' to include the previously independent voluntary sector, controlling the range of activities by compliance, in a process of self-regulation (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 475).

Reinforcing hegemony is the use of a legitimising rhetoric by national governments in widely differing political contexts to extend their power over multiple sectors by creating a political consensus (Jing and Savas, 2009). While rhetorically promoted as achieving a cultural partnership or collaborative advantage by improving efficiency, the extent to which governments across the political spectrum intervene to support pluralism exposes a crisis of legitimacy (Jing and Savas, 2009). Examining the use of legitimising rhetoric at the interorganisational level, Benjamin Huybrechts and Alex Nicholls (2013) find that even collaboration between organisations with similar principles, such as social enterprises[23] and private corporations, creates tensions between differing logics and legitimation criteria (the pursuit of a social mission and the profit motive, respectively) (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013). To maintain legitimacy with multiple audiences, the social enterprise conforms to the dominant market logics of the private sector, while portraying its collaboration discursively as a pragmatic means to achieve its moral purpose (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013, pp. 138–141). Once again, this reduces the third sector organisation's agency over collaborative structures and practices, leading to a loss of influence and capacity for innovation (Jones and Liddle, 2011; Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013).

Thus, hegemonic rhetoric, isomorphism and governmentality combine to form interorganisational arrangements and practices which create self-discipline and conformity. However, Milbourne and Cushman (2015) caution that their power can be interpreted over deterministically and note that partners in collaboration also have agency, or power to change their own and others' behaviours. The erosion of trust can be overcome by a deliberate effort to invest in communication, mutual organisational learning and negotiation of 'purposes, meanings and values' in the collaborative project (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 505). This process of locally situated learning can encourage a critical attitude towards policy and professional or scientific discourses (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015; Schmachtel, 2016). Milbourne and Cushman (2015) find such critical awareness can challenge the assumption of consensus, sparking resistance by either withdrawing from the state project or building interest-

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[23] Social enterprises are defined as non-profit 'organisations pursuing a social mission through their economic activity' (Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013, p. 131). Although distinct from for-profit businesses and public agencies, they share the private sector's pursuit of an economic business opportunity.

based alliances with other organisations. Such alliances are not restricted to the intra-sector alliances that build social capital (see Dow *et al.*, 2013 discussed above), but can extend by virtue of a common political interest to 'public sector workers, trade unions and wider social movements' (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 481). Whereas neoliberal pluralist hegemony constrains the agency of voluntary organisations to creatively re-imagine their role, cross-sector alliances can develop an alternative discourse and enter into a 'struggle for hegemony in which some voices, interests and alliances prevail' even if only partially and temporarily (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015, p. 481).

In summary, power exerted directly through resource dependency imposes the dominant partner's interests and constrains the third sector's strategic autonomy. Indirectly, power is exerted through hegemony. The prevalent ideology of neoliberalism is accompanied by discourses of the plural state and market-centric managerial practices, leading to a transfer of corporate managerial practices to the third sector. Compliance leads to a shift in risk and responsibility to the third sector, concealing conflict and dominant interests and constraining critical awareness of the exercise of power. Compliance is reinforced by the power of homogenising isomorphism, self-regulating governmentality and legitimising rhetoric. These interacting forces create a culture of third sector compliance with its subordinate role, constraining innovation and strategic action. Despite this, there is evidence that hegemony can be resisted through investment in the management of interpersonal relationships discussed earlier, to negotiate a shared vision and engage in locally situated practice. These activities enhance critical awareness, leading to either withdrawal from the project of pluralism, or the creation of an alternative alliance. However, the literature reviewed is limited in its capacity to explain how such investment is motivated and whether withdrawal or alliance-building can overcome the power of hegemony.

Second meta-interpretation and further questions

The literature reviewed in Part II allows a second layer of meta-interpretation, to explain the conceptual issues arising from Part I. Here I summarise how it has shaped three categories of explanation for the interactions amongst the domains of the system of cross-sector collaboration but leaves open a question regarding the transformation of power and domination in such partnerships. I show how the review explained the issues arising in my early meetings with my research partners. In the light of my ongoing participation in the research partners' and other meetings I reflect on how the literature review draws attention to the effects of power. Then I explain how discussions with NWWT and the PSB identified a research focus for each

research partner, stemming from the limited capacity of the literature to explain whether and how cross-sector collaboration can change the dominance of hierarchical accountability.

Building the meta-interpretation

The literature reviewed portrays the interactions between domains of the system of cross-sector collaboration in three main ways. First, the management of formal interorganisational arrangements affects the quality of interpersonal relationships and interaction between the collaborative network and wider society. Second, the management of interpersonal relationships and community engagement shapes formal and informal interorganisational arrangements. Third, the wider societal system exerts power over the interorganisational arrangements for collaboration, thus affecting interpersonal relationships. Failure to take account of these power relations enlists managerial approaches in the exercise of power and creates compliance rather than consensus and trust in interpersonal and interorganisational relationships.

These accounts of cross-sector collaboration contain numerous concepts which helped me to develop a shared language with my collaborating research partners. Managerial accounts portray the interactions between domains of cross-sector collaboration as the result of management techniques to *coordinate the action* of multiple organisations to address *complex social challenges*. Management aims to change *organisational culture* towards interdependence and enhance *collaborative capacity*. Approaches focussed on managing inter-organisational arrangements fail in their aims in three main ways. First by creating a *culture of accountability* with conflicts between *hierarchical control* and *political accountability*. Second by making *conflict inherent* in collaborative networks through a combination of *resource centralisation* and *dependency*, *competitive* forms of coordination and *marginalisation* of some interests. Third by having detrimental effects on the *trust and commitment* in interpersonal relationships necessary for a *negotiated consensus*, caused by *shifting risk* to smaller and third sector organisations, and *excluding communities* from decision-making.

Managerial approaches to internal interpersonal relationships and external community engagement focus on building trust, commitment and interdependence to support *informal systems of accountability* based on *reciprocity* and hence increase the *inclusion of diverse interests*. However, management of both internal and external relationships is constrained by institutional structures. Internally, forming a *dialogical, cooperative and participatory* group disposition through *boundary-spanning* and *facilitative leadership* is limited by the persistence of historically *divergent accountabilities* and *competitive organisational cultures*. These are

exacerbated by a lack of *mutual understanding* and a lack of *infrastructure for dialogue*. Externally, *intentionally empowering* approaches to community engagement are constrained by *hierarchical* and *competitive organisational cultures*, and by conflict with *instrumental rationales* for involving communities.

Power-based accounts of cross-sector collaboration explain the failures of managerial approaches as the result of *power relations* emanating from the wider social context. A pervasive *neoliberal ideology* interacts with *resource dependency* to embed competition and conflict in cross-sector relationships, replacing trust with formal accountability. The ideological portrayal of collaboration as mutually advantageous forms a *legitimising rhetoric* that disguises the inherent *imbalance of power* and conflicts of interests and creates *homogenising pressures* to adopt corporate management practices. The expectation of consensus drives a process of *governmentality*, creating a *culture of compliance* which *masks* the comparative advantage of selective interest groups. Pragmatic acquiescence with the competitive managerial culture sustains the *hegemony* of hierarchical or elite interests over a politically negotiated common interest.

However, these same accounts of power relations also offer the potential for emancipation from power through the *agency* of collaborating organisations to create a facilitative group disposition and to form interest-based and cross-sector *alliances*. They point to the role of raising *critical awareness* of the effects of power and forming an *alternative discourse*. The literature reviewed is limited however, in its capacity to explain how collaborating organisations take account of power to sustain relationships and overcome the marginalisation of interests. I posed a third conceptual question, '*how might cross-sector networks change the power relationships between collaborating partners which constrain their collaborative capacity?*'

Explaining the research partners' experiences

The second layer of meta-interpretation provides some explanations for the practical issues highlighted by the research partners' experiences. The first two issues I highlighted at the end of Part I were the focus of the largely public sector PSB, voluntary sector NWWT and cross-sector forum Social Value Cymru alike on both *public engagement* and *evaluating outcomes*. This focus demonstrated the extent to which approaches to enhance interpersonal and community relationships as well as managerial accountability practices have been adopted across sectors in Wales and reflected the tension in the research literature between hierarchical and political accountability. The third issue regarded the tension between *strategic planning*

and *taking joint action* and was combined with the fourth, of an emphasis in both sectors on the *transfer of funds* from larger to smaller organisations with an associated evaluation and monitoring process. These interacting issues were explained by the strength of resource dependency as a motivator for cross-sector interactions and illustrated the weakness of the argument that pluralism promotes a creative transfer of ideas to deliver collaborative advantage through joint action. Fifth, the *limited ability to engage* residents and *lack of knowledge* of some public bodies about the third sector contrasted with the third sector's practical understanding of cross-sector work and familiarity with co-production. This divide was explained by studies showing how the informal accountability needed to sustain relationships in collaboration decreases with increasing hierarchical levels of authority. Sixth, the *roles* adopted by the Partnerships Manager and the Social Value Cymru network and NWWT's recognition of the importance of *leadership* reflect the emphasis in the literature on boundary-spanning and the communicative skills of facilitative leadership.

Highlighting the effects of power
Reflection on the accounts of power relations in the literature review revealed issues not expressed in my initial discussions with my research partners of their experiences. The literature review prompted further engagement with them which revealed how the exercise of power fed into their uncertainties about cross-sector collaboration.

Through discussions with volunteers, employees of NWWT and the Council of Trustees, I began to understand their underlying sense of an imbalance of power. The effects of resource dependency were clear in the Volunteer Coordinator's perception of a loss of sense of direction when accessing funding directed at people's well-being rather than environmental conservation, and in the Living Landscapes Officer's concern that public bodies' short funding cycles constrained the sustainability of projects (Fieldnotes, 02/06/2017). The exertion of power through managerial practices was evident in restrictive funding requirements for People and Wildlife work which led the Chair of Trustees to urge committee members to tailor their ideas to grant criteria and to consider opportunities to commercialise activities (PWC, 25/05/2017). Similarly, the effects of hierarchical control, conflicts of interests and resource dependency had arisen in an earlier Trustees meeting (Trustees, 20/04/2017). Here, one Trustee spoke of the way funding criteria had shifted the Trust's 'direction slightly in the past' leading to its current focus on people as well as wildlife (Wrexham Trustee #1). Others spoke more generally of the effect of policy and funding on agricultural practices, pointing to the detrimental environmental impact of the European Common Agricultural Policy, but hoping

for a redirection of payments to support environmentally beneficial farming and fisheries practices. The detrimental effects of conflicting interests and resource dependency on trust were indicated as trustees discussed the relationship with their main public sector partner, NRW. There was suspicion that NRW was not motivated by environmental principles, 'their goal is to save money not to save wildlife' (Clwyd Trustee). Others spoke of the lack of active support from NRW and obstructive monitoring practices, and their impression of a lack of respect for the Trust's professional judgement (Trustees, 20/04/2017).

Opportunities for alliances but inherent risks were illustrated by the People and Wildlife committee's discussion of coalitions with other environmental organisations nationally to combat increasing competition from public bodies for grant funding. These discussions were tempered by the Project Manager's recognition that forming coalitions posed a reputational risk to the Trust by building up expectations, only to have them dashed if the bid was unsuccessful (PWC, 25/05/2017). Additionally, the Trustees expressed disappointment that collaboration within the environmental sector was held back by failure to form a common goal. Competitive pressures were implicit in one Trustee's conclusion that collaboration would not be driven by coinciding interests or by altruism, but only by funding and the Fundraising Director's assessment that collaboration needed equal commitment motivated by an 'equal stake' in the outcomes (Trustees, 20/04/2017).

Similar issues of power exerted through resource dependency, hierarchical market-based approaches and conflicting interests, and the detrimental effect on relationships were evident as I observed PSB meetings in early 2017. Resource dependency was evident in the effects of budget cuts to public bodies, exemplified in a presentation by the National Park representative in which he pointed to pressures to commercialise training due to the imminent loss of European funding (PSB, 24/02/17). The effect on relationships and community engagement was clear as the representative expressed disappointment at a lack of funding from Gwynedd Council and noted the restricted capacity for partnership work with farmers since the end of Glastir (a Wales-wide funding scheme for environmental land management).

Although little conflict was visible in the immediate relationships in the PSB during that early period of observation, more widely conflicting interests were evident between local, regional and national priorities and between the needs of different groups within local communities[24].

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[24] I explore these tensions in more detail in Chapter Seven, here I focus on how they informed the research partner's research question

For third sector PSB members, conflict centred on perceptions of the marginalisation of CVCs[25] in the north relative to the south of Wales and disregard of the importance of the Welsh language by WCVA (PSB 24/02/2017). The different spatial boundaries and timeframes for reports from the regionally organised bodies, NRW and the North Wales health board (BCHUB) created difficulties in integrating their findings with the PSB's local well-being assessment (PSB, 24/02/2017). In discussing the emerging messages from the local well-being assessment, members referred to conflicts between national transport policies and local rural needs, between economic priorities to attract big businesses and the need to sustain the Welsh language, and between the needs of long-standing families and newly retired incoming groups of the population (PSB, 13/04/2017).

Divergent accountabilities within the Board delayed consensus and plans for joint action. The Police representative expressed frustration with progress on the PSB and was keen to start working on a joint project, prioritising accountability to the public. However, Gwynedd Council CEO urged members to consider how working together would contribute to 'the greater good', implying the need for accountability to a higher authority or joint goal (PSB, 24/02/2017). Initial plans to integrate social care and healthcare services failed to include third sector organisations, requiring further work to integrate their concerns and contributions (PSB, 24/02/2017). The divergence of accountabilities and lack of common practice was evident in the Board's well-being assessment with its separation of different aspects of well-being and separation between the two counties of Gwynedd and Anglesey. No attempt was made to show the contribution of these different aspects to the national well-being goals or to any other common vision (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2017a, 2017c).

The hope of beneficial alliances was kept alive by the National Park representative who acknowledged that budget cuts had prompted a shift from directly employing staff to contracting local craftspeople, consequently improving relationships with the local community (PSB, 24/02/17). In the same meeting, there was general agreement about the need to work together to find new ways to fill gaps in public services due to budget cuts. In a later meeting, there was evident pride in the way the PSB had engaged communities in the well-being assessment process, 'Gwynedd and Môn have taken a radically different approach' (Emergency Services, PSB 24/02/2017). However, hierarchical control re-emerged as the local authority representative asserted the responsibility of the PSB to decide priorities and the risk

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[25] CVCs (County Voluntary Councils) are the local infrastructure organisations for the third sector. WCVA (Wales Council for Voluntary Associations) is the national infrastructure body.

that engagement would raise communities' expectations and result in negotiation (CEO Gwynedd, PSB 20/06/2017).

These conversations during the literature review demonstrated that despite the evidence of the detrimental effects of power relations and resource dependency on NWWT and the PSB's experiences of joint working, each organisation retained the hope that collaborative alliances offered a way to improve access to resources and improve relationships with the community.

Forming a research focus with my research partners
I reflected with the NWWT Trustees and the PSB Partnerships Manager on the evidence of an underlying awareness of the imbalance of power but the desire to involve communities, the third sector and other public bodies. While the second meta-interpretation had drawn attention to the effects of power it had not explained how or whether these could be overcome through cross-sector collaboration. Together we identified a research focus for each partner to address this gap in understanding.

For NWWT, a desire to work more closely with other partners was expressed at a Trustees meeting (20/04/2017). The Chair stated the aim to change political attitudes by 'getting people talking about the importance of wildlife', and many trustees emphasised the importance of working through schools to get young people involved. When I referred to the literature on building trust in collaborative partnerships, the Trustees reflected that they valued being in the company of likeminded people and that they had a good track record of building partnership relationships. They also recognised the importance of working 'from the inside' (Denbigh Trustee) to reach people with different interests and 'align ourselves with other people's objectives' (Powys Trustee). Although the Trustees acknowledged the difficulty in finding partners with shared values and a common stake in the environment, they also agreed with each other that collaboration perhaps offered the only way of getting any results, let alone better results (Trustees, 20/04/2017).

To identify a research focus, I reached agreement to hold a short discussion during the Trustees meeting of 13/07/2017 (which included senior members of staff). Based on my previous observations and discussions I suggested exploring how the Trust could maximise its contribution to well-being while at the same time increase action for wildlife. There was initial agreement on this, but the discussion soon turned to financial sustainability. Several members emphasised the reduced public sector budgets awarded to conservation bodies and the constant need to press for support for wildlife interests. While there was agreement on the need to frame

the Trust's work in terms of well-being outcomes for people, they also expressed concern that this would be 'the tail wagging the dog' (Wrexham Trustee #2, 13/07/2017) and distract the Trust from its primary concern of wildlife. With the input of the Fundraising Director and Treasurer the Trustees agreed the research focus must address their financial and wildlife concerns, **to understand how NWWT can sustainably maximise its contribution to national well-being while at the same time increasing the focus on wildlife**.

Although I had been observing PSB meetings during the literature review, an opportunity for focussed discussion came much later than with NWWT. To understand the PSB's focus for the research, I relied on reflective discussions with the Partnerships Manager and PSB Chair. Asking how they felt the Board would like to improve its relationship with the third sector led to reflection on the PSB's processes and priorities. The Partnerships Manager's assessment was that the PSB were starting to notice potential partners in the third sector to work with locally, but that changing the way public services work was going to be challenging (Partnerships Manager, 19/06/2017). She pointed to the cost of the PSB members' time for meetings, and felt the Board should ask the same question of themselves that they ask of organisations in receipt of grants, 'what are the outcomes?' In her interpretation, what was driving the Board's desire to collaborate was a hope of adding value to the work that each organisation was currently undertaking. In a focussed discussion with the PSB later that year, members confirmed the Partnerships Manager's assessment, referring to 'added value' when I asked them about the common vision of the Board (PSB, 4/10/2017). Despite the ambiguity around the term 'added value', the Partnerships Manager and I agreed that the research focus for the PSB was on **whether and how Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB members can collaborate in a way that adds value to the work of their individual organisations**.

Although these organisations' concerns were superficially distinct and seemingly introduced a new concept of added value, in the light of the literature review both concerns related to the tension between multiple directions of accountability. The Wildlife Trust faced the various challenges of first, meeting its charitable aim and the interest of its members to promote the needs of wildlife, second, contributing to multiple social, economic and cultural interests including a different emphasis on the environment, and third, achieving financial sustainability. They were aware of the risk of being drawn away from their charitable objectives by becoming accountable to wider well-being interests and that resource dependency could affect the balance of accountabilities.

Similarly, the PSB faced a multitude of priorities. The Board expressed a desire to improve aspects of *local* well-being but had a duty to show how its well-being plans would maximise the contribution to the *national* well-being goals. They also faced scrutiny from committees and their own organisations to account for how their strategic plans would make best use of resources. The Board implicitly assumed the position that contribution to national well-being was additional to delivering their organisations' objectives, not a prerequisite. In the concurrent context of commissioning, as the Partnerships Manager had pointed out, this meant the rationale for collaboration was to add value to their existing work.

The literature reviewed explained this inherent conflict between political accountability (to the individual organisation, communities and partner organisations) and hierarchical accountability (to funders and government). It showed how management of interpersonal relationships and interorganisational arrangements were both limited in their capacity to change the way power is exerted in cross-sector collaboration. However, it held out the hope that collaboration can enhance the agency of marginalised organisations to assert their interests while forming a diverse alliance with others. Thus, the research partners' concerns centred on this gap in the literature to understand **whether and how collaborating sectors can negotiate the tension between hierarchical and political accountability without dominance.**

PART III Theorising emancipatory conditions

In this final Part of the chapter, I explore the social theories underpinning the power accounts of cross-sector collaboration in Part II, which explained the continual re-emergence of hierarchical control as the exercise of power. However, these articles were unable to explain whether and how collaborating partners could challenge this power to reassert political accountability to each other and to communities. This section develops a third layer of meta-interpretation which theorises the conditions for emancipatory cross-sector collaboration. In summary, it shows how the very process of selectivity that leads to hegemony provides the opportunity for an alternative ideology to arise. This process can engender critical consciousness and provoke a new practical and 'ideal'[26] philosophy that enhances agency and autonomy. This shift from ideology to a critical and empowering philosophy changes the dynamic of legitimisation, isomorphism and governmentality.

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[26] I use the term 'ideal' here in the sense of the intellectual worldview or theory which guides and emerges from practical action in the world, following Gramsci (1971)

Antonio Gramsci's prison notebooks (written between 1929 and 1935) set out his thinking around ideology, philosophy and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 321–376). Hegemony is the 'uncritical and largely unconscious' adoption of the beliefs and practices of a dominant ideology, or 'common-sense' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 322). By prevailing over other ideologies, hegemony creates the dominance of an elite social group by enlisting other groups in society to contribute to its own collective aims or 'corporate interests':

> it is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become "party", come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society [...] thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 181–2)

The 'common-sense', or uncritical adoption of neoliberal pluralism and its managerial practices is therefore 'submissive and subordinate' conduct that empowers an elite group (Gramsci, 1971, p. 327). However, Gramsci distinguishes common-sense and good-sense, with good-sense being the result of effort 'to work out consciously and critically one's own conception of the world' in order to 'choose one's sphere of activity', thus enhancing agency and autonomy (Gramsci, 1971, p. 323). This philosophical process is intellectual as well as practical. New practices require the formation also of a new conception of the world to qualitatively transform social structures. It begins with critical awareness, '[c]onsciousness of being part of a particular hegemonic force (that is to say, political consciousness) is the first stage towards a further progressive self-consciousness in which theory and practice will finally be one' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 333). The growing awareness of the effects of power to restrict third sector autonomy (Milbourne, 2009), and attempts to form inclusive strategies and relational practices (Durose and Lowndes, 2010; Bartels, 2018) are therefore the beginnings of a critical good-sense or 'philosophy of praxis' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330).

For this new philosophy to prevail over hegemony it requires 'quantity', or adoption by diverse social groups, as well as 'quality' in the adequacy of its conception of the world, thus becoming 'totalitarian' in the sense of unifying society (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 347–366). This unity, however, is politically democratic rather than hierarchically hegemonic since it is based on philosophy, which is 'the democratic science par excellence in so far as it refers to the reasoning faculty common to all' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 363). Although critical awareness leads third sector organisations to achieve autonomy through withdrawal from cross-sector arrangements and by income diversification (Silverman and Patterson, 2011; Milbourne and Cushman, 2015), by itself this simply shifts the controlling force of resource dependency (Bingham and Walters,

2013). Thus, reaching a state of political unity requires multi-sector alliances, extending beyond the interest-based or intra-sector coalitions called for by Dow *et al*., (2013) and Milbourne and Cushman (2015) if they are to overcome the power relations of hegemony.

The conflict between governments' legitimisation of hierarchical control of cross-sector service delivery and the political accountability needed to build legitimacy and alliances with wider stakeholders can be understood with reference to Max Weber's analysis of authority and power (Weber, 1968, pp. 31–45). Like ideology, authority has multiple possible bases all related to belief, 'it is even possible for the same individual to orient his behaviour to contradictory systems of order' (Weber, 1968, p. 32). Third sector organisations' responses to the concept of 'Big Society' (Mohan, 2011) illustrate authority based on *expediency* (the expectation of some advantage to the sector) rather than that the concept expresses the 'ultimate values' of society, a *value-rational* belief (Weber, 1968, p. 33). The rhetoric and tactics of national governments to manage collaboration and gain political consensus (Jing and Savas, 2009) can be seen to promote *traditional* bases for legitimate authority as well as a rational expectation of social outcomes, that is an *interest* basis. Both expediency and interest as bases for authority introduce conflict, which Weber defines as the intentional carrying out of one group's will against others' resistance (Weber, 1968, p. 38). Therefore, although the nature of belief means authority is power not by force but by 'acquiescence', it can nonetheless represent a situation where a dominant group imposes its ideas upon a minority (Weber, 1968, p. 37). Weber therefore distinguishes legitimacy from legitimation[27], which is a situation of domination. The assertion of hierarchical accountability in cross-sector arrangements (Checkland *et al.*, 2013) is indicative of the potential for legitimation.

Weber (1968, pp. 40–43) also distinguishes two rationales for collective behaviour, contrasting the basis for legitimacy of associative relationships with that of communal relationships. Cross-sector collaboration where interest groups adapt for expediency or rationally adjust their actions towards a common set of values, such as the managerial norms of NPM, exhibits an associative relationship. The complex accountabilities and hierarchical management of cross-sector collaboration therefore emerge from 'the conflict of interests, with its attendant competition for supremacy' of associative relationships (Weber, 1968, p. 42). Weber argues that a rational agreement and focus on technical activity and mutual benefit (as reflected in the emphasis on outcomes measures) is insufficient to sustain collective relationships. In order to

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[27] Weber uses the term 'legitimation' while the literature reviewed uses the term 'legitimisation' to indicate a situation of domination

maintain their legitimacy to act together as a group, collectives must also form the affectual and traditional ties that are the bases for legitimacy in communal relationships, invoking a feeling of belonging together (Weber, 1968, pp. 41–42). The relationship-building and champion behaviours that facilitate informal accountability in cross-sector networks (Romzek *et al.*, 2014) illustrate that communal relationships need not be based on similarities amongst the partners but are present when each party orients its behaviour towards benefitting the other rather than towards benefitting from the situation (Weber, 1968, p. 42).

However, the analysis of the instrumental use of neighbourhood engagement (Durose and Lowndes, 2010) illustrates the coercion that is possible within communal relationships, based on the relative capacity of each partner to exploit opportunities to gain advantage. Similarly, the evidence of limited participation in decision-making processes (Jones and Liddle, 2011) demonstrates the 'closed' nature of networks which limits their political accountability to diverse social groups (Weber, 1968, pp. 42–43). In contrast, facilitative leadership that increases mutual understanding to negotiate conflicting interests (Williams, 2013) enhances 'openness' and therefore political legitimacy. Extending such leadership to take an explicitly empowering approach to community engagement, as seen in participatory evaluation in Amsterdam (Bartels, 2018), reduces the opportunity for coercion.

Hegemony explains domination as the power of a social elite, while the growth in managerial bureaucracy legitimises this elite's interests. Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983) argue that rationality alone is insufficient to explain the continuing growth in corporate practices across sectors. Their theory of institutional isomorphism explains the growing homogeneity as resulting from coercive, mimetic, and normative pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, pp. 150–154). The managerial emphasis on accountability coupled with funding dependency increases the *coercive* pressure on sectors to institutionalise competitive and hierarchical decision-making processes. The complexity of accountabilities (Gazley, 2008) and failure of informal approaches to withstand hierarchical control (Romzek *et al.*, 2014; Bartels, 2018) increases modelling or *mimetic* behaviours amongst organisations seeking legitimacy to access resources. Governments' legitimisation of competitive neoliberal forms of pluralism (Jing and Savas, 2009) and the dissemination of prevalent managerial practices through academic and professional networks (as indicated by the provenance of articles in the literature review) create *normative* isomorphic pressures. The institutional homogeneity that ensues from these multiple isomorphic pressures restricts the range of strategic choices available to collaborating organisations, 'enabling us to understand the irrationality, the frustration of power, and the lack

of innovation that are so commonplace in organizational life' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 157). Power relations amongst sectors become entrenched and agency to make alternative choices is limited as 'organizational actors making rational decisions construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change in later years' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 148).

At the same time their theory of isomorphism exposes the locus of power as the control over the 'norms and standards' to which organisations rationally adapt their actions, and control over the 'appropriate models of organizational structure' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 157). The frustration of third and public sectors at the imposition of processes that secure legitimacy but which conflict with their social aims (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015), indicates a growing critical awareness of these power relations. The literature reviewed on informal accountability, interpersonal relationships and empowering approaches to community engagement indicates a movement to establish alternative norms and interorganisational practices. It thus responds to DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) concluding appeal, '[t]o the extent that pluralism is a guiding value in public policy deliberations, we need to discover new forms of intersectoral coordination that will encourage diversification rather than hastening homogenization' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, p. 158).

The literature reviewed shows that the third sector continually complies with adverse organisational practices. Milbourne and Cushman (2015) explain this culture with reference to Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality. Governmentality is the art of enlisting the population's cooperation in delivering its own wellbeing and self-regulation (or self-administered sanctions) (Foucault, 1991, pp. 87–104). Internalisation by the third sector of a dominant conception of its role as facilitating and subordinate to the private and public sectors (Eccles and Saltzman, 2011; Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant, 2012; Milbourne and Cushman, 2015; Bradley, Orr and Rapson, 2017) therefore subjects the sector to government control. Applying the concept of governmentality to the field of collaborative governance, Jessop (2020, pp. 147–161) argues that the combination of common practices and narratives creates self-discipline. The prevalent institutions of accountability and resource dependency create differential access to resources, thereby managing the relationships in society between people and 'wealth, resources, means of subsistence [and] the territory with its specific qualities' (Foucault, 1991, p. 93). The global rhetoric of neoliberal conceptions of pluralism evidenced in the SSIR articles, and its cultural adaptation (Jing and Savas, 2009) manipulates people's 'customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking' (Foucault, 1991, p. 93). Through cross-sector

organisational arrangements, government therefore draws upon the 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics' to exercise a 'complex form of power' (Foucault, 1991, p. 102).

The evidence of alternative strategies and models of collaboration in the literature reviewed (on both interorganisational arrangements and interpersonal relationships) shows how the management of cross-sector relations becomes a 'space for political struggle and contestation', continually defining and redefining what is 'within the competence of the state and what is not' (Foucault, 1991, p. 103). This follows from Foucault's concept of civil society as independent of government, with its own characteristics and relationships and therefore 'a source of inherently progressive resistance against the state' (Jessop, 2020, p. 155 citing Dean and Villadsen, 2016). Jessop (2020) argues that the power of governmentality can be changed from self-discipline to self-care by fostering an 'ethico-political' stance, that is a self-critical awareness of the effects of ideology and development of autonomy. Thus, '[c]are of the self becomes a focal point for individual freedom, positive relationships with others and, potentially, ethical and self-emancipatory participation in civil activities' (Jessop, 2020, p. 159). Evidence in the literature reviewed of divergence from hierarchical, strategic management reflects Foucault's argument that power is dispersed and not held entirely by the state, but that the state 'can only operate on the basis of other, already existing, power relations' (Jessop, 2020, p. 160). Thus, the micro-relations of collaboration are not separate from the macro-relations but empower them.

Emerging from the literature review, therefore, is a supposition that the constraints imposed by prevalent managerial practices raise the critical awareness of third sector organisations and communities. However, neither situated practice that focusses on community engagement and building interpersonal relationships, nor withdrawal from resource-dependent relations, nor interest-based alliances alone are sufficient to overcome the forces of oppressive power relations. What is missing from the past and current literature is an understanding of how collaborative networks create the deliberate intent to change power and how or to what extent a focus on micro-relations can affect macro-level power relations in society. It is therefore limited in its capacity to guide the research partners to act in ways that will reconcile the tension between hierarchical accountability to government and funders and political accountability to partners, communities and their primary interest groups. I posed a fourth conceptual question to guide the next step in the research, '*how might networks resist hegemony and integrate multiple interests?*'

Conclusion

By adopting a strategy of meta-interpretation, adapted to facilitate a participatory approach, this literature review developed my knowledge and that of my research partners of the theoretical concepts and professional challenges of cross-sector collaboration. The synthesis has developed a conceptual framework for understanding collaboration which creates a typology of cross-sector relations as the effects of interorganisational arrangements, interpersonal relationships and the exercise of power. It draws attention to the underlying dynamics of power relations that maintain hierarchical domination but have the potential to support the emancipation of marginalised interest groups. The participatory process of the review increased our mutual understanding and formed a focus for the research on the conflict between hierarchical and political accountabilities in cross-sector collaboration. It also laid a foundation to engage the partners actively in further collaborative research to work out pragmatic answers to their questions.

However, the literature reviewed is limited in its capacity to direct the research partners' actions in ways that will realise the emancipatory potential of cross-sector collaboration. Situating the literature review in a wider theoretical context can enhance insight into the ways in which the dynamics of power relations can be changed. As the literature search developed in response to the research partners' concerns and conceptual questions (see Appendix 2), its 'boundaries of applicability' broadened (Weed, 2008). My initial focus on cross-sector collaboration was guided by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015. This broadened to include multiple definitions and contexts of cross-sector collaboration (see Appendix 2), encapsulated by Sørensen and Torfing's (2009) description of governance networks (in Part I). I therefore adopt these authors' description to define the situations to which this synthesis is applicable as those where *dependent but autonomous organisations from multiple sectors form an institutional framework to negotiate diverse interests and define problems, visions and plans that will contribute to policy and the common good*.

This definition places the case of cross-sector collaboration within the field of network governance. In the next chapter therefore, I turn to this field to seek greater understanding of whether and how the research partners can engage in cross-sector collaboration in ways that support their primary interests as well as contributing to the wider common good of national well-being.

Chapter 3 Theoretical rationale
A strategic relational approach

Introduction

The aim of this thesis was to understand the role of cross-sector collaboration in delivering the aspirations of the Well-being Act. The literature review in Chapter Two developed a definition of cross-sector collaboration which placed it in the wider field of network governance. In the current chapter, I turn to governance theories to address my research partners' concerns, reflected in the literature reviewed, of the tendency for hierarchical control to dominate collaborating partners' accountability to each other, to their support base and to the wider community.

This chapter contributes to a gap in understanding in network governance by combining three purposes. First, it develops a theoretical statement that explains how the dynamic of cross-sector collaboration can change from hierarchical domination to negotiated accountability and interdependent intersectoral relations. Second, it forms the rationale for the research approach and design by setting out the basis for dialogue with my participants during the fieldwork, to build their pragmatic understanding and answer their research questions about collaboration. Third, the abductive process of developing theory forms the basis for my own dialogue with the empirical findings and the concepts of the meta-interpretation and governance theory to ground theory in the data.

In this chapter, I develop my theoretical frame of reference in four sections. First, I turn to the field of governance theory as a rich source of understanding of the power relations and dilemmas of cross-sector collaboration. I explore the origins of this literature in the UK context, drawing out the crisis tendencies of network governance and the central principle of reflexivity, with reference to the work of Gerry Stoker and Bob Jessop. I investigate the growing divergence in this literature in the UK and Europe between that which espouses theories of governance as hegemony, and that embracing the transformative potential of network governance. This investigation engages more closely with the work of Jonathan Davies and Eva Sørensen and her colleague, Jacob Torfing, previously introduced in Chapter 2.

Second, following Jessop (2007) I use a strategic-relational heuristic to explain how cross-sector collaboration affords selective advantage to some groups relative to others (the 'relational' aspect) and how the principle of reflexivity facilitates strategic adaptation which changes these structures (the 'strategic' aspect). This approach provides a framework to

integrate the theories of governance as hegemony or as transformation by creating a focus on the capacity of interest groups and alliances for reflexive action. I consider the limited capacity of the strategic-relational approach and theories of governance to explain how social groups build the capacity for reflexive action and whether or how this affects the exercise of power through societal culture and structures. This lacking knowledge underpins the divide in governance theory and forms the gap in existing research which I address in this thesis: '*whether and how can cross-sector collaboration transform power relations to support action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being in Wales?'*

In the third section, I consider the governance context for the research partners' concerns about negotiating multiple accountabilities. I explore whether the Well-being Act forms the conditions for hegemony or transformation of inter-sectoral relationships. I begin by applying the strategic-relational heuristic to the Well-being Act to draw out its ambiguous effects to maintain power structures or support reflexivity. Then, with reference to the work of Eckersley (2020b), I consider whether current prevalent worldviews can support ecological interests. I apply her analysis to show how the Well-being Act has the potential to form the necessary conditions for critical situated problem-solving to generate action towards an ecological state. This analysis highlights the urgency of the research focus to explore the capacity of cross-sector collaboration to create reflexive rationality.

Finally, in the fourth section I explain the statement of the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration that emerged from the research. In contrast to the broadening of conceptual and theoretical understanding thus far, I take a theoretical position to combine key concepts and theories which focus the research more precisely on the dynamic between hidden power and transformation in collaboration. In this chapter I concentrate on the theoretical statement's foundations in governance theory and my literature review. In later chapters I explain how my stance was informed by the experiences and emergent findings of the critical-relational systemic enquiry. This section therefore abductively *guided* the research approach and design and *emerged* from the research investigation.

In the conclusion, I summarise how the review of governance theory, strategic-relational heuristic and analysis of the capacity of the Well-being Act for hegemony or transformation refined the research question to focus on changing the dynamic of power relations.

Governance theory

Whereas the Well-being Act portrays cross-sector collaboration as joint action of public and third sectors to include diverse interests in the contribution to national well-being, governance networks are more broadly described as a *self-organising group of bodies, which interact through negotiation within a defined framework with the aim of contributing to areas of public policy* (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). These characteristics and the crossing of public, private and third sector boundaries create networks' capacity to act as a 'steering' mechanism for government to coordinate societal action (Rhodes, 1996, p. 660). R.A.W. Rhodes (1996) argues, therefore, that although ostensibly self-organising, networks remain subject to state influence. The diverse theoretical roots of literature on governance (Stoker, 2018) mean it offers a rich source of ideas to understand the interaction between the internal relations of collaborative partnerships and power.

Stoker's seminal work (2018, originally published 1998) treats network governance as a means of coordinating collective action in response to perceived failures of governance by market exchange, state bureaucracy or mixed economy. His work and elaborations by Jessop (2000, 2003) delineate the dilemmas of pluralist governance. They explain the inherent risk of reinforcing power relations that constrain action in the collective interest, but the transformative potential of pluri-centric governance to overcome the limitations of other modes. This literature contains the key concept of reflexive rationality, which is networks' orientation to 'negotiation around a long-term consensual project' (Jessop, 2000, p. 6).

Later work builds on this theoretical field, developing the two strands of this argument. Davies contrasts the 'ideal-type' of *network governance* that 'fosters ethical virtues such as trust and empowered reflexivity' with actual *governance networks* as 'formal and informal resource-exchanges between governmental and non-governmental actors' that reinforce the historical hierarchical style of government that constrains some interest groups (Davies, 2011, p. 3). Developing the latter strand, I focus particularly on Davies and colleagues' work (Davies, 2005, 2011; Davies and Blanco, 2017; Davies and Chorianopoulos, 2018; Davies *et al.*, 2020) to exemplify the arguments of governance as hegemony. I then turn to the work of Sørensen and Torfing (2005, 2007, 2009, 2018) to elaborate the theory of democratic network governance and its transformative potential. These strands of governance theory are divided as to whether networks can build a culture of reflexive rationality and whether reflexivity in networks transforms the power exercised by meta-governance.

Dilemmas and reflexivity

Concluding a major research programme in the 1990s in the UK, Stoker produced a conceptual framework to help simplify and organise the study of governance (Stoker, 2018 originally published 1998). The propositions and dilemmas of this framework derive from a consideration of the effectiveness of networks from the perspective of government, 'to maintain public order and facilitate collective action' (Stoker, 2018, p. 15). It therefore contrasts with the literature reviewed in the previous chapter, which largely considered cross-sector collaboration from the vantage point of the individual public manager and the organisations directly involved. The macro perspective draws out the dilemmas of governance and begins to reconcile the multiple accounts in the meta-interpretation. In addition, Stoker's article and Jessop's elaboration of governance theory (Jessop, 2000, 2003, 2020) begin to explain how the reflexive rationality of networks changes the dynamics of power. In his later article Stoker (2011) reflects on the practice of network governance. He draws out the limitations of his conceptual framework and questions the sustainability of local governance as a model for democratic local government. In addition, Jessop (2003) elaborates the concept of meta-governance and shows how this reinforces the tendency of networks to inequality, unless this higher-order management is predisposed towards ethically reflexive governance.

Stoker (2018) sets out five propositions about network governance and counters these with their inherent dilemmas, as follows. Governance networks explicitly include organisations from outside government, inherently contravening the cultural norm that governing is done by an elected body. Governance deals with policy issues crossing societal sectors, but this blurs the responsibility for action. Networks expose the power and dependency of collaborating organisations, but this interdependency changes the relationship with government and its capacity to control action. Networks are self-governing but this creates multiple lines of accountability. Governance promotes and relies on consensus rather than authority to motivate action, but hierarchical authority is always an option in the case of governance failure and therefore is never fully abandoned. These dilemmas reflect the dynamic tension between legitimisation and legitimacy, self-regulation and ethico-political self-care, isomorphism and diversity, and hegemony and a critical philosophy inherent in the theoretical underpinning of the meta-interpretation in Chapter Two, Part III. I explore this tension next.

The lack of power of local governance networks is a significant source of failure contributing to their lack of legitimacy and capacity to act. The lack of public support for network governance in comparison to representative local government in the UK restricts the 'soft'

power of networks, especially when networks introduce partners with greater access to resources or 'hard' power into local decision-making (Stoker, 2011, 2018). Resolving this legitimacy crisis requires networks to establish the same emotional and traditional bases of support as local government, 'it will draw legitimacy to itself because of the values, ideologies and ethos it expresses' (Stoker, 2011, p. 28). This reinforces the finding of the meta-interpretation, that network legitimacy requires communal relationships as well as a focus on the material outcomes of collaboration for each interest group to shift the power dynamic from legitimisation to legitimacy.

Networks are open to the pressures of governmentality as authorities seek to control the objects of governance (Stoker, 2018). This quest stems from the lack of direct accountability of multi-party decision-making and the capacity of networks to change the balance of power at multiple levels of 'principal-agent relations, inter-organizational negotiation and systemic coordination' (Stoker, 2018, p. 20). Although Stoker does not offer a counter strategy, Jessop's (2020, pp. 155–160) treatment of governmentality (see Chapter Two, Part III) shows that freedom from the constraints created by ideological worldviews requires a critical self-relationship and ethical reflexivity in relation to others in the network. Stoker's view that local government is 'bounced along on a fluctuating wave of popular politics' with varying degrees of relevance (Stoker, 2011, p. 28) suggests, however that governance networks do not withstand governmentalities.

Shared governance can acquire high levels of decision-making power but the process of forming a joint mission can narrow the focus of collaborative action, restricting the inclusion of diverse interests[28]. Such narrowing fuels a (hegemonic) struggle between the simplified vision of the network and a more complex vision that represents the wider public interest (Stoker, 2018). This also explains the emergence of isomorphism in collaboration, as the inherent complexity of networks increases pressures to adopt homogenous practices, further constraining the network's scope to adapt its vision to incorporate diverse interests. The discussion of hegemony in Chapter Two, Part III points to the need for critical reflexivity (awareness of how the network's composition, processes and vision restrict the capacity of

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[28] This point requires an understanding of the use of the term "interests". Whereas individuals' interests can be defined as 'what is important in people's lives' (Lukes, 2005, p. 80), in networks members can be understood to represent their organisation's interests. Therefore, I treat an organisation's interests as 'what is important to an organisation's mission'.

some organisations to achieve their interests) and a broad alliance of interests if the network is to enhance its capacity to act.

Thus, Stoker and Jessop's work explains how power is exercised by forces of legitimisation, governmentality, isomorphism, and hegemony. They also explain how the alternative, more inclusive and equal relationships theorised in Chapter Two, Part III can be achieved through networks' communal relationships, a critical self-relationship and ethical reflexivity. Jessop highlights reflexivity as the key characteristic of networks that supports inclusive relationships. He defines 'reflexive rationality', as 'dialogic rather than monologic, pluralistic rather than monolithic, heterarchic rather than either hierarchic or anarchic' (Jessop, 2000, p. 16). That is, reflexive rationality coordinates action through the iterative (dialogic) development of consensus on a mission amongst collaborating partners, incorporating their multiple (pluralistic) perspectives. It is a process where each has equal control (heterarchy), contrasting with the top-down control established in bureaucracy (hierarchy) or the lack of direct control inherent in free markets (anarchy).

However, this reflexivity and self-organisation are put at risk by the tendency of governments to intervene: 'faced with the complexity and autonomy of a system of multi-level governance there is a strong tendency for political leaderships to seek to impose order and issue directives' (Stoker, 2018, p. 22). Multiple dimensions of governance failure exacerbate this tendency as meta-governance[29] or the 'governance of governance' determines the balance between these dimensions – of cooperation and competition, openness and closure, governability and flexibility, and accountability and efficiency (Jessop, 2000). As seen in the literature review, governments' role in meta-governance is broad, extending to the design, regulation, culture, power differentials and communicative processes of networks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). Through these aspects governments exercise the direct dimensions of power, that is the capacity to make concrete decisions and the power to limit the scope of decision-making (Lukes, 2005).

Jessop (2003) argues that to promote reflexive rationality, meta-governors must adopt a continually 'reflexive orientation' to the effectiveness and objects of governance and combine a 'flexible repertoire' of collibration (or coordination) strategies of anarchic market exchange,

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[29] Initially Jessop (2000) uses the term *meta-governance* to refer to the governance of network governance, but later extends it to the 'collibration' of multiple forms of meta-management, by markets and bureacracy as well as networks to reflect its pluralist nature (Jessop, 2003, p. 16). Here, I use *meta-governance* to refer to the management of networks and use the term *collibration* to refer to governments' coordination of multiple mechanisms.

hierarchical bureaucracy, and heterarchical networks. These two attributes must be supported by a third, 'self-reflexive irony' or 'romantic public irony', to proceed as if success in (meta-) governance were possible while recognising the likelihood of failure (Jessop, 2003, p. 7). This reflexive orientation means that meta-governance is not manipulative, reinforcing hegemony, but designed to combat the uncertainties caused by the dilemmas and dimensions of failure of governance (Jessop, 2003, pp. 7–10).

Yet, as governance networks are continually exposed to hegemonic forces it is not clear whether networks can maintain their reflexivity or how meta-governors can acquire a predisposition for pluralist governance. Thus, I treat meta-governance as well as governance as open to influence from prevalent beliefs, practices and norms, or 'societal culture', whether or not this is ideological and therefore hegemonic.

Governance as hegemony

In this debate, Davies places himself firmly on the side of 'governance as hegemony', that is governance networks cannot 'transcend hierarchy', but perpetuate 'the centralisation of power across economy, state and society' (Davies, 2011, pp. 6–8). His central argument is that network governance creates a culture of consensus that undermines the capacity for politicised resistance (Davies, 2011, pp. 101–124). His more recent work on the governance of austerity provides empirical support for this argument (Davies and Blanco, 2017; Davies *et al.*, 2020). In the context of a dominant worldview of neoliberalism, networks struggle to form a shared, or 'ethico-political' imaginary that incorporates multiple material interests (Davies, 2011, p. 119). This conflict between ideological elitism and the pluralism of networks is the cause of their multiple dilemmas and 'undercuts connectionist aspirations' for the development of shared goals and trust through communication and creativity (Davies, 2011, p. 124). Notwithstanding the possibility of exceptional local circumstances, he concludes 'it would be very surprising if authentic and sustainable network governance emerged on a significant scale in the capitalist epoch' (Davies, 2011, p. 8).

It is the 're-acculturation' process in networks that both constrains their capacity for reflexive action and strengthens hegemony (Davies, 2011, pp. 114–124). The culture of joint problem-solving and interdependence creates an expectation of consensus, undermining the organising potential for more radical community leadership (Davies, 2011, pp. 117–119). The new culture shifts the focus of marginalised groups from the effects of power relations to the need to form a sense of belonging, thus 'obscuring bullying and domination by the very managers circulating discourses of governance' (Davies and Chorianopoulos, 2018, p. 6). Contributing to a

symposium led by Davies (see Davies, 2014b, 2014a), Janet Newman argues that networks' weakening of activism strengthens the grip of hegemony. Meta-governance ushers in domination by extending the reach of ideological narratives to multiple areas of social life and activism through networks (Newman, 2014). In the name of negotiated consensus, these narratives incorporate activists' ideas, changing their meaning and appropriating their energies, therefore stripping them of political power (Newman, 2014). Consensus is also more achievable where the social status of the collaborating partners is similar (Davies, 2011, p. 121). So, networks build alliances based on the desire for action and therefore include members according to their capacity to contribute resources (Davies *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the network culture of consensus constrains critical awareness and restricts the diversity of interests, so networks fail to negotiate the shared vision that can produce a broader alliance across sectors. These assertions are borne out by a cross-case study of EU governance networks (Davies and Blanco, 2017).

The claim that negotiated consensus in networks is the rational way to organise collective action assumes that social identities are becoming *individualised*, which Davies (2005) refutes. Instead he draws on Gramsci's conception of hegemony and the integral state to show how interest *groups* continue to interact strategically through networks (Davies, 2011, pp. 101–124). Dominant narratives of complexity and individualised risk promote the need for networks but create a strategic advantage for economically powerful social groups by distracting attention from causality, that it is the upward concentration of wealth that causes poverty and social problems (Davies, 2011; Davies and Chorianopoulos, 2018). Governance for austerity, as an act of neoliberal ideology delivers a 'functional hegemony' by directing resources and creating a focus on pragmatic action in ways that exclude alternative worldviews (Davies *et al.*, 2020, p. 59).

Despite the strength of Davies and others' arguments of governance as hegemony, doubt is cast by considering a further contributor to Davies' (2014) symposium. Davies claims there is little evidence of a strong counter-hegemonic movement against neoliberalism and therefore that network governance is not emancipatory (Davies, 2011, pp. 119–121). Yet, Mike Geddes study of Bolivia's Movement Towards Socialism government shows how the government uses discourses of 'vivir bien'[30] and policies of a plural economy to gain social cohesion (Geddes, 2014). Such narratives and pluralist policies can be interpreted as the pursuit of an increasingly

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[30] Vivir bien: 'living well', a form of ecological, social, and economic harmony

coercive integral state rather than the power of counter-hegemony. However, they could also more radically be the 'occupation of the state on behalf of the social movements – "integral civil society" perhaps' (Geddes, 2014, p. 179). The latter would accord with Jessop's (2003) requirement for a predisposition towards reflexive, or ethically inclusive emancipatory meta-governance. Perhaps, as Geddes concludes, the beginning of the struggle to build a 'broad bloc of support' is evident even if 'the post-neoliberal, let alone post-capitalist, project is still struggling to be born' (Geddes, 2014, pp. 178–9).

Democratic network governance

Hegemonic power is inherently undemocratic, so the counter to hegemony is arguably the democratic inclusion of multiple interests in the formation and implementation of policy. Sørensen, Torfing and colleagues are supportive of the democratic capacity of networks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2018). Like Davies, but from an institutionalist theoretical basis, they focus on the cultural institutions of networks and how these emerge from broader social relations that constrain the capacity for democratic pluralism (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, pp. 25–42). Unlike Davies, however, they assert that the dilemmas and tendencies for failure of networks provoke awareness of the exercise of power through cultural institutions and draw attention to the undemocratic nature of network culture. The ensuing hegemonic struggle to construct a new culture is formed both in the internal relationships of networks and in interaction with meta-governance (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, pp. 95–110).

Contributors to Sørensen and Torfing's (2007) book argue that the capacity of networks to include diverse perspectives and form a broad alliance of interests is not determined simply by the constraints of dominant ideologies and hidden power, but by the creative agency of collaborating partners acting in diverse situations (Bevir & Rhodes, 2007). Similarly, Patsy Healey's work on governance in the field of planning also emphasises the role of creative agency (Healey, 2003). Nevertheless, Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 169–230) acknowledge that meta-governance to resolve dilemmas and increase effectiveness undermines the self-regulating nature of networks and hence the agency of stakeholders to create a reflexive culture. However, by showing that focussing meta-governance on enhancing networks' capacity for pluri-centric democracy *also* enhances their effectiveness to form and deliver policy (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005, 2009), they offer a way forward to establish the predisposition towards reflexive governance called for by Jessop (2003).

Sørensen and Torfing's analysis centres on the regulatory, normative, cognitive, and imaginary aspects of networks' cultural institutions and how these can create the conditions for discourse that respects conflicting interests and forms an understanding of the common good:

> The institutionalized framework has a regulative aspect in the sense that it provides rules, roles and procedures; a normative aspect in the sense that it conveys norms, values and standards; a cognitive element in the sense that it generates codes, concepts and specialized knowledge; and an imaginary aspect in the sense that it produces identities, ideologies, common hopes and visions. (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005, p. 204)

These authors argue that not only are many aspects of networks inconsistent with liberal models of democracy, but their cultural institutions are also distorted by broader social relations (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, pp. 95–110). Regarding the former, networks conflict with democracy by blurring the boundary between state and civil society, so obscuring the locus of power and responsibility. They exacerbate inequality of access and influence, so reducing the transparency and accountability of decision-making. Regarding the latter, the authors propose multiple institutional theories that explain how network culture is distorted from the pluralist ideal by social forces. Historical path dependency, restrictive practices based on rational choice, socially constructed perceptions of cultural appropriateness aggravated by isomorphism, and tactical discourses of governmentality become embedded in the cultural institutions of networks, restricting networks' capacity for democratic inclusivity. Thus, not only are networks subject to the direct power of meta-governance, but they are also open to influence from the forces generated by the social imaginaries and ideologies[31] of societal culture.

However, institutionalist theories that espouse the power of agency as well as structures to determine social relations support the argument that continual critical reflexivity within networks changes their culture (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, pp. 38–41). Change happens both gradually through the diversity of perspectives and radically through exposing the limits of the current culture to resolve dilemmas. The latter process forms 'a strategic terrain for hegemonic struggles' to construct a new culture (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, p. 41). The creative agency of stakeholders in the face of multiple governance dilemmas and diverse contexts means that the institutions of networks emerge from individuals' contingent, situated responses and everyday practices (Healey, 2003; Bevir and Rhodes, 2007). Therefore, although networks have a tendency to reproduce inequalities, the democratic quality of network culture is not determined by 'inexorable, impersonal forces' alone (Bevir and Rhodes, 2007, p. 77).

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[31] For a distinction between social imaginary and ideology see Chapter Two, p.56

Essentially, networks 'must be able to create a regulative, normative and cognitive framework that facilitates problem-oriented negotiations' and to do so '*in the face of* persistent conflicts and power struggles' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, p. 98 added emphasis).

Despite this analysis, the authors recognise the need to regulate governance networks to ensure their effective contribution to government of society, and therefore the need for hierarchical as well as political accountability. Institutional network governance theories expose the way meta-governance affects the agency of networks to sustain the necessary reflexive rationality by reintroducing hierarchy and hidden forms of power. Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 169–182) identify three aspects of control: institutional design to overcome conflict establishes hierarchical state control; civil society is integrated into political government by the promotion of a shared vision; and the promotion of interdependence requires the skills and technical powers of the state. Therefore, meta-governance may invoke normative ideals, may be the exercise of state power or may be a managerial response to overcome dilemmas. In all cases, it is a 'reflexive, higher order governance' of networks that tends to be the domain of public authorities at multiple spatial levels (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, pp. 245–246).

However, meta-governance that pursues the European 'hegemonic norms' of effectiveness and democracy can interact with the cultural institutions of networks in ways that enhance the conditions for reflexivity (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 235). This requires a shift in the perception of effectiveness from a focus on efficiency and operational outcomes to evaluating how well networks contribute to the policy process, from 'identification of policy problems' to 'the building of capacities for future cooperation' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 242). Meta-governors can simultaneously enhance the effective contribution to policy and deepen democracy in multiple ways. They can encourage self-regulation of competing elites and the required inclusion of less powerful actors, enhance the deliberative, participative and purposive design of the network, increase political capacity and engagement, and regulate discursive conditions and alignment to the political (electoral) process (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). These processes deepen the capacity of the network for political participation in respect of its inclusivity, the scope of policy considered relevant and its authenticity (Dryzek, 2007, pp. 262–273). At the very least, governance networks are a more transparent process for decision-making than the hidden 'input and aid from a broad range of societal actors' that more generally informs government policy (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005, p. 198).

Despite this analysis of the complementarity of networks' effectiveness and pluralist democracy, Sørensen and Torfing acknowledge the risk that governments exercise power in ways that distort negotiated consensus. Reflexive development of policy in networks risks divergence from wider political discourses. Consequently, meta-governance to restore convergence risks the imposition of 'short-term interests', 'instrumental co-optation' of network stakeholders and 'strategic manipulation of the networked policy process' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009, p. 252). The norms of effectiveness and democracy exert a hegemonic force that co-exists with other political ideologies including the ideology of neoliberalism. Whereas Sørensen and Torfing and colleagues (2007) argue that the norms of effectiveness and democracy in networks interact with meta-governance to enhance reflexivity, Davies (2011) argues that neoliberal ideology has the greater influence over the (re-)acculturation process of network governance. The question therefore remains as to whether and how networks can interact with meta-governance in ways that sustain the reflexive rationality of the network and the reflexive orientation of meta-governance.

A strategic-relational approach

The review of governance theory in the previous section deepens understanding of cross-sector collaboration provided by the literature review in Chapter Two. The tension between hierarchical and political accountability is explained by Stoker's (2018) analysis of the inherent dilemmas of network governance. The dominance of hierarchical authority is not only the effect of inherent conflict (Davies, 2005) but is also created and disguised by the very culture of consensus formed in collaborative networks (Davies, 2011). Sørensen and Torfing's (2007) argument that the inherent dilemmas of networks raise critical awareness of power relations is reflected in the literature review's evidence of dissent (see for example, Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). The theoretical underpinning of the meta-interpretation (Chapter Two, Part III) highlighted the contingent nature of the exercise of hierarchical power and domination. Jessop's (2000) analysis of reflexive rationality explains how dialogic, pluralistic, heterarchical micro-relations leverage this contingency to change the dynamics of power. However, both the meta-interpretation of Chapter Two and the review of governance theory in the current chapter have limited capacity to explain why or how reflexive rationality emerges in networks or how it interacts with multiple hegemonic social norms of neoliberal capitalism, effectiveness and democracy. This limitation in existing knowledge refines the research focus to address the research partners' concerns by understanding how to create reflexive rationality in networks.

Following Jessop (2007, pp. 21–53), I take a strategic-relational approach (SRA) to form a coherent theoretical understanding of these issues, The SRA is not a theory but a heuristic that does not validate the theories but 'highlight[s] their interrelated structural and strategic dimensions' (Jessop, 2007, p. 53). It therefore provides an exploratory approach to compare the governance theories discussed above, with their diverse conceptual bases, and to guide the empirical research.

The SRA treats power in neo-Gramscian fashion, as a social relation: different interest groups including third sector organisations, public bodies and government derive their power by constraining or coordinating the actions of others. Social groups with different configurations of interests face different barriers to or opportunities for action, or 'strategically selective structures' and each adapts strategically with 'structurally oriented reflexive action' to realise those interests, thereby creating structures for other groups (Jessop, 2007, p. 41). The SRA is therefore about 'analysis of the relations among different relations comprising the social formation[32]' (Jessop, 2007, p. 29 citing Jessop 1982).

Strategic relationships of power ('relations') may therefore be obtained directly, as I explored in the previous chapter, by gaining the capacity to make decisions that affect others' interests and by limiting the scope of decision-making (Lukes, 2005). Steven Lukes (2005) also shows that they may also take a more hidden form, constraining the capacity of other groups for reflexive action by limiting dissent. Such acquiescence to power relationships can be achieved through pervasive worldviews. A worldview coordinates diverse social groups' actions through the adoption of a common set of beliefs, values, and practices. I noted in Chapter Two, that Sum and Jessop distinguish ideologies, which are worldviews with coercive power, from imaginaries, which primarily help people to make sense of the world (Sum and Jessop, 2013, pp. 169–172). People gravitate to worldviews that give advantage to their interests, so imaginaries 'always contain biases' but they are not necessarily 'ideological, that is inevitably related to power and domination' (Sum and Jessop, 2013, p. 169). Interest groups can free themselves from the selective strategic effects of dominant ideologies (or hegemony) by reflexive action. That is, by critical reflection on how these worldviews disadvantage their and

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[32] Jessop's use of 'social formation' rather than 'society' indicates his structuralist conception of social life – that it is the institutional context rather than individuals that determines what happens in society (see www.oxfordreference.com). However, his emphasis on the centrality of reflexivity indicates his openness to the power of agency.

others' identities and interests and by the development of strategies that transform social structures (Jessop, 2007).

The capacity for reflexivity can therefore transform strategic relations. The focus of reflexive action must be the transformation of ideology, including the associated cultural beliefs, values and practices, or societal culture. Interest groups compete to establish their preferred imaginary, using discourses, strategies, practices and the status given to selected organisations or sectors to disseminate it widely through the institutions of society (Sum and Jessop, 2013, pp. 171–172). The unique role of government to maintain social cohesion among competing interest groups, means its power is also a social relation, that of 'political strategy' (Jessop, 2007, p. 35). Thus, state power is the widespread (political) establishment of a worldview and is exercised through the ensemble of institutions that make up the state system.

The SRA creates theoretical consistency between the meta-interpretation of Chapter Two and the dichotomy of structure and agency emerging in the governance theory reviewed in this chapter. It draws attention to the exercise of power through competing worldviews and how the attendant societal culture forms strategically selective structures for different interest groups. It explains the emergence of reflexive rationality and hence agency in networks as the interdiscursive critical awareness and strategic calculation of configurations of interest groups. The meta-interpretation and governance theory portray the strategic relations of dominant ideologies and how these emerge as unequal cross-sector relationships. The SRA explains the emerging importance in governance theory of the need to transform ideology and not only cultural institutions. The SRA explains the meta-interpretation's arguments (Chapter Two, Part III) for critical awareness and new practices, communal relationships, an ethical stance and collective organisation, and preference for diversity, as arguments for the reflexive action of strategically disadvantaged interest groups which changes the contingent power relations.

Although the application of SRA to governance theory explains how the reflexivity of marginalised social groups can transform the constraints of dominant ideologies, it has two main limitations for the research partners. First, it does not explain how strategically disadvantaged groups develop the elements that support their reflexive capacity and whether cross-sector collaboration affords that opportunity. Secondly, neither does the SRA explain whether social imaginaries (rather than ideology) emerging from collaboration can achieve the widespread dissemination necessary to become the dominant imaginary coordinating social action and therefore driving the orientation of meta-governance. These limitations mean the

question remains as to whether cross-sector collaboration as required by the Welsh Government through the Well-being Act supports the interests of an elite group or enhances the capacity of marginalised groups for reflexivity. I therefore refined my overall research question to ask: '*whether and how can cross-sector collaboration transform power relations to support action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being in Wales?*'

The governance context in Wales

The review of governance theory has shown an inherent tendency for cross-sector collaboration to lead to the domination of less powerful interest groups unless networks form the dialogic, pluralistic and heterarchical conditions for reflexive rationality. The SRA has emphasised that critical awareness of the selective effects of dominant ideologies is the foundation for such ethical reflexivity. My interaction with the research partners described in Chapter Two showed their historically grown awareness of the risk of marginalisation of ecological interests and the dominance of hierarchical control in Wales. Whether the Well-being Act will perpetuate or change this historical situation, therefore, will depend on its capacity to sustain prevailing power relations through cross-sector collaboration or, alternatively, to create the conditions for critical awareness and reflexive rationality.

I first examine the Well-being Act's capacity to form a state project that enhances the Welsh Government's hierarchical authority and secondly, its potential to support the conditions for reflexive rationality. My review of governance theory has shown that, despite political aspirations, cross-sector collaboration has a tendency for hierarchical dominance unless government has a reflexive orientation. So, I then consider the necessary conditions for the Welsh Government to develop reflexivity. In this analysis I focus on its capacity to reflexively integrate ecological interests, in the context of the Act's aspiration of sustainable development.

The Well-being Act as a state project

Building on my earlier consideration of Jessop's work on reflexive rationality and the SRA, I turn to his analysis of the dimensions of state power (Jessop, 2016, pp. 53–90) to examine the capacity of the Well-being Act to form a state project. The Well-being Act sets out a worldview of national progress as the sustainable development of integrated domains of well-being. In addition to this discursive dimension of state power, the Well-being Act contains other dimensions of power, as a state project which enhances the social bases of power, changes channels of representation and institutional architecture, and creates new methods of intervention (Jessop, 2016, pp. 53–90).

In requiring cross-sector collaboration, the Act forms a *state project* by redefining the boundaries of government with wider society. It reinforces this integrative aspect through its elevation of the status of the County Voluntary Councils as participants from the third sector and its requirements for well-being assessments and objectives that act as standardised forms of accountability. The narrative of national well-being has the potential to be a *hegemonic vision* that can justify a raft of policies in its name. National well-being is projected as a vision of the 'public interest', a one-nation project to gain popular support through both 'material concessions' of enhanced domains of well-being, and 'symbolic rewards' of being a world leader in sustainable development (Jessop, 2016, p. 87). The development of the Act through a national conversation reinvigorates the *social bases* for political support and potentially a 'broader ensemble of national popular forces' (Jessop, 2016, p. 73). In addition to these discursive and action dimensions, the legislation employs the more formal dimensions of governments' power. Changes to the *modes of representation* and *institutional architecture* by establishing PSBs and determining their membership affect the relative power of different interest groups and public bodies. Finally, the Act employs new *methods of intervention* in the form of the five practices of sustainable development. These 'shape the art of the possible, whether the state appears to act despotically (alone) or in more or less open alliance or coordination with other political forces' (Jessop, 2016, p. 70).

Capacity for reflexive rationality

The effects of the Well-being Act on reflexive rationality are uncertain. The interorganisational arrangements and processes for cross-sector collaboration in Wales are described by the Well-being Act's five sustainable development practices. These require collaboration, involvement, long-term planning, a preventive approach and integration and therefore ostensibly form the foundation for the dialogic, pluralistic and equal relationships of reflexive rationality. However, the review of governance theory showed that without critical awareness, the cultural institutions and practices of collaborative networks form a common-sense that embeds historical ideologies (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). In addition, the literature review of cross-sector collaboration showed that the adoption of specific practices, such as community engagement, is insufficient in itself to prevent their use instrumentally rather than to empower marginalised groups (Durose and Lowndes, 2010). The ambivalence of the Act's stance towards ecological interests creates uncertainty regarding its capacity to raise critical awareness of the detrimental relationship between economic and ecological progress. It follows that the Act's five sustainable development practices may not by themselves create the critical good-

sense necessary to change historically embedded practices and may be used instrumentally to support hierarchical control.

In addition to uncertainty over the capacity to raise critical awareness and change prevalent beliefs and practices that marginalise the environment, the Act has ambiguous effects on the communal relationships, ethical collective organisation and diversity needed to change the underlying power dynamic that sustains this marginalisation. Communal relationships motivate collective action based on a shared emotional or traditional sense of belonging. However, although the Well-being Act requires collaboration and establishes Public Services Boards, it is not clear whether the named bodies view each other as legitimate and natural partners in their contribution to national well-being, a communal rationale, or if collaboration will rely on justifying each one's contribution to the other bodies, an associative rationale. Ethical collective organisation (the equal inclusion of multiple perspectives in joint action) enhances reflexivity by promoting a self-critical stance of individuals that motivates them to join with diverse others in a movement for change. Although the Act's requirement to collaborate provides opportunities for collective organisation, the doubt over critical awareness and the uncertain motivation for the new practices undermines the capacity of PSBs for ethically reflexive action that maximises diversity.

State power and ecologically sustainable development

Given the capacity of the Well-being Act to form a state project and its uncertain support for reflexive rationality, its effect on inter-sectoral power relationships will depend on the interaction of macro-level ideologies and the reflexive rationality of collaborating groups. The SRA has shown that this will require Welsh Government to adopt a reflexive orientation if it is to change power relations. That is, to participate in the meta-governance of cross-sector collaboration as one amongst many interests to form a shared imaginary rather than impose a hegemonic worldview. However, the review of governance theory shows that prevalent neoliberal ideologies are incompatible with the ethical inclusion of diverse interests necessary for negotiated consensus and that prevalent norms of effectiveness and democracy can conflict in networks. In addition, the literature review of cross-sector collaboration shows how this inherent conflict plays out *generally* in the relations between national and local government and communities to accentuate hierarchical authority and constrain political accountability. Of importance to the research partners and to the aspirations of the Well-being Act in Wales, is the *specific* question of the compatibility of dominant worldviews with ecologically sustainable development.

The prevalent global model of democratic capitalist states is constrained in its capacity to generate ecological sustainability. Eckersley's critical appraisal of theories of the environmental state contends that the state is 'functionally incapable of giving priority to ecological sustainability' due to the conflict with the ever-increasing consumption needed to sustain both capitalism and fiscal indebtedness to deliver the state's functions (Eckersley, 2020b, pp. 2–7). Therefore, states cannot in their current form shift to an ecological paradigm. Moreover, 'environmental state' models which take a problem-solving approach to ameliorate environmental challenges without changing social structures are insufficient to create the transformation needed to prevent the 'civilisational collapse' from ecosystems' devastation (Eckersley, 2020b, p. 3). This dilemma puts the focus on *transition,* or the generation of action directed towards ecological sustainability. Eckersley (2020b) turns to neo-Gramscian theory, consistent with my SRA analysis, to propose a critical method to manage the associated political challenges.

This critical method combines both macro-level conjunctural analysis and micro-level situated critical problem-solving (Eckersley, 2020b, pp. 9–14). Conjunctural analysis identifies dynamic sets of social situations with the potential for ecological transition. The *critical* approach to problem-solving considers the opportunities to change social structures as well as take ameliorative action. The *situated* approach identifies immediate steps with the best potential for long-term ecological sustainability. The critical method therefore takes advantage of the inherent instability of strategic relations, to change power dynamics from constraining ecological transformation to instead create new and accelerated transitions. Situated, critical problem-solving requires empowered, reflexive societal networks and 'collective societal responsibility' (Eckersley, 2020b, pp. 12–13). It also requires governments to be involved in the conjunctural analysis to 'maintain an ongoing just transition strategy on a societal scale' (Eckersley, 2020b, p. 16).

Social innovation of the kind envisaged by the Well-being Act potentially supports the critical method to generate action directed towards ecological sustainability. It creates a discursive shift from 'economic prosperity' to 'national well-being' and facilitates the capacity for situated problem-solving in collaborative networks, the PSBs. However, the problem-solving approach must be critically aware to identify the social structures that can be changed if it is to generate action towards ecological sustainability. It must also include the government as one partner in the negotiations. The capacity for ecologically sustainable national well-being therefore emerges from the interaction of reflexive meta-governance and critical ethically

reflexive micro-relations. Focussing the research on the potential to change power relations through cross-sector collaboration therefore has wider significance to understand the capacity of nations to generate action directed towards an ecological state.

Theorising the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration

The SRA to governance theory identified a gap in knowledge, developing my overall research question to focus on understanding the creation of reflexive rationality in networks and whether and how this can change the contingent dynamics of power relations. It therefore required a development of theory and practice to enhance understanding and address my research partners' pragmatic concerns about the tension between hierarchical control and political accountability. To understand how to combine concepts from the broad empirical and theoretical base for network governance, I needed to participate in the creative, situated practice of cross-sector collaboration to explore how praxis and theory relate to each other. I took an abductive approach to develop a theoretical position that on the one hand, provided a rationale for the research approach and design and on the other, was informed by my fieldwork.

This statement is therefore specifically developed in relation to the social context for cross-sector collaboration for my research partners at the time of the research. In that context, I have identified, analysed and evaluated various concepts, explanations and interpretations of 'cross-sector collaboration.' This process involved my literature review in the previous chapter, discussion of the interdisciplinary perspectives in this chapter, the participatory research elaborated in Chapters Six and Seven, and abductive critical reflection to create a coherent explanation of the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration.

In the following chapters I discuss how the statement guided and was developed through the primary research. I focus here on the three main arguments of my theoretical stance. First, that reflexive rationality in networks supported by a similar disposition in meta-governance creates the transformative capacity of network governance. Second, that reflexive rationality can be created in critical-relational communities of practice (CoP). Third, that the critical philosophy of praxis created in the CoP changes the relationship between the network and its meta-governance through a dynamic strategically adaptive process of cultural embedding.

Reflexive rationality

My starting point is the argument that network governance challenges prevalent strategic-relations when it facilitates reflexive rationality and critical awareness in the micro-relations of the network, distinguishing transformative cross-sector collaboration from hegemonic

governance networks. Reflexive rationality is a dialogic, pluralistic and heterarchical approach to reach negotiated consensus and coordinate joint action (Jessop, 2000). The process of negotiating consensus raises critical awareness of the selective effects of power on different interest groups. This awareness happens through dialogue that includes diverse perspectives and critical reflection on situated practice (Eckersley, 2020b). It creates a network culture of ethical reflexivity where members are attentive to the effects of power on each other's interests (Jessop, 2020, pp. 159–160) which motivates action that challenges common-sense practices (or historical cultural institutions) (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007, pp. 38–41). Critical awareness thus changes the cultural institutions (regulatory, normative, cognitive and imaginary) of networks, to sustain reflexive rationality through inclusivity, equality, co-creation and a belief in a broad alliance of interests, a self-reinforcing culture (Sørensen and Torfing, 2005, 2007).

Reflexive rationality in networks is sustainable when supported by meta-governance that itself has a reflexive orientation (Jessop, 2003), thus creating reflexive rationality in the *macro-relations* of collaboration. Meta-governance is a higher-level governance of the conduct of networks that acts through both meta-governors (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) and through the influence of societal culture and ideology (Davies, 2011, pp. 101–124). A reflexive orientation in meta-governance requires ideological flexibility and a romantic public irony (Jessop, 2003). Ideological flexibility involves critical reflection on the failures of markets, bureaucracy and networks as coordination mechanisms. A romantic public irony entails a preference for network governance while acknowledging that all coordination mechanisms have crises. Such romanticism predisposes meta-governors to enhance the reflexive capacity of the network, to facilitate dialogue amongst diverse perspectives and encourage shared ownership.

Meta-governance by societal culture (commonly held beliefs, practices and norms) is hegemonic not reflexive because it embodies prevailing strategic relations. Cultural meta-governance thus restricts reflexive rationality in the micro-relations of the network through the hidden exercise of power that supports the interests of a social elite (or hegemony) (Davies, 2011, pp. 101–124). This power is reinforced by isomorphic pressures that limit the creative development of an alternative culture (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), the force of legitimisation to create dominant interests (Stoker, 2011), and governmentality that replaces consensus with a self-regulating compliance (Davies, 2011, pp. 114–124). Changing the dynamics of these forces requires the development of a critical philosophy of praxis (see Gramsci, 1971, pp. 321–376), critical reflection and creative agency to change network culture (Sørensen and Torfing,

2007, pp. 38–41), a communal rationale and political accountability to diverse interests (Stoker, 2011, p. 28) and the development of ethical reflexivity (Jessop, 2020, pp. 155–160).

Critical-relational communities of practice

I argue that reflexive rationality and critical awareness can be created in communities of practice through a critical and relational process. The emerging negotiated consensus, or shared vision, has the qualities of a philosophy of praxis which sustains the CoP's reflexively rational culture.

The concept of a CoP describes the social nature of learning experiences engaged in by individuals, communities and organisations (Wenger, 1998, pp. 3–9). The CoP facilitates co-learning by creating a community that develops a sense of belonging and identity and develops meaning through engaging in practice. Developed by Etienne Wenger (1998) in the context of education and organisational learning, the concept has been applied by Agranoff to cross-sector networks. In this context, Agranoff (2008) describes CoPs as self-organizing systems with a core of technical specialists who solve problems which cross organisational boundaries. Building on Agranoff's (2008) description, I extend the core membership of the transformative CoP to include members with a strategic perspective as well as technical experts. In addition, the CoP's capacity to transform power relations is created by the critical and relational nature of its social learning process that develops a negotiated consensus.

Relationally, the CoP integrates diverse interests in a negotiated consensus through communication based on principles of inclusivity, fairness and diversity and aimed at mutual understanding (Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018). The relational CoP is *dialogic* in its iterative activities of knowledge exchange, informal learning and mutual engagement to develop a common problem definition and co-develop solutions. It is *pluralistic* in its orientation to mutual gain and inclusion of diverse perspectives. It is *heterarchic* in its interdependent, self-organising nature and shared ownership or leadership. The relational CoP thus develops the characteristics of reflexive rationality.

Critically, the CoP engages in critical reflection on everyday practices, facilitated by its relational communication, practitioners' experiential knowledge and inclusion of diverse perspectives. Critically reflective practice raises awareness of the power relations that disadvantage some groups' interests. When oriented to taking joint action, it exposes the dilemmas and dimensions of failure of network governance (see Jessop, 2000; Stoker, 2018) and the (in)adequacy of cultural institutions to address these democratically (Sørensen and

Torfing, 2007, pp. 38–41). Conflict over what constitutes success or failure exposes the different beliefs and traditions that are embodied in cultural institutions, adding to critical awareness (Bevir and Rhodes, 2007).

The combination of critical and relational approaches to developing a consensus creates a shared vision which develops a self-sustaining culture in the CoP. The reflexive rationality and critical awareness motivate an ethically reflexive stance to empower diverse interests. This stance develops a *group* disposition of boundary-spanning *and* facilitative leadership, facilitating the creative integration of diverse interests in the negotiated consensus (building on Williams, 2013; Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018). This capacity for creative synthesis and ethical reflexivity develops a culture that sustains reflexive rationality. Regulatory aspects of the CoP culture are informed by the need for inclusivity in procedures, normative aspects by the presumption of equality, cognitive elements by the orientation to shared knowledge, and imaginary elements (or worldviews) by the 'ethico-political' or integrated interests.

Thus, drawing on Gramsci (1971, pp. 321–376), the CoP's shared vision has the quality of a philosophy of praxis. Negotiated consensus is motivated by raising critical awareness, empowers diverse interests rather than establishing a dominant interest, and changes cultural practices to support a shared vision. It is therefore a conscious and critical conception of the world to guide action.

Strategically adaptive cultural embedding
The CoP's critical philosophy of praxis can change the underlying power dynamics of cross-sector collaboration by motivating a wider embedding of the transformative culture in a dynamic strategically adaptive process. This process builds a reflexive orientation in direct and cultural meta-governance, changing the dynamics of hegemony, legitimisation, isomorphism and governmentality.

The philosophy of praxis can alter the dynamics of power from hegemony to critical consciousness. As the CoP encounters dilemmas of governance its critical beliefs motivate efforts to change the practices of meta-governance which create selective constraints on collaborative capacity. This creates a process of socialisation or cultural sedimentation (Sum and Jessop, 2013, pp. 171–172), changing beliefs and practices within the networked organisations, meso-levels of meta-governance and more widely in society.

Encountering the lack of power raises collaborating partners' critical awareness of the structural constraints on action created by legitimisation of dominant interests. The combined

associative and communal rationale for the CoP's shared vision enables the network to draw legitimacy to itself by building a broader alliance through the further negotiation of consensus (as argued by Stoker, 2011). Exposing the inadequacy of meso-level managerial practices to support the CoP's reflexive rationality can motivate innovation in these practices to support both effectiveness and democratic inclusivity (see Sørensen and Torfing, 2009), resisting the pressures of isomorphism. The CoP's ethically reflexive shared vision promotes this reflexive orientation by meta-governors by shifting their focus from individual gain to sustaining collaborative advantage through empowering others' interests. Confronting the risk of the hierarchical determination of the objects of governance fosters self-reflexivity and ethico-political reflexivity, or assertion of the partner's own and others' interests (Jessop, 2020, pp. 155–160). This ethical reflexivity changes the dynamics of governmentality from self-regulating compliance with dominant interests, to self-emancipatory participation and the ethical empowerment of diverse interests.

The philosophy of praxis can thus motivate a social movement with the potential for 'totalitarianism' in the sense of becoming a pervasive disposition in society (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 347–366), creating the political basis for governments' ideological flexibility and reflexive orientation. The process of cultural embedding relies on forming a broader alliance of interests. It is therefore not one of hegemony but of reflexive rationality based on raising critical awareness of the effects of power. The creativity afforded by the very challenges of governance sustains an attitude of public irony, in that the challenges are acknowledged but embraced. The reflexive orientation, ideological flexibility and romantic public irony necessary for transformative governance (Jessop, 2003) therefore emerge from the strategically adaptive interaction between the micro-relations of the community of practice and meta-governance.

Conclusion

The field of governance theory explains the dialectic of hierarchical domination but potential for transformation in cross-sector collaboration as the interaction of power with the network culture. These theories explain how the struggle to maintain reflexive rationality plays out in networks' culture and its interaction with meta-governance, or the ways in which networks are themselves governed both directly and through societal culture. Key authors are increasingly divided in their focus either on the power of dominant ideologies to regulate cross-sector relations, or on the capacity of network members to determine network culture.

The SRA placed the focus on the capacity for networks to develop a reflexively rational culture and critical awareness and the need for this to be supported by a reflexive orientation in meta-

governance. However, it was limited in its ability to explain how this culture is created and whether or how it could change the effects of power exercised through meta-governance. This analysis therefore refined my research question to address my partners' concerns about the practice of cross-sector collaboration and this gap in existing knowledge by focussing on the capacity of networks to change strategic relations.

Applying the SRA to the context for the research partners' cross-sector collaboration, that is the Well-being Act, revealed an ambiguous situation. The Act enhances Welsh Government's capacity for hierarchical control but also creates five sustainable development practices which may support reflexive rationality in cross-sector networks. However, the ambiguous treatment of the environment (explored in Chapter One) indicates a lack of critical awareness and the potential for an instrumental use of the five practices to sustain hierarchical control. Cross-sector collaboration therefore risks perpetuating the instrumental treatment of the environment and resisting action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being.

To understand whether and how collaborating partners can change the dynamics of power, I developed a theoretical statement through abductive dialogue between the fieldwork and the field of network governance. I take the position that the development of reflexive rationality and critical awareness in critical-relational communities of practice creates the transformative capacity of cross-sector networks. The emergent philosophy of praxis changes the relationship between the network and its meta-governance through a dynamic strategically adaptive process of cultural embedding.

In this chapter, I have focussed on the statement's underpinnings in governance theory and the literature review. In Chapter Four, I elaborate how it formed a rationale for the research approach and in Chapter Five, explain how it both guided the research design and was grounded in the fieldwork. The discussions in Chapters Six and Seven show how my frame of reference developed in relation to the participatory research.

Chapter Four Research philosophy and design

A critical realist approach to critical-relational action research

Introduction

The strategic-relational treatment of governance theory in the previous chapter shaped the research focus on the development of reflexive rationality in cross-sector networks and whether and how this could change the exercise of power. This research focus created the rationale for my research approach and design, which I explain in the current chapter.

In the first section I explain how a critical-realist approach enabled the understanding of hidden power and opportunities for transformation. I explain how critical-realist research combines explanation and interpretation to understand diverse experiences and perspectives on complex situations and the influence of underlying power relations. The next section discusses the abductive logic of enquiry of critical realism I employed to develop my theoretical statement. I explain how I combined the concept of morphogenetics (Archer, 1995) to explain changes in power, with a dialogical approach to policy analysis (Wagenaar, 2011) to interpret the meanings of contextual action. The final section turns to the action research design of the study. I explain how the critical and relational principles of action research informed a strategy simultaneously geared to producing critical awareness and actionable knowledge in collaboration with my research partners. I show how these principles informed my design of a critical-relational systemic enquiry. I conclude with a brief overview to summarise how the research philosophy and design created a methodological framework to produce an answer to the research question.

Research approach

The SRA refined the research question to focus on whether and how cross-sector collaboration can transform strategic-relations. This approach assumes the existence of hidden power relations or structures that create strategic advantage for selective social groups. The meta-interpretation and review of governance theory showed how power is exerted both directly through the management of collaborative networks and indirectly through societal culture. However, the SRA also emphasises the contingency of social power relations, that is, social groups can adapt strategically to prevail over structures that constrain their actions. To understand how cross-sector collaboration in the context of the Well-being Act creates conditions for reflexive rationality to enable strategic adaptation or exerts power as a state hegemonic project, a research approach was required that offered a critical orientation to underlying power relationships and the dynamic processes through which these might change.

For this purpose, I adopted a critical-realist approach, drawing on the work of Roy Bhaskar (1989) and Margaret Archer (1995, 2016), supplemented by Hubert Buch-Hansen and Peter Nielsen's more recent interpretations (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020). Critical realism accepts the reality of things that exist outside of our awareness or knowledge, which empirical observation or contextual interpretation (hermeneutics) alone do not reveal. It also assumes a social world where structures and phenomena are not permanent but characterized by change. Research must be critical and reflexive in its questioning of 'the nature of causation, agency, structure, and relations, and the implicit or explicit ontologies we are operating with' (Archer *et al.*, 2016 no page numbers).

Critical-realist research critiques ideas that have real effects on social actions even though they are not real in the material sense (Bhaskar, 1989). Social reality comprises multiple understandings and perspectives that together make up a meaningful 'superstructure' (Bhaskar, 1989; Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020). The *empirical* domain of people's experiences is part of a broader *actual* domain of events and phenomena that have the potential to be experienced but are not necessarily apparent. In addition to and encompassing these empirical and actual domains is the hidden *real* domain of social structures and culture (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, pp. 29–31). The multiple explanations of cross-sector collaboration as a managerial challenge, a set of relationships, a coercive situation or an opportunity for reflexive creativity reflect its 'complex and overdetermined' reality (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 143). While on the one hand there is a conceptual struggle to establish a dominant social imaginary, on the other there is the potential for creative agency and the building of social alliances. The interaction of dominant cultural institutions (beliefs, rules, norms and practices) and reflexively rational collaborating groups dynamically structures and differentiates reality, characterising it by 'emergence and change' (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 191). Therefore, critical-realist research critiques both the 'common beliefs and [...] the praxis-dependent structures or circumstances that sustain them' (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 190).

The research question had an emancipatory intention, to understand how to transform the dynamic of strategic relations in Wales in favour of less powerful interests. The emancipatory capacity of social research rests on the assumption that a critical understanding of praxis and structures enhances the capacity of individuals and groups to be reflexive about the constraints on their actions: 'We are simultaneously free and constrained and we also have some awareness of it. The former derives from the nature of social reality; the latter from human nature's reflexivity' (Archer, 1995, p. 2). Although power structures constrain individuals' action, the

strategic-relational account of governance networks portrays society in critical-realist terms as 'characteristically transformable' not static and unchangeable (Archer, 1995, p. 1). Reflexive changes in cultural rules, norms, practices and imaginaries create structural transformation, changing the constraints on social groups' actions. Therefore, the research took 'a practically-oriented critical realist approach […] to determine to what extent enduring underlying structures themselves are being modified or even transformed' (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 191).

A critical-realist philosophy assumes historicity, that is, 'structure necessarily pre-dates the action(s) which transforms it' (Archer, 1995, p. 138). The theoretical underpinning of the meta-interpretation (Chapter Two) assumed that 'some features of social structure and culture are strategically important' (Archer, 1995, p. 138 citing Cohen, 1968) and that they have causal powers in that they constrain strategic adaptation and action. Ideology that privileges economic growth and markets and that is accompanied by hierarchical management practices, pre-exists the current situation but does not create continuous structuration. Rather, '[t]hey are structures by virtue of being emergent properties which are irreducible to the doings of contemporary actors, yet derive from the historical actions which generated them, thus creating the context for current agency' (Archer, 1995, p. 139). Instead of persistent structuration, the strategic-relational approach assumed autonomy (of different periods), opening the possibility for discontinuities in the recursively adaptive strategic process. Thus, people do not create social structures but either *reproduce* or *transform* them to become the emergent properties for future cycles of social action. Therefore, the key analytical question for the research was 'when are we going to get transformation rather than reproduction, or vice versa?' (Archer, 1995, p. 140).

Logic of enquiry

Critical-realist research follows an abductive logic of enquiry (Archer *et al.*, 2016). Abductive argument moves between a social phenomenon, its context and theory to infer the underlying conditions which produce the phenomenon. By 'combining explanation and interpretation' critical-realists enquire into empirical data, interpret its meaning in the light of its context and explain logically the 'complex, layered, and contingent processes or structures which cause those regularities, facts, and events' (Archer *et al.*, 2016 no page numbers). As meaning is contingent on the historical, social and cultural context, interpretation requires a rich understanding of context. As knowledge is partial, being relative to people's normative standpoint on the situation and their position of power, understanding requires multiple perspectives and a critical stance. As the real domain of power relations is hidden and dynamic,

inferring it requires evolving theoretical concepts that form a level of abstraction from the empirical domain.

I combined explanatory and interpretive approaches to form an abductive dialogue with theory. Taking a morphogenetics approach, following Archer (1995) provided an analytical framework to explain logically the cultural and structural power underlying the phenomenon of cross-sector collaboration. Taking a dialogical approach, following Wagenaar (2011) provided an interpretive framework to understand the meanings of the phenomenon for differently positioned groups of society. By forming a dialogue between these emergent explanations, interpretations and the literature, I developed my strategic-relational approach to governance theory to form my theoretical position discussed in Chapter Three.

Morphogenetic explanation
The complex nature of the strategic relations of cross-sector collaboration means the emergent effects are *unintended*, *unacknowledged* and only partially known, or *opaque* (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 4). The literature review showed that the structural conditions of cross-sector collaboration which selectively constrain interest groups emerge from the complex power dynamics between hegemony and critical awareness, hierarchical legitimisation and political legitimacy, governmentality and ethical reflexivity, and between isomorphic pressures and a search for cultural diversity. Accentuating this complexity and the partiality of understanding is the hidden nature of the rules, values, practices and imaginaries that form the network culture. This cultural domain is an 'uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 322). Thus, the dynamics of power must be inferred not empirically observed.

Morphogenetics forms a logical framework through which to infer the state of change in power dynamics from the interaction of cultural and structural domains (Archer, 1995, pp. 308–324). Morphogenetics assumes that culture and structure are dynamic and distinct, so that although experiences occur in the context of a configuration of cultural and structural conditions, these are specific to the time and context and not permanent. As changes occur in cultural beliefs, values, rules and practices they interact with changes in structural access to resources, forming a reciprocal relationship. If either culture or access to resources is static, then changes in one may effect change in the other. Whether these changes in structures and culture have a transformative effect on power relations depends on 'what agency does in these different circumstances' (Archer, 1995, p. 308), which will depend on the capacity for reflexivity. I

briefly describe the configurations of cultural and structural stasis and change and the mediating effect of agency next.

At one conjunctural extreme, the stability of social groupings and their access to resources (structural stability) reinforces and is reinforced by hegemony (cultural stability). A lack of material interest groups to challenge the dominant group, whether the latter is a global elite, state government, local government or resource rich organisation, and a lack of alternative ideas to challenge the dominant ideology of neoliberalism, pluralism or capitalist democracy, mutually reinforce each other to exert power through historically determined strategic relations. The entwining of the structural and cultural domains generates the power dynamics of hegemony, legitimisation, governmentality and isomorphic pressures of the meta-interpretation.

Moving away from this extreme stasis conjuncture, where there is discontinuity or change in the structural domain but continuity in the cultural domain, material interest groups differentiate themselves to promote their primary interests. This form of dis-juncture arises where there is a dominant cultural idea but a change in the structures controlling access to resources for different material interest groups, as seen for example in the use of outcomes contingent funding regimes (Liebman, 2013). The cultural hegemony, of efficiency and accountability, then becomes a constraint for some interest groups' legitimate access to resources, motivating the search for an alternative or critical social imaginary, for example promoting the *democratic* value of advocacy work (Silverman and Patterson, 2011). 'It is the material interest groups most hindered by it [hegemony] who have the motivation to diagnose the problems it cannot solve and the issues with which it cannot deal' (Archer, 1995, p. 314). In Gramsci's analysis of hegemony, these interest groups are motivated to develop a new 'good sense' because they are the ones who encounter the problems when using everyday 'common sense' (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 326–331). The new imaginary competes with the legitimacy claims of other interest groups but hegemonic structures persist until a new critical discourse gains momentum amongst multiple interest groups (Archer, 1995, pp. 314–315).

Alternatively, discontinuity in the cultural domain but continuity in the structural domain means there is pressure to maintain a particular form of social organisation. Stability in the structural distribution of resources reinforces strategic relations, preventing the differentiation of material interest groups. However, new interest groups may arise differentiated according to ideal interests (beliefs) not material interests, for example as with the promotion of the social

model of public health (Davies *et al.*, 2014; Plough, 2015). New beliefs motivate broader alliances, and this withdrawal of cultural continuity destabilises structural continuity by creating comparative advantages for the new alliance. The reflexive development of new ideas has transformative effect on structures, '[f]or what cultural morphogenesis does is to change people (or at any rate some people), from unthinking traditionalists into evaluators of alternatives and from passive conformists into potential competitors' (Archer, 1995, p. 317).

The alternative conjunctural extreme is that of simultaneous cultural and structural morphogenesis (change) which transforms the organisation of interest groups into more powerful groupings. It requires diversification and opposition to domination in both domains. As new ideas occur, alliances build to promote particular social discourses and gain a comparative strategic advantage to access resources for the alliance's material interest groups. In this way, as different alliances build, structural diversification increases, for example in the case of ad-hoc climate adaptation networks in North America which enhance access to social rather than financial capital (Dow *et al.*, 2013). The interacting process of differentiation across both domains puts pressure to build broader alliances across material *and* ideal interests, as seen in the movement to promote a transition to the ideal of an ecological state by linking everyday household practices with their indirect ecological effects (Eckersley, 2020a). 'Ideas must be adapted, often substantially, to appeal to material interests and thus mobilize the groups associated with them' (Archer, 1995, p. 320). In this way, morphogenesis explains the relationship between social imaginaries (ideals) and strategic relations as the struggle to develop an imaginary that enables an alliance across material interests rather than a comparative advantage for selected (dominant) interests. The role of agency in this relates to the capacity of collaborating partners for reflexive rationality, forming a 'revolutionising praxis' which changes beliefs and capacity for action and provokes a change in the social forces behind the constraining structures (Gramsci, 1971, p. 322).

Incorporating this morphogenetic methodology in the research meant I paid attention to the ways collaborating groups formed new ideas and beliefs, new ways of accessing the resources they needed to act in their common and individual organisations' interests, and whether the formation of alliances was inclusive of diverse interests or based on a narrow common interest. Explaining how these social phenomena indicated reproduction or transformation of the underlying strategic relations and structures required abductive inference in a dialogue between the developing theoretical statement and the participatory research (Archer *et al.*, 2016).

Dialogical interpretation

The abductive logic of inquiry also required an *interpretive* approach to understand experiences of cross-sector collaboration as the management of interorganisational arrangements, the development of interpersonal and community relationships, or the exercise of power. The research sought to understand not only *why* and *how* reproduction or transformation of social relations occurs but in practical terms, what this *means* for collaborating organisations' capacity to act. However, the multi-layered nature of reality means that 'not all accounts are equally accurate representations of reality' due to the partiality of experiences within the possible 'actual' domain and the opaqueness of the 'real' domain (Buch-Hansen and Nielsen, 2020, pp. 42–43). Thus, the empirical situation of cross-sector collaboration holds different meanings for differently positioned social groups. A dialogical approach to interpretation enabled me to integrate these multiple perspectives and meanings into a collective interpretation. In this section, I explain how I developed this interpretation and in the next I explain how the interpretive and morphogenetic approaches created an abductive dialogue with theory.

Interpretivist research focusses on the creation of meaning in context. It assumes that multiple influences shape people's experiences and beliefs, and that the meanings they attach to these phenomena in turn affect their language and actions. I followed Wagenaar's dialogical approach to interpretive policy analysis, which takes the form of 'an ongoing dialogue between theory and the empirical world' so that theory is grounded in data and not confined to a single explanatory theory in advance (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 10).

Wagenaar's 'dialogical' and 'actionable' approach to interpretive policy analysis claims that the empirical world can be known by 'acting upon it' (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 11). That is, people's subjective intentions inform their actions based on what they believe about social reality. Social reality comprises the cultural 'concepts, rules and conventions' relevant to the context for action (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 18). When people act, by expressing themselves and engaging in intentional behaviour, they are enacting a 'shared set of understandings' about the empirical world which are dialectically sustained by their 'linguistic and actionable' behaviours (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 21). The actions and discourses of collaborating organisations thus signal the cultural beliefs, structural constraints and the coercive or emancipatory effects of the situation. That is, they are 'the carriers of social meaning' of the situation for the different interest groups (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 21). However, the partiality of both the actor's and the researcher's understanding of the subjective intentions and cultural assumptions means

interpretation of these behaviours is a dialogical process of careful reasoning based on situating the behaviour in its cultural context (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 22–23).

Engaging in a dialogical process harnesses the partiality of our perspectives to produce a fuller understanding of the situation. Drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 1979), Wagenaar argues that far from having to set aside our prejudices, we can use them productively (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 54–57). Our *horizon*, or the standpoint which is informed by historical experiences and beliefs about the world is the foundation from which we notice what is meaningful about phenomena and begin to question or interpret them. This interpretation requires a confrontation of our own pre-formed understanding by what is different about the situation or another's interpretation of it, 'shed[ding] light on the nature of partiality in understanding' (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 55). Engaging in dialogical process involves not only empathy for others' perspectives or horizons, but also with how the past has informed our horizons and an openness to change one's understanding. This *fusion* of horizons attains a 'higher universality that overcomes, not only our own particularity, but also that of the other' (Gadamer, 1979, p. 272). Interpretive dialogical meaning is therefore relational and ethically reflexive.

In a dialogical interpretive process, the meaning of the situation can be identified by engaging with the context. Wagenaar extends this engagement from verbal dialogue to include action (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 57–62). The complexity of social reality means that understanding will always be partial if interpretive analysis restricts itself to people's expressions of their intentions and assumptions. By acting in the world, we experience the 'reality' of cultural institutions, structural constraints and creative agency, as it emerges from our interactions with others in context. Thus, interpretive analysis pays attention to 'the action-oriented, interactive, and ongoing nature of meaning' (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 62), in which understanding forms through action, and meaning from the way people negotiate the situation. The central intention of a fusion of horizons means such 'actionable' approaches to dialogical understanding are necessarily 'open-ended, collaborative, participative, inclusive, non-hierarchical, and non-instrumental' (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 229).

Abductive dialogue
The abductive logic of enquiry I adopted provided an analytical approach to answer the research question, to understand how to negotiate multiple interests and accountabilities and how this process of cross-sector collaboration interacts with the dynamics of power relations. The dialogical approach to interpretation enabled me to develop an understanding of the

meanings of the phenomenon of cross-sector collaboration for differently positioned groups. The morphogenetic approach provided a logical framework through which I could infer the dynamic of power from changes in cultural and structural domains and their interaction with reflexive rationality. Combining these approaches enabled me to engage in a dialogue between the empirical findings and the literature on cross-sector collaboration and governance theories. This enabled me to take a strategic-relational approach to develop my perspective on theory. The ongoing dialogue between theory and action also helped me to raise critical awareness amongst the research partners and stimulate their ethically reflexive inclusion of others' perspectives in a collective interpretation. The next section explains how this abductive logic was supported by the action research design of this study.

Research design

Following the critical-realist research philosophy and abductive logic of enquiry, I designed the research based on action research principles to create a dialogue between multiple views on the empirical situation and the developing strategic-relational account of cross-sector collaboration. Action research is a participatory approach to social research aimed at developing knowledge and action that strengthens both democracy and well-being (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). It involves 'critical and relational processes through which researchers and their co-enquirers aim to collaboratively produce scientifically and socially relevant knowledge and transformative action' (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, p. 4). Rather than a single methodology, it is a family of approaches that adopt the same three principles: action, research and participation (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, pp. 6–7). Action research combines active involvement in practical situations with joint enquiry and learning and aspirations for democratic social change. It co-produces research to generate new knowledge and change by following a participatory[33] approach to enhance people's agency in action and research.

Within the field of action research, numerous specific designs and methods are used, cutting across academic disciplines and diverse settings for research (Dick, 2015). In his review of methodologies used in action research, Bob Dick (2015) notes that rather than being pre-determined, these designs largely evolve from the specific contexts for research and the way actionable knowledge develops within them. He draws out a series of ideal elements to which

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[33] All Action Research (AR) is participatory to the extent that it is based on the principle of enhancing democracy and control over one's own life. However, this participatory *principle* should not be confused with the term Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR is used to refer to a specific form of AR which addresses situations of extreme exploitation, inequality and lack of democracy, often but not always focusing on the global south. It is also called 'Southern' PAR for this reason (see Greenwood and Levin, 2007, pp. 29–32).

action researchers aspire, namely, to support and sustain efforts to learn, diversity in participation and an action-oriented approach, reflecting the strategic principles of all action research. Reflecting the *critical* nature of action research, Dick (2015) argues that the iterative cycle of action and reflection and inclusion of diverse perspectives is crucial to reveal hidden assumptions and tacit knowledge. In complementary fashion, Davydd Greenwood and Morten Levin (2007, pp. 133–235) emphasise the *relational* aspect of action research in their critique of a variety of action research designs. They focus on the capacity of each design to facilitate a common understanding amongst participants or co-researchers of their historical experiences, likely future scenarios and shared vision, and to initiate joint action. The flexibility to adapt and use different methods in response to the specific context and developing knowledge is foundational to the research capacity to meet these critical and relational criteria (Greenwood and Levin, 2007; Dick, 2015). Thus, action research designs are specific and responsive to the context rather than determined by academic discipline, and the growth and diversity of descriptions indicates this adaptability.

My research strategy emphasised the critical and relational nature of action research (as highlighted by Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018). It created a critical approach to enhance collaborating partners' understanding of the exercise of power and a relational approach to develop ethically reflexive cross-sector relationships. Following this strategy, I designed the research as a 'critical-relational systemic enquiry' to maximise the collaborative, participative inclusion of diverse standpoints, building on the work of Danny Burns (2007, 2012, 2014). In this way, the research design brought together people with diverse and conflicting views to engage in a co-generative learning process to produce knowledge which was workable and credible (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, pp. 55–75). I explain the principles of the critical-relational action research strategy next and then discuss how I designed the research as a critical-relational systemic enquiry.

The critical-relational strategy

My research strategy follows Bartels and Wittmayer's (2018, pp. 1–17) analysis that criticality and relationality are fundamental principles of action research that are essential for its transformative power. These authors argue that the *critical* stance of action research is evident in its normative ambition to promote social change and empower marginalised groups. Action research aims to reveal the way institutions and discourses sustain dominant norms and power. At the same time, it is grounded in a *relational* worldview focussed on the reciprocal relationships of systems, institutions and people, following the philosophical foundations of

'classical pragmatism, critical realism and General Systems Theory' (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, p. 6). Therefore, my research strategy focussed on the dynamic relationship between criticality and relationality to generate actionable knowledge, strengthen relationships and transform hegemonic systems (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, p. 1).

On the one hand, criticality and relationality are in continual tension in action research (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018). *Relationality* involves building trusting relationships and commitment, while *criticality* is awareness of the power enacted in social relationships (whether hidden or overt) and the influence of broader, macro structures and discourses. Strengthening the relational aspects of the research process can reinforce power through instrumentalization and co-optation of the researcher and participants in their search for mutual benefit. Participation can take on a tyrannical nature, concealing and reinforcing oppression when it does not involve a critical stance to the exercise of power *through* relationships (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Conversely, challenging power structures risks alienation, undermining the inclusion of diverse perspectives. On the other hand, criticality and relationality can reinforce each other. Relationality is essential for sustaining the participatory approach which underpins the critical stance and transformative capacity of action research. It is also essential to strengthen the social bonds necessary for dialogue and joint action and to form workable knowledge which addresses power relations (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, pp. 6–7). Action research must therefore adopt a reflexive, or critical stance to the exercise of power whilst sustaining relationality.

In line with my critical-realist stance, I took a relational approach to bring together diverse perspectives in dialogical action to understand the empirical and actual domains of reality. I did so by developing two dimensions of trust, to enhance relationships in the research and the credibility of the research findings (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, pp. 67–69). First, the co-learning process had to earn the trust of those participating in it by being directed at a salient social problem, enabling the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and producing workable solutions that enhanced agency. Secondly, trust in the applicability of the findings to other situations depended on showing how the research confirmed or altered previous theories and a careful analysis of historical and contextual factors that affect the transferability of knowledge. Greenwood and Levin (2007) argue that these criteria for trust can be met by a focus on learning that is dialogical (contrasting and combining diverse perspectives), co-generating learning through cycles of action, reflection and sense-making. Like Wagenaar (2011), they propose Gadamer's hermeneutic method as a suitable approach, being a 'complex combination of dialogue, mutual interpretation and eventual (but never final) "fusion of horizons"'

(Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 69). I adopted this relational approach by using the empirical context of cross-sector collaboration for national well-being as the focal point around which diverse perspectives were brought into mutual understanding, or fusion.

At the same time, to understand the real domain of power, I took a critical approach to question and problematise common-sense discourses and practices in an abductive dialogue with the developing theoretical statement. By focusing on action, the research process was one of 'grounding sense making in context and practical choices', thereby creating the possibility of overcoming hegemony by questioning common practices (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 265). Such pragmatic problematisation forms the critical good-sense to transform the historical common-sense praxis that supports domination (Gramsci, 1971). Greenwood and Levin (2007, p. 265) point out that political debate that is constrained by ideology is mere 'posturing', therefore I explicitly designed the research to enable critical analysis of the power relations of ideology by introducing reflexivity into the participatory research process.

As Bartels and Wittmayer (2018, pp. 8–10) explain, achieving a reciprocal relationship between the critical and relational principles of action research requires self-reflexivity to consider the influence of power at multiple points during the research. Next, I explain how I designed the research as a critical-relational systemic enquiry to incorporate this continual reflexivity. In the following chapter, I describe in more detail how I reflexively negotiated the dynamic of relationality and criticality during the research.

A critical-relational systemic enquiry

In this section, I explain how my research design of 'critical-relational systemic enquiry' created the reflexive, relational and critical basis for action research. I begin by explaining how it combined elements of 'participatory systemic enquiry' (PSE) and 'systemic action research' (SAR), both developed by Danny Burns (2007, 2012, 2014). I show how I combined these approaches by designing five 'streams' of enquiry and developing a 'learning architecture' to share knowledge across the streams. I explain how this design enhanced the critical and relational aspects of action research. In the following chapter, I give a practical and detailed account of the research methods, experiences and challenges involved.

PSE is a method of understanding complex relationships of causality, meaning, values, power and social networks, embedded in situations that people are trying to change (Burns, 2012). It focusses on involving people with diverse perspectives on the social phenomenon and the wider 'web of relations' in which it is situated, to 'build a picture of the different realities experienced

by different stakeholders' (Burns, 2012, p. 88). PSE frequently develops multiple streams of enquiry with separate groups of participants to understand different contextual imperatives, to embed learning in multiple institutions, and to maximise the diversity of perspectives. To integrate the learning from these diverse perspectives, PSE develops an explicit architecture to share ideas across the streams.

However, as Burns (2012) highlights, this structure risks giving the researcher and funders (or, in this case, collaborating partners) greater control than less powerful participants over the choice of research context and plans for action. It therefore risks a conflict between building the research partners' commitment to the process of action research and the ethical inclusion of diverse perspectives necessary for a critical approach. To address this risk and support a reciprocal dynamic between relationality and criticality, I adapted the research design using the approach of SAR (Burns, 2007, 2014).

SAR is built on the framework of PSE, but the focus is not only on harnessing diverse perspectives but also on understanding the systemic relationships that interact to create system-wide change (Burns, 2014). The underlying systemic-thinking approach understands social stasis and change in relational terms as emerging from the 'interconnections between people, processes and the environment in which they are situated' (Burns, 2014, p. 5). At the same time, systemic-thinking views system change as emergent and occurring at many levels. It enhances the agency of less powerful groups by critically identifying how a change in one domain leads to change in others. SAR therefore requires the sustained efforts to learn and diversity in participation typical of action research, set out by Dick (2015) as discussed earlier. These principles underpin the cycle of action and reflection from diverse perspectives that develops critical awareness. They also facilitate the relationships and orientation to joint action needed both to understand the 'interconnections' that create power relations and to generate new knowledge that can enhance agency, as discussed above with reference to Greenwood and Levin (2007).

Following this combined PSE and SAR approach, I designed the research as a series of interacting streams of enquiry into cross-sector collaboration in Wales, with each stream having the flexibility to develop a different perspective on the situation. I use the term 'stream' to describe these concurrent enquiries to reflect the fluidity of membership, group formation and extent of engagement with the action research within each. To diversify perspectives, I stimulated a system-wide enquiry across multiple interest groups, sectors and geographical

scales. Central to the systemic enquiry was stream one, consisting of two consecutive core research groups and, in comparison, the PSB as cross-sector networks with the potential to form communities of practice. A further four streams of enquiry diversified the perspectives on these groups' action by including their colleagues and peers (stream two), line managers and supervisors (stream three), cross-sector forums (stream four) and individuals with varying levels of authority and spatial responsibility (stream five).

To enhance the relational aspect of action research, while respecting participants' differing levels of desire to take part, I adopted a spectrum of action research methods with varying degrees of participation across the streams of the enquiry (following Burns, 2014). As I explore in greater detail in the next chapter, the critical-relational design created a flexibility which enabled these methods to evolve throughout the research, in response to participants' needs and the emerging opportunities and questions arising from the developing collective understanding. Briefly, the core research groups participated through iterative dialogue and action, colleagues and peers through interviews to exchange information, line managers and supervisors through semi-structured interviews, cross-sector forums (including the PSB) through my participant-observation and group discussions, and other individuals through semi-structured interviews.

I addressed the critical-realist requirement to analyse the hidden 'real' domain of power relations by following Burns' recommendation to create an explicit learning architecture to form a 'deeper understanding of systemic power' (Burns, 2014, p. 13). As I explain in greater detail in the next chapter, I shared learning across streams by using reports and updates from the core research groups, relaying information across the streams, encouraging dialogue in the core groups which drew upon other perspectives and holding a cross-stream workshop. These methods allowed new questions to form and new participants to join in the research. I adopted Burns' recommendation that it is the role of the researcher-facilitator to engage in continual 'meta-level' reflection on the direction of the research (Burns, 2014, p. 15). Thus, it was primarily my responsibility as researcher to engage in abductive dialogue between the interpretive understanding developing during the action research and the explanatory theoretical framework. However, wherever possible I created opportunities to engage my research partners in this reflexive practice to enhance critical awareness.

Through this design of critical-relational systemic enquiry I brought together diverse perspectives, identified concerns and opportunities for local action, and provoked

understanding of system-wide issues that affected multiple streams of the enquiry. The flexible and evolving design opened new directions of enquiry in an 'iterative and dynamic' way (Burns, 2014, p. 9). The resonance of issues across multiple streams of enquiry enhanced the legitimacy of the research partners to act on them, creating the opportunity for transformational change in the way power is exerted (Burns, 2014).

Conclusion

This chapter explained the approach that informed the methodology, logic of enquiry, strategy and design of the research. I showed how my strategic-relational approach to theory development created the rationale for a critical-realist approach to the research. This approach treats the social situation of cross-sector collaboration as comprising empirical experiences, potential events and phenomena, and hidden power that has real effects. I explained how critical realism follows an abductive logic of enquiry to reveal the partiality of understanding and hidden nature of power relations. This logic required both explanatory and interpretive approaches. I set out how I used morphogenetic explanation and dialogical interpretation to create the abductive dialogue with the literature review and governance theory which developed my theoretical statement. The morphogenetic framework formed a logical way to infer changes in power dynamics from observed changes in culture and structures. The dialogical approach created a collective interpretation of the effects of interorganisational arrangements, interpersonal relationships and power relations experienced in cross-sector collaboration. It enhanced interpretive understanding by creating a focus on meaning in context and dialogue amongst diverse perspectives.

I explained how my research strategy of action research created an emphasis on reflexivity to sustain a reciprocal dynamic between critical and relational aspects of the research. The iterative cycle of reflection and action in action research raises critical awareness, while the focus on mutual understanding and joint action develops relationships amongst participants. A reflexive approach is necessary to avoid the risk of instrumentalization or alienation of participants and loss of diversity. I set out how my research design of critical-relational systemic enquiry combined elements of PSE and SAR to sustain the critical, relational and reflexive aspects of action research. The PSE approach of multiple streams of enquiry created the necessary diversity of perspectives. The SAR emphasis on multiple methods of action research in these streams created the empowering cycle of action and reflection that raises critical awareness and builds relationships. Creating a learning architecture to share knowledge

across the streams enhanced reflexivity by increasing the diversity of perspectives and understanding of the interconnected system-wide relationships.

In the following chapter I explore how I maintained the reflexive stance needed to sustain relational and critical aspects of the research. I explain how I negotiated the multiple and conflicting researcher roles this required and the ensuing ethical challenges. I explain in more detail the evolving methods and streams of enquiry and how these were driven by and informed the data analysis.

Chapter Five The research process

Negotiating a critical-relational systemic enquiry

Introduction

The previous chapter emphasised the reflexivity needed to create a reciprocal dynamic between the relational and critical elements of the action research design of systemic enquiry. This chapter explains how I conducted the research process and data analysis to create such a reciprocal dynamic. I have written this chapter from my point of view as researcher, reflecting on my experiences of negotiating and developing the research process while also accounting for the diversity of perspectives of the research partners and other participants. In the next two chapters I describe the evolving research process from both my and their points of view.

The chapter has three main sections. In the first, I explain how the research developed through five streams of a systemic enquiry, with a central focal stream of core research groups and the PSB. Using Bartels and Wittmayer's (2018) guiding framework for critical-relational action research, I explain how I established an ethically reflexive approach that underpinned multiple aspects of the research design. I explain how the research design created conditions for embedding the core research groups' new imaginary and practices over time and at scale as they included diverse perspectives and uncovered the dilemmas of cross-sector collaboration.

In the second section, I explain how my action research design created a context for an ethnographic approach of participant-observation supported by multiple data collection methods and tools. I describe how each method and supporting tools complemented each other to facilitate multiple degrees of participation in the research and immersion in the worlds of my research partners.

In the third section, I explain how Grounded Theory Analysis guided both the collection and analysis of data by integrating interpretive and morphogenetic approaches in a continual movement between theory and data (following Charmaz, 2017). I explain how inductive reasoning and abductive inference iteratively increased the level of analytical abstraction to develop my theoretical position and answer the research question.

I conclude by reviewing how the strategies I adopted during the research process sustained an ethically reflexive stance throughout the research.

A critical-relational systemic enquiry

In this section, I set out how the critical-relational systemic enquiry developed through five interacting streams. Following Bartels and Wittmayer's (2018, pp. 8–10) framework of four

dimensions of reflexivity in action research, I explain how the research design involved *negotiating multiple starting points*, *creating interactions between the streams of enquiry* to engage with hidden power, *developing multiple roles and relationships* for both researcher and co-researchers, and how each aspect was underpinned by *establishing ethically reflexive practice.* I conclude this section by showing how this critical-relational research design created conditions for *sustaining and scaling* the research findings and change.

Developing five streams of systemic enquiry

I explained in the previous chapter how I built on the foundations of PSE and SAR to develop multiple streams of enquiry to understand the diverse perspectives of differently positioned social groups on cross-sector collaboration. In a first round of dialogue with the literature review, I grouped these perspectives according to the conceptual categories of my meta-interpretation (Chapter Two, Part II). I purposively sought participants with perspectives related to the collaborative process and interpersonal relationships, interorganisational arrangements and the wider system context and power, to inform the streams of enquiry.

To develop the streams of enquiry, I used a 'multi-method' approach typical of action research (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 134). These methods allowed the extent of participation and critical discussion to vary according to the willingness of participants to be involved and to allow me to take part in their meetings and events. This reflected Dick's (2015, p. 436) finding that 'choices can be made about the extent of participation' in action research by both researcher and contributors. Specific methods within the overall action research design included observation, information exchange, semi-structured interviews, group discussions and engaging core research groups in cycles of dialogue and action (see Burns, 2014, p. 4 for a similar range of action research methods).

As the systemic enquiry grew, I identified five streams of enquiry by grouping the participants according to their primary position in the system of cross-sector collaboration and the action research method appropriate to their degree of participation (see Table 1).

Table 1 The streams of the systemic inquiry

Enquiry stream	Standpoint on the system	Type of participant	Methods of action research	Number of events
1	Collaborative process	Core research group phase 1: *'road verges group'*	Action research group	5 group discussions
		Core research group phase 2: *'social prescribing group'*	Action research group	4 group discussions
		PSB and sub-groups	Observation and group discussions	15 meetings
2	Collaborative process	Colleagues of collaborating partners	Information exchange interviews	8 interviews
3	Inter-organisational arrangements	Line managers and supervisors	Observation, group discussions, semi-structured interviews	15 meetings and interviews
4	Wider system context	Regional and national forums	Observation and group discussions	15 meetings
5	Wider system context	Individuals at different hierarchical levels of authority	Semi-structured interviews	18 interviews

Here, I briefly describe the participants in each stream and how they contributed to the enquiry and in the following section I discuss each method in detail.

Streams one and two contributed to the dialogical interpretation from the perspective of the collaborative process and interpersonal relationships. *Stream one* consisted of two action research groups and the experiences of research partner Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board (the PSB) and its sub-groups. In Chapters Six and Seven I explain how I negotiated the formation and membership of the two research groups and engaged with them in action research driven by the intention of forming a reflexively rational cross-sector network. These groups generated a community-level focus to complement the systemic-level

understanding derived from the other streams of enquiry, enhancing the capacity of the research to transform locally-situated practices (Burns, 2014). They became the central focus of the research, dialogically integrating information from across the streams of enquiry and engaging in action to change the marginalisation of their interests. Reflecting their centrality, I referred to them as the 'core research groups.' The first core group focussed on a grassroots concern with road verges management and as the interests of this group broadened, they transitioned to a second group focussing on social prescribing. As a cross-sector network, the PSB formed a comparator group in this stream. The PSB members did not become co-researchers to the same extent as the core groups, contributing primarily through my observation of their Board meetings. However, I was able to hold group discussions in one Board meeting and in a separate meeting which I convened for interested members, and to participate in two of the PSB's sub-groups.

In *stream two*, I held interviews with colleagues and peers of the members of the core research groups and the PSB from both within their own organisations and from other organisations. These interviews were informal exchanges of information about issues arising in the groups and the context of wider organisational strategies. In this way, the stream formed a relational network around the collaborating groups and PSB, providing insight into their experiences of the collaborative process by linking these with the wider priorities, interests and values of the collaborating organisations, and helping to guide the core groups' action.

Engagement, in *stream three,* with people in managerial and supervisory roles provided insight into the reasons for the choice of interorganisational arrangements. These interactions included observation, group discussions and semi-structured interviews. They involved PSB members who were also line managers of some core group members, and the trustees and senior managers of NWWT. They provided opportunities for critical reflection on the discussions and practices of the core research groups and the PSB and the constraints on their action. This stream of enquiry provided 'sanction and sanctuary' for the core research groups, by maintaining permission for them to continue to engage in action research and protecting the time for them to engage in critical reflection (Henderson and Bynner, 2018, p. 92). It formed part of the critical and relational network around the core research groups.

To understand wider societal culture from multiple spatial standpoints, I drew upon discussions in regional and national forums in *stream four* and interviews with individuals at various levels of authority in *stream five*. In *stream four*, I observed as a participant in cross-sector forums

which met in the context of the Well-being Act, contributing to group discussions by giving short presentations and sharing reports on the work of the core research groups. Attending these gave me the opportunity to ask questions about the core groups' plans for action and how these related to wider regional and national policies and strategies, information which I shared with the core groups. Observation of these forums also provided insight into the ways they enacted and interpreted cross-sector collaboration. *Stream five* also contributed to the perspective of the wider system context. It consisted of semi-structured interviews with individuals at varying levels of authority or positions of governance. These interviews provided further detail on issues raised by participants in other streams, enabled critical reflection on the discussions of the core group and PSB and raised diverse points of view, thus adding to the exchange of information characteristic of stream two interviews. The participants included local councillors, members of the PSB, the president of NWWT, directors of regional and national third and public sector organisations, staff at the Future Generations Commissioner's office and staff at Welsh Government.

I have focussed in this section on how the various streams contributed to the systemic enquiry using multiple methods of action research. The diverse methods were supported by and developed from my reflexive approach to negotiate the tension between criticality and relationality in action research. I explain in the following five sub-sections how I sustained a reciprocal relationship between these principles, and in the next section return to the various methods of action research to discuss how each contributed to the data collection.

Negotiating multiple starting points
The first area for reflexivity was to guide the choice of research context and direction for the action research (following Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018). This required a relational approach to engage participants in the research and a critical approach to be explicit about the influence of the researcher, research partners and wider culture. I therefore included four aspects of negotiation in the systemic enquiry to guide the action research of the core groups in stream one and the critical-relational conversations in all streams of enquiry.

The *first aspect* of negotiation began with a common interest in the Well-being Act, indicated by the presence of the main research partners at networks and workshops held in the context of the legislation's progression from White Paper to Act. From conversations at these forums, I negotiated commitment to the research from the two main research partners and access to the first cross-sector forums that formed the basis for stream four of the enquiry. In Chapter One I described my two research partners (NWWT and the PSB) and how we agreed on their

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participation in the research. As an independent charity free from external authority, NWWT was able to commit to a high level of involvement in the research and gave me broad access to meetings with volunteers, members, staff and trustees, and to documents and discussions happening online within and across Wildlife Trusts in the UK. The PSB, on the other hand was more limited in its participation and my role was less active. This was largely due to my access through the Partnerships Manager, lack of previous working relationship with the Board or its organisations, and the legal framework surrounding the PSB. The Partnerships Manager and I first reached agreement with her line manager (at Gwynedd Council) for me to make a short presentation to the Local Services Board (the PSB's predecessor, with largely the same representatives) in February 2016. While the members focussed on establishing the structures and processes for the PSB during spring and summer 2016, I kept in touch with the Partnerships Manager as we attended various events in the context of the Well-being Act (Fieldnotes, Feb. – Dec. 2016). As I was neither a statutory member nor invited participant, the Partnerships Manager explained my participation in the PSB would be limited. However, in February 2017 we agreed that I could attend Board meetings, subgroups and workshops as an observer-as-participant (see later section for details of this approach). She also agreed I could hold group discussions by inviting members to a separate meeting rather than at the Board meetings (except for on one occasion where full Board discussion was possible as part of the development of its well-being assessment) (Fieldnotes, 15/02/2017).

The *second aspect* of negotiating a starting point was to agree focal concerns for the research with each partner, which took place during the period of literature review (see Chapter Two). In common with much action research, it signified a first step on the road to a 'shared critical awareness of local and wider relational interdependencies' (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, p. 248). It was a period of developing trust in my role as researcher with each organisation and moved the organisations towards taking an active part in the research. In this way, the participatory approach to the literature review played a relational role. The issues raised by the partner organisations and in other meetings during the review informed the critical focus of the research on the dynamics of power relations. This initial engagement also formed the basis for ongoing critical reflection with NWWT trustees and PSB members on the core research group's discussions and action, developing into stream three of the enquiry.

Our discussions of the research partners' concerns led into the *third aspect* of reflexive negotiation, to identify a focus for action. In Chapter Two, I explained how the partners' research concerns crystalised at meetings with NWWT trustees (13/07/2017) and with the PSB

Partnerships Manager (19/06/2017), later supported by discussion with the PSB (4/10/2017). During the same Trustees meeting, under a separate agenda item NWWT's branch forum representative raised members' concerns about Local Authorities' management of road verges and the potential to enhance their value for wildlife. Meeting with me later that week, the CEO and Chair of trustees recognised this as an area with the potential to involve a range of cross-sector partners, but which had historically raised issues of power imbalance, frustrating members' efforts to change practices (CEO and Chair, 19/07/2017). In addition, the issue of road verges was a grassroots environmental interest so choosing it as the local focus for action research meant that the 'participative process [was] driven by those who are most oppressed by [...] power relationships' (Burns, 2012, p. 99). In Chapter Six, I describe how I sought out NWWT members with an interest in the topic and looked to PSB members to involve their organisations in the action research. During these discussions the tension between criticality and relationality came to the fore as PSB organisations' officers questioned the relevance of road verges to their roles. I resisted the pressure to choose a different context for collaboration, but instead encouraged these officers to think of a broader context within which road verges formed a particular issue (PSB_PH 23/10/2017; Team leader NRW, 23/10/2017; NRW team, 17/11/2017). Negotiating the establishment of the first core group thus took four months and negotiation of the focus for action persisted throughout the road verges group's action research, as they included each other's interests and those of local communities.

The *fourth aspect* of negotiation related to the transition between core research groups, the first focussing on the grassroots issue of road verges, and the second on the strategic context of social prescribing. In Chapter Six, I explain how the first core group's initial focus on road verges developed into a broader vision that included public health and local communities' interests. I describe how constraints on the road verges group's action led us to seek ways to embed the core group's ideas more widely in their organisations through the context of social prescribing. In Chapter Seven, I describe how I negotiated the establishment of a second core group. I explain how the relationships formed with the road verges group eased the period of negotiating a second group, shortening it to a matter of weeks and attracting the interest of people with managerial levels of responsibility. As I describe our experiences, I show how this level of interest risked drawing attention away from grassroots concerns and how I reflexively encouraged the group to critically reflect on the effects of our plans on the least powerful interests.

The process of negotiating commitment from research partners, agreeing research concerns and a focus for action research, and forming two core research groups strengthened and was guided by sustaining a reciprocal dynamic between relational and critical elements of action research. The four aspects of negotiating starting points enhanced relational aspects by encouraging diverse stakeholders to participate in the research and creating two cross-sector networks in the form of the core groups. The process of negotiation enhanced the critical aspect by bringing together diverse perspectives on cross-sector collaboration and by sustaining permission for and commitment to critical reflection on the effects of power on the core groups and the PSB's work.

Creating interactions between streams of enquiry
The second area for reflexivity was in developing interactions between the streams of enquiry. In line with the key design principles of SAR (Burns, 2007, pp. 85–102) this process had the effect of sharing insight across groups, connecting the action research to formal decision-making structures, maintaining open boundaries to participation in the research, informing my overview of the connections amongst different parts of this 'system', and creating an evolving research design. I engaged in ongoing reflexivity to develop connections without creating hierarchical dominance over the direction of the action research. Here, I focus on how the methods I used formed connections between the streams of enquiry, and then explain the methods in more detail in the 'data collection' section below.

In *stream one*, the members of the core groups and I introduced information from the other streams of enquiry to inform our cycle of reflection and action. This took the form of verbal reports, written summaries of documents and digital maps in the form of GIS (Geographical Information Systems). Similarly, PSB members relayed information from their own organisations to the Board and the PSB received numerous communications from external organisations (mainly those at a national level) to consider in their decision-making process, connecting the PSB to wider social processes. In my fieldnotes of the PSB meetings, I noted issues that resonated with or raised questions about the core research group's discussions. As I participated in the Board's subgroups and workshops and held two group discussions, I introduced the road verges and social prescribing groups' ideas and plans, raised issues from the literature review and asked them to comment on issues arising in the other four streams of the enquiry regarding regional and national strategies. This approach created relationships between the discussions of the PSB and the core research groups while also reflexively questioning assumptions and power relations.

My conversations with individuals in *stream two* were largely prompted by members of the road verges and social prescribing groups and the PSB who directed me to colleagues with specific knowledge and experience who could help inform the collective understanding. These interviews had a conversational nature, asking questions about issues arising in the core groups and PSB but also relaying information about the core research groups' ideas and plans. I fed this information back into further discussions with the core groups to inform action and raise critical awareness of the influence of wider organisational strategies and common practices on the groups' efforts to collaborate.

In *stream three* of the enquiry, my discussions with line managers and supervisors of the core research group members centred on a series of short updates summarising the activities of the core groups. These updates ranged from short memos to two longer project style documents and were written by me with reference to the transcripts and fieldnotes of the core groups' meetings. Short updates took the form of text in an email circulated in advance of a meeting, a verbal introduction at the start of a meeting, or information and questions to guide the discussion. The longer documents related first to the road verges group and second to the social prescribing group. They benefitted from core group members' comments and suggestions as I circulated them to the group, and each new version updated and extended the previous document[34]. As I noted in the earlier section on developing the streams of enquiry, these updates formed a relationship between the core research groups and their supervisors that was additional to their internal organisational relationship and encouraged critical reflection. The updates provided an opportunity to renew permission for each group member to engage in action research, adjust the direction of the core group's plans and question organisational practices and strategies that constrained the core groups' action. At the same time, this feedback into the core groups' discussions risked the imposition of hierarchically determined priorities, requiring reflexivity in the core groups' dialogue to integrate this information.

The updates from the core research groups that informed conversations in stream three also helped me gain access to the regional and national forums in *stream four*. The updates enhanced the salience of the core groups' activities to the work of these wider forums and provided talking points at the meetings to explore different perspectives. These discussions in turn informed the action and reflection of the road verges and social prescribing groups. This maintained the openness of these core groups to wider issues and concerns and helped me to

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[34] Extracts from the project reports are available in Appendices 3 and 4

gain a broader overview of the connections between the core groups' plans and wider strategies and policies. By noting issues or statements made in these forums, I was able to follow these up with specific individuals at a variety of levels of authority and arrange to have a conversation with them, creating *stream five* of the enquiry. These interviews with individuals and discussions in the forums took on a critical-relational character, as I reflected with them on the societal influences on the core groups' plans while also enlisting their help in resourcing and managing the plans for collaborative action.

In summary, the systemic enquiry created five interacting streams to develop a collective understanding of cross-sector collaboration in the context of the Well-being Act. Although delineated by a shift in focus, the two core research groups overlapped in many ways. There was some continuity of participants and their line managers in NWWT and the PSB as the social prescribing phase developed out of the ideas of the road verges group, and the community action of the road verges group ran concurrently with the beginning of the discussions of the social prescribing group. As I explain in Chapter Seven, the work of both core groups ran concurrently with the work of the PSB as it developed its well-being objectives. The interactions between streams of enquiry and overlapping work of the core groups therefore created a complex web of relationships. In Chapters Six and Seven I focus on how these relationships played out through the core research groups' discussions and at the PSB, rather than treating them as separate lines of enquiry.

Developing multiple roles and relationships

The complex process of developing a critical-relational systemic enquiry created numerous roles and relationships for me as researcher, a consistent experience in action research (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014; Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018). These multiple roles enhanced the collective interpretive understanding of cross-sector collaboration and critical analysis of power relations, but they also gave me a position of influence and the roles risked conflicting with each other. Addressing these issues of influence and conflict required continual self-reflexivity and, where two roles conflicted, developing a third role to mediate (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014). For example, my responsibility to organise and direct the research process conflicted with my aim to motivate shared leadership in the core groups. I mediated this conflict through my role to share knowledge across the streams of enquiry which gave the core groups the information to decide on their plans for action.

Wittmayer and Schäpke offer a heuristic framework for critical reflection on five roles of action researchers (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014, pp. 487–489). First, the action researcher acts as

reflective scientist, the traditional role of researcher to provide knowledge for the research partners and other stakeholders by systematically collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data. Secondly, the action researcher has a role as *process facilitator* to facilitate an inclusive learning process including initiation, selecting participants, and determining and facilitating action. Thirdly, as *knowledge broker* the researcher tries to form a common problem definition for the research by mediating between different perspectives, introducing relevant information and facilitating critical reflection to create and review emergent insights. Fourth, the action researcher participates explicitly as *change agent* to motivate and empower participants, building trust by involving them in the research design and networking with others outside the immediate research group. The fifth role type is that of a *self-reflexive* scientist who is critically aware of their own position and norms and how these influence the power dynamics.

In enacting these roles, I drew heavily on my background in project management and experience of working with small and medium sized enterprises as research officer at Bangor University. As project manager and research officer, I had taken responsibility for translating and disseminating research for my team and the partner organisations, the role of reflective scientist. To build a team within the Welsh language project 'Twf' (Woodcock, 2011), I had developed skills as a facilitator and by extending this team to include community practitioners, I had acted as knowledge broker. Working directly with parents (in Twf) and with businesses and charities (as researcher) to understand the challenges of increasing the use of Welsh at home and at work, I had developed skills as change agent to develop their trust and relationships with others who could support them, as well as the ability to question assumptions and current practices in a constructive manner. Finally, my master's in project management prepared me for the self-reflexivity I needed to position myself as an active participant in the research, adapting from observer to facilitator to critic to negotiate the relational and critical aspects of the research.

These multiple researcher roles were evident in this research, in the processes of developing five streams of enquiry, negotiating multiple starting points, and creating interactions between the streams. As I *developed the streams of enquiry*, I acted as reflective scientist to create a framework for the systematic collection and interpretation of data. As process facilitator I developed an inclusive learning process by using multiple forms of action research to encourage a participatory and dialogical approach. In developing the systemic enquiry, I acted as knowledge broker by seeking and including diverse perspectives to contribute to collective

understanding and promote the core group's critical awareness. As change agent, I tailored the intensity of each participant's or group's involvement in the research to their willingness to participate and built trust through the process of negotiation that motivated participation in the action research.

However, as self-reflexive scientist I recognised the conflict between my responsibility as reflective scientist for the research design and selection of participants with my role as change agent to support the agency of the core research group to choose their co-researchers and context for research. As each member agreed to join the core groups, I discussed with them others whom we could invite to join us, both in the formation of the initial group and in the transition to the second phase. Similarly, I acknowledged the conflict between knowledge broker and change agent. By developing multiple streams at different geographical scales and with diverse interests, I risked taking the research focus away from the local context, again potentially disempowering the co-researchers. I avoided this dissipation and helped to ensure their relevance to the core group's concerns by selecting forums and participants purposively as they were referred to by the core group or other participants. In this way, I built upon and strengthened relationships between successive participants.

The process of *negotiating multiple starting points* was strongly influenced by my position as self-reflexive scientist in each aspect of negotiation, from reaching agreement with research partners, determining research questions, selecting the context for action research, to the transition between road verges and social prescribing phases. First, in negotiating my research partners' agreement to collaborate in research, I was aware that the research context of cross-sector collaboration as described by the Well-being Act was very much my choice and influenced by my interest in sustainable development. To reduce the imposition of my own interest on others, I spent time at the Act's consultation events talking to a wide range of individuals from across sectors and fields of interest to gauge who was already interested in these topics. However, the choice of research partners was largely driven by the people I had opportunities to discuss the Well-being Act with, which inevitably meant they were located geographically close to my place of study, in North Wales. As process facilitator of the systemic enquiry, I therefore continually reviewed the geographical location and spatial scale of each participant, network or organisation to ensure a wide coverage across Wales.

Second, in determining the research questions, my background in project management predisposed me to take a managerial approach to cross-sector collaboration. However, by

allowing the issues in the research partners' meetings to guide the process of literature review, it exposed me as much as the research partners to the reality of hidden power relations. Additionally, I mitigated the risk of my influence on the focus of the research by negotiating the research questions directly with NWWT and the PSB, to adapt the research to their specific concerns. Third, as knowledge broker, I was open to potential influence by the more powerful and highly resourced members at the PSB, to accept the issues they considered important as the focus for the action research. I consciously resisted these pressures, discussing the context for research first with the less powerful research partner and choosing an issue of concern to their least powerful stakeholders (the volunteers and members). Fourth, in the transition to the second phase of action research the focus shifted to an area of strategic importance to the PSB members. However, this focus on social prescribing emphasised its contribution to ecological sustainability and was decided by the road verge group members. As change agent I thus enabled the least powerful to retain power over the direction of research.

Multiple research roles also arose during the process of *creating interactions between streams of the systemic enquiry*. As self-reflexive scientist, I constantly reflected on my interpretation of the diverse perspectives in each stream. As reflective scientist, I analysed the data to provide points of discussion and reflection in each stream, introduced knowledge from the ongoing literature review and disseminated the knowledge created by the streams of the research. As process facilitator, I created interactions between the streams to facilitate collective understanding, while as knowledge broker, I mediated these different perspectives by sharing insight across and within the streams. As change agent, I enhanced the capacity of the core groups to act by facilitating external networking and connecting them to formal decision-making structures. However, to fulfil these roles, I relied heavily on my own competency to interpret, mediate and exchange information across the complex network of the streams of enquiry. The extent to which I could draw upon the research participants' skills and competencies was constrained by my decision as change agent to help participants to choose their level of involvement in action research. This raised questions about my capacity to maintain an overview of the direction of the research, the partiality of my knowledge and the limitations of my time and research budget. I adopted a range of techniques to enhance my capacity as process facilitator and support the participants to act as co-researchers.

First, I aligned research milestones to the research partners' own strategic schedules and used frequent short updates to enhance participants' capacity to facilitate the research process. I timed reporting on the road verges phase to coincide with the PSB's publication of their well-

being objectives and the beginning of NWWT's five-year strategic plan (2018-23). The social prescribing phase ran concurrently with the PSB's organisation of action on its well-being objectives, creating an opportunity for mutual feedback and shared learning. The short updates that I used to create interactions between the streams of enquiry established a network of regular participants to reflect on the research with me, increasing their opportunities to advise and contribute to the process in a timely fashion.

Second, I created visual mind-maps in NVivo software to maintain a systematic overview of the research direction. These helped me to review the extent and coverage of each stream of enquiry and check how the systemic enquiry reflected the domains of the system of cross-sector collaboration as well as guard against a concentration on one perspective at the expense of others. Third, I developed a 'just in time' approach to data analysis which made efficient use of my time and research budget as well as helping in the systematic development of the systemic enquiry. Using Nvivo, I developed an approach of rapid annotation of whole conversations and a series of journals for reflective notes. These annotations and reflections raised conceptual and practical issues and gaps in knowledge which helped me to identify participants to include in the systemic enquiry, plan meetings with the core research groups and create the interaction updates. The systematic and rapid nature of this process meant I could respond quickly to emerging opportunities to participate in forums or convey salient information to participants. It also meant I could identify multiple participants in specific geographical locations to combine several conversations in any one trip, saving time and money. I explore how data collection and analysis became mutually informing processes in more detail in the section on data analysis, below.

Establishing ethically reflexive practice

The fourth aspect of the guiding framework for maintaining a reciprocal dynamic between relationality and criticality in action research, is that of 'evaluating reflexivity, impact, and change' (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, p. 2). The normative goal of action research to facilitate emancipatory change entails evaluation of definitions and the extent of success, or impact, both during and after the research. This evaluation must therefore be ethically reflexive, taking account of multiple perspectives and not allowing one interest group's (including the researcher's) definition of success to dominate at the expense of other interests. In this section I explore how, going beyond meeting institutional requirements for ethical approval, I addressed these ethical challenges by developing reflexive ethical praxis during the research.

In the following section I explain how the research design created the foundation to maintain this ethical stance after the research to scale-up and sustain the research findings.

I obtained ethical approval from Bangor University College of Business, Law, Education and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee[35]. The protocol explained how the research would maximise the benefit to the participants and organisations involved and to wider society. It explained the research position in the context of major social theories, the topic of cross-sector collaboration and recent developments in the field of public policy. It showed how the research approach minimised harm and set out to transform strategic relations that perpetuate unequal power relations. It explained how the approach of continual negotiation would involve the research participants in setting the terms of the enquiry, both informing their consent and ensuring its voluntary nature.

All participants gave their informed consent to take part in the research, through a discussion with me of the purpose and methods of the study, written information and the opportunity to ask questions, and then completing consent forms. (In forums and board meetings, I observed as a non-participant with the authority of the chair or facilitator, explicitly introduced myself to members and shared information sheets but did not complete individual consent forms). All information was available in both Welsh and English and I conducted the research in both languages, according to the participants' preferences, to maximise inclusion and equality of treatment. In view of the evolving nature of the research design I prepared for some additional data collection procedures, which were then not needed during the research. I arranged to follow safeguarding procedures of the host organisations if an opportunity arose to collect data from groups of people under the age of 16 or vulnerable adults. I arranged to gain permission from moderators of intranet or online chat rooms if I saw an opportunity to gather data in this way, and to post a statement to inform site users of the research that was taking place.

I anonymised all evidence before using it in written reports or other forms. There were limited exceptions to this, which I set out clearly in the information sheets and consents forms[36]. These related to the use of names of participants' organisations and job titles for public-facing roles to make clear interests and standpoints that were relevant to understand the data. These details were also included where contextual factors, such as geographical location could make the organisation identifiable regardless of efforts to anonymise. I held all audio data on encrypted

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[35] Appendix 5 Research Ethics Committee Approval
[36] Appendix 6 Information Sheet and Consents Form

devices, securely stored all physical and digital data, and transferred data for transcription using encrypted services. I have arranged to discuss data archiving with the relevant department at the University and will send details of the arrangements to the appropriate Ethics Committee.

The systemic enquiry, especially the development of a core research group required group-based work. Anonymity is not possible within groups and is challenging in situations of multiple streams of enquiry where each participant reflects upon the others' perspectives (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007). To address this, I adopted a process of iteratively reaffirming consent within the core groups as the streams of enquiry extended. In this way, the core group had continual oversight of the streams of enquiry and therefore to what extent I shared knowledge of their involvement. I also informed each participant in the streams of enquiry of the plans and ideas of the core groups, meaning they could decide what information to contribute to this process. This process made explicit any conflicts of interest for my role in the core group and in other streams of enquiry. Throughout the research, I made clear the involvement by, access to and financial support from the two research partners, NWWT and the PSB. There were no financial conflicts of interest arising as part of the research.

Going beyond these institutional requirements, the action research design presented frequent opportunities to develop *a reflexive ethical praxis* both for myself and of the co-researchers in the core groups. This is a common experience: '[m]ost action research includes a self-reflexive practice with regard to the one's own normative orientation and to internal and external power dynamics' (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014, p. 489). In addition, the cycle of reflection and action in action research allows and encourages the *participants* to 'engage in the ethical review of their own projects' (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007, p. 39). The preceding subsections explained how I developed my own reflexivity. Here, I focus on the ways the research participants developed their reflexivity and ethical practice, especially those engaged in the core groups, as they formed multiple research relationships within and across streams of enquiry.

The design put a responsibility on me as researcher to review the 'openness and fairness of the day-to-day processes that take place but also to see about fairness of the outcomes' (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 262). Therefore, I used the dialogical approach of the research to encourage participants' self-reflexivity, to reveal their hidden assumptions and values in 'an examination of the foundations of frameworks of thought' (May and Perry, 2017, p. 3). Within the core research groups I encouraged each participant to assert their own primary interest or goal while also considering how their plans for action may marginalise others' interests, including those

of participants contributing through the other streams of enquiry. As the core groups engaged in action research, I encouraged them to question how their everyday practices may exert power over collaborating partners and exclude groups and to think of alternative, more inclusive practices. I also created mechanisms to account to their organisations for the co-researchers' time. The iterative process of core group discussion and reflection with colleagues, line managers and other forums provided oversight. Organisations' governance of the co-researchers' roles in the action research was on the basis that each justified their involvement according to the fit of the research with their work role. In a similar way, volunteers and members were held accountable by their peers in NWWT's branch forum. This democratised the relationship between the 'professional researcher and the local interested parties' (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, p. 4) by establishing collaborative responsibility for developing understanding, decision-making and action.

The research was therefore characterised by reflexive ethical praxis throughout, both of myself as researcher and generated within the road verges and social prescribing core research groups. These groups' focus on the inclusion of multiple interests embedded an 'ethic of care' amongst the co-researchers (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007, p. 36). The dialogical process within these groups and across streams of enquiry ensured both my and the co-researchers' 'decision making and behaviour [was] rooted in commitment to others' (Manzo and Brightbill, 2007, p. 36).

Sustaining and scaling change

The research design formed the foundation for extending and sustaining the work of the core research groups beyond the research period. The research aim was to develop reflexive rationality and a negotiated consensus in cross-sector networks and change the way power is exerted through cross-sector collaboration. The micro-focus of the research was therefore on reflexive rationality in the relationships within the core research groups and, in comparison, in the PSB. The macro-focus of the research was on embedding this reflexive orientation more widely, aiming to extend and sustain change to become the prevailing imaginary in the context of national well-being in Wales (Sum and Jessop, 2013).

The systemic enquiry, with its multiple and interacting streams created a framework to extend the core research groups' new imaginary and practices to other organisations and networks. The principle of diversity meant that I involved a wide range of sectors, organisations and fields of interest in the systemic enquiry. The updates from the core groups began to transfer the learning across these streams during the research. At the same time, these groups' critical

reflection on feedback from the other streams of enquiry meant they were able to include wider strategies and priorities in their negotiated consensus, broadening the fusion of horizons. After the phases of core research groups, during the thesis writing-up period I built on this network to arrange follow-up discussions with individuals, organisations and networks to encourage further understanding and action on the core groups' ideas.

As part of this extended discussion, to facilitate the embedding of the core research group's new ideas and practices I organised a 'whole system in the room' workshop (Burns, 2007). Such large events are an attempt to see '*more* of the whole', enough to be able to make sense of how the different domains of the system interact and to be able to act 'meaningfully and purposefully' (Burns, 2007, p. 22 added emphasis). This workshop[37] brought together participants from multiple streams of the systemic enquiry who had not previously all met together. I co-developed the workshop aim with the participants, to form a practical plan to begin to act more widely upon the road verges and social prescribing groups' new ideas and practices. We decided to begin with presentations about how the road verges group's 'wild pathways' strategy, when applied to the context of social prescribing, draws collaborating partners into a reciprocal relationship. Then we decided to hold a facilitated discussion to link the core research groups' ideas to organisational, regional and national strategies, priorities and resources and plan practical next steps for emancipatory cross-sector collaboration.

I tried out our ideas in advance of the workshop, in an interactive presentation at the British Sociological Association conference, 2019[38]. This gave me greater confidence that I was making good use of the intended workshop participants' valuable time, but also added to the reflective analysis and early dissemination of the research. At the conference, I arranged the audience into groups with four members, each member having a role as 'community group', 'practitioner', 'manager' or 'funder' with information about their main interest or organisational priority and their current standpoint on the cross-sector context of social prescribing. One group had some additional information based on the core groups' ideas for their presentations to the planned workshop. Each group was tasked with forming a plan for

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[37] An ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) Impact Accelerator Award (IAA) funded the workshop, covering travel and subsistence costs and some time for me as facilitator. The IAA was managed and delivered by Bangor University and aimed to extend the societal impact of the research. See Appendix 7 Workshop Programme.

[38] BSA 2019, 24/04/2019 – 26/04/2019, Glasgow. Theme: Hierarchy and Inequality. Sub theme: Working with non-academics and other disciplines and having a meaningful role in public debate. Stream: Environment and Society. Abstract Title: *'Cross-sector collaboration to incorporate environmental values: action research, interests and inequalities.'* The conference organisers specifically requested presenters to consider innovative forms of presentation.

collaboration in the context of social prescribing that would benefit each interest. Unsurprisingly, the group with the additional information developed an idea for green infrastructure that closely related to the shared vision of the core research groups. More interestingly, as I guided the groups through a reflexively rational process of asserting each member's interests and reflecting on how their interests complemented or conflicted with each other, each group's ideas for joint action took on an increasingly reciprocally beneficial nature.

23 people attended the whole system in the room event, representing all five streams of the enquiry (Workshop, 07/06/2019). They included members of both core research groups, representatives from local and national third sector organisations, the CEO and two Trustees of NWWT, the Public Health representative and a delegate for the National Park representative from the PSB, a senior member of staff at WCVA (the national third sector infrastructure organisation) and a member of the Future Generations Commissioner's team. Three core group members gave short presentations explaining the reciprocal nature of the 'wild pathways' strategy and practices. That is, how it helped them to improve their delivery of their *own* organisation's objectives by contributing to *partner* organisations' aims. I gave a brief overview of the research and explained the key critical and relational principles that guided the core groups' dialogue to form their new strategy. I followed this by facilitating a whole group discussion where I encouraged the core group members to take the lead to suggest ways in which they could extend their collaborative work. They and I posed questions and requests to other attendees to explore ways of enabling shared working, pooling resources and mechanisms to include wider third and public sector partners. We closed with a buffet lunch to celebrate the work of the core research groups and give people an opportunity to discuss plans for joint action more informally.

Reflecting on the flipcharts and post-it notes made by myself and other participants during the group discussion, I drew together a summary report of the presentations, the links between the new ideas, wider strategies and potential governance mechanisms, and the identified short- and medium-term actions. The summary formed the basis for end of research reports to the main research partners and an online guest blog[39] about their 'wild pathways' strategy, which aimed to embed the core research groups' ideas. I followed up the workshop with informal discussions with the Partnerships Manager and NWWT Trustees (Partnerships Manager 02/10/2019,

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[39]   https://epwales.org.uk/elizabeth-woodcock-a-wild-new-way-we-can-manage-our-health/   Environment Platform Wales aims to increase the quality and relevance of evidence available for environmental management and policymaking in Wales.

Trustees 19/09/2019) and some of the invited participants who had been unable to attend the workshop (CVC 10/06/2019, SP CoP 08/07/2019). I sent links to the blog, which was on the website of the newly formed Environment Platform Wales and edited by their social media officer, to the core group members and associates in their organisations with responsibility for social media. Besides generating these outputs, the whole system in a room event further clarified links between theory and the locally situated practices of the core groups.

Collecting the data

Following Angrosino (2007a, 2007b), I treated action research as a form of ethnography in that it was a way of becoming immersed in the community I was studying. The critical-relational systemic design created the 'behavioral context out of which an ethnographer uses defined techniques to collect data' (Angrosino, 2007b, p. 16). The design enabled me to adopt a 'dialogic, dialectical, and collaborative' style of research using techniques which supported a general approach of 'participant observation' (Angrosino, 2007b, pp. 11–16). In line with my critical relational approach, the techniques I used enabled me to take part in conversations with my research partners and others involved in cross-sector collaboration, to gather diverse standpoints and opinions and to engage participants actively in the research (Angrosino, 2007b, p. 11). As I explained in the previous section, my research partners and others' level of active participation in the research varied according to their preferences and work situations. Therefore, my approach varied on a spectrum from *observer-as-participant to participant-as-observer*. At the former end of the spectrum, I was immersed as a known researcher in multiple aspects of my research partner, NWWT's work and with them, primarily as participant, in the core research groups. At the other end of the spectrum, my involvement (again as a known researcher) with the PSB, was primarily as observer and included attendance at specific meetings and interviews with specific individuals, but also more active engagement with some members.

As I explained in the previous section, the various streams of enquiry enabled me to adopt a variety of techniques (or methods) and tools to suit the varying degrees of active participation in the research. The methods included observation, information exchange interviews, semi-structured interviews, group discussions and core research groups. Supporting tools included research updates in the form of emails, presentations and project documents, GIS maps, and written documents summarising organisational strategies and information on specific issues. Each method and tool contributed to the critical and relational dynamic of the action research

and raised questions to direct the further collection of data, and each method helped complement and accommodate the limitations of the others.

Observation

The method with the least intensity of participation by my partners was my participation as observer of meetings of NWWT Trustees, the PSB and regional and national forums. Observation offers an opportunity to record 'the activities and interrelationships of people in the field' (Angrosino, 2007a, p. 37). Revealing what is important in these behaviours and actions relies on a systematic process of making fieldnotes. I recorded my fieldnotes in a series of 15 notebooks (which also acted as reflective journals, see later section on data analysis). Following Angrosino (2007a, pp. 37–40) for each event I made a statement and description of the setting, details and description of the participants, a chronology of events (usually referring to a meeting agenda), descriptions of people's behaviours and interactions, and near verbatim records of the conversations. As the research progressed and I noticed patterns, my descriptions also started to include some interpretations.

Through this basic ethnographic method, I became 'involved in the ongoing, daily world' of the people I was studying (Fielding, 1995a, p. 156). Observation enabled me to observe naturally occurring behaviours in these settings, developing relationships but also maintaining a position as an outsider so that it was possible to ask probing questions when given the opportunity (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002). By attending the PSB and other meetings regularly and over an extended period of two years, I gained trust as a group member, to the extent that heated discussions occasionally occurred with no noticeable constraint due to my presence. This familiarity helped me to understand the common practices and ideas in these bodies in the context of the immediate situation as well as in the wider historical and cultural context depicted through the systemic enquiry (Liebow, 2003).

As an example, observing a NWWT Trustees meeting early in the research, I began to understand the importance of good working relationships to cross-sector collaboration. I noted that 'their discussion of joint working recognises the need for good relationships' but also that 'the Trust's networks with external agencies such as NRW have the potential for good personal working relationships but there is a perceived lack of commitment from these other organisations' (Fieldnotes, Trustees 02/02/2017). Observing a meeting of the PSB, I noted that 'relationships within the Board seem polite and respectful but not enthusiastic or friendly. Few people take advantage of the coffee breaks to chat to each other. There is frustration with the lack of action of the previous LSB' (Fieldnotes, PSB 24/02/2017).

Although observation gave me insight into my research partners' worlds, as an outsider I had only a partial understanding of the institutional culture and had limited opportunities to ask questions. In addition, as I gained understanding of the field these meetings provoked questions and ideas for further exploration. I therefore used methods of interviews and group discussions to elicit further information and opinions.

Interviews

Although taking the form of conversations, interviews are purposive and directed at gathering specific information (Angrosino, 2007a, pp. 40–48). Aiding my systemic approach, such individual interviews 'provide the opportunity to examine how large-scale social transformations are experienced, interpreted, and ultimately shaped by the responses of strategic actors' (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002, p. 201).

The most basic type of interviews I undertook were designed to *exchange information*. Interviews with colleagues of the members of the core research groups gave me the opportunity to discuss the groups' progress on joint plans, request further information to assist them and help me to understand technical issues and the strategic context. I also used *semi-structured interviews*, designed to clarify the meaning of statements or exchanges in the observed meetings, uncover background contextual factors, and understand different perspectives. This type of interview was largely with specific members of the PSB and NWWT (stream three) and with individuals at various levels of authority (stream five) to encourage them to engage in critical reflection on everyday practices and beliefs. However, information exchange interviews also occasionally developed a critically reflective nature where I was able to ask for opinions and narratives of their experiences in addition to specific information (Angrosino, 2007a, p. 42). Both types of interviews were purposeful but responsive to contextual factors and their semi-structured nature gave me flexibility to gauge the appropriateness of raising critical questions (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 251–259).

I used research updates as a tool to explain the purpose of the interview and as a prompt for questions and information exchange. Although designed to elicit the interviewee's opinions and perspective, often these updates required elaboration from me in response to the participant's questions. Interviews lasted less than an hour to respect participants' time for other activities, to focus the conversation and to minimise transcription time and costs. They were held in any location that was convenient for the participant, at their office, a local venue or the University. I made a judgement on the choice of recording method to maintain both relational and critical elements of the research. Where interviews were mainly to find out more

information about an issue that was someone's job role, for example in understanding how NRW used GIS mapping tools, I recorded discussion in the form of fieldnotes. Where meetings raised more critical questions and were with people who were already participating in the research, I made digital audio-recordings and transcribed them.

For example, I talked to an officer with the national Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW) to understand the extent of collaboration between Trusts in Wales. I recorded this in the form of field notes as she was new in her post, and I was focussed on information exchange. However, the interview developed a more critically reflective nature, casting light on the way a lack of shared information constrained the Trusts' capacity to work together, and how requests for information by public bodies were treated with suspicion due to the conflict between public access to reserves and wildlife needs. She described her 'researcher' job as specifically to 'collate information across the Wildlife Trusts in Wales and the activities they're undertaking' with the intention to 'see if we can think more strategically about our activities … and feed into the Natural Resources Report and Area Statements[40]'. I asked more critically whether the Trusts had been happy to provide the information and she replied 'yes, yes they're all happy' but added that they questioned her, 'what are you going to do with this' explaining 'some of them have got confidentiality issues over their reserves, they're not publicly accessible' (Fieldnotes, WTW Researcher, 06/03/2017).

Group discussions

While observation and individual interviews helped me gain direct information about common ideas, beliefs and practices, they were limited in their capacity to bring together diverse perspectives and invoke critical awareness and transformative change. Therefore, where it was possible to convene group discussions, I took an approach that I describe as *'critical-relational discussion'* after my action research strategy. I held these purposeful discussions with line managers and supervisors of the members of the core research groups, in NWWT Trustees meetings, with specially convened groups of members of the PSB and within larger forum meetings. As I engaged in cycles of action and reflection with the core groups, the updates and presentations of our work formed the focus for these discussions, which varied in length according to the time allocated to me. They tended to be less than 15 minutes in larger forums, and up to 2 hours where specially convened.

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[40] National Natural Resources Report and Area Statements: see Footnote 1, Introduction Chapter

The strength of such discussions was that they offered insights into broader contexts that could help form consensus between collaborating organisations, such as national strategies that crossed the boundaries of several public bodies' work. They cast light on participants' awareness of organisational interdependencies and how they negotiated their interests by asserting them or couching them in terms of their contributions to others (Fielding, 1995b, pp. 141–142). The group discussions supported the relational and critical aspects of the action research, by sustaining permission for the core research groups to continue to meet and by providing the opportunity to question how power was exerted through common managerial practices. However, they had the drawback of being challenging to organise and facilitate, due to time pressures affecting participants' attendance and the conflict between forming relationships and questioning assumptions and power (Fielding, 1995b, pp. 141–142).

I held a group discussion with NWWT Trustees (20/04/2017), based on an open question to each about their motivation to work with the Trust and their opinion of the desirability of collaborating with other sectors and organisations. This audio-recorded discussion elicited strong opinions about a lack of support from other organisations: 'I just reported through to NRW a case of ancient hedgerows and trees being ripped out … and believe it or not, everybody's saying oh forget it, don't worry … now as regards the Wildlife Trust, I feel this is the one wildlife body that's out there that actually works for wildlife' (Clwyd Trustee). His thoughts were taken up by other trustees 'we haven't perhaps related as much as we could to the outside world' (Wrexham #1 Trustee), 'it's such a shame the National Trust and the Wildlife Trust can't be more [goes quiet] ... I know the Wildlife Trust are open to that you know and there would be so much more potential there' (Anglesey #1 Trustee), 'what are these partners for? … only one thing, to help us achieve our goal' (Wrexham #2 Trustee). When I asked if any partner did not help them achieve their goal, the latter trustee replied 'Natural Resources Wales, well they should be a partner but they're a hindrance. Their goal is to save money not wildlife'. Although there was some rebuttal of this by another trustee, 'I don't think it's money. It's about how do we align our strategic objectives with well-being goals … we need to focus on aligning ourselves with other people's objectives' (Denbigh Trustee), there was general agreement with the Fundraising Director when he expressed the opinion 'I think a true collaboration [is one] in which partners other than ourselves have as high a value stake'.

Core research groups
As I explained earlier, I initiated the establishment of two core research groups, focussing on road verges management and then on social prescribing. The road verges group had five

meetings over the course of ten months, including a period of activity with communities. The social prescribing group and our wider partners held four meetings over the course of eight months, extending into a period of planning joint action. Both groups met with each other and with representatives from the other streams of enquiry at the 'whole system in a room' workshop. Each group had between six and eight members, varying according to availability, and changing as we identified new people to join us.

Combining the action research cycle of action and reflection with the research focus on developing reflexive rationality in cross-sector networks, led me to treat the core groups as potential communities of practice. The aim of action research is to engage co-enquirers in the collaborative production of knowledge to inform transformative action (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, p. 4). This co-learning is based on bringing together 'action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities' (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 5). Wenger describes such co-learning as 'a fundamentally social phenomenon' through which we become 'active participants in the *practices* of social communities' and form a common '*identity'* (Wenger, 1998, pp. 3–4 emphasis in the original). She describes three dimensions through which practice creates the coherence in a community which enables co-learning: mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998, pp. 72–85). *Mutual engagement* is the involvement of diverse participants in action that creates relationships amongst them. *Joint enterprise* is the collective negotiation of a joint activity that is not just a common goal, but which creates relations of mutual accountability. A *shared repertoire*, including stories, tools, techniques and concepts, develops through engagement in practice. Thus, the CoP can support the plural diversity, dialogical integration and shared accountability of reflexive rationality to negotiate consensus on long-term joint action.

I therefore aimed to develop reflexive rationality in the core research groups by encouraging mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire through my critical-relational approach. First, to develop *mutual engagement* I encouraged members to share their own interests and enhance their mutual understanding through dialogue, by sharing information gathered through other streams of enquiry and by making documentary summaries of policies and strategies relevant to the group's discussions. To create these summaries, I selected policies and documents as they were referred to in the other streams of enquiry, or by following up suggestions from the core group members about gaps in their information. For the road verges

group these summaries included information on local 'active travel'[41] and public rights of way improvement plans, community groups and amenities, Local Authorities' highways maintenance policies and local development plans, and environmental organisations' advice on road verges management. For the social prescribing group, I focussed on summarising local, regional and national policies, academic studies and evaluations of social prescribing. I paid special attention to forms of 'green' social prescribing, where nature-based activities were related to mental and physical well-being and other social and economic outcomes. I included information from the core group members' organisations' own websites[42], to understand how social prescribing was being framed in the different sectors.

Second, to develop *joint enterprise* I prompted the core group members to become co-researchers in discovering ways in which they could contribute to each other's needs without marginalising their primary interests. I supported this task by developing basic skills in digital mapping, or Geographical Information Systems (GIS) teaching myself to use QGIS[43] software, with some guidance from a colleague at the University. Rather than using GIS as a *quantitative* data collection method, I used it as a *qualitative* 'representational technology' (Aitken and Kwan, 2010, p. 287) to create a visual representation of the diverse interests of the collaborating organisations. In this way, it became a tool to encourage our mutual understanding and ethical reflexivity as we considered and reconsidered the layers to include and the relationships amongst these layers.

Third, to develop a *shared repertoire* I encouraged a focus on action, critically reflective practice and engagement with the wider streams of enquiry. I supported this by making summary documents in the form of project reports. These reports were suggested by members of the first core group to manage the group's work, form the basis to attract resources and hold it accountable to managers in the members' organisations. I encouraged group members to contribute to and comment on these documents to encourage the diversity of perspectives and reflective practice. As I explained earlier, these project reports also facilitated my engagement in other streams of enquiry, co-developing the reports and thereby creating relationships and common practices with a broader range of stakeholders.

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[41] Active Travel is a priority in the Welsh Transport Strategy to promote sustainable transport by encouraging walking and cycling as well as the use of public transport.
[42] These websites included Public Health Wales Observatory, Public Health Wales, The Wildlife Trusts intranet, NHS PrimaryOne, NRW, Sport Wales
[43] QGIS: Qualitative Geographical Information Systems, a free opensource digital mapping software increasingly used by the third and public sector bodies which I encountered during the research

In Chapters Six and Seven, I describe how the core research group meetings placed the co-researchers at the centre of developing dialogical understanding. I show how I used the tools to support the co-researchers' participation by combining 'group-based processes' of effortful collective reflection, dialogue amongst diverse perspectives and 'asset mapping' (Dick, 2015, p. 438).

Volume of the data collection

Table 1 (above, p.116) summarises the distribution of meetings across the five streams of enquiry and the forms of data collection I employed. In total 80 main conversations and observations contributed to these streams of enquiry, with numerous interim short conversations with core group members by email, phone and over coffee, and other individuals at forums and events. Many of these main conversations were with groups of between 5 and 20 people in the forums, group discussions and core groups. The data created by these methods were qualitative. I recorded them in the form of digital audio-recordings and transcriptions, field notes, groups' working notes including flipcharts and post-it notes, and email correspondence.

Stream one included the two core research groups' nine meetings, twelve PSB board meetings, a PSB workshop and two PSB subgroup workshops. Eight interviews contributed to *stream two*, with staff and members of NWWT, the local councils and Anglesey social prescribing scheme. *Stream three* was informed by seven discussions with PSB members (in small groups of two to four), three with subgroups of NWWT trustees and my participation as observer in five board meetings of these trustees, 15 conversations in total. Across the two phases of action research, I participated in and observed 15 meetings of regional and national forums, contributing to *stream four* and held 18 interviews with individuals with various positions of authority to contribute to *stream five*. In addition to dialogue and experiences, the data also encompassed written documents including meeting agendas and documents, minutes, policy reports and information on organisations' websites. These data were purposively selected according to their relevance to the core groups' discussions, which related to their strategic nature, the timing of publication, influence on public debate and because they had prominence in the five streams of enquiry. These streams ran concurrently throughout the two years of systemic enquiry, see Figures 8 and 9 and the key in Table 2.
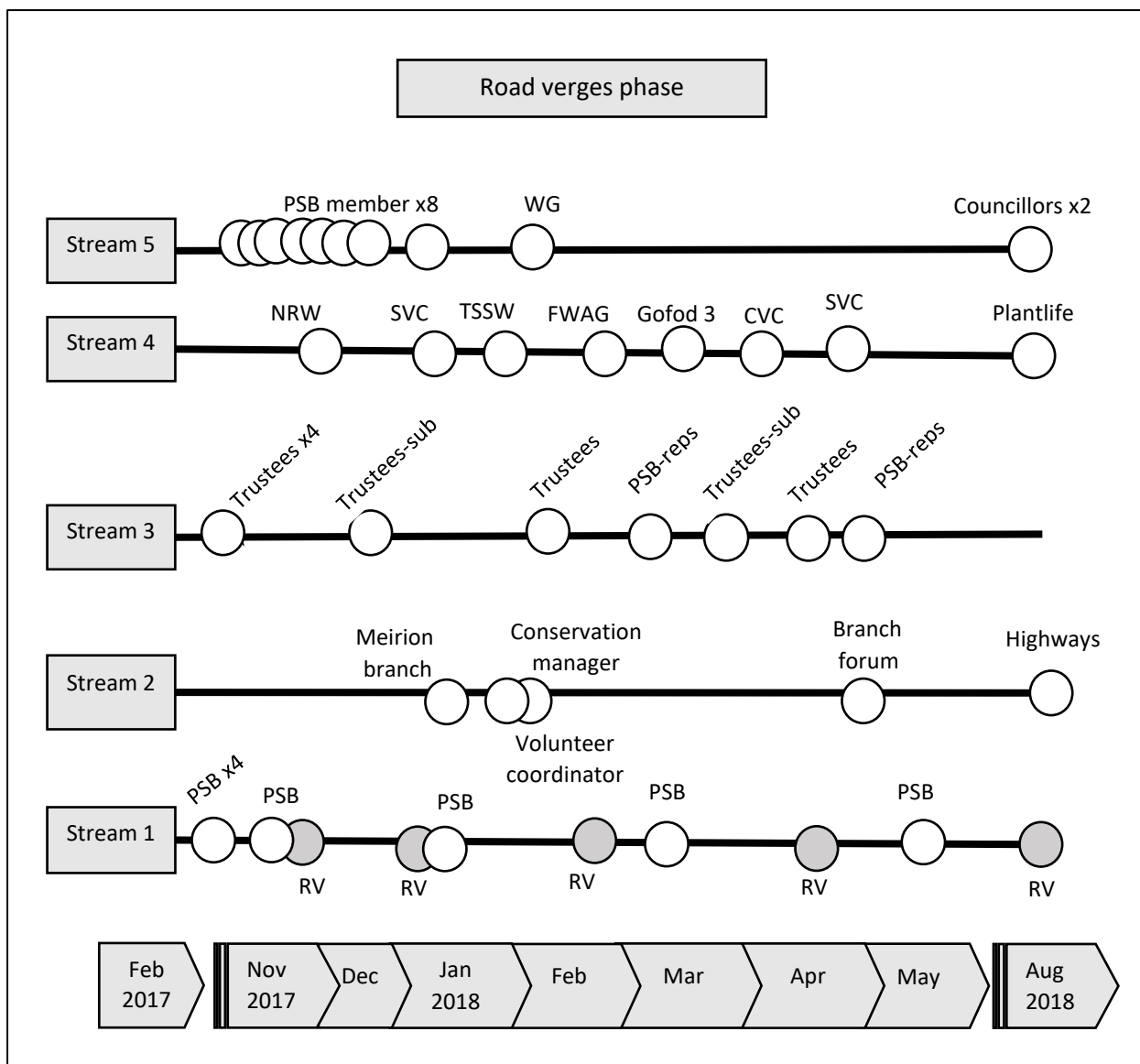
Figure 8 Data collection during road verges core research group phase
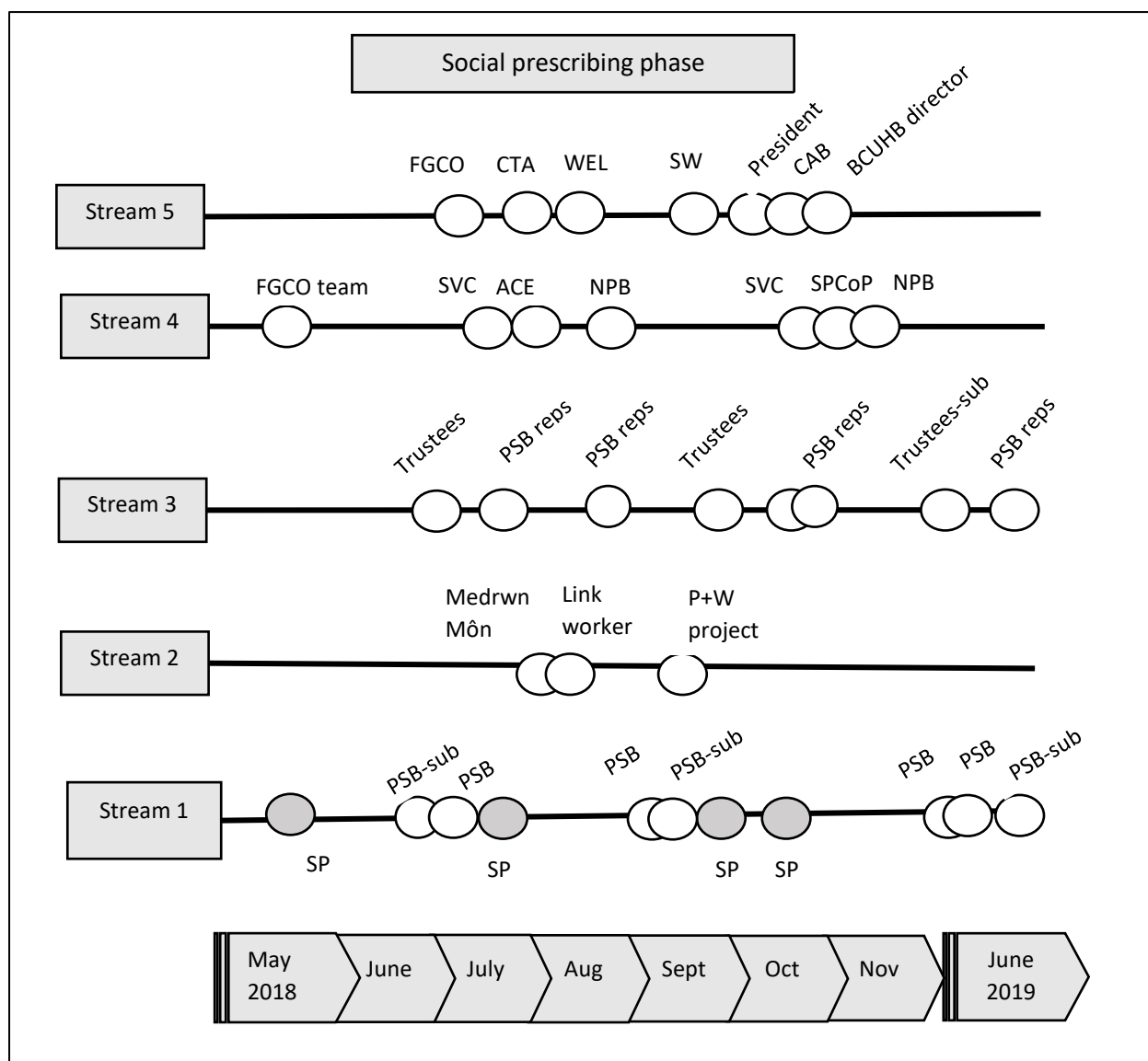
Figure 9 Data collection during social prescribing core research group phase

Table 2 Key to data collection (figures 8 and 9)

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KEY to data collection figures

Stream 1: Core research groups and PSB meetings
PSB: Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board
PSB-sub: Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board official sub-group
RV: road verges core research group
SP: social prescribing core research group

Stream 2: Colleagues and peers of core group members and PSB members
Meirion branch: Meeting of the NWWT local branch for Meirionydd, South Gwynedd
Volunteer coordinator: NWWT Volunteer coordinator
Conservation manager: NWWT Conservation manager
Branch forum: NWWT forum for representatives of its North Wales branches
Highways teams: meetings with Gwynedd Council and Anglesey Council Highways teams
Medrwn Môn: Local third sector infrastructure organisation
Link worker: Officer on social prescribing scheme
P+W project: People and Wildlife project meeting

Stream 3: Line managers or supervisors of core research group members
Trustees: NWWT Council of Trustees
Trustees-sub: Small group of NWWT Trustees/ senior staff
PSB-reps: Small group of Public Services Board representatives

Stream 4: Regional and national forums
NRW: Natural Resources Wales event
SVC: Social Value Cymru network
TSSW: Third Sector Support Wales forum
FWAG: Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Gofod 3: Third sector Wales conference
CVC: County Voluntary Council event
Plantlife: Third sector environmental campaign group Plantlife
FGCO team: Future Generations Commissioner's Office team
ACE: Adverse Childhood Experiences Hub workshop
NPB: National Public Bodies network
SPCoP: Social Prescribing Community of Practice

Stream 5: Individuals with positions of authority
PSB member: Public Services Board member
WG: representative of Welsh Government
Councillors: Gwynedd Council elected members
FGCO: Officer at Future Generations Commissioner's Office
CTA: Community Transport Association Officer
WEL: Wales Environment Link Director
SW: Sport Wales Officer
President: President of NWWT
CAB: Cyngor ar Bobeth/ Citizens Advice Cymru Director
BCUHB director: BCUHB Director of community health

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Contribution of the data to the critical-relational systemic enquiry

These qualitative data from across the systemic enquiry gave shape to an extended and systematic conversation developing amongst multiple social groups and individuals over time.

The conversation formed out of the dynamic interaction of the ideas, plans, strategies and action of the core research groups, my multiple research roles and the wider streams of enquiry. It consisted of the (inter-)subjective experiences of each participant, their developing mutual understandings and shared professional concepts, their reflections on their own and others' words and actions, their understanding of strategies and tactics for collaboration and their developing understanding of power relations. The conversation became an exploration of the horizons of the diverse participating groups and individuals and, through its critical approach, their understanding of the strategic relations of cross-sector collaboration. The extended conversation raised questions that prompted further data collection, in an iterative cycle of data collection and analysis, as I explore next.

Analysing the data

Grounded Theory Analysis (GTA) guided the collection and analysis of the data. Following Charmaz (2017), GTA enabled me to create a complementary relationship between the action research strategy and the critical-realist approach to theory development. Like Charmaz (2017, pp. 35, 41) through this process I combined inductive and abductive analysis pragmatically, to 'move back and forth between stories and analysis.' I began with *inductive* understanding of the empirical world as it unfolded through the critical-relational systemic enquiry. The process of inductive analysis systematically raised questions about the emerging concepts, which guided further data collection. It also raised critical questions about the participants' interpretations and the implications for power relations by situating the data in the wider societal context, informing dialogue with theories of governance (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 250–272). This dialogue with theory created *abductive* analysis in which I was guided by the concepts of morphogenesis (Archer, 1995), paying attention to evidence of changing cultural and structural conditions to infer changes in power relations. Hence, my use of GTA combined an interpretivist focus on inter-subjectivity with a critical orientation to hidden power (Charmaz, 2017, p. 39). This continual movement between theorising and collecting data increased the 'level of abstraction and complexity of the analysis' (Charmaz, 2017, p. 39) in order to construct the theoretical statement.

I followed the key principles of Charmaz's (2006, 2014) systematic but flexible approach to constructing grounded theory to support the evolving approach to action research. In line with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original guidance, Charmaz's approach is built on the principles of simultaneous data collection and analysis, inductive not deductive construction of codes, constant comparison, iterative development of theory through the elaboration of conceptual

categories and theoretical sampling of data, and an engagement with literature primarily after inductive analysis (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 5–6). These techniques enabled me to link the interpretive understanding closely to the data to ensure its 'fit and practicality' and meaningful relevance to the core research groups, and avoid imposing my preconceptions on the data (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 260). Following Charmaz, I adapted the basic elements of coding, memo-writing, sampling aimed at theory development, and comparative methods in an iterative fashion during the research process, as I explain in the following sections. Due to the diverse streams of enquiry, the large number of conversations (in various forms), and complex interactions, I used qualitative software NVivo to support a systematic process, guided by Pat Bazeley and Kristi Jackson's (2013) methodical approach, and supported by workshops at the University and with NatCen[44].

Coding

I used annotations as a form of coding to make sense of the data, labelling segments of the transcripts, fieldnotes and other data to categorise and summarise them. I focussed on interpreting and gaining new insights into the phenomena and processes of cross-sector collaboration (Charmaz, 2006). The aim of coding is not to produce a detailed description, but to sustain the cycle of action and reflection in the core research groups to form a collective dialogical understanding (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 259–266). As I had been part of every conversation and had therefore made my own sense of it at the time, returning to the data in this way helped me to check that I remained close to the participants' perspectives and interpretations. Annotations, rather than line-by-line coding, enabled me to make rapid sense of the conversations to inform the ongoing action both of the core research groups and my data collection (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013, pp. 24–46).

I made comprehensive annotations of the data, covering the whole of the conversations of each stream of the systemic enquiry to find connections and concepts that occurred within and across them (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 261–266). As the data were largely group discussions, I found annotations helped me to make sense of meanings that developed in the interactions between people, and in a disjointed fashion across the course of the meeting. Codes must be applied to a specific piece of data. My annotations often spanned a series of comments in separate parts of the conversation to make sense of them. The annotations initially consisted of a summary (usually between one and three sentences) of the overall meaning of segments of transcripts

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[44] NatCen: The National Centre for Social Research, UK

and fieldnotes, and it was this summary which informed my immediate actions to guide and raise questions with the core research groups and to develop the streams of enquiry to seek further understanding.

As an example, observing a Trustees meeting, I annotated my fieldnotes 'Why such a formal structure? Are these people friends or professional colleagues – do they trust each other or is there someone to whom they feel accountable? Trustees are very willing to chat with each other across and round the table at points between agenda items. Later, however, there is a vote on an issue rather than any discussion and no attempt to come to an agreed solution.' (Fieldnotes, Trustees, 20/04/2017). This prompted me to return to earlier conversations to examine issues around relationships, as well as to raise questions with individual trustees and question what was happening in other forums that I observed.

As the list of annotations grew, where possible I summarised some in gerund form, or an action term, such as 'developing a common purpose' or 'focussing on the current situation' to attribute intentions to the observed actions, both verbal and behavioural (following Charmaz, 2014). Where relevant, I marked segments of text related to this gerund with sub-codes, for example 'developing a common purpose' had sub-codes of 'contribution to well-being', 'vision for group' and 'vision for project'. This helped to simplify comparisons with the accumulating data, and I started to group some annotations together in categories, developing a further level of abstraction (Charmaz, 2014). The ideas of the early literature review provided some prompts for categories, in an early cycle of dialogue between the data and emerging theoretical orientation. For example, the concept of leadership prompted me to create a category 'developing a team', grouping together a long list of 14 annotations with small numbers of repeat instances, including 'arranging meeting times', 'clarifying roles' and 'recounting history of working together'. Without this overall category these seemingly small parts of conversations held little intentional meaning. Grouping the annotations and codes helped me to understand them as the intention to develop a team. In this way I brought my own 'horizon', informed by the literature review, to bear upon the data by drawing my attention to recognisable and surprising features (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 264).

Reflective journals
I adapted Charmaz's (2014) use of memo writing to create reflective journals. Memos are 'analytic notes' which record ideas about comparisons and connections between codes, possible theoretical categories and insights into explanations (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 95–119). They encourage the researcher to create an interaction between the data and developing

theoretical explanations. However, memos are usually linked to codes and as I had largely used annotations, combining codes to create categories was not always possible. Instead, I decided to create 'reflective notes' and combine them in a series of journals.

I developed a cycle of creating annotations and writing reflective notes that interacted with the cycle of action and reflection in the core research groups. I used my annotations to gain an interpretive understanding of the core groups' discussions and the data from other streams of enquiry. I reflected on these meanings and the connections between them to understand how they related to the literature review and governance theories. I made many of my reflective notes in the 15 field notebooks that also contained much of the data collected. I selected some of these notes and developed more, in a series of three journals. These related to the period of literature review, the road verges phase of action research and the social prescribing phase of action research.

The journals served two purposes. First, they had a practical purpose to inform the research direction. In the first journal, I developed ideas to form the basis for discussing and agreeing research questions with my research partners. In the other two journals, I used my reflective notes to raise questions and ideas to discuss in future research group meetings or other streams of enquiry. Often, in these reflective notes I explored ideas for meeting agendas, interview prompts and critical questions. These ideas helped me to write the short project reports, presentations and diagrams which I used to reflect on the core groups and the PSB's experiences in other streams of enquiry. Often preparation for meetings and conversations was the prompt that motivated the writing of a journal entry. The research questions journal had four short reflective notes associated with it. The road verges journal had 54 entries and 21 related reflective notes including drafts for the project reports. The social prescribing journal had 58 entries and 7 related reflective notes (the number of notes reduced due to grouping meetings' preparation into one long reflection). Secondly, this process of reflective writing in my field notebooks and journals helped me to reflect on the development of the action research as a whole (following Bazeley and Jackson, 2013, p. 45). This formed 'a key element in the dialogue between data and (emerging) theory' (Wagenaar, 2011, p. 262).

As an example of these reflections, early in the road verges phase of action research, I noted in my journal (06/11/2017) 'This week's meetings – a very busy week.' There followed a list of meetings for each day of the week, with comments like 'Monday PSB: I aim to observe and note any links to the action research project. Will chat to PH rep to check her commitment to

the project. Tuesday NRW: hope to gain NRW PSB rep's support for the project. Wednesday NRW: just had meeting with Team leader rescheduled for the third time. Friday PSB Chair: this meeting has also been rescheduled.' Followed by my reflection, 'relationships between third sector and public sector are constrained by difficulties in arranging to meet. Constant rescheduling creates the impression that collaboration is not important. Relationship to theory – see Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) – operational collaborative capacity/ constraints.'

Theoretical sampling

The journals enabled me to develop tentative conceptual categories and possible connections between them as well as identify gaps in the data. I used a strategy of theoretical sampling to search for further data to give each category and connection more substance, or to refine the initial ideas. Theoretical understanding forms not from the number of repeated instances of a particular event but from the capacity to explain an increasing diversity of phenomena. The aim of sampling was therefore to develop concepts and theory by increasing the diversity of the data and its context (Charmaz, 2006; Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 270–272). Charmaz portrays theoretical sampling as 'strategic, specific, and systematic', happening as part of the ongoing data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2006, p. 103).

Theoretical sampling became a process of continual comparison between data, annotations and concepts from the literature. Unlike Glaser and Strauss's (1967) initial exhortations to return to the literature only after inductive analysis, I was guided by Wagenaar's (2011) explanation of Gadamer's hermeneutic process of fusion of horizons. By referring to the literature review and governance theories, I explicitly engaged my own knowledge horizon to interpret the data. To avoid imposing my preconceptions on the data however, I kept returning to my records of participants' own words as I developed theoretical concepts (Wagenaar, 2011, pp. 267–272). In addition, guided by my reflective notes, I raised questions about potential explanations with the core groups and with participants in other streams of enquiry. This led me to select (or 'sample') new participants to seek new perspectives, developing the streams of enquiry. The cyclical and rapid nature of this process took on what felt to me like a 'just in time' character, with each cycle of analysis informing the ongoing data collection.

As I continued to explore cross-sector relationships, theoretical sampling directed further enquiry. For example, after observing the PSB meetings for six months, the Manager and Chair suggested I discuss my research with the PSB members in an upcoming meeting. This gave me the opportunity to ask the PSB members about the literature review's depiction of cross-sector collaboration as a system with domains of interpersonal relationships, interorganisational

arrangements and wider system influences. In my field notes, I noted their responses to each dimension (for more details see Chapter Seven). In my journal, I reflected 'limited mutual understanding, some members see practical structural barriers to inter-organisational working, but others refute this. Is this an example of a divide between those who see the effects of power and others who focus on creative agency? Does the core research group also demonstrate evidence of structural barriers that create constraints on collaborative capacity? What do people in the SVC forum and Future Generations Office think prevents organisations from working together?' (Journal, 04/10/2017).

As the process of sampling and analysis raised questions about connections between concepts, I developed the rounds of the literature review to understand how these issues presented in other contexts. As an abductive dialogue between the fieldwork and analysis, this grounded the theoretical explanations in 'data systematically obtained from social research', a process that both discovers and verifies theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 2).

Comparing data and theory

As the volume of data and annotations from the systemic enquiry grew, it became increasingly challenging to understand how each conversation and stream of enquiry interacted with the others. Comparing data, annotations, categories and literature was complex. I used framework matrices[45] in NVivo to make comparisons across the diverse perspectives of the systemic enquiry and develop a further level of abstraction from the data. This tool helped me to create a dialogue between multiple conversations, their annotations, conceptual categories and the developing theoretical connections, while maintaining a direct link to the original data. There was not a perfect fit between the parameters of framework matrices and my use of annotations, sub-codes and conceptual categories[46]. However, I used the frameworks as a heuristic to gain insights by applying them to a limited amount of data. I treated each conversation as a 'case', each concept as a 'theme', and my limited use of gerunds as 'codes', creating a series of thematic frameworks or matrices. Each thematic matrix grouped the conversations (cases) by their streams of enquiry and longitudinally over the fieldwork. Each matrix held one or more conceptual categories (themes) with their annotations (codes). The live links between matrix

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[45] Framework matrices are a querying tool for qualitative data that enable the cross referencing of large amounts of data. Developed by NatCen, the matrix is a form of thematic framework 'now widely used for analysing qualitative data by researchers in the social policy field and beyond', (*Framework in NVivo 11 A step-by-step guide*, NatCen Learning – a manual accompanying training). Framework *matrices* are distinct from the 'framework *method*' which was a forerunner to the coding used in qualitative software (Gale *et al.*, 2013)

[46] Due to the imperfect fit I restricted the use of framework matrices to the final stages of action research, where the relationships amongst the data were at their most complex.

cells and the original data in Nvivo facilitated a closeness to the data not enabled by simple spreadsheets, while the matrix view increased the level of abstraction and conceptual refinement. Table 3 is an example of a framework matrix.

Table 3 Example of framework matrix. Category: Relationships

THEME / CASE		Category 4 Relationships				ORIGINAL DATA
Enquiry stream	Case	Code 4.1 identity	Code 4.2 commitment	Code 4.3 interdependence	Code 4.4 accountability	
1 Social prescribing core research group	Meeting 1 xx/xx/xx	*Summary analysis over whole conversation*			*Summary analysis over whole conversation*	Annotated transcript
	Meeting 2 xx/xx/xx	*Summary analysis over whole conversation*	*Summary analysis over whole conversation*			Annotated transcript
	Meeting 3 xx/xx/xx		*Summary analysis over whole conversation*	*Summary analysis over whole conversation*		Annotated transcript
3 Managers and supervisors	Trustees xx/xx/xx			*Summary analysis over whole conversation*		Annotated field notes
	PSB reps xx/xx/xx				*Summary analysis over whole conversation*	Annotated field notes
	Trustees sub-group xx/xx/xx	*Summary analysis over whole conversation*		*Summary analysis over whole conversation*		Annotated field notes
Interpretive analysis		*Analysis over time and across streams*	*Analysis over time and across streams*	*Analysis over time and across streams*	*Analysis over time and across streams*	
Abductive dialogue and inference		*How the data confirm, contradict and develop the theoretical statement*				

In the two left-hand columns are the 'characteristics'[47] of the case, that is the stream of enquiry with the name and date of the conversation. On the right-hand side of the table are the original data. Across the top of the matrix are the conceptual categories and codes. The central cells contain a summary interpretation of all the material in the original conversation that had the same code or meaning. The code-summaries formed a series of summaries of the meanings of each conversation and how these meanings related to each other within each conversation. The framework matrix enabled me to create a dialogue between the different conversations within and across streams and over time. By linking each summary to the original text, it facilitated referencing of the original data while at the same time developing analyses that were more abstract. By exporting the framework matrix in the form of a spreadsheet I could then add further rows (although losing the live link to the original data held in NVivo). The penultimate row summarises the interpretive understanding of each code across multiple conversations, providing an overview to help conceptual refinement. The final row is based on abductive dialogue between this interpretive analysis and conceptual refinement and my developing theoretical stance.

Conclusion

I have explained in this chapter how I conducted the research to enhance reflexivity and sustain a reciprocal dynamic between the critical and relational principles of action research. This reflexive process extended to multiple aspects of the design of the critical-relational systemic enquiry as well as the methods of data collection and analysis. The dynamic of reflexivity, criticality and relationality enhanced my self-reflexivity regarding my influence and roles in the research and facilitated my abductive dialogue between fieldwork and theory. This dynamic also facilitated the development of the core research groups as critical-relational communities of practice.

I have shown how the systemic design and multiple methods of data collection maximised participation and diversity, to develop a dialogical understanding of the culture and practices, structural conditions and power relations of cross-sector collaboration. I explained how negotiating multiple starting points encouraged commitment to action research and enabled me to establish two core research groups whose members became co-researchers. Creating interactions between the streams of enquiry developed trusting relationships, the inclusion of diverse perspectives and raised critical awareness. I showed how this process created multiple

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[47] 'Characteristics' in matrices would usually refer to individuals' demographic characteristics, but as these data referred to group conversations it was more appropriate to describe them by the characteristics of the group.

researcher roles for me and how I developed self-reflexivity to check my influence on the research. I showed how the dynamic of relationality and criticality developed ethical reflexivity and critical awareness in the core groups, creating reflexive rationality to negotiate consensus on a long-term project. I explained how this ethical praxis created the foundation to sustain change after the research period.

I explained how the multiple data collection methods and tools I used in the action research supported the dynamic of reflexivity, criticality and relationality. These methods and supporting tools encouraged diverse participation, enabled me to be immersed in my research partners' worlds to understand their perspectives, developed mutual understanding and raised our critical awareness through engaging in practical experiences of cross-sector collaboration.

I showed how GTA both directed the data collection and guided its analysis. This iterative approach supported the inclusion of diverse perspectives in a dialogical interpretation of the inter-subjective effects of cross-sector collaboration. It aided a critical approach to raise questions and understand the dynamic of power relations by abductive inference between the data and governance theory. It sustained my self-reflexive stance by keeping close to the participants' words and actions, to ground my developing theoretical statement in the data.

In the following two chapters, I explore how the dynamic of reflexivity, criticality and relationality developed through the experiences of the two core research groups. I compare their experiences with those of the PSB and draw upon the systemic enquiry to understand the wider societal context that helps to explain the constraints and opportunities for their collaborative action.

Chapter Six Forming a Community of Practice

Introduction

In this and the following chapter I explain how my critical-relational Wales-wide enquiry, which centred on the actions of two core research groups and the PSB, enabled me to develop my theoretical statement (in Chapter Three). In that statement I set out how reflexive rationality in the micro-relations of the network combined with a supportive environment of meta-governance can transform the dominant power relations of cross-sector collaboration. I identified the critical and relational characteristics of communities of practice (CoP) which can create reflexive rationality. I explained how an emergent philosophy of praxis can change the interaction between the network and its meta-governance.

In the current chapter, I explore the experiences of the first core research group over the course of a year, from initial discussions in September 2017 to joint action in June 2018 and a reflective meeting in August 2018. I begin with a brief description of the historical context of a grassroots concern with road verges' management and explain how I worked with my research partners to establish a core research group to focus on this issue.

I then divide the chapter into four chronological sections following the meetings of the group in November, January, February and April. Each section describes a meeting of the core group and our subsequent actions and draws upon the systemic enquiry to understand the wider context for the group's experiences. The meeting in April led into a longer period of action followed by a meeting to reflect in August, so this section is structured in five sub-sections that explore the process of, respectively, planning action, developing a sense of interdependence, extending the shared vision to colleagues, holding community events and reflecting on the constraints on our action. Throughout this rich description I reflect on my literature review to analyse how the core group's experiences are explained by or contradict existing literature on cross-sector collaboration. I build a picture of the way the road verges group developed relational and critical characteristics as a CoP and actively participated as co-researchers. I consider how my multiple research roles contributed to building relationships and raising critical awareness.

In the penultimate section of this chapter, I discuss how my participation in the core research group and wider enquiry developed the concept of a critical-relational CoP. I consider the transformational potential of the CoP and how I inferred a change in the power dynamics of meta-governance.

I conclude this chapter with a summary of the core group's development from focussing on a grassroots issue to the integration of diverse interests in a shared vision. I explain how our reflection on the constraints on scaling-up joint action led to the creation of a second core group which focussed on a strategic context for cross-sector collaboration.

Road verges: the historical context and the core research group

In this section I discuss historical grassroots concerns with managing road verges for wildlife and how I worked with my research partners to establish a cross-sector research group. In Chapter Five (*negotiating multiple starting points*) I explained how representatives of NWWT branches raised their concerns about road verges with the Trustees, and why this was suggested to me as a topic for action research. To explore the background to this issue I met with the Branch Forum representative who had raised it and through him attended the Forum and contacted an environmental group and local council officer involved in road verges policy. Our discussions revealed a situation that had been the preserve of local activist groups but was becoming relevant to public bodies. I became aware of a lack of infrastructure for dialogue, lack of support from local elected members[48] and resource imbalances which combined to marginalise wildlife interests in decisions about road verges management. On the other hand, community engagement by local council officers and supportive legislation were beginning to change the situation, although concerns over the inclusion of environmental interests remained.

Historical context

Meeting with the Branch Forum representative over coffee, he explained NWWT's structure of six local branches and a central forum (Forum rep, 20/09/2017). Local branches across North Wales hold meetings for members and the Branch Forum consists of one or two representatives from each branch and about four members of staff. The Forum shares ideas, considers cross-cutting issues and raises concerns with staff, sending a Forum representative to Trustees meetings to exchange information and raise outstanding concerns. The representative explained that the issue of road verges was discussed frequently at Forum, with members wanting to map sites which have high wildlife value but perceiving pressure on Councils from the public and elected members to cut verges frequently, destroying wildlife habitat. The Forum's request to Trustees was to create a strategic plan and coordinate local action across

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[48] Local Authorities in Wales have elected members and officers. Elected members (councillors) represent neighbourhood level wards and have a 'political' role, whereas officers have a professional and 'impartial' role (effective-member-and-offi-aa7.pdf (local.gov.uk))

North Wales. I suggested NRW's Area Statements[49] might be the process through which to coordinate such action but the representative was unaware of this new process, indicating a possible lack of inclusion of the third sector in this public body's work.

At the next Forum meeting, nine branch members, the CEO and two other members of staff met at the Flintshire branch location, a small community building adjacent to a nature reserve (Branch Forum, 28/09/2017). Although ostensibly set up to promote action, the formality of the meeting with officials and set agenda restricted opportunities for creativity or for members and staff to share responsibility for action. The item on road verges focussed on an explanation by the NWWT Living Landscapes (LL) Officer of a new policy at Denbighshire County Council. Although a county-wide policy, it was to be agreed and implemented through local community councils. Referring to a history of non-wildlife friendly practices, the LL officer urged members to monitor implementation and the Forum agreed further lobbying was needed. The LL officer put me in touch with a local environmental group in Denbighshire, 'Life on the Verge'.

I discussed the background to the policy by phone-calls to a member of the group (which is independent of NWWT) and a local council officer who had worked closely with it (Life on the Verge, 25/09/2017, 05/10/2017). They explained the group's aim to change the timing and frequency of road verge cuts so that wildflowers could flower and seed to benefit pollinators and birds and create habitats for small mammals. Our conversations revealed how the recent change in Denbighshire policy had followed years of attempts by Life on the Verge. The group's early petitions had failed to influence local councillors, leading instead to distrust and opposition from the relevant portfolio holder at the Council. Elections and sickness disrupted relationships with a sympathetic MEP (Member of European Parliament) and with the elected member who was the County's 'biodiversity champion'. More recently, the council officer had contacted Life on the Verge to discuss sustainability and they began to work with other local organisations to improve wildlife habitat on verges near towns and villages in Denbighshire. This work was dominated, though, by a commercially interested group, Denbigh in Bloom, with greater financial resources and the focus shifted from wildlife to flower displays. However, Life on the Verge members were reluctant to follow the council officer's advice to

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[49] Area Statements are descriptions of the state of management of the environment across Wales. They are the responsibility of NRW to produce as a requirement of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and contribute to PSBs' Well-being Assessments.

work with local community councils as they regarded this approach as preventing them from achieving county-wide influence.

The group member and council officer both identified two significant turning points. First, a new Head of Highways demonstrated his commitment to Life on the Verge by travelling to meet them at their location, increasing the group's trust in the Council. Second, the new Environment Act gave support for their wildlife concerns in its 'section six' requirement for public authorities to 'enhance biodiversity' and 'promote the resilience of ecosystems' (Welsh Government, 2016a, sec. 6 para 1). The Head of Highways drafted polices which took account of the group's focus on road verges and the legislation and sent them to the group for comment. The county-wide nature of the draft policies encouraged Life on the Verge to attend community councils' meetings to agree local road verge management practices, in contrast to their earlier reluctance. Eventually, the County Council published its new road verges policy, explicitly including biodiversity amongst the many considerations:

> Road verges must be managed to ensure the safety of all road users. They are also increasingly recognised as important habitats for maintaining biodiversity - to the benefit of species such as bees and other pollinating insects, as living spaces for wildflowers and other wildlife that is being lost from the wider countryside, and as vital wildlife corridors connecting habitats together. This policy aims to address these desired outcomes in a realistic and economic way. (Denbighshire CC policy Friday 5th July 2019 – Version 3)

These conversations helped me to understand the Forum's lack of confidence in implementation of the policy. Road verges management involved multiple interests, creating the tension noted by Checkland *et al*., 2013 between hierarchical accountability to priorities decided by organisations with authority and political accountability to other partner organisations and communities' interests. The lack of a mechanism in the policy to decide between conflicting 'safety', 'biodiversity' and 'economic' interests, coupled with the vagueness of the term 'realistic' created uncertainty about the priority given to wildlife. Branch Forum's call for lobbying and appeal to the Trustees were attempts to strengthen the influence of wildlife interests and revealed members' awareness of the risk of dominance.

Establishing a core research group
Guided by these discussions, I worked with my research partners to establish a cross-sector core research group to explore how to redress the imbalance of accountability. As the issue of road verges was not a priority for NWWT staff time or resources (CEO and Chair, 19/07/2017), I turned to its volunteers and members guided by the CEO's recommendations. After several conversations, a member of NWWT's Anglesey branch with extensive expertise in managing

road verges for wildlife agreed to share her experience and ideas (Anglesey member, 1/09/2017, 31/10/2017, 10/11/2017). A member of Arfon branch, north Gwynedd offered to contribute her long experience of involvement with Wildlife Trusts including as a trustee, supporting her close friend the Anglesey member (Arfon member, 30/10/2017).

I approached members of the PSB to gain representation from the public sector and maintain a close link to the context of the Well-being Act. The NRW representative had expressed interest in the research during the literature review (see Chapters Two and Five). She introduced me to her colleague, the Area Statements Lead Officer, at a PSB meeting, who saw the direct relevance of both biodiversity and collaboration to his work to develop these new statements (PSB_NRW and AS Lead, 7/11/2017). It took a series of introductions and conversations with NRW staff, however, to find an officer who felt she could legitimately commit her time because it was relevant to her work role (Partnerships Officer, 10/11/2017). The NRW PSB representative suggested a growing partnership with public health (PSB_NRW 04/01/2017), so I approached the Public Health representative. The Public Health Consultant agreed to attend a meeting (PSB_PH, 23/10/2017) and later nominated a member of her team for his local expertise (Core research group, 08/01/2018).

Finally, I approached a biodiversity officer at Gwynedd Council, guided by the suggestion of the local council officer in Denbigh and the research focus on the Anglesey and Gwynedd area. The Gwynedd Biodiversity Officer had expressed interest in my research in a meeting in a different context and immediately saw the relevance to her work, having only recently had a conversation with Gwynedd highways team about alternative forms of road verge management (Biodiversity Officer, 17/11/2017). Figure 10 illustrates the members of the first core research group.
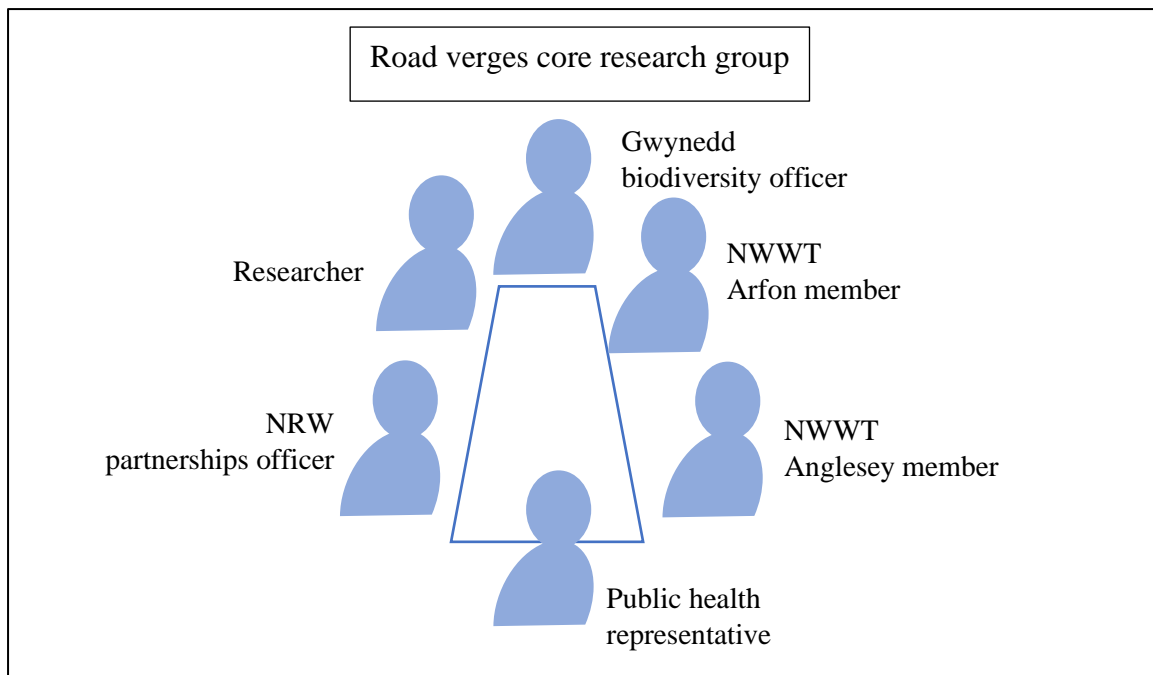
Figure 10 Road verges core research group members

Having taken over three months to negotiate the group membership, I arranged for us to meet quickly after agreement with the Biodiversity Officer. This began the process of six months of discussions culminating in joint action, which I explore in detail in the following four sections of this chapter. In each section, quotes are taken from the main core research group meeting, unless otherwise stated.

November: negotiating multiple interests

Starting with our first group meeting as a core research group, I explain how we began to develop the characteristics of a community of practice. I describe how I emphasised the relational aspect of action research through my various research roles and how this developed interpersonal relationships and shared leadership. Developing the critical aspect of action research, I show how our reflection on current practice raised our awareness of the marginalisation of ecological interests. I describe how the core group members actively participated as co-researchers to develop a shared vision to guide our collaborative action and how, as we began to act on our plans, established beliefs and managerial practices constrained their organisations' capacities for strategic planning.

We met at Bangor University's coffee shop and held our first meeting in an adjacent board room (Core research group, 20/11/2017). As process facilitator I chose this location to enhance our relationships. It offered a familiar social venue to put the core group at ease and emphasised the research purpose of our meeting but was not too closely associated with any single interest.

At the last minute the Public Health Consultant was unable to be present, due to an emergency staff meeting. So, I explained her interest to the others and, at the end of the meeting, arranged with the Partnerships Officer to meet the Consultant together. The two NWWT members, NRW Partnerships Officer and Gwynedd Biodiversity Officer introduced themselves to each other as I fetched coffees.

Opening the meeting, to emphasise inclusivity I explained how I hoped we could learn more about how 'cross-sector collaboration can help include everybody's voices in decision-making, especially those that don't tend to get as much influence.' To help us to consider how we could contribute to rather than simply gain from collaboration, I tried not to impose the topic of road verges but encouraged the group to think more generally about how their volunteer and work roles contributed to national well-being. I intended this approach to lessen the risk of dominant interests, by developing a communal rationale where each partner orients their action towards contributing to the situation (Weber, 1968). To facilitate this discussion, I used a simple framework of well-being domains[50], briefly explaining the multiple aspects and the different national well-being goals. The framework helped to break the ice and our discussion developed supportive relationships as the members helped each other to understand these unfamiliar goals:

> **Partnerships Officer:** 'it's not the kind of thing you remember unless you've got them in front of you!'
> **Biodiversity Officer:** 'one of them is biodiversity resilience, isn't it?'
> **Anglesey member:** 'does the "globally responsible" encompass the biodiversity aspect?'
>
> (Core research group 20/11/2017)

As we considered the contribution of our work to well-being, the group members talked of their hopes to improve people's sense of well-being (Arfon and Anglesey members), enhance partnership on projects (Partnerships Officer) and improve ecological resilience (Biodiversity Officer and Arfon member). However, they shared how changes in their organisations restricted their ability to realise these hopes. A focus on planning and regulation in the Council made it 'difficult to be proactive' and increased the 'job pressures, the workload that we have' (Biodiversity Officer). The Partnerships Officer sympathised, and they agreed that these pressures in the Council and restructuring in NRW restricted opportunities to raise awareness of the environment through educational work and treated the third sector as a resource. The Partnerships Officer added apologetically that her organisation was 'reliant on people like you

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[50] Appendix 8 Well-being Domains

now' (turning to the NWWT members) 'we can facilitate it through organisations like yourself, apparently.' The NWWT members in turn, explained how the changes in NRW restricted the availability of speakers for Branch meetings.

The Anglesey member and Biodiversity Officer introduced their immediate concerns about road verges. However, the Arfon and Anglesey members were uncertain of the value to wildlife. The Anglesey member was concerned that 'road verges aren't the best place for pollinators to be, with traffic whizzing past', but emphasised the value to 'community well-being', saying 'a lot of people in the spring, they really appreciate seeing spring flowers on verges and, in the old days when cutting took place early in the year, they used to get really upset when primroses or bluebells or whatever were cut.' Reflecting on this focus on well-being, the Arfon member pointed to the Wildlife Trust's recent shift from 'reserve management and conservation' to 'the individual well-being of people coming and either working at the reserve or just sitting in the hides watching the birds.' Although she recognised the need to 'carry people with you' she suggested 'it may have swung a little bit too far the other way now.'

Listening to this sympathetic exchange of views, I recognised how they indicated the need to pool resources and expertise and raise awareness of the needs of wildlife, creating social capital through an environmental sector alliance (as shown by Dow *et al.*, 2013). I remarked in my fieldnotes that the group were beginning to form a CoP, as defined by Agranoff (2008), by sharing expertise and identifying problems. To encourage the group to build an alliance, as reflective scientist I explained how my literature review had emphasised the importance of trusting relationships in collaboration. I commented that they seemed to have built some trust during this discussion and as the Anglesey member had introduced road verges, I asked if the group felt that would be a project they could work on together.

Our ensuing discussion revealed the diversity of conflicting interests influencing road verge management, echoing the experiences of 'Life on the Verge.' Noting that the timing of councils' road verge cutting mid-summer was 'working directly against ecosystem services', the Partnerships Officer was surprised to realise that advice from NRW was not being followed. The Biodiversity Officer pointed out 'this is the most cost-effective' time for cuts, even though verges in Gwynedd were classified for cuts at different times of year according to the needs of wildflowers. However, pointing to the wider context of austerity, she framed this as an opportunity to work with the Highways Department, as 'with their seriously reduced funding,

they are willing to think about things a little bit differently'. The Anglesey member added that she thought the recent Environment Act had 'given a bit more leverage' to consider biodiversity. On the other hand, the Biodiversity Officer cautioned that 'verges have a lot of other issues; services in the road verge [and] visibility' and observed that the Highways team 'weren't very positive' about the additional costs of collecting cuttings[51]. The Arfon member pointed out that 'nitrogen run-off' from farmers' fields contributed to the excess growth on verges, introducing a further conflicting interest. The Anglesey member concurred and said she also had the impression that contractors were not complying with agreed cutting schedules. The lack of influence of the environmental sector was highlighted as the Partnerships Officer and Biodiversity Officer discussed consultations on a planned new bypass:

> **Biodiversity Officer:** I think the issue with the road was we've provided a lot of advice over the years, and they haven't taken it on board.
> **Researcher:** And you'd think your voice had a reasonable amount of influence, wouldn't you?
> **Partnerships Officer:** Well, why would they ask us otherwise? I mean it's silly, isn't it? To ask you and then pay no attention.
>
> (Core research group, 20/11/2017)

These reflections revealed how consultation can be used instrumentally, as shown by Durose and Lowndes (2010), hiding the inherent conflict Davies (2005) argues is caused by including diverse interests. The group's awareness of these conflicts motivated us to discuss ways to resolve them and we began to form a common vision in the process. The Biodiversity Officer said she was thinking of applying to NRW for funding for the costs of collecting cuttings, and creatively suggested sowing yellow rattle[52] seeds on trial verges. The Partnerships Officer joked 'now you put that on the table!', recognising the appeal to her own work in co-developing grant applications. The Anglesey member was not sure what plans NWWT had to influence road verges management, turning to the Arfon member to ask, 'it's sort of gone all rather quiet, hasn't it really?' I explained that the Chair of Trustees had suggested in our earlier meeting that road verges may act as 'connective corridors' forming a 'living landscape[53].' The Partnerships Officer saw how 'wildlife corridors', as she put it, could broaden the focus from flowers to other habitats, enhancing any grant application to NRW. Her remark sparked an enthusiastic discussion about the inclusion of hedgerows and treelines as well as verges. The Partnerships

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[51] Removal of cuttings prevents nitrogen being returned to the soil, reducing its fertility which enhances the habitat for wildflowers by reducing competition from more vigorous plants such as grasses.
[52] Yellow rattle is a native wildflower known to parasitise grasses, reducing their vigour.
[53] Living Landscapes, a Wildlife Trusts strategy, is explained in the Introductory Chapter

Officer extended the concept from verges to the management of 'Lonydd Glas'[54] and other recreational routes in Gwynedd and Anglesey. I asked how this might appeal to the absent but interested Public Health Consultant, and the Partnerships Officer suggested there was a 'big health and well-being benefit' if plans included recreational routes as well as road verges. This discussion marked a development from reliance on me to facilitate discussion of diverse perspectives, to the group's adoption of shared facilitative leadership to 'convene the relevant interests around a common purpose' (Williams, 2013, p. 25). As argued by Stout, Bartels and Love (2018) this group disposition fostered collaborative dynamics. It indicated the group's capacity for creative agency even if, as Williams (2013) points out, it was limited by the boundaries of their organisations' current structures and cultures.

We began to envision these new wildlife corridors, for example linking 'a country park in Caernarfon with Lôn Las Menai and Lôn Eifion' (Partnerships Officer). The Biodiversity Officer stated her approval: 'I really like the connection of the verges with the lonydd glas and public open spaces, nature parks' and the Arfon member pictured 'leaving some long grass and people will begin to understand why it's long and it's like flower beds with grass paths.' However, the co-researchers soon turned to the difficulties of changing practices, raising the practical problems of disposal of cuttings, litter and dog waste. To address these challenges, the Partnership's Officer suggested we gather a list of organisations who could 'partner up' and we pooled the contacts and organisations which might help. We soon realised the complexity of organisations and different Council departments involved, with the Arfon member noting the 'barrier' this caused. I reflected in my journal (20/11/2017) that, as found by Milbourne and Cushman (2015), our sharing of contacts and recognition of the barriers caused by this organisational fragmentation began to create an interest-based alliance, as well as the intra-sector social capital indicated by Dow *et al.*, (2013).

Despite the barriers, we agreed on some actions focussed on additional sharing of information, further developing as a CoP and forming human capital with potential personal, organisational and network benefits (Agranoff, 2008). The Biodiversity Officer offered to make a list of relevant contacts at Gwynedd Council and ask her counterpart on Anglesey for a similar list. She offered to share a file of surveys of Gwynedd verges with the NWWT members, so they could 'prioritize some verges for management', creating a benefit to both their organisations. The Anglesey member admitted she held all the verges information for the Island and stated

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[54] Lonydd Glas or 'Green Lanes' are walking and cycling routes following disused railways in Gwynedd. Each 'Lôn Las' has a name linked to place, e.g Lôn Las Menai or Lôn Las Eifion.

her intention to upload it to the local environmental records centre, Cofnod, that winter, creating a network benefit of a database for other organisations. She also stated that she had applied for a local grant for 'communicating with community councils about the management work on verges' and was hoping to hear the outcome soon. The Biodiversity Officer requested help to cost the collection of cuttings, and as I knew of a Wildlife Trust doing this work, I offered to find out for her. The Partnerships Officer recommended that the Biodiversity Officer or her colleagues attend an upcoming event with NRW about funding priorities and offered her support with developing a grant application. She supported the Biodiversity Officer's plan to apply for funding based on the group's discussions: 'I was just going to do verges but connecting it to the lonydd glas and nature reserves, kind of talking about connectivity, I was thinking of linking it to pollinators. I will try and do something' (Biodiversity Officer, 20/11/2017).

The emergence of human capital demonstrated that the group was developing associative relationships based on mutual benefit from collaboration, as I discussed in Chapter Two, Part III with reference to Weber (1968, pp. 40–43). It also developed out of our mutual trust and commitment, a common finding in CoPs (Agranoff, 2008). This latter, communal basis for their relationships was reinforced by the co-researchers' shared appreciation of wildflowers, illustrated as they chatted on leaving the meeting:

> **Partnerships Officer:** I know around Parc Menai there's quite a few bits of verge that we lobbied to have cut at certain times and not others because of the orchids.
> **Anglesey branch member:** The orchids are sort of declining at the moment.
> **Partnerships Officer:** Probably because they're not being cut.
> **Anglesey member:** No, it's something that happens with these orchids.
> **Biodiversity Officer:** A lot of people notice those.
> **Partnerships Officer:** Yes
> **Biodiversity Officer:** Oh, I've seen the orchids!! And the, you know, it's wonderful. It's good.
> **All:** Yes.
> **Partnerships Officer:** Well, it proves the point, doesn't it? Of it having an impact on people's wellbeing.
> **Arfon member:** And I mean going down Llŷn sometimes, you know, it's all the blackthorn flowers and the gorse together and then later you get the um...
> **Anglesey member:** The harebells, brilliant.
> **Arfon member:** Yes, and the campion and ….
>
> (Core research group, 20/11/2017)

Following our meeting, I arranged to meet as soon as possible with the Public Health Consultant (representative on the PSB), attended an NRW event and discussed our ideas with a subgroup of NWWT Trustees. These meetings helped me to understand the constraints on

cross-sector collaboration faced by the environmental sector but developed an idea for mutually beneficial joint action.

The first constraint on collaboration I encountered was organisations' lack of understanding of each other's work and potential contribution to well-being.

I invited the Partnerships Officer from NRW to join me to meet the Public Health Consultant due to the growing relationship between NRW and Public Health at the PSB. They began by agreeing how a lack of mutual understanding between their organisations prevented collaboration (PSB_PH and NRW_PO, 4/12/2017). The Partnerships Officer recognised the limited joint action, 'even though you would think there was an obvious connection' and the Consultant agreed saying that people like her and the NRW representative on the PSB were 'dying to get into a room together and just do a bit of work.' They pointed to the lack of understanding of 'the fact that nature conservation can actually have massive health benefits' (Partnerships Officer), with the Consultant remarking 'how far certain people around the PSB [are] from grasping some of this.'

In other conversations, core group members referred to a lack of communication that prevented understanding. Hierarchical processes prevented the Biodiversity Officer from speaking directly to elected members in the Council, while a lack of environmental forums or inclusion in NRW's development of Area Statements prevented environmental organisations from working together (Biodiversity Officer, 04/12/2017). Limited communication between Wildlife Trusts in Wales restricted the Trusts' capacity to work together (Anglesey and Arfon members, 07/12/2017). This historical lack of communication added to the core group's earlier recognition of the barriers caused by fragmentation of environmental interests, as shown by Dow *et al*., (2013).

A second constraint on cross-sector collaboration was an instrumental treatment of the environment and third sector and the risk of domination of ecological interests by other aspects of human well-being.

NRW organised a series of events to explain its current grant criteria. I attended the North Wales event, which had been referred to in our core group meeting. Also attending were the Partnerships Officer, the Biodiversity Officer's line manager, the CEO and other staff from NWWT, and around 50 representatives from other third sector and public bodies (NRW event, 27/11/2017). The NRW spokesperson set the tone for the day by stating that 'demonstrating benefits for society and the economy are the driving force behind sustainable management of

the environment.' Funding criteria reflected this instrumental treatment of the environment. Most of the event was managed in small, themed groups but, in a joint session, delegates' discontent was evident as they questioned NRW's prior determination of priorities, criteria and timescales for grants, and the lack of inclusion of the third sector. They pointed out the burden on smaller organisations of requiring partners to not only deliver NRW's priorities but also contribute 50 percent of the resources to do so and the cash-flow problems created by paying grants in arears. I reflected in my notebooks that the focus on outcomes measures reinforced resource dependency, as shown by Bingham and Walters (2013), exerting NRW's power to determine environmental priorities in the conflict of hierarchical and political accountability found by Checkland *et al*., (2013).

A similar assumption of the environment as a resource for human well-being was made in my meeting with the Partnerships Officer and Public Health Consultant (PSB_PH and NRW_PO, 04/12/2017). I had explained how the idea of *environmental* connectivity had helped broaden the core group's discussion from verges to recreational routes. This led to a discussion of *social* connectivity and benefits for mental health as the Officer and Consultant talked about a growing movement to prescribe outdoor activity, part of so-called 'social prescribing'.

> **Partnerships Officer:** The whole situation has changed over the last four years, where people have started to realise with the prescribing 'going outside and getting active' to people that really need to get healthy, has meant that they can maybe connect more. I mean, there's loads of other connections you can make – from allotments to all sorts of stuff that develop people's mental and physical health in a really positive way. But until now, it's not been something that people have been switched onto.
> **Public Health Consultant:** No, it does feel like things are changing a little bit round that. The 'in thing' is social prescribing, and that can mean pretty much anything you want it to mean, as far as I'm concerned.
>
> (PSB_PH and NRW_PO, 04/12/2017)

The Public Health Consultant welcomed the development of 'green' social prescribing (activity in natural environments) as potentially contributing to 'resilience.' She described this public health concept as stemming from childhood experiences and affecting multiple areas of well-being, including 'how productive you'll be' and 'how you'll perform educationally, how likely you are to get a satisfactory job.' Prescribing outdoor activity contributed to her current priority of childhood obesity and the intergenerational setting in which obesity develops, by creating a context in which the whole community would improve their health. However, unlike the core group's earlier discussion which had focussed on *improving* the environment to benefit health,

she distanced her organisation from this aspect: 'we wouldn't really get involved probably in things like the conservation aspects of it.'

The risk of marginalising ecological interests by this focus on human well-being was explained by a subgroup of NWWT Trustees. I convened this small group to extend the diversity of perspectives on the core group's ideas and to create links with higher levels of authority, acting as process facilitator and knowledge broker (Trustees subgroup, 19/12/2017). I created a discussion document using the system framework of cross-sector collaboration I had previously used in Trustees' meetings to develop research questions (Chapter Two). I updated each domain with findings from the core groups and wider enquiry. Referring to the widespread expectation that the environment should contribute to well-being, the Chair of Trustees stated his opinion: 'that is the way you get the money, undoubtedly.' However, like the Arfon member earlier, others questioned the 'flight towards well-being' (Treasurer) and the risk of pursuing activities that are 'marginal to our aims and mission, which is wildlife not well-being' (Wrexham Trustee #2). While not wanting to take direct action on well-being – 'well-being should be an essential by-product of what we do but it shouldn't be our core focus' (Treasurer) – they also recognised that public bodies would not improve the environment, for example road verges, 'until we can demonstrate the fiscal value of what we have to offer, [that it] makes savings to public bodies' (Wrexham Trustee #2).

A third constraint on the environmental third sector was the effect of resource dependency to restrict its capacity for strategic planning and willingness to collaborate. My discussion with the Trustees' subgroup (Trustees, 04/12/2017) explained how the focus on formal arrangements rather than collaborative agreement confined the environmental sector to the reactive and non-strategic response found by Bingham and Walters (2013). These trustees explained that grant funding required project management processes and performance targets, driving the professionalisation of Trust roles. This increased the need to employ and retain staff rather than rely on volunteers, in turn increasing administrative costs and dependency on public funding. It 'embedded' a 'cultural aversion to planning almost' (Wrexham Trustee #2) with the Trust becoming institutionally 'structured' to 'searching out [funding] opportunities' (Treasurer) but without a 'framework to know why you're going for some opportunities and not others' (Bangor Trustee). This tendency to 'short-termism' was exacerbated by the recent loss of NWWT's strategic planning partner, Countryside Commission for Wales (CCW) [55].

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[55] In 2013, Countryside Commission for Wales was merged with the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission to form Natural Resources Wales

Coupled with the 'blame culture in public services', this resulted in a lack of 'trust in the Wildlife Trust to be getting on and giving it money' (Trustees Chair). The discussion neatly illustrated how 'trust, which formerly underpinned varied relationships between public and third sector agencies, has been widely displaced by formalised arrangements' (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013, p. 487), reducing the capacity for autonomy to take action mandated by communities (or in this case, wildlife's) needs.

Reflecting on my discussions thus far, I concluded that 'each sector's view of the other's interests as separate from, rather than contributing to, its own restricts its willingness to act on the other's behalf' (Journal, 19/12/2017). The formal transfer of resources between sectors restricted the development of the interdependent relationships and facilitative behaviours shown by Romzek et al., (2014) to create informal accountability.

Despite these constraints, my discussion with the Partnerships Officer and Public Health Consultant (04/12/2017) indicated the possibility of a strategically beneficial common vision and a motivation to collaborate.

As the Partnerships Officer and Public Health Consultant discussed green prescribing, I introduced a document produced by Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW) which linked the environment to the national well-being goals. I had re-read this document when I reflected on the core group's first meeting and had brought it with me to this meeting. I showed my partners its definition of green infrastructure as 'a living network of green spaces, water and other environmental features in both urban and rural areas. Examples of this include trees, parks, gardens, road verges, allotments, cemeteries, amenity grassland, woodlands, rivers and wetlands' (Wildlife Trusts Wales, 2016, p. 4). The Partnerships Officer pointed to the need to develop green infrastructure and not just improve people's access to it. The Consultant recognised 'it's about where you can find shared outcomes' and 'bring[ing] people together around a shared vision', although her focus was on ensuring action was 'more efficient, cost effective.'

As we concluded our discussion, these partners' growing sense of interdependence and motivation to collaborate was clear as they spontaneously reflected on my role. My efforts as knowledge broker and process facilitator (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014, pp. 487–489) provided the facilitative leadership needed in CoPs to form a shared vision (Williams, 2013):

> **Partnerships Officer:** Not now, yeah, but initially when we spoke to you [the researcher], you know, [other NRW team members] struggled really to get the concept,

but ultimately, it's managing to get people to think about how their work influences so many other things, and not just thinking so restrictedly about just one small thing.

Public Health Consultant: I think it's just positive that someone like yourself [the researcher] is trying to work outside, doing something outside the PSB, an example of how we can all work together. I think if we got a bit of a win on something, it might help momentum, a different way of working – I think we need something like that.

(PSB_PH and NRW_PO, 04/12/2017)

Building on this commitment and the finding of poor communication in both sectors, following these discussions I continued to broker knowledge and facilitate the process of collaboration. I created an Excel database to collate the publicly available contacts shared in the core group's first meeting. Following up some of these contacts, I relayed information to group members for their funding applications. Reflecting on our first group discussion, I noted references to the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) which was also highlighted in the NRW event as an important tool for public and third sectors. I began to think about how this tool could help the group to plan their action together more strategically and approached the local environmental records centre Cofnod (which the core group had praised), to see what help they could offer.

January: developing place-based plans

Having established a core group and noted how we were beginning to develop the technical expertise, shared knowledge and human capital of a CoP, in the New Year I convened a further meeting to continue to develop our shared vision and plans for action. This section shows how we developed mutually supportive relationships and broadened our environmental interest-based alliance to include public health and community interests. I explain how conversations with potential partners and participation in cross-sector networks revealed support for an empowering approach to engaging communities but reiterated the widespread instrumental treatment of the environmental and third sectors.

To facilitate the exchange of knowledge, I had kept in touch with my co-researchers by email, phone and over coffee since our first meeting. I suggested we meet to discuss any difficulties they were encountering and to consider the use of GIS maps to plan a way forward. I chose the NWWT's new offices in Bangor as our location, to maintain the focus on wildlife and because they were centrally located, easily accessible by public transport and had an informal atmosphere. This time, the Public Health Consultant joined us (Core research group, 08/01/2018).

The individual group members had previously expressed concerns to me about their progress in obtaining grant funding (Biodiversity Officer, 04/12/2017, Anglesey and Arfon members, 07/12/2017). As they updated the group they appealed to each other's interests and received practical suggestions of help, developing mutually supportive relationships (Core research group, 08/01/2018). The Anglesey member planned a series of talks in community halls across Anglesey to meet her grant funding criteria of raising awareness. She appealed to the group for help: 'you can advise me on what I ought to put on my poster and my leaflet.' The Biodiversity Officer explained that restrictive NRW funding criteria had curtailed her application for a grant, but she was still looking for funding to improve recreational routes in line with the group's vision: 'kind of connecting them to wildlife sites or nature reserves and public spaces.' The Arfon member supported her, giving the example of a local picnic site near a busy tourist route 'that's managed with lovely banks of wildflowers around where the short grass and picnic tables are.' Further support came from the Public Health Consultant. She introduced her own work and spoke of her hopes that the work of the core group would help the PSB to begin to act collaboratively. She offered the help of her colleague, a Senior Practitioner in public health whose focus was on improving physical activity. She described his work on 'green health and social prescribing' including 'access to green spaces' as 'a much more holistic approach to medicine.' Although he was unable to make this meeting (and I wanted to let the group decide who should join them before inviting him), she hoped he would be able to join the group to support her 'quite strategic' role.

I reflected later (Journal, 08/01/2018) that the group's requests for advice, acknowledgement of lack of success, reiteration of the common vision and offers of support demonstrated the developing 'trust, reciprocity and respect' of informal accountability (Romzek et al., 2014, p. 821) and the facilitative leadership needed to build a team (Agranoff, 2008; Williams, 2013). I concluded that we were developing the dialogue, pluralist inclusion of interests and shared leadership of reflexive rationality, as defined by Jessop (2000).

To progress our shared vision and plans for joint action, I introduced the idea of GIS maps. Since the previous meeting I had followed up a presentation by Cofnod (the regional environmental records centre) at the NRW funding event and asked for their help to produce maps for Gwynedd and Anglesey. Together we had selected GIS layers of information which my co-researchers had referred to in previous meetings: road verges identified as wildlife rich sites ('conservation road verges'), habitats designated for wildlife ('wildlife sites' and 'sites of

special scientific interest') and areas proposed for purposeful physical activity ('active travel designated localities'). I shared paper copies of a map Cofnod produced, see Figure 11.
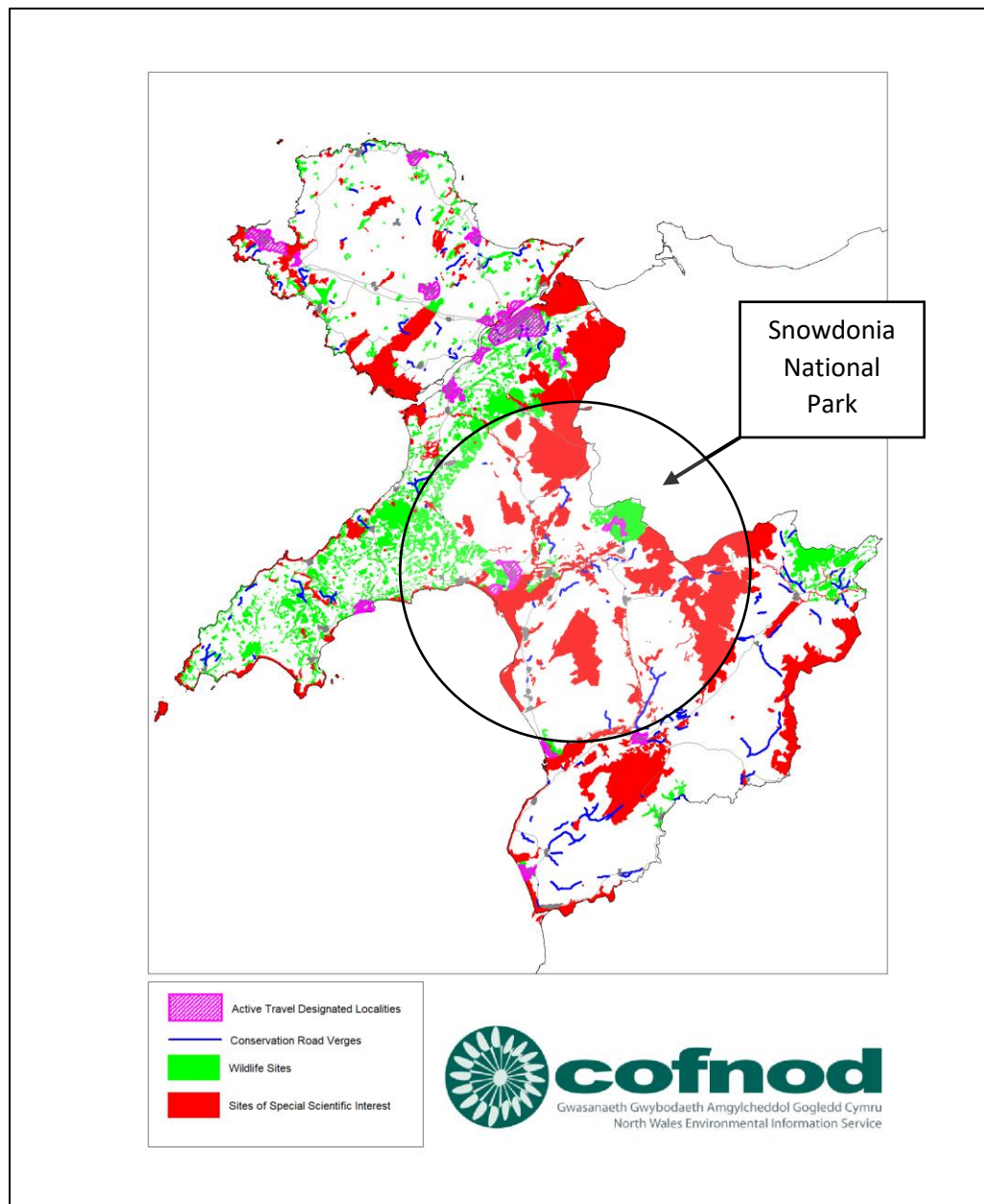
Figure 11 GIS layers for Gwynedd and Anglesey. Source: Cofnod 19/12/2017

Our discussions of the map enhanced our understanding of the group's shared vision, its underlying strategic concept of connectivity and how it could include benefits to public health. I explained my idea that the convergent layers showed opportunities to connect wildlife verges and recreational routes for ecological and health benefits and group members raised and answered each other's questions about the layers. They explained the concept of connectivity to the Consultant as 'like little pathways for species' (Biodiversity Officer) and 'connectivity for people who want to commute to work [which] doesn't involve crossing main roads, usually

flanked by some nice greenery, so woodland, verges and hedgerows' (Partnerships Officer). They reflected on the benefits of wildflower verges for people's enjoyment (Anglesey member) and for pollinators (Biodiversity Officer). We all agreed with the Consultant's suggestions of layers to add to the map, to show access to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty[56] (AONB) and rates of childhood obesity, reflecting her interest in increasing outdoor activity. The GIS map coupled with the concept of connectivity thus acted as a boundary-spanning tool, helping the group to 'understand the connections that tie, or potentially tie them together to achieve some form of collective purpose and synergy' (Williams, 2013, p. 25).

As we discussed these layers, the co-researchers' practical experiences and understanding of strategies and priorities enabled them to develop a strategy to guide both short-term local action and long-term planning for mutual benefit. Examining the map, they exchanged ideas for immediate local action linked to specific communities, including ways to enrich local habitats, links between work programmes in geographical locations and potential sources of funding through community councils. Addressing the common problems of coordination and funding, they talked of involving volunteer coordinators and the Partnerships Officer encouraged the group to think longer-term, integrating the programme into the work of 'organisations who are able to fund it.' She suggested this would also overcome the obstacle of 'chasing funding from one year to the next' which the Anglesey member agreed was 'really debilitating.' We responded by sharing a variety of strategic work programmes to coordinate and fund action, including green social prescribing projects (Anglesey member), the AONB work programme (Partnerships Officer), Living Landscapes (Researcher) and the Consultant added that the group's idea fitted well with a public health strategy known as 'Five Ways to Well-being'[57].

By using a GIS map, I had prompted a cooperative style to identify convergent interests, enhancing the members' responsiveness to each other and avoiding dominance, following Stout, Bartels and Love (2018). Added to this, sharing their practical knowledge gained as volunteers and 'street-level' workers helped build interdependent and trusting relationships indicative of informal accountability (Romzek *et al.*, 2014). However, this informal accountability risked becoming managerial control, as found by Gazley (2008), as the

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[56] Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a planning designation for land protected by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

[57] Five Ways to Wellbeing, new economics foundation (a report presented to the Foresight Project on communicating the evidence base for improving people's well-being). A public health approach promoted by NHS Wales http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/861/page/93956 (accessed 10/01/2020)

Partnerships Officer and Public Health Consultant introduced a hierarchical approach to joint action, as I explore next.

Taking a linear approach, the Consultant encouraged the group to first decide 'the outcome we want to achieve' and then plan 'how are we going to do that.' She agreed with the Biodiversity Officer's summary of the vision and outcomes: 'we're working on a project that's going to enhance the environment, our biodiversity and wildlife and will also engage people […] and they will get healthier and maybe learn to understand more about nature and wildlife.' The Partnerships Officer suggested some broad aims, such as 'getting people more active', 'into these green spaces' and 'volunteering.' Again, the Consultant agreed and linked the group's vision to many of the PSB's well-being objectives, including 'health and social-care', 'children's well-being', 'improving health through the natural environment' and 'probably even something around climate change.' She suggested that creating a specific link to these 'high-level objectives' would get the 'buy-in of the Board.' In a reminder of the PSB's research focus she added: 'it feels like the *added value* is bringing things together, the health and the environment and stuff together and actually seeing it much more holistically and about well-being.'

This link to the PSB had the potential to position the core research group as a CoP within the wider network of the Board, the relationship shown by Agranoff (2008). In recognising that added value flowed from the inclusion of *multiple* interests, the Consultant acknowledged the pluralism of the group's vision and the potential benefit of the group's human capital to the wider network. However, by linking the group's plans to pre-determined objectives, there was a risk of excluding diverse interests, as Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) and Schmachtel (2016) have shown.

The group, however, persisted in including communities' needs and their own priorities rather than on achieving managerial objectives. We agreed on the idea of an incremental approach, 'testing out small-scale improvements with a view to scaling-up over time' (Public Health Consultant) and on the need for a 'project outline' (Partnerships Officer) that would 'outline what it is that we're going to do, you know pilot areas, the projects, coordinators to look after the volunteers' (Biodiversity Officer). Rather than focus on specific outcomes, the group instead concentrated on the need to develop a 'big strategic map' (Biodiversity Officer) including data on childhood obesity rates (Consultant) that would help identify opportunities for connectivity 'in a particular community' (Partnerships Officer). We thus adapted project

planning from a focus on accountability to instead facilitate shared understanding, communities' interests and mutual benefit.

As we were running out of meeting time, I offered to summarise our discussion as a project plan and to contact group members to decide on the next steps, continuing my role as process facilitator and facilitative leader. Reflecting on our discussion, I surmised that by adapting practices to support our emerging shared vision, the core group had the potential to change the 'praxis-dependent structures' (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 190) that constrain access to resources. However, I was not sure how this could create the supportive meta-governance environment shown as necessary by Agranoff (2008). Consequently, I decided to draft a project plan to show how the group's ideas guided both immediate action and longer-term planning to benefit multiple interests, and explored the group's ideas with potential partners, colleagues and other networks, as follows.

I found the idea of involving local communities in decision-making and practical conservation work was widely supported. First, to include the wider NWWT membership, I contacted its Meirion[58] branch in south Gwynedd. Meeting in a café in Dolgellau on a snowy day with the local branch members, I found little interest in road verges. However, the broader idea of corridors for people and wildlife sparked their interest, leading to offers of help and suggestions of local groups to involve (Meirion branch, 17/01/2018). Then, with the core group's agreement, I arranged to meet the Public Health Consultant's colleague and invited the NWWT Arfon member to join us. The Senior Practitioner's local knowledge of high rates of childhood obesity and existing projects to enhance physical activity complemented the Arfon member's knowledge of wildlife habitats and local community groups. Together they identified two communities in Gwynedd with the needs and resources to develop wildlife corridors, one of which was in the Meirion area (Senior Practitioner and Arfon member, 25/01/2018).

Similarly, NWWT staff responded positively to the idea of involving communities in decisions over conservation, explaining (like the trustees earlier) that this had been a role fulfilled by CCW before its merger into NRW (Conservation Manager, 26/01/2018; Volunteer Coordinator, 29/01/2018). Attending the cross-sector network Social Value Cymru (SVC) I found they promoted engaging residents in co-production of 'community assets' with the explicit aim of 'sharing power and developing reciprocal relationships' (SVC, 11/01/2018). The core group and other organisations' receptivity to and promotion of community

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[58] Meirion or 'Meirionydd' is the name for the old administrative area of south Gwynedd

engagement indicated the potential to co-develop the common vision, norms and practices shown by Jones and Liddle (2011) to be needed to build trust with communities. I reflected (Journal 11/01/2018): 'this potentially empowering approach to community engagement, described by Durose and Lowndes (2010) and Huggins and Hilvert (2013), creates a supportive environment for the core group which could help guard against the risk of imposition of objectives by the PSB or other organisations with authority.'

The risk of such instrumentalization was indicated in two cross-sector forums. First, SVC's promotion of SROI[59] evaluation meant its discussions focussed on measuring outcomes to assist public bodies' procurement of services from the third sector (SVC, 11/01/2018). Outcomes evaluation can exacerbate the effects of resource dependency to make third sector organisations' priorities subservient to the priorities of public bodies (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). However, the SVC network's emphasis on participation of intended beneficiaries in decision-making and co-production held the potential to redress this imbalance of influence. Second, delegates at a meeting of Third Sector Support Wales (TSSW) conveyed their concerns about the lack of inclusion of environmental interests and the third sector in public sector decision-making (TSSW, 17/01/2018). TSSW members are leaders of third sector infrastructure organisations (the CVCs and WCVA[60]) and at the meeting I observed, had also invited members of Welsh Government and the Future Generations Commissioner's Office. From their vantage point of being representatives on every PSB in Wales, the CVC leaders reflected that most PSBs interpreted the goal of "Resilient Wales" as meaning resilient *communities* rather than resilient *ecosystems*, a considerable shift from the ecological intentions of the Well-being Act discussed in Chapter One. TSSW delegates expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of openness of PSBs, many without published minutes and not involving other third sector organisations. They also noted concern that the Future Generations Commissioner preferred individuals' stories rather than reports from third sector organisations, potentially excluding the sector. In a later conversation with the delegate from Welsh Government (Local Government Partnership Team, 30/01/2018) she refuted this sense of exclusion. However, the formal opportunities she suggested for inclusion of the sector were limited to an, at the time, inactive forum (Third Sector Partnership Council, TSPC) and a forum for public bodies only (Wales Local Government Association, WLGA). The PSBs and these national forums thus

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[59] SROI Social Return on Investment, see above p. 42
[60] CVC: County Voluntary Council; WCVA: Wales Council for Voluntary Associations – see my explanation of these institutions in Chapter One

portray themselves as partnerships but reinforce hierarchy, as found by Durose and Lowndes (2010).

Encouraged by the support for a place-based approach involving communities but aware of the risk of imposition of priorities, I drafted the project document[61]. With further discussions with the core group this document consolidated our shared vision and its multiple benefits. The first draft included the vision of wildlife corridors, strategic plan to identify place-based convergent interests using GIS layers, and our ideas for local action in Gwynedd and Anglesey. I emailed this to the group who replied with some small amendments. The Senior Practitioner (30/01/2018) was enthusiastic in his support for the project vision, explaining how it overcame prevalent barriers to participation, benefitted multiple life-long health conditions, and contributed to people's well-being. The Arfon member (12/01/2018) sounded a note of caution that the plan had 'moved on quite a way from the original verges' but recognised that the project now held 'much wider benefit for wildlife and people.' I reflected on this with the Anglesey member (19/01/2018), and she pointed out that road verges in Anglesey were not as amenable to people's use as the recreational routes in Gwynedd. She and I discussed this concern with NWWT's Marketing Officer, who suggested the marketing materials for Anglesey should encourage people to take inspiration from the verges to be active in exploring local paths for wildflowers (Anglesey member and NWWT staff, 19/01/2018). I revised the document with the group's suggested amendments and quoted the Senior Practitioner's statement of the links to well-being. To restore the focus on wildlife, I highlighted the Arfon member's suggested description of wildlife corridors which emphasised natural habitats rather than people, 'a verge and hedgerow, linked by a footpath and cycleway to a small wood, churchyard, village green, playground, common land, country park etc.' (Arfon member, 12/01/2018).

Following the revised document, members of the group began to identify opportunities for action. The Arfon member and Senior Practitioner updated the group by email on their progress on identifying, respectively, road verges in Gwynedd for pilots and data sources to map public health concerns. Despite her caution, the Anglesey member sent a draft of her design for a leaflet to the group for comments. The group replied with enthusiastic praise for the quality of her photographs and the way they created a focus on wildflowers. However, the Partnerships Officer suggested finding images that portrayed people engaged in activities related to wildflower verges to convey the link to public health, indicating the need to develop a greater

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[61] An extract from the final project document can be found in Appendix 3

sense of interdependence in the group. Consequently, as knowledge broker, I decided to focus on the principle of connectivity to align interests and gained sufficient skills in GIS mapping to produce simple layered maps. As process facilitator and change agent, my aim for our next meeting was to help the group develop a sense of interdependence to overcome the risk of dominant interests and to identify pilot areas for action.

February: connecting needs with assets in communities

While our first core group meeting had created a CoP, in our second we had developed our reflexive rationality and inclusion of communities' interests. To develop our sense of interdependence and to motivate us to take joint action, I prepared further GIS maps and convened a third meeting. In this section, I explore how we further developed our relational approach and critical awareness and how this enhanced group members' active participation as co-researchers and our involvement of communities. By also drawing on the wider enquiry, I show how power imbalances and conflicting interests created an unfavourable environment for cross-sector collaboration that was exacerbated by managers' lack of mutual understanding.

As the Partnerships Officer was unable to join this meeting due to annual leave, I had a discussion by phone with her in advance so that I could take her views to the group. The Senior Practitioner joined the Biodiversity Officer, NWWT members and me (Core research group, 13/02/2018). I chose to meet again at NWWT offices as a convenient location but also to renew the focus on wildlife, taking on the role of change agent to not simply bring diverse perspectives together but change power differentials (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014).

To enhance our understanding of each other's plans but the difficulties we encountered, I suggested we update each other. Continuing the place-based focus of the project plan, each member took account of communities' needs and potential resources. The Senior Practitioner and Arfon member had identified communities of Tywyn (in south Gwynedd) and Aberdaron (on the Llŷn Peninsula), in response to needs and resources in each area. In Aberdaron, the Arfon member had received an appeal for help to develop a wildlife rich churchyard. In Tywyn, in addition to the NWWT branch in nearby Dolgellau, the Senior Practitioner had identified a colleague and existing beneficiary group with an interest in developing nature-based activities for health. The Anglesey member recounted her progress to raise awareness and manage road verges through her contact with a local third sector organisation. She noted the mutual benefits to wildlife (by improving road verges management) and people (by providing activities):

> I got in touch with the Gerddi Haulfre[62], which provides services for people with learning difficulties, and they have a volunteer group who are trained up to use strimmers[63] and so on, and they are going to go and do one of the conservation verges, which is not far from where they work.
>
> (Anglesey member, Core research group, 13/02/2018)

However, the scale of the problem created uncertainty. Faced with the large number of potential verges and recreational routes for improved management and the large geographical area, the Arfon member expressed doubt, 'I don't really know quite where I'm starting.' The Senior Practitioner empathised, explaining the challenges of addressing his primary concern of childhood obesity. Portraying it as 'a very complex picture, but not insurmountable I don't think – it's a challenge', he explained the contributing 'combination of factors.' Similarly, the Anglesey member was unsure which communities to target on the Island with her leaflets and pop-up banners. On the other hand, her knowledge of the combination of a wildlife-rich village green and closely located community hall in one village gave her an idea for a starting point.

The group members' inclusion of community concerns in their plans indicated the development of a shared responsibility for understanding the relationships between different interests. This group disposition of boundary-spanning contrasted with the usual treatment of this as an individual attribute, (see Keast *et al.*, 2004; Williams, 2013; Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014). This added to our group disposition of shared facilitative leadership, noted above, demonstrating how the group members started to exercise their co-researching abilities. Our initial plans created opportunities to engage democratically in situated practice to address social and ecological problems (following Huggins and Hilvert, 2013; Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015; Eckersley, 2020a). However, the practical complexity of incorporating diverse concerns and addressing multiple contributory factors reinforced the risk of resorting to hierarchically decided policies rather than empowering residents and a focus on accountability rather than interdependence, the outcomes shown by Huggins and Hilvert (2013).

To encourage a sense of interdependence, I introduced GIS maps I had prepared after teaching myself to use QGIS[64] software. Taking southeast Anglesey as an example, I added layers to reflect the interests expressed in our previous meeting. These layers depicted environmental *assets* (wildlife sites, conservation verges, SSSIs[65] and the AONB) which also indicated

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[62] Gerddi Haulfre: literally, Sunny Garden Place
[63] Strimmers: a colloquialism for motorized grass and brush cutters
[64] QGIS: see explanation in Chapter Five
[65] SSSI or 'Triple S I' are Sites of Special Scientific Interest, a planning designation for areas of land with features of special interest for wildlife, geology and/or landform

wildlife *needs* for connectivity. I complemented these with layers showing resources for physical activity (rights of way, forest recreation routes and active travel areas) which had the potential to serve people as well as wildlife. Finally, I added lists of community assets which the CVC, Medrwn Môn had developed from surveys of residents in selected villages and towns. This produced the map depicted in Figure 12.

Figure 12 Depiction of GIS layers for southeast Anglesey

Although data on childhood obesity were not readily available in GIS format, the Senior Practitioner had earlier directed me to maps of rates of childhood obesity in North Wales, which I produced alongside the above GIS map to create a comparison, see Figure 13.

Percentage of children aged 4 to 5 years who are obese, Betsi Cadwaladr UHB, Child Measurement Programme for Wales, 2013/14 -2015/16

MSOA, percentage
- 14.8 to 17.1 [12]
- 12.5 to <14.8 [24]
- 10.2 to <12.5 [30]
- 7.9 to <10.2 [22]
- 5.6 to <7.9 [6]
- Local authority boundary

Due to smaller sample sizes at MSOA level, caution should be taken when making comparisons between areas.

Produced by Public Health Wales Observatory, using CMP data (NWIS)
© Crown Copyright and database right 2017, Ordnance Survey 100044810

Figure 13 Child Measurement Programme for Wales maps 2015/16, Public Health Wales. Source:
www.publichealthwales.org/childmeasurement

As I explained these maps, the Senior Practitioner introduced the idea of 'doorstep activities', steering the group's focus to a scale of walking distance from people's homes. He explained how this idea enhanced the benefit of wildlife corridors for people:

> We call those, doorstep activities, because you don't have to go very far. From the work that has already been done, you can almost say there are assets in and around most communities, but they just haven't realised that they're assets, because to them they're just a verge at the moment. But if you bring that verge alive and show the biodiversity that exists in a verge, you are going to spark an interest, aren't you?
>
> (Senior Practitioner, Core research group, 13/02/2018)

I encouraged the group to discuss how the layers applied to the communities they had identified in Gwynedd. Each co-researcher drew upon their own local knowledge to identify footpaths, cycle routes, quiet lanes for walking, community groups and wildlife habitats. As we focussed on specific places, the co-researchers increased their awareness of the benefits of contributing to each other's interests. The Biodiversity Officer remarked upon the high rates of childhood

obesity as well as the density of environmental layers for the identified 'Llŷn and Bermo[66]' areas. In response, the Senior Practitioner explained that the former reflected a long-term trend and ill-health more widely in the community. The Biodiversity Officer then pointed out how focussing on improving doorstep locations to benefit *people's* well-being enhanced the benefit to *wildlife* compared to the original focus on road verges alone. The doorstep approach would restore the resilience of fragmented habitats: 'by managing somewhere like a park or a churchyard you are creating this pool, island there, they are a bit more robust than a verge which is long and narrow.' The principles of doorstep activities and connectivity thus created relationships between public health and environmental organisations based on reciprocal benefit (derived from contributing to each other's interests).

The co-researchers then suggested potentially similar reciprocal relationships with local community groups. As we focussed on specific villages and towns, their attention increasingly turned to ways to encourage and support local people to improve wildlife corridors in their communities. They noted opportunities to work with 'families together in areas' (Senior Practitioner) and with 'whole communities' (Biodiversity Officer). They identified colleagues and contacts they had in common and expressed their willingness to approach new people on the basis that 'a diversity of people is important' (Biodiversity Officer) and 'because they know their community, they know what's do-able' (Senior Practitioner). Again, the Anglesey member drew on her long-standing work on the Island to identify volunteer and other community groups located close to conservation verges. By the end of the meeting, we had pooled a network of community contacts in the identified locations.

The core group's recognition of the value of working with locally based organisations and residents demonstrated the respect and ethical inclusivity that sustains political accountability to communities (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013; Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015). It indicated our capacity to '[empower] residents to take action' to address complex social challenges (Huggins and Hilvert, 2013, p. 8). However, we had not at this stage explicitly addressed how we would involve communities in decision-making and joint action in the face of the widespread exclusion of third sector groups.

To understand the group's awareness of the risk of exclusion, I introduced the Partnerships Officer's comments from our earlier phone-call. Her focus had been on helping the group to find funding and I contrasted this with our emphasis so far on finding ways to help each other

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[66] Bermo, an abbreviation of the Welsh name Abermaw (Barmouth), a town near Tywyn

and communities. The group members nodded agreement with the Biodiversity Officer's opinion that it was more helpful to start with identifying active partners. She continued by noting the restrictive criteria of NRW's funding that prevented her organisation's involvement and suggested: 'you can make things happen' by drawing on 'a little bit of time from one person and another.' The Senior Practitioner agreed, saying 'it's probably more sustainable doing it that way because it comes from the community.' They agreed with the Arfon member's suggestion that you could 'show something works on a small scale' and then make a case for funding to expand it. Thus, the focus on action, specific places and network of community contacts, in line with Bartels (2018), had the potential to create human and social capital, as shown by Dow *et al*. (2013), alternative resources that freed the group from the constraints on strategic planning imposed by funding criteria.

Our discussion led to plans for action based on actively involving communities, following my suggestion of taking Medrwn Môn's approach to find out from communities 'what the assets are.' Starting with the people we knew, group members offered to contact individuals in the target areas of Tywyn and Llŷn. The Arfon member agreed to accompany me on visits to these communities. The Anglesey member suggested she would use the GIS tool to accompany her talks, to show the location of verges and encourage a sense of local ownership. To guide our project planning and sustain my research partners' support for our work, I verbally summarised our plans to 'focus on churchyards in Aberdaron, on footpaths near Barmouth and on practical conservation work on Anglesey.' I suggested a timeframe of planning action by the end of March to coincide with the publication of the PSB's well-being objectives and NWWT's five-year plan and the Senior Practitioner commented 'I think that's a lot if we can achieve that.' As the meeting closed, the co-researchers chatted in twos and threes about their planned next steps. Our deliberation about convergent resources and needs thus generated the trust and interdependence which motivated us to consider new alliances and plan joint action, the outcome shown by Milbourne and Cushman (2013).

Following this third group meeting, I worked with my co-researchers to develop links with community groups, reflected on their plans with my research partners, and participated in other networks to understand the wider environment affecting the core group.

The Arfon member and I visited first Aberdaron then Tywyn, in Gwynedd. In Aberdaron, the Arfon member introduced me to the churchwarden, who explained her idea for a churchyard

event to raise awareness of plans to enhance wildflowers and introduced us to other people[67] living and working in the area (Fieldnotes, 28/02/2018). In Tywyn, we followed up our contacts and other introductions from the Dolgellau NWWT branch members. We met first with the Exercise by Referral Officer (colleague of the Senior Practitioner in public health) and then with local organisations and groups from across sectors[68] (Fieldnotes, 15/03/2018). The Arfon member and I used the same relational approach in these discussions as the core group, introducing our own interests in wildflowers and health and eliciting the community group's primary interests and challenges. In each community there was initially a lack of the perceived relevance of road verges but as we talked about their concerns, we developed a common interest. We developed plans with them for a churchyard wildflower celebration event in Aberdaron and a wildflower identification walk in Tywyn. Each incorporated an element of raising awareness of wildflower verges and encouraging physical activity, although we were unsure yet how we would build on the events to change the management of road verges. I summarised the plans for Tywyn as an example in the developing project document, for reflection with the PSB and NWWT Trustees:

> The local children's day nursery [a private business], suggests joining the NWWT Meirion branch members and other local groups, to identify wildflowers along a local verge. Returning to the nursery the older children can help the younger ones to create wildflower spotter sheets, which they can use on their next walk from the nursery to Tywyn town centre. Once in town, the library has extended a welcome to the children and nursery staff to visit to have their lunch and a story and rhyme session using the library's resources. For the nursery this can provide multiple free educational and importantly, daylong activities for the children. The nursery suggests this will keep down the costs of childcare, alleviating one of the main barriers to economic growth in the area. For the library, it helps achieve their target of reaching young people and families, without the need for additional staff resources. For the local NWWT branch, a flower identification walk can help them contact families to sustain their work on conservation activities. The Exercise by Referral officer hopes such a walk can offer a meaningful experience to her group, motivating them to take regular, free physical exercise. For all the local groups the walk can provide an opportunity to network and arrange longer-term activities for mutual support.
>
> (Extract from project report, 19/03/2018)

In this document, to create a sense of coherence of the diverse events in Gwynedd and Anglesey, I started referring to our ideas as the 'Wild Pathways project.' I avoided the term green social prescribing due to the lack of a formal connection to primary healthcare and the

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[67] We had discussions in Aberdaron (28/02/2018) with the two church wardens, a local member of NWWT, an ecologist, National Trust manager, and a local resident

[68] We had discussions in Tywyn (15/03/2018) with the owner of a children's day nursery, leaders of two pre-school playgroups, manager of 'Y Lantern' community cinema, and the lead librarian at the Council library

association with a view of the environment as a resource rather than the primary focus for action. Instead, the term 'wild' reflected its use by Wildlife Trusts in Wales for activities with both conservation and health benefits (Health and Well-being group, Welsh Wildlife Trusts, 30/06/2017). I updated the project document with the ideas for events and work in Gwynedd and Anglesey, circulating it to the core group. Our relational approach to engaging community groups (following Bartels, 2018) had built our shared understanding of the links between social and ecological needs, helping to create links between managing the challenges of people's everyday lives and the ecological consequences (Eckersley, 2020a).

However, by participating in other forums I came to recognise the unusual nature of the core group's sense of reciprocity and community-based approach. Discussions with small groups of PSB members (05/03/2018) and NWWT Trustees (19/03/2018) indicated their scepticism that projects could achieve both environmental and health benefits. I convened a subgroup of the PSB in which the elected Leader of Gwynedd Council expressed his opinion that the focus on enhancing the environment was irrelevant to people's immediate needs, (talking of a mother on a low income): 'she won't go round walking footpaths', and even detrimental: 'we've got the lowest income in Europe within the National Park, so the environment … [pauses]' (PSB subgroup, 05/03/2018). In the same meeting, the Public Health Consultant while recognising the 'different kinds of outcomes' wanted to know 'how do we link back to human health so that we are going to impact on that', recommending the group should strengthen its evaluation measures. The PSB members suggested I update the full Board to gain further perspectives. Similarly, the trustees questioned how the local approach was going to contribute to their ambition of large-scale change across North Wales. They recommended I write to County Councils to encourage a consistent approach (Trustees subgroup, 19/03/2018). These discussion groups' focus on appealing to people in authority contrasted with the core group's community-based focus, indicating a wider hierarchical culture.

This caution regarding the benefits of cross-sector collaboration was part of a mixed picture across Wales. Other forums varied from a growing confidence in the benefits of collaboration to a sense of outright conflict, based on awareness of the imbalance of power between sectors. At a local third sector meeting, presenters from the public and third sector alike portrayed an increasingly close relationship between the sectors, in the contexts of integration of health and social care, the PSB's well-being objectives and delivery of the Well-being Act's goals (CVC, 16/03/2018). In contrast, conflict between interests was evident in a meeting of the Wales

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group[69] (FWAG). Their discussion concentrated on how farming can benefit wildlife rather than how managing farms for wildlife could also benefit farmers. The detrimental effects of farming and conflict with NRW's work to support economic interests featured highly (FWAG, 22/02/2018). Similarly, at a conference for the third sector held in Cardiff there was disagreement over the public sector's use of the term 'resilient' to describe communities (Gofod 3, 08/03/2018). Third sector speakers preferred the term 'empowerment' seeing 'resilient' as accepting stagnation and even decline, reflecting this in a report (Todd and Nicholl, 2018). Rather than acquiescence with the expectation of consensus and collaboration, these forums and the PSB and NWWT members indicated their awareness of the risks of conferring advantage on dominant interests, resisting a hegemonic consensus, as Milbourne and Cushman (2015) have shown.

Based on further reflection with PSB and Trustees' subgroups, I identified a lack of mutual understanding that contributed to the sense of conflicting interests and constrained the capacity for joint strategic planning. As they reflected on the core group's inclusion of diverse interests, these managerial groups rejected the idea that they needed a better understanding of each other's priorities and argued that such communication was more appropriate for people at a lower level of authority. PSB members agreed with Gwynedd Leader's statement that 'we've spent too many hours talking' and his desire instead for 'a project which we are really working on.' The Public Health Consultant suggested that the place for 'this way of working' was the '*boards underneath* the PSB' that will deliver on the PSB's well-being objectives (PSB subgroup, 05/03/2018). Similarly, the Trustees subgroup dismissed the work to engage communities as not what the branch forum expected of Trustees. However, they were enthusiastic about NWWT CEO's plan for *staff* to develop a community engagement plan as the basis for a new pilot project (Trustees subgroup, 19/03/2018).

These discussions showed the gap between 'street-level worker' relational practices and managerial level requirements for outcomes accountability. I concluded that this risked undermining the informal accountability shown by Durose and Lowndes (2010), Romzek *et al*. (2014) and Bartels (2018), to be necessary for inclusive collaboration. I continued to participate in the core research group as we planned events to see whether we could maintain our inclusivity and find a way to influence the management of road verges.

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[69] FWAG was established as a charity in the 1960s by farmers seeking to show that care for the environment was important for successful farming (About FWAG — The Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group). It has a branch in Wales and regional branches in England.

April to August: place-based action and building a broader alliance

Between April and June 2018, I held a further meeting with the core research group and participated in joint events with communities. In August I reconvened the core group to reflect on our experiences. This activity continued my researcher roles to facilitate the process of action research, share knowledge from different perspectives and participate in changing practices and beliefs that marginalised some groups' interests.

I have divided this section of the chapter into five parts. The first three parts relate to our April meeting. In the first, I consider how we assumed shared responsibility for action and how this focus developed useful human capital. Second, I show how, as my co-researchers reflected on the process of research, they consolidated their shared vision and sense of interdependence. In the third part, I explain how the core group members made plans to share their new beliefs and relational practices with their colleagues with the aim of sustaining and scaling up action. In the fourth part of this section, I describe our events with local communities and efforts to influence road verge management. In the final part, I reflect on the core research group's experiences of joint action and the constraining effects of widespread beliefs and practices. I explain how we identified a broader strategic context to effect cultural and structural change.

Planning joint action and creating human capital

We met again in our now familiar meeting place of the NWWT offices. The Partnerships Officer was unfortunately unable to join us because of a funeral but all other group members were present. I reflected that we'd been meeting for five months and that it would be good to know the co-researchers' opinions of the process and discuss how they planned to move forward with the ideas (Core research group, 16/04/2018).

The Arfon and Anglesey members shared their ideas for activities in Gwynedd and on the Island. By focussing on responding to and involving communities they extended the vision for wildlife corridors to encompass these wider interests. Immediately, other members offered help to lead coastal walks (Biodiversity Officer) and to advise on churchyard management (Anglesey member). In Gwynedd, we discussed ways to involve local schools through the Healthy Schools Programme (prompted by the Senior Practitioner), nearby churches, NWWT members and supportive local councillors. We decided on the use of 'spotter' sheets on wildflower walks to help multiple groups to take part and agreed bilingual marketing was essential to respect Welsh speakers. Similarly, the Anglesey member spoke of her plans to 'start to involve other outside bodies', naming many which had been mentioned in our first meeting. Our shared knowledge thus created human capital with personal benefits for the group

members, as anticipated by Agranoff (2008). The Anglesey member had also acted on her intention to contribute data to Cofnod. Other members pointed out the benefits to multiple organisations of this database, describing it as 'a valuable resource' (Senior Practitioner) and 'greater than the sum of the parts' (Biodiversity Officer).

Throughout these discussions, the focus was on ways of creating connections between local habitats and community amenities using wildflower-rich pathways, integrating the concepts of doorstep activity and connectivity. The need for me to prompt and include members was much reduced in this meeting, as the co-researchers built on their shared facilitative leadership, through which they included *each other's* interests, to develop a shared boundary-spanning leadership through which they included *external* diverse concerns and interests. These combined skills enhanced our mutual understanding of the contributions of different agencies and sectors. The co-researchers thus demonstrated the self-organising, shared leadership and knowledge-building processes of a CoP (Agranoff, 2008) and creative solutions to multiple social problems, as shown by Healey (2003).

A sense of interdependence

To encourage reflection on the process of deciding on joint activities, I used layers on a new GIS map, illustrating how the plans for a wildflower identification walk in Tywyn integrated physical activity, wildlife habitats and community benefits. As I added layers digitally, the co-researchers reflected on their experiences of planning joint action and how it had changed their perspectives on the relationship between health and the environment:

> **Biodiversity Officer:** For me, I think it's been great being involved with the Health Board and making that direct connection between nature and people's health. I think it really is an obvious thing that nature and health go together, it's having you here has made me realise how people working in the health sector recognise the importance of nature.
> **Arfon branch member:** I think that's been an eye-opener for me, that I hadn't seen the possibilities without meeting you [turning to the Senior Practitioner] and hearing the ideas come forward from the health…
> **Senior Public Health Practitioner:** I think, to be fair, that's great to know because from our perspective we don't know enough. We don't have the expertise and the knowledge that you guys have on the actual technical side of it. [Elaborates on the work of the health service and continues:] we do that work from multi-community cohesion, including mental wellbeing, getting people to be physically active. Getting people engaging in communities, getting to know their own communities and the corridors between them, particularly with children and young people. It's an opportunity that hasn't perhaps been taken up.
> **Biodiversity Officer:** I think the other thing I've liked about this project is it seems to have been very grassroots really. (Core research group, 16/04/2018)

Our vision for wildlife corridors based on combining strategic principles had developed to integrate diverse interests, creating greater benefit to each interest group. By expanding from road verges to enhancing *community* amenities, the shared vision had greater potential impact on *ecological* resilience (as the Biodiversity Officer had explained in our previous meeting). Focussing on place-based action and benefits to *communities* created a greater contribution to broader *public health* strategies for resilience and well-being. Our relational approach to dialogue and engagement with communities thus overcame the barriers of a lack of mutual understanding, poor infrastructure for dialogue and divergent accountabilities identified by Keast et al. (2004), Jones and Liddle (2011) and Forrer, Kee and Boyer (2014). The motivational effect of our pluralist vision was reflected in the co-researchers' willing offers of help for each other and in their place-based action in the months after this meeting.

Extending the vision to colleagues

During our meeting, group members raised the need to involve other colleagues in their organisations to sustain and scale-up action on road verges. As we discussed our plans for events, we had realised the motivational effect of our developing sense of reciprocal relationships. Consequently, co-researchers drew upon the *other* organisations' strategic principles to involve their own colleagues.

The Arfon member used the *public health* concept of doorstep activity as a way of motivating NWWT branch members to identify good local habitats.

> We should now take it back to them [NWWT branches] and say, "Okay. Could you find in your local area the best – just from your local knowledge – the best verges, that you think, the verges that are really still good and rich and so on."
>
> (Arfon branch member, Core research group 16/04/2018).

The Senior Practitioner focussed on the value of physical conservation activity to improve *ecological connectivity:* 'you can become a volunteer. You can learn with your children. It can be a family activity that you do on a Saturday morning on a regular basis.' He had begun to write a scoping paper on the 'therapeutic benefits' of 'green health' to encourage colleagues in the wider health service to promote take-up of such conservation activities through the strategy of social prescribing. The Biodiversity Officer recognised how the *public health* strategy of social prescribing could coordinate wild pathways-type activities, overcoming the fragmentation of 'all these disparate groups, all very separate.' In a later conversation, the Partnerships Officer suggested NRW could systematically prioritise the management of

pathways by assessing their contribution to ecological connectivity *and* doorstep activities, which would maximise their contribution to diverse aspects of well-being (Partnerships Officer, 11/06/2018).

I encouraged the group to consider how the community events would lead to changed road verges management and the Anglesey member prompted us to consider how we could create a consistent approach across North Wales. To effect change, the Senior Practitioner suggested we would need to involve many different groups by identifying a 'pied piper' in each community who had a network of contacts. This prompted me to suggest each network would need to approach the community council (with responsibility for pathways and verges), to explain how *prioritising* wildlife needs would also benefit these multiple groups. I suggested this would mean 'then we are representing the whole community and not just some special interest group.' The Senior Practitioner regarded this as radical: 'what you've just described actually turns it on its head, doesn't it? What you've done is giving people power.' I then introduced the idea of identifying clusters of communities to create change at scale. Referring to a recent conversation with NWWT's Living Landscapes manager (28/03/2018), I explained his strategy of developing clusters of linked habitats to form a connected landscape. I suggested this would enable us to scale-up wild pathways activities without losing the place-based approach. The Senior Practitioner agreed and explained this would be consistent with the way health systems develop primary-care facilities according to population numbers or 'clusters' (Core research group, 16/04/2018). However, the Biodiversity Officer and NWWT members warned that the loss of budgets for the management of pathways was a significant barrier to working with local councils.

I reflected (Journal, 16/04/2018) that this discussion had revealed the group's tacit awareness of the way cultural beliefs and practices exercise power. They had acknowledged how a culture of specialisation fragmented the activities of different organisations, created competition for resources and undermined the coordination of a systematic approach at scale. In this way the group discussion demonstrated how resource dependency, when coupled with hierarchical and competitive organisational arrangements, constrains cross-sector collaboration. This contrasts with Sullivan and Skelcher's (2002, pp.135–6) argument that resource dependency motivates collaboration.

Community events and constraints

As 'change agent' and to understand how this prevalent culture affected the co-researchers' collaborative action, I participated in the community events and accompanied them in their efforts to engage their wider organisations.

I joined the Arfon member and Biodiversity Officer to help facilitate events in Tywyn and Aberdaron in mid-June. (The events clashed with holidays or were too distant for the Anglesey member and Partnerships Officer to attend and the Senior Practitioner delegated action to his colleagues in Healthy Schools and Exercise by Referral). These activities brought disparate groups together in each community, creating forums for dialogue amongst diverse interests. Like the core group's meetings, the events became an exchange of information and contacts to plan future mutually beneficial action. In Tywyn, a local 'Well-being group' arranged to meet with the Exercise by Referral group for a monthly wildflower exploration of the local coastal path. In Aberdaron, the National Trust warden and local NWWT members developed plans to involve the local school in regular flower identification trips to the churchyard and create wildlife-friendly pathways between these two community amenities.

Our hopes to achieve both public health and environmental benefits as well as enhance community facilities, were not realised, however. In Tywyn, the emphasis shifted to the recreational benefits of the environment rather than practical conservation activity, an ecosystems services rather than ecological resilience approach (as explained in Chapter One). The alliance between health-focussed groups (the Well-being group and Exercise by Referral group) excluded the need to contribute to ecological interests that would have motivated the involvement of local NWWT members or projects. In Aberdaron, the focus shifted to the improvement of isolated wildlife habitats, such as meadows and churchyards, rather than the connections between them. The churchyard provided a crop of green hay to seed other habitats, enriching their value for wildlife and reducing the costs of disposal for the church. Without the focus on connectivity, there was less motivation to create a 'wild pathway' between the school and churchyard, reducing the school's involvement through its 'Healthy Schools' programme. In addition, these local alliances made no attempt to contact community councils to change pathways' management. I made initial enquiries with local Councillors and received assurances that they were open to the idea of integrating biodiversity alongside other criteria in community councils' pathways and verge management plans (Llanbedrog councillor, 10/06/2018 and Aberdaron councillor, 31/07/2018). However, although I contacted key people at each event, I

held back from facilitating their contact with the local Councils to respect their agency to pursue the opportunity.

Reflecting on these developments, I drew the conclusion that the failure to include ecological interests in each alliance reduced the motivation for change. The health-based alliance in Tywyn contained the resources it needed (in the short-term) to meet its needs for physical activity. The environmental alliance in Aberdaron had the resources it needed to improve habitats (but not the connections between them). In addition, this self-containment reduced the motivation to include more diverse interests. The community events alone had been insufficient to provide the opportunities for communication and co-creation that can build cross-sector trust and alliances (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013). Consequently, the interest-based alliances did not have the power to change wider culture and restricted their capacity and motivation to change prevalent practices of pathways' management, in line with the findings of Dow *et al*., (2013).

Reflecting on constraints

To understand the constraints on the strategy of wild pathways and the extent of opportunities to scale-up action, I returned to the transcript of our April meeting, attended meetings with the co-researchers and their colleagues and held a further meeting with the core group in August.

Following up our ideas to extend the vision to colleagues, I attended a Branch forum with the Arfon member. Echoing NWWT Trustees' earlier suggestion that I should contact County Councils to achieve regional change, the Branch forum dismissed the Arfon member's recommendation of a local approach. Representatives expressed a clear preference for campaigning, adamant that the place for influence was at the Chief Executive level of each local authority not through community councils (Branch forum, 17/04/2018). I discussed this approach with an environmental lobby, Plantlife[70], which had been running a campaign for wildlife road verges concurrently with this phase of the research. They had found Highways Managers were reluctant to change practices based on public petitions alone and wanted more tailored support and information (Plantlife emails, May 2018). The Biodiversity Officer and I followed this up with meetings with local Highways Managers who confirmed the need for detailed guidance on management practices, their costs and the benefits for wildlife. They also confirmed the key political pressure point as the local community council rather than at county

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[70] Plantlife is a British conservation charity working to save threatened wild flowers, plants and fungi (Plantlife :: About Us, accessed 04/12/2021)

level, as these bodies control the management of doorstep urban verges and pathways (Gwynedd Highways team, 09/07/2018; Anglesey Highways team, 01/08/2018).

Reflecting on these meetings, I drew the conclusion that the assumption of a hierarchical approach and tactics of lobbying constrained the capacity for and benefits of cross-sector collaboration. The widespread or cultural nature of these assumptions had been indicated in our April meeting. Despite our community-focussed approach, the Anglesey member and Biodiversity Officer had both stated the need to encourage people to write to county-level Highways services to praise well-managed verges so that they understood the level of public support (Core research group 16/04/2018). By assuming the need for a top-down approach, NWWT branch forum members did not engage in identifying local road verges or work with local community partners. This limited the data sent to Cofnod and therefore the network benefit. It also weakened the strength of the ecological voice in local plans for action, with the consequent loss of focus on connectivity and loss of motivation to work with community councils to change the management of pathways. The Biodiversity Officer had explained in our meeting with Highways how the lack of influence with community councils increased her reliance on grants. The inherent risks and constraints of resource dependency (Milbourne, 2009) were clear as she discussed her intention to apply for a Landfill Tax grant to manage some trial verges, even though she was not sure her plans met the criteria (Gwynedd Highways team, 09/07/2018).

Seeking a way to change the barriers created by this hierarchical culture and the prevalent ecosystems services approach, I reflected on our April meeting. Then, the co-researchers had begun to identify ways to embed their beliefs and practices through strategic work programmes in their organisations (Core research group 16/04/2018). The Senior Practitioner had explained his line manager's (the PSB representative) intention to use his green health scoping paper to 'drive policy change within Local Authority, National Parks and other organisations.' The Anglesey member had suggested linking the creation of wild pathways to NWWT's Living Landscapes and People and Wildlife strategies. The Arfon member and Biodiversity Officer had noted the relevance to other organisations' strategies, such as Buglife's 'Beeline' project and the Church in Wales 'Cherishing Churchyards' project. Added to the NRW Partnership Officer's idea of prioritising path management according to multiple well-being benefits, these links to strategic work programmes and policies offered the opportunity to change the cultural environment.

In August, I invited the core group to reflect on our experiences. Although annual leave prevented the Biodiversity Officer and Partnerships Officer from attending, the Senior Practitioner and NWWT members met me at NWWT offices. These co-researchers considered the constraints on their work and concluded that cross-sector organisations needed to share their resources more effectively (Core research group, 13/08/2018). They noted the importance of a networked community contact (Arfon member), the need to include other organisations at each other's events (Anglesey member) and to create a funding stream for collaborative work to encourage public bodies to engage the third sector (Senior Practitioner).

Reflecting further on these issues led me to understand better how meta-governance operated through cultural and structural constraints. Cultural constraints were created by the belief in nature as a source of ecosystems services and by the prevalent practices of specialisation, hierarchy and lobbying. Structural constraints were created by the separation of organisations' strategic objectives and budgets which reduced their willingness to share resources. However, our reflections on practice offered a way to change the culture at a managerial level in the partner organisations. The combination of strategic principles underlying our strategy of 'wild pathways' offered a way to align multiple strategic work programmes and motivate collaboration based on reciprocal benefit.

In the next section, I discuss the contribution of this chapter to the concepts in my theoretical statement (set out in Chapter Three). Through this dialogue between theory and fieldwork I infer a change in the dynamics of power operating through cross-sector collaboration.

Developing a critical-relational community of practice

In this section I discuss how the combination of my multiple roles as researcher and the co-researchers' technical and experiential knowledge created a critical and relational approach to develop a community of practice and a shared vision with the power of a philosophy of praxis.

Through the detailed narrative above, I have shown how I combined roles as process facilitator, change maker, knowledge broker and reflective and reflexive scientist. These roles contributed to the development of the mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire identified by Wenger (1998) to create a co-learning CoP. Additionally, as the co-researchers engaged with me to share information and critically reflect on current practice, we created human capital, typical of a CoP, that had personal, organisational and network benefits, as anticipated by Agranoff (2008).

My roles and the co-researchers' engagement enhanced both the relational and critical aspects of the core research group and its characteristics as a CoP. We developed the CoP's *relational* character as I, following the relational nature of my action research design, supported mutual engagement by encouraging dialogue amongst the diverse perspectives of the co-researchers and with their wider organisations and local community groups. By focussing on our contributions to national well-being and on a place-based approach to action using tools of GIS, I supported the development of joint enterprise. Through this we fostered a communal relationship with each other and with communities, in line with Bartels' (2018) findings of the effects of a relational approach to street-level work in Amsterdam. My relational stance provided the boundary-spanning and facilitative leadership shown by Williams (2013) to form a shared vision and agreement on joint action. Additionally, our communal relationship and focus on action created a shared responsibility to develop mutual understanding and engage external groups, contrasting with Williams' (2013) focus on boundary-spanning as the property of an individual. In this way, we developed a shared repertoire of skills, beliefs, managerial tools and stories of engagement with communities. I have shown that our relationships exhibited trust, interdependence, inclusivity and diversity, which developed our accountability to each other and to communities. Thus, we created the dialogue, pluralism and heterarchical relationships that produce reflexive rationality (as defined by Jessop, 2000). Therefore, we demonstrated our creative agency as a cross-sector network to establish a culture of informal accountability (as argued by Bevir and Rhodes, 2007; Romzek *et al.*, 2014).

Our CoP developed a *critical* character as we shared our diverse perspectives, engaged together in situated practice and reflected on the barriers to and outcomes of our actions. As Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 38–41) argue, our critical reflexivity exposed the power of prevalent competitive and hierarchical managerial practices, in this case reinforcing an instrumental treatment of the environment and third sector. It also revealed the power imbalance exerted through resource dependency, as shown by Silverman and Patterson (2011) and Matthews (2014). The co-researchers and I further developed our awareness of the systemic or cultural nature of these managerial practices through our engagement with communities, colleagues, people in authority and regional and national organisations. Our situated practice and boundary-spanning approach therefore exposed the constraints on collaboration created by meta-governance, through both direct or meso-levels of management (as explored by Sørensen and Torfing, 2009) and ideology expressed through societal culture (as argued by Davies, 2011, pp. 101–124).

The shared vision that developed through this critical-relational approach had the character of a philosophy of praxis with the potential to transform the dynamics of power. Reflecting Gramsci's (1971, pp. 321–376) analysis of a critical philosophy of praxis, our negotiated consensus and vision of 'wild pathways' emerged from our reflexivity and critical awareness, leading us to adapt our managerial practices to support our inclusive culture. Our critical awareness of the systemic effects of power encouraged us to support weaker interests and develop an understanding of reciprocal relationships between our interests. Our shared vision therefore had the quality of a non-coercive 'imaginary', as described by Sum and Jessop (2013, pp. 169–172). It contrasted with the prevalent instrumental treatment of the environment and third sector. Our development as a critical-relational CoP thus demonstrated the necessary interorganisational arrangements and internal processes anticipated, but not defined, by reviews in Part I of my literature review (Chapter Two) to reach negotiated consensus.

Our philosophy of praxis instigated the changes in the dynamics of power discussed in Chapter Two, Part III. Our shared vision created a communal as well as associative basis for collaboration, indicating a shift in the dynamics of power from legitimisation to legitimacy. Our efforts to understand each other's concerns while also asserting our own interests indicated a shift from self-government by accountability to ethical reflexivity through mutual understanding. The contrast between our culture of inclusive dialogue, presumption of equality and orientation to mutual understanding and the prevailing specialisation, hierarchy and exclusion of third sector interests demonstrated our capacity to resist the homogenising pressures of isomorphism.

However, as argued by the theories of governance in Chapter Three, the persistent power of meta-governance to constrain cross-sector collaboration was clear as we encountered prevalent beliefs, assumptions and managerial practices. Nevertheless, the co-researchers' ideas for embedding our critical beliefs and practices through multiple work programmes indicated an opportunity to create the social movement and broader alliance shown by Gramsci (1971, pp. 347–366) to transform hegemony. In my concluding section, I summarise the contribution of this chapter to my theoretical stance and explain how the co-researchers' ideas prompted a new phase of action research.

Conclusion

In my theoretical statement (Chapter Three), I set out three main aspects of transformative cross-sector collaboration. First, the need for reflexivity in the cross-sector network and a supportive meta-governance environment. Second, the concept of critical-relational CoPs

which create reflexive rationality and critical awareness. Third, the power of a philosophy of praxis, generated in the CoP, to change the relationship between the network and its meta-governance. This chapter has contributed primarily to the second aspect, the concept of a critical-relational CoP.

Negotiating the relational, critical and systemic aspects of the action research design helped me to establish a similar stance within the core research group. Developing my multiple research roles as knowledge broker, process facilitator, change agent, and reflective and reflexive scientist (Wittmayer and Schäpke, 2014) aided this process. These roles created a reflexive stance which facilitated the active participation of the core group as co-researchers.

I explored how the core research group developed its focus from a grassroots issue of road verges management to a shared vision that addressed ecological, public health and community groups' concerns. This rich description shows how we negotiated our diverse interests, took a place-based approach to develop mutual understanding which created a focus on convergent needs and assets, and developed a sense of shared leadership and responsibility. I explained how this process motivated us to consider the interests of communities and include them in action. My detailed account of our plans for action, events with communities and reflective practice shows how we developed human and social capital and consolidated our sense of interdependence. I showed how our sense of reciprocity motivated us to involve the co-researchers' colleagues to scale-up action. Throughout this account, I described how our reflective practice and discussion with colleagues, line managers and other networks raised our awareness of the effects of prevalent beliefs and practices to constrain our capacity for mutually beneficial action.

Reflecting on our experiences, I discussed how the action research design guided our development as a critical-relational CoP. I showed that my theoretical concepts are grounded in the fieldwork by explaining how our experiences correspond to and develop the existing literature on cross-sector collaboration and governance theories. I demonstrated how the development of reflexive rationality in a CoP can transform network culture from the hegemonic norm and create the conditions to develop critical beliefs and practices. I showed how this conceptual development enabled me to infer a change in the power of meta-governance.

My narrative closed with our reflections on the constraints created by prevalent beliefs and practices. My co-researchers' ideas to involve their colleagues and align the strategic work

programmes of their organisations created opportunities for me to reflect with my main research partners. As the core group and I planned and held community events, I began to discuss our ideas with PSB representatives (PSB_NRW, PSB_PH, 24/04/2018) and NWWT Trustees and staff (during April and May 2018). In the next chapter, I explain how from these conversations an idea developed to align multiple strategies and involve community groups in the context of social prescribing. I explore how taking the action research in this direction developed greater understanding of the interaction between reflexive rationality within the network and its meta-governance.

Chapter Seven Embedding a philosophy of praxis

Introduction

This chapter provides further empirical evidence to substantiate my stance on the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration, developed in Chapter Three. The key argument of my theoretical statement is that cross-sector collaboration transforms prevalent strategic relations when it generates reflexive rationality in the network and a reflexive orientation in meta-governance. The previous chapter examined the process of developing reflexive rationality in a CoP. The central insights were first, that a critical and relational approach to cross-sector collaboration can develop a negotiated consensus that includes diverse interests and motivates joint action. Secondly, that the critical beliefs and practices created in this process can begin to change power relationships. However, the experiences of the core research group demonstrated the need to embed this philosophy of praxis more widely to change prevalent assumptions and institutional processes which constrain collaborative capacity. The current chapter explores how this embedding creates a strategically adaptive process and changes the relationship between the cross-sector network and its meta-governance.

I begin the chapter with an overview of the settings for collaborative action. This shows how the meetings of the PSB and of the second core group correspond chronologically to each other and to the rest of this research, as outlined in Chapter Five. It puts the PSB and core group's activities in the context of their earlier well-being assessment and focus on road verges respectively and explains the change in membership of the core group as our focus shifted to social prescribing. I explain how the systemic enquiry supported my multiple research roles in the core research group (as explored in Chapter Five, *developing multiple roles and relationships*), enabling me to present diverse perspectives, share information, encourage action and reflection, and facilitate the negotiation of a consensus.

In the two main sections of the chapter, *developing a shared vision* and *planning joint action*, I explain and contrast the processes of the PSB and the social prescribing group in connection to my literature review in Chapter Two and review of governance theory in Chapter Three. These detailed descriptions and reflective discussions demonstrate how maintaining a reflexive stance (through my multiple researcher roles) enabled me to create a reciprocal relationship between criticality and relationality in the core research groups, which explained why their experiences contrasted with those of the PSB. The rich narrative of these networks' meetings shows how isomorphic pressures constrained the PSB's capacity for reflexivity and how the social prescribing group's critical and relational approach created a negotiated consensus. As

the groups planned action, I show how the PSB risked losing legitimate control of its objectives and contrast this with the core group's developing reciprocal relationships and changing access to resources. Through these accounts, I explain how continuity and change in culture and structures associated with the Well-being Act interacted with the PSB and core group's cultures to constrain or enhance collaborative capacity. I conceptualise the relationship between reflexivity in the network and in meta-governance as a strategically adaptive process.

I conclude by reviewing how this chapter provides supporting evidence for my theoretical statement. I summarise the evidence that cross-sector collaboration has transformative capacity when networks generate reflexivity in their micro-relations and a reflexive orientation in meta-governance. I show how the chapter has contributed to further understanding of the critical-relational CoP and the development of reflexive rationality and a shared vision with the quality of a philosophy of praxis. I summarise the evidence that embedding a philosophy of praxis more widely creates a strategically adaptive process of interaction between the network's reflexive culture and cultural and structural changes more widely in society.

Settings for cross-sector collaboration

In Chapter Five, I set out a timeline of the meetings of the PSB, the two consecutive core research groups, and data collection in other streams of the systemic enquiry (see Figures 9–11). The current chapter compares the meetings of the PSB and its sub-groups between February 2017 and June 2019, with the experiences of the second core research group meeting between May 2018 and June 2019.

In the Introductory Chapter, I explained how the Well-being Act determined the membership of the PSB and I set out the regular participants at its meetings (see Figure 3, Chapter One). In February 2017, I began to observe the PSB's meetings as the members finalised their well-being assessments of Gwynedd and Anglesey, in accordance with the Well-being Act (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2017c, 2017a). From February 2017 to January 2018, the PSB focussed on what I describe as *developing a shared vision*, discussing their well-being objectives (as required by the Act) based on the well-being assessment's summary messages. This phase culminated with the publication for public consultation of its draft Well-being Plan (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2017b). Between March 2018 and June 2019, I observed the PSB as it entered a phase of *planning joint action* focussing on the reports of its sub-groups.

During the period of observing the PSB's meetings, I facilitated the formation of the second core research group, as follows. In spring 2018, I reported on the work of the road verges group (see Chapter Six) to my main research partners and received support in a variety of meetings to explore further the links between public health, ecological resilience and community engagement. This process set the context for the second core group. At a NWWT Trustees' meeting, the CEO of the national partner organisation (WTW) responded to my project report by confirming its alignment to Welsh Government's intentions and drew the Trustees' attention to early discussions around forming a 'green health coalition' between environmental groups and health bodies (NWWT Trustees, 19/04/2018). NWWT's Living Landscapes Manager confirmed to me the importance of community involvement to achieve ecological improvements and was attracted to the idea of scaling up projects through cluster development[71], pointing out this would also benefit reserves conservation (Living Landscapes Manager, 18/05/18). The Trust's People and Wildlife Manager also recognised the importance of aligning his work programmes with the wider work of public health in North Wales (emails, P&W Manager, January 2018). Sharing my project report with the PSB gained the attention of the Public Health and NRW representatives, who met with me to discuss it further. They identified their common interest in developing environmental activities as part of a social model of health, a form of 'green social prescribing' (PSB_NRW, PSB_PH, 24/04/2018).

This support provided a legitimate basis to invite staff from these organisations to form a second core research group. The Senior Practitioner in public health stayed on from phase one and was joined by the Area Statements Lead Officer from NRW, and NWWT's CEO and People and Wildlife Manager. Together, we invited three people associated with green social prescribing on Anglesey – a medical director in the Health Board (BCUHB) who was Chair of Cwlwm Seiriol (CS, a green health project), the CS Project Manager and a General Practitioner who was Chair of Anglesey primary-care cluster[72]. As the need arose, we invited other colleagues and partner organisations to join us at our meetings, to develop our shared

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[71] See Chapter Six: Cluster development had been suggested by the road verges group as a way of scaling activity by identifying 'clusters' of ecological, public health and community needs which could become assets when combined reciprocally. They had compared this approach to that of the strategy of Living Landscapes and to primary-care development (see Footnote 69)

[72] Primary-care cluster: 'A cluster brings together all local services involved in health and care across a geographical area [...] Working as a cluster ensures care is better co-ordinated to promote the wellbeing of individuals and communities' http://www.primarycareone.wales.nhs.uk/primary-care-clusters (accessed 01/08/2020)

understanding of specific issues. Figure 14 illustrates the main members of the second core research group.

Social Prescribing core research group

Researcher

NRW AS Manager

Chair, Primary-care cluster

NWWT CEO

Cwlwm Seiriol Manager

NWWT People & Wildlife Manager

Cwlwm Seiriol Chair

Senior Practitioner
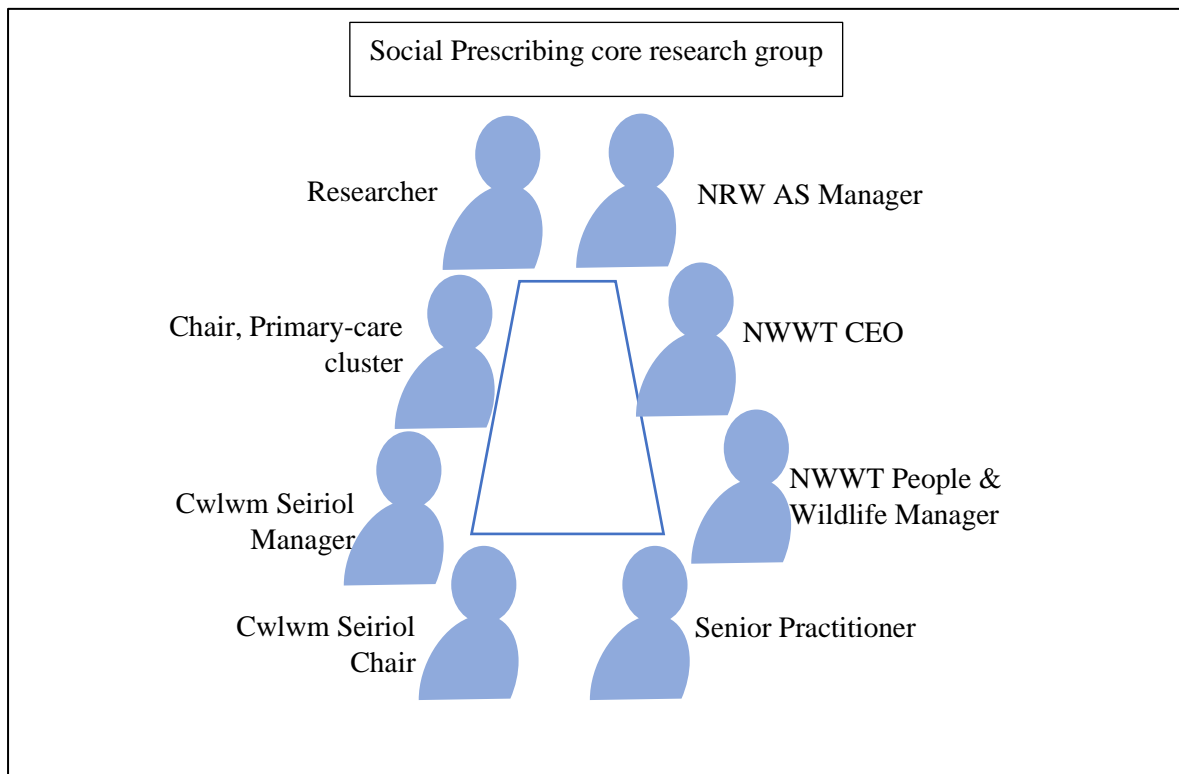
Figure 14 Social Prescribing core research group members

Between May 2018 and August 2018, the core research group members and I began to *develop a shared vision* for cross sector collaboration, taking responsibility as co-researchers to negotiate diverse interests. In late August, as we reached agreement on key strategic principles, Welsh Government opened a call for applications for a new grant, Enabling Natural Resources and Well-being (ENRaW). The grant's requirement for public and third sector collaboration, priorities of 'nature based solutions' and a 'place-based approach' (Welsh Government, 2018, para. 2.4) and explicit references to the Well-being Act, Environment Act and National Natural Resources Policy[73] were all relevant to our identified strategic principles. This led us to focus, between September 2018 and December 2018, on *planning joint action* to develop an application with other partner organisations for ENRaW funding. Our focus on joint action continued into the winter of 2018/19 and despite a lack of success in obtaining funding, culminated in a joint planning workshop in June 2019.

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[73] National Natural Resources Policy (NNRP), see explanation in Chapter One

In comparison to the road verges group, the greater managerial responsibilities of the social prescribing group restricted their time for meetings and the extent to which they could share boundary-spanning and leadership with me. In these circumstances, by participating in multiple streams of enquiry (see Chapter Five, *developing five streams of enquiry*) I gained the information I needed to assist my multiple researcher roles and maintain the critical-relational approach of the core group. To actively build *relational* trust and mutual understanding, I combined the roles of reflective scientist (presenting information about organisations' strategies and social prescribing), knowledge broker (conveying information from other sources) and process facilitator, (sustaining conversations between meetings and creating links to other streams of enquiry). Through participation in national forums, I became aware of the imminent ENRaW funding and its significance for cross-sector collaboration in the context of the Well-being Act (NPB network, 02/08/2018), giving me the confidence to introduce the grant to the core group (Core research group, 28/09/2018). As the group discussed plans for joint action, my understanding of the wider system supported me to act as change agent to enhance *critical* awareness and encourage action that would support weaker interests. As we encountered a lack of capacity to write the grant application I self-reflexively questioned the tension between transferring responsibility and authority to the co-researchers for their actions and retaining a role as facilitator. As I explore in the section '*planning joint action*' below, I managed this tension by drawing on my understanding of the systemic enquiry to inform and co-ordinate but not lead the co-writing process.

In the following two main sections of the chapter, *developing a shared vision* and *planning joint action,* I describe the experiences of the PSB and social prescribing group as cross-sector networks. I divide each section into chronologically ordered subsections relating to each meeting of the two groups. Quotes relate to the meeting referenced at the start of each subsection, unless otherwise noted and are attributed to specific participants in brackets. I also include extracts from my fieldnotes (written during each meeting), journals (later reflections on the meetings) and other participants and research observations.

PART I Developing a shared vision

In this section, I explore the PSB and core research group's contrasting efforts to develop a shared vision. Following Jessop's (2000) analysis of reflexive rationality, I focus on their capacity to negotiate a consensus by creating a culture of dialogue, pluralism and heterarchy, and the constraints on this culture. I explore how their negotiations raised each group's critical

awareness of power relationships amongst the collaborating partners and between the network and its meta-governance.

Having published their draft well-being assessments for Gwynedd and Anglesey in January 2017, the PSB members began to discuss which aspects of well-being they would prioritise for joint action. It was at this point in their development that I began to attend the Board's meetings. I describe here their efforts to reach consensus and show how their negotiations were constrained as they replicated the separated and hierarchical structures of their member organisations. I describe the internal conflict and exclusion of practitioners and communities this created. I show how these effects were reinforced by a lack of reflexivity in the bodies managing the PSB.

Following this description of the PSB, I give an account of the second core research group beginning with its establishment in May 2018. I describe how we developed reflexive relationships and critical awareness which motivated us to explore ways to collaborate. I show how our critical reflection on practice revealed how resource dependency and managerial accountability constrained collaborative capacity. I explore how we adapted line management practices, promoted a community-centred approach and developed a strategic basis for interorganisational relationships to change these constraints.

PSB February 2017 – January 2018
The first meeting I observed of the PSB, in February 2017, was held in a large meeting room in a conference centre, with the members seated formally around a lengthy series of tables. The location, in Parc Menai business park (Gwynedd) adjacent to the main road and rail bridges to Anglesey provided a neutral meeting point for the two Councils and reflected the scope of the other members' work across both counties. The size of the room, its layout and the lack of a soundproof box for concurrent translation (from Welsh to English for a small number of members) made for difficult acoustics and were the focus of many complaints. Future meetings at the conference centre were held in a smaller room and the Partnerships Manager (whose facilitative role I introduced in the Introductory Chapter) made efforts to rotate the meeting around the members' own venues, aiding both communication and familiarity with the multiple organisations.

February 2017
The main purpose of the Board's 2017 winter meeting was to reach agreement on the final version of its well-being assessment (PSB, 24/02/2017).

This and future meetings indicated the PSB's commitment to the principles of collaboration and engagement. In response to the Partnerships Manager's presentation of draft well-being assessments for Gwynedd and Anglesey, Board members noted their pride in the 'radically different approach' of this PSB compared to others in North Wales to involve local communities in the assessments' development (Emergency Services representative). During the meeting, the CEO of Gwynedd Council and Leader of Anglesey Council both stated their aspirations for the Board's collaboration, to 'work together for the greater good' and 'to change the way of working.'

The assessments indicated the diverse aspects of well-being the PSB would need to consider, summarising them under seven main 'messages' of communities, the environment, health, Welsh language, changing demography, jobs and housing, and childhood experiences (Papers 5A, 5B, PSB, 24/02/2017). Adding to this complexity, the Board considered the health needs assessment for North Wales (conducted by the Regional Partnership Board, RPB[74]) and the Area Statements[75] of the condition of the environment (conducted by NRW). Members noted the additional challenges these reports created, as the different legislative timetable had prevented their inclusion in the assessment (Gwynedd Council Manager) and their different geographical scales created potentially conflicting local and regional priorities (Chair).

Also evident in this meeting and reiterated in future meetings, was the PSB's unfamiliarity with interorganisational working but growing understanding of mutual benefits and the importance of trust and inclusivity. The BCUHB representative presented an initiative to integrate social and health-care services (called Five Days in a Room) and focussed on the importance of developing trusting relationships between local authorities and the health sector. A presentation by Parc Eryri promoted the multiple social, health and economic as well as environmental benefits of the national park. During the tea-break, the NRW representative spoke to me of growing 'synergies' between the work of NRW, Parc Eryri and Public Health. However, members indicated a broader culture of exclusion as they noted the failure to include third sector organisations in the BCUHB initiative or to consult the University in the RPB needs assessment, and the risk that budget cuts would reduce the capacity for community engagement.

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[74] The Regional Partnership Board (RPB) was established under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (as explained in Chapter One). It provides arrangements for the local authority and the health board to carry out their functions in partnership.

[75] Area Statements – see Chapter One.

In the PSB's next meeting, the Partnerships Manager focussed on supporting members to agree on areas for collective action based on both their draft well-being assessment and detailed comments from the Future Generations Commissioner's Office (PSB, 13/04/2017). To facilitate discussion, the Partnerships Manager rearranged the long tables into small groups. However, dialogue was limited by a lack of time for preparation and meetings, and tensions between members' interests and in the PSB's relationship to external bodies became clear.

Discussing the Commissioner's letter, some members admitted they had only had time to skim-read it and asked the PSB administrator to highlight points of specific interest. Others expressed concerns about a lack of time to respond to all the letter's recommendations and a lack of capacity to deliver the complex requirements of the Well-being Act following a decade of budget cuts. Two further agenda items raised members' concerns about working on a regional basis. Discussing a grant for North Wales PSBs, Gwynedd and Anglesey CEOs questioned Welsh Government's intentions to restructure local authorities into regional boards. They pointed to the risk of 'working to the lowest denominator' (Anglesey CEO) as they emphasised their priorities for Welsh language and local community engagement. Underlining this point, they decided not to consider the recommendations of the regional North Wales Public Sector Equality Network until it provided its report in Welsh as well as English, highlighting the irony of this omission.

To reach agreement on the PSB's well-being assessment, the Partnerships Manager encouraged a focus on how working together could 'add value' to the work of the member organisations and contribute to the national well-being goals. However, rather than exploring mutual benefits I noted that 'members veered between focussing on the detailed background to each headline message, deciding which single organisation was responsible for each, and raising areas of conflict between messages' (Fieldnotes, 13/04/2017). Open conflict was avoided by the Partnerships Manager proposing to collate notes from each discussion group for her to consider further with experts in each organisation. However, members noted their limited availability for further discussions as a Board, reinforcing their earlier concerns about their capacity to address the complex requirements of the Well-being Act.

June 2017

By the next meeting (PSB, 20/06/2017) the Board's well-being assessments had been published. The Partnerships Manager explained to the PSB that she had discussed them with the members individually to overcome the lack of time for group meetings, and the assessments

now had an expanded list of nine headline 'messages' with the addition of 'the effects of poverty on well-being' and 'transport' (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2017a, 2017c).

The indications of a lack of consensus on the importance of inclusivity (in April's meeting) resurfaced in a discussion of the process to determine the PSB's well-being objectives. The Partnerships Manager stated her plan to hold a series of workshops over the summer to seek the opinions of practitioners from public bodies, other organisations and community groups on priorities. Although members again expressed pride in the approach to community engagement, they questioned how 'priorities' would be chosen (NRW), how these would distinguish between existing work and the 'additional' activity of the Board (Gwynedd CEO) and noted the need to 'integrate [the chosen objectives] with public bodies own plans' (Anglesey CEO). A presentation by Anglesey CVC on principles of engagement (based on Participation Cymru, 2011) prompted questions about her focus on empowerment. I noted 'members are unfamiliar with encouraging people to raise issues of importance to them and supporting them to solve problems' (Fieldnotes, 20/06/2017). Comments about the duplication of 'consultation' by multiple organisations (BCUHB) and the risk of 'raising people's expectations' (Gwynedd Leader), indicated a more instrumental approach by some members.

The PSB members continued to express their awareness of the complexity of cross-sector collaboration as they considered a report from the Chair (BCUHB representative). Updating the Board on the 'Five Days in a Room' initiative, she described it as a form of 'systems-thinking' intended to change institutional culture. Gwynedd CEO underlined its innovative nature, calling it 'the most important project that the Board has seen.' While members praised the recent inclusion of third sector organisations (addressing CVCs' concerns expressed in their February meeting), they highlighted the difficulty of changing hierarchical systems (Police) and the risks that regional structures (for example the RPB) would undermine local agreements (Gwynedd CEO). However, further opportunities to develop mutual understanding were limited. A presentation from NRW on links between the environment and well-being was postponed due to a lack of time for the representative to prepare. Consequently, the Parc Eryri representative's related request for a discussion of social prescribing was also postponed.

October 2017
The focus of the PSB's next meeting was on the Partnership Manager's draft report which recommended well-being objectives (PSB, 04/10/2017). The report was based on a series of 18 workshops in both Anglesey and Gwynedd with third sector organisations, practitioners and

managers in public bodies. These were facilitated by the Partnerships Manager and PSB members were invited, although few attended. Using NVivo software I had assisted her to summarise over 40 pages of feedback into common themes, building the relational aspect of my research approach by extending my role as reflective scientist to help her.

Prior to the Board's discussion of the report, I was invited by the Chair to discuss my research, again reflecting my role as reflective scientist but also as knowledge broker. I used a systemic diagram based on Part I of the literature review (Chapter Two) to facilitate a discussion of the Board's interpersonal, community and interorganisational relationships and constraints. Although they declared the PSB's aim 'to improve the lives of people in Gwynedd and Anglesey' (Gwynedd Leader) and 'provide a better service to residents' (Gwynedd CVC), members did not have a clearly defined vision of how that improvement would happen or what difference the PSB would make. Working relationships on the Board lacked 'give and take' (Gwynedd CEO) and at the close of the meeting (following a tense discussion of the proposed well-being objectives) one representative commented 'I don't hold much hope if we have to rely on our personal relationships.' They expressed a range of rationales for community engagement, with leaders of the councils seeing themselves as the 'voice of the community', implying a representative form of engagement, and others arguing for 'more than just asking opinions or consultation' (Gwynedd CEO) and emphasising the need to involve people in decisions (Anglesey CVC CEO). There was limited discussion of the barriers posed by their organisations' structures, with some expressing their desire to focus instead on opportunities (Gwynedd CVC, Police).

The PSB's uncertainty in previous meetings over the purpose of engagement and the process of determining well-being objectives constrained their discussion of the Partnerships Manager's draft well-being objectives. Her report emphasised the workshop participants' desire for collaboration, 'there is no need for new ideas, there is good work happening now, [but] the lack of collaboration and the lack of understanding of what is happening is a barrier to the success of the work' (Paper B, PSB 04/10/2017). However, rather than discuss their contribution to themes categorised in the report as cross-cutting issues for joint action, members questioned the use of workshops to arrive at objectives. They expressed a preference for the process of other North Wales PSBs, where their organisations had presented recommendations directly to the Board. They also questioned how to select 'priorities', on the one hand stating, 'all these [objectives] are priorities for the PSB' (Police) and on the other

demanding a 'list of actions to prioritise' (Gwynedd Leader) and querying the absence of the 'Five Days in a Room' initiative (Gwynedd CEO, Anglesey CEO).

The tension created by members' refusal to discuss the draft objectives and rejection of the report led the Welsh Government and NRW representatives to request a short discussion at the end of the meeting with the Chair and the Partnerships Manager, who invited me to join them. In this reflexive discussion, we reflected on the need for the PSB to feel involved in interpreting the summer workshops, and they decided the next meeting would take the form of a workshop to discuss the detailed feedback and agree objectives.

November 2017
The PSB's next meeting focussed on agreeing objectives (PSB, 06/11/2017). The Partnerships Manager had prepared two papers to facilitate discussion. Paper A summarised key principles to underly the approach to action, based on the summer workshops. Paper B set out the links between the PSB's well-being assessment messages, national well-being goals, public bodies' well-being plans and actions suggested variously by PSB members, the summer workshops and the Future Generations Commissioner. She split the Board into two groups to discuss these papers and reach agreement on the principles, actions and well-being objectives. I describe here how a combination of factors, related to unfamiliarity with the Well-being Act and the process of negotiating agreement, led to open conflict and eventually to a semblance of consensus.

I noted during the meeting that the PSB members' unfamiliarity with the Well-being Act was revealed as they discussed the 'principles' set out in Paper A (Fieldnotes, 06/11/2017). Alongside the principles of collaboration, integration and community engagement (reflecting the Well-being Act's principles of sustainable development), Paper A included the 'Welsh language' and 'equality' without acknowledgement that these are national well-being *goals*. It also included a definition of 'integration' that differed from that used by the Well-being Act. Paper A treated 'integration' as a form of merger: 'We will look to integrate services if evidence shows this would ensure the best results for communities.' In contrast, the Act defines integration as considering the impact of each body's objectives on the well-being goals and on other bodies' objectives. I had earlier reflected with the Partnerships Manager (PM, pre-meeting, PSB 06/11/2017) that without a focus on the latter definition, the PSB risked not including each other's interests as they negotiated consensus. She invited me to explain the distinction and the Board adapted its definition to combine both descriptions but stated they did not want to use a definition 'just because it's in the Act' (Gwynedd CEO).

Members indicated unfamiliarity with the process of reaching agreement as they formed two groups. As they discussed Paper B, they questioned the value of this split, stated opinions rather than engaging in dialogue, and none suggested a framework for the discussion or took the lead to ensure each representative was invited to express their perspective (Fieldnotes, 06/11/2017). The link in Paper B between local well-being messages and national well-being goals offered a framework to determine objectives and assess the proposed actions. For example, the report linked the well-being assessment message of 'support, develop and maintain healthy community spirit' to five of the national well-being goals and to eight suggested actions. However, rather than discuss the various actions and how each organisation could contribute to them, members focussed on accountability. They stated the need for the PSB to 'be accountable' (Anglesey Leader), 'hold someone responsible' for each objective (Gwynedd CEO), assess the evidence that actions 'will work' (Public Health) and set tangible and local outcomes for each objective (BCUHB, Anglesey Leader). Gwynedd CEO summarised this as needing 'to step back from the report and think what would add value through everyone working together.'

As the Partnerships Manager attempted to reach agreement by narrowing the list of well-being objectives, the PSB began to prioritise rather than negotiate. Rather than pursue the Public Health representative's suggestion of choosing 'top priorities which are common to everyone' members began to state their own priorities. The Partnerships Manager referred to earlier discussion in her group, selecting some of the nine well-being 'messages' as objectives: 'young people's well-being, housing, older people's care, Welsh language, poverty and jobs.' Pressure to agree to these priorities increased as the Chair reminded the Board of the tight timetable set by the Act to decide, consult, go to scrutiny committees and publish before May 2018. Members began to talk over each other, listing relevant organisations working on each of these issues and possible strategies.

The PSB's failure to treat either the Well-being Act or Paper B's recommendations as a framework to negotiate agreement led to open conflict. When the NRW representative asserted the importance of including the environment as an objective, there was an angry response from Gwynedd Leader, supported by Gwynedd CEO. They rejected the need to 'protect the environment', stating that it conflicted with economic development. Some semblance of harmony was restored when the NRW representative and Partnerships Manager quietly raised the statutory duty to consider the impact on the environment. Police and BCUHB representatives supported the University representative's suggestion that the environment

contributed to each of the priorities and Gwynedd Leader reluctantly acknowledged his own enjoyment of the environment and the need to understand its value to communities. Extending this approach, Anglesey CVC suggested assessing each objective's contribution to social, economic and environmental outcomes 'to include everyone's interests.' However, quelling further discussion Gwynedd CEO stated that failure to agree upon objectives would lead to his departure from the Board.

There was a pause, then the PSB ended on apparent consensus. The Partnerships Manager restated the list of priorities, including the environment and the Board agreed that she would draft well-being objectives and principles for agreement at the next meeting, scheduled for January. However, conversations following this tense meeting belied the superficial agreement. Meeting with the NRW representative the next day (to discuss setting up the first core research group), she expressed her anger at the dismissive attitudes displayed, lack of vocal support from other members and the relative power of the Councils through their multiple representatives on the PSB. She was cautious about including the environment as a *contributor* to each objective, stating that it was important for the environment itself to be an objective (NRW, 07/11/2017). The Partnerships Manager phoned me, asking 'what do you think went wrong?' (Partnerships Manager, 09/11/2017). We reflected on the apparent lack of preparation of members for this and previous discussions, and she suggested this showed an over-reliance on her to facilitate the meeting. She agreed with members' suggestions to include the environment's contribution to each objective but noted that she would discuss this further with NRW.

January 2018

The detrimental effects of the previous meeting's conflict soon became clear in the PSB's January meeting (PSB, 08/01/2018). I describe here how, as the members finalised their well-being objectives there was a loss of commitment, a failure to accept shared responsibility and persistent competition between priorities.

Opening the meeting, the Partnerships Manager announced that she had accepted a job in the Health Board, and this would be her last meeting with the PSB. In a later interview with me, she explained she felt the PSB members were there 'to represent their own organisations rather than there to act as a Board' and that some members' voices were not being heard (Partnerships Manager, 22/01/2018). Her feeling that some were not willing to speak up and offer her or each other support during conflict had led to her decision to leave. However, she added that she felt the Board would change its focus to 'achievement' now, having 'reached agreement on the

priorities.' I reflected (Journal, 22/01/2018) that her sense of the lack of inclusion of some members' interests reflected an earlier conversation I had with the Public Health representative. In that meeting (PSB_PH, 23/10/2017), the Consultant referred to a 'two-tier' status of statutory and invited PSB members and expressed concern that discussions did not include all opinions. She stated that although she and others did not always contribute, silence was not necessarily 'corroboration' but that she was uncertain 'how to get issues on the agenda.'

The Partnerships Manager went on to inform the PSB (08/01/2018) that since the November meeting, she had agreed objectives with individual members and that the NRW representative had met with senior staff at the two Councils to discuss the risks of climate change. However, these negotiations and a presentation at the meeting failed to shift the Board's discussion from competing priorities to adopting shared responsibility. NRW and a colleague from Gwynedd Council gave a dramatic presentation on the effects of rising sea-levels on a community in Gwynedd, expected to be the first community[76] in the UK at risk of being destroyed by climate change. They asked the PSB to coordinate multiple organisations' work to mitigate the effects of climate change on communities and emphasised the detrimental effects on social, health and economic interests as well as on the environment, appealing to members' interests. However, PSB members questioned the Board's authority to undertake the work of coordination, stating the lack of resources and the scale and risk of the task (Gwynedd Leader, Housing, University, Anglesey Leader). The risk included a loss of political support from communities, indicated by the local community's dissatisfaction with the level of communication with public bodies (Gwynedd Leader). Rather than shoulder collective responsibility, the Board decided to include the risk of flooding as an objective led by NRW and to 'lobby' Welsh Government to take greater responsibility for the effects of climate change.

Competition between priorities, rather than agreement on a shared goal, persisted despite the Partnerships Manager's explanation that the PSB needed to justify the process of agreement rather than the objectives themselves. I noted, following a later meeting with public bodies (Journal, 02/08/2018), that this accorded with the Wales Audit Office's expectation for 'public bodies to be able to demonstrate how the Act is shaping what they do' and its recognition of the challenging nature of this task: 'Wales Audit Office welcomes honest self-reflection on progress and will take account of the fact that it will take time for bodies to thoroughly consider how to apply the Act and deliver real and meaningful change' (Auditor General for Wales,

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[76] Fairbourne is a coastal town in south Gwynedd at risk of coastal flooding. See Fairbourne Moving Forward (accessed 04/04/2022)

2018, p. 25). However, the failure to agree shared objectives was reflected in the PSB's published draft well-being plan, which contained only a broad statement of the Board's intention 'to make a real difference to the lives of residents and ensure that public service providers work together to achieve a common ambition for the area' (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2017b no page numbers). The plan's priorities closely reflected the strategic priorities of the statutory (and as the Public Health Consultant had reflected, most influential) members: the Councils, NRW and Health Board. These were grouped as two objectives, first, 'communities which thrive and are prosperous in the long-term' (with priorities of Welsh language, housing, poverty and climate change) and second, 'healthy and independent residents with a good quality of life' (with two health priorities).

I reflected after the meeting that 'the PSB's lack of alignment to the Well-being Act and lack of inclusivity of each other reflects their perceptions of the approach of other public bodies' (Journal, 08/01/2018). The PSB (08/01/2018) was critical of documents produced by the Future Generations Commissioner and the regional Health Board (BCUHB). They argued that the Commissioner's well-being objectives report had no connection to the national well-being goals and questioned her authority to influence the PSB's local objectives. They questioned the degree of inclusivity in developing the BCUHB strategy, highlighting a lack of attention to collaboration (Gwynedd Leader) and prevention (Parc Eryri), the exclusion of members of the PSB (University, NRW, Gwynedd CEO) and the lack of attention to the needs of local communities (Chair, Anglesey CVC).

Discussion of the PSB's shared vision

The evidence of open conflict, rejection of feedback from engagement workshops and lack of shared vision at the PSB despite the Partnerships Manager's facilitative leadership and members' commitment to collaboration and community engagement challenged my expectations. The Board did not develop the dialogue, plural integration of interests and shared leadership argued by Jessop (2000) to generate reflexive rationality and reach a negotiated consensus. Rather, the Board's lack of reflexivity shows the power of isomorphism and governmentality (as explained in Chapter Two, Part III). As I explain these conclusions in this section, all the page references refer to the narrative in the previous sections.

I observed that isomorphic pressures created by the Well-being Act and the culture of the member organisations and external institutions produced a hierarchical and individualised culture at the Board. As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue, this was not a rational decision but driven by normative, coercive and mimetic pressures. The PSB's hierarchy, with statutory

members having a greater perceived influence than invited members (see above narrative, pp. 208–209), was prompted by the distinction in the Well-being Act between 'members' and 'invited participants' (Welsh Government, 2015e, para. 30 (5)). This generated *normative* pressures on invited participants and members alike to adopt this distinction in status. These isomorphic pressures took on a *coercive* nature, to use Milbourne and Cushman's (2015) analysis, as they interacted with the power of governmentality. The PSB's self-imposed requirement to 'add value' and 'be accountable' created a self-regulating governmentality (pp. 204, 208). In combination with the hierarchy of status on the PSB this self-regulation prevented invited participants (such as Public Health) from asserting their organisations' interests (pp. 208–209). As my research narrative shows, the Councils held greater power even where statutory members (such as NRW) made a claim for priority. Weight of numbers and their line management of the Partnerships Manager allowed them to impose conditions (p. 209).

In addition, the PSB mimetically replicated hierarchy and individual responsibility. Jessop (2003) argues that higher-order governance of networks reinforces their tendency towards inequality and exclusion unless this meta-governance itself exhibits a reflexive orientation. The mimetic effect of meta-governance was displayed by PSB members who pointed to a lack of inclusivity, dialogue and community engagement in the development of regional and national bodies' strategies (p. 211). The PSB's replication of this hierarchical culture was clear in the focus on prioritisation rather than formation of joint well-being objectives (pp. 208–209). The Board demonstrated its rejection of shared ownership even as it agreed to NRW's call for a climate change objective, by the imposition of responsibility on NRW (p. 210). The PSB's instrumental treatment of engagement was evident when it dismissed the contributions of those at a practitioner level and in the third sector (p. 206), undermining the Board's political accountability, the outcome shown by Durose and Lowndes (2010).

The hierarchical and individualised culture of the PSB constrained members' capacity to develop a relational culture and critical awareness. Previous research shows that to change the dynamic of isomorphism requires the creative construction of an alternative culture (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), which Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 95–110) argue must focus on the democratic inclusion of diverse interests. Changing the power of governmentality requires the development of critical awareness to provoke the assertion of self-interests and the ethical inclusion of others' interests (Jessop, 2020, pp. 147–161). I observed the Partnerships Manager's efforts to encourage group discussion, provide frameworks to assist decision-making, engage with members between meetings and involve communities and practitioners.

She performed the roles of boundary-spanning and facilitative leadership which have been shown to enhance collaborative relationships (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Williams, 2013; Romzek *et al.*, 2014). However, members did not engage in dialogue or take shared responsibility to reach agreement on a shared vision. The competitive prioritisation, assignment of responsibility to single organisations and focus on accountability created inherent conflict (pp. 208–210), corroborating Davies' (2005, p. 315) argument about such competitive NPM practices. Members' critical awareness of this underlying conflict reduced trust and responsiveness to each other's interests, which Stout, Bartels and Love (2018) argue are necessary to develop shared leadership. Critical awareness but a lack of reflexive rationality therefore reinforced the Board's lack of inclusion of diverse interests. I concluded that the PSB's apparent consensus on its well-being objectives created a rationalised myth of partnership that disguised conflict, as shown by Schmachtel (2016) in her discussion of the micro-politics of co-creation.

Nonetheless, the PSB had some potential to develop reflexive relationships. When the Board reflected on situated collaborative action from multiple perspectives, members identified barriers created by hierarchical organisational cultures and acknowledged the risk of dominant interests. In this context, they expressed their commitment to collaboration and engagement *despite* their awareness of the challenges of changing power relationships and organisational structures (p. 205). This amounts to a 'romantic public irony' of the kind Jessop (2003) argues drives a reflexive orientation in governance. Furthermore, Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 95–110) argue that networks develop the creativity and motivation to establish an alternative culture as they encounter the dilemmas of governance. I therefore continued to attend the PSB meetings to understand how they responded to and pre-empted such dilemmas.

Social Prescribing group May 2018 – August 2018

I facilitated meetings of the social prescribing core research group in May and July 2018 and had further discussions with its members during June and August. Just as the PSB's meetings were a continuation of its initial work to develop a well-being assessment, the social prescribing group built on the foundation created by the road verges group. The Senior Practitioner's and my participation in both core groups, and my updates to the research partners during the road verges phase meant members of the group started with, on the one hand, an expectation of potential mutual benefits of collaboration between public health, environmental organisations and community groups. On the other hand, the critical reflection afforded by the first phase of action research had also raised our awareness that ecological interests are marginalised by

widespread beliefs and practices. During these summer months, therefore, I facilitated the core group's discussions with the intention of understanding whether and how we could agree a way to act collaboratively that would change the effects of these prevalent beliefs and practices.

May 2018 meeting

I continued the custom of the road verges group by holding the social prescribing group's meetings at NWWT's office in Bangor. This location was convenient for the participants, familiar to many and acted as a constant reminder to include the less influential environmental interests. In our first meeting we explored how the co-researchers' organisations could benefit from working together and what practical action we could take (Core research group, 29/05/2018).

During this meeting we developed mutual understanding through dialogue. I opened the meeting by encouraging everyone to explain their work roles, current priorities and challenges. This gave each member the opportunity to assert their organisation's interests, including 'a healthy functioning environment' (NWWT CEO), 'getting people outdoors or taking part in social activities' (CS Chair), 'youth development' (People and Wildlife Manager), 'the concept of green health' (Senior Practitioner) and meeting the requirements of the Well-being and Environment Acts (AS Lead). Each began to relate their own concerns to others' interests, immediately taking shared responsibility as co-researchers to develop a common interest. They talked of 'the obvious benefits for nature and the environment as well as personal development benefits for the young people taking part' (People and Wildlife Manager) and the 'huge impact on well-being' of NRW's policy to make land more accessible to people (AS Lead). We developed our dialogue by asking questions, gaining a better understanding of each other's work and its challenges. Each member anticipated benefits to their organisations at both a strategic and practical level from collaborating. NWWT CEO emphasised the need for a broad alliance to 'address climate change, agricultural policy, fisheries policies', stating 'a small local charity can't do it alone' and the CS Manager explained her interest in 'hearing about all the things North Wales Wildlife Trust are doing' so she could create local 'volunteering opportunities' and 'link people within these communities with their local natural environment.' Members agreed with the Senior Practitioner that social prescribing formed an 'obvious overlap between all of us', creating a context from which each organisation could gain.

Our common interest in social prescribing initially assumed a transactional relationship between the environment and health sectors, with benefits largely accruing to health. The co-researchers spoke of the 'clear health benefits' and 'skills and training' for volunteers working

on reserves (Living Landscapes Manager) and the 'increasing evidence that the outdoors is hugely important for the health and well-being of the population' (CS Chair). They assumed the need to evaluate the benefit of the environment to the lives of local people in terms of health indices, especially physical activity and obesity levels. Whereas GP practices anticipated reduced demand on primary and secondary-care services (Cluster Chair), the environmental sector was drawn in by its need for resources to manage nature reserves, put simply 'we want evidence to get money' (Living Landscapes Manager).

However, as we explored ways to improve the current state of green social prescribing by improving the links between organisations and with communities, we identified ways each organisation could benefit from the situation. The Cwlwm Seiriol Chair and Cluster Chair began to share their knowledge of social prescribing schemes on Anglesey and identified the need for greater coordination of multiple organisations' activities. A lack of 'local assets coordinators[77]' (LACs) constrained the capacity of the current social prescribing scheme (Cluster Chair). The co-researchers noted that plans to expand the LAC team and link it with local GP practices would also address both NWWT and Cwlwm Seiriol's challenges of a lack of 'relationships and trust' with disadvantaged sections of the population and disruption caused by staff turnover due to short term funding (Living Landscapes, People and Wildlife, CS Managers). Closer working between environmental groups and the LACs would address the lack of existing activities and social groups, supporting community development (Cluster and CS Chairs). It would also help to engage people of diverse age groups and interests in environmental activities (People and Wildlife Manager). Creating a link between NRW and the LAC scheme could help channel funding to environmental organisations involved in social prescribing activities (AS Lead). The discussion led the co-researchers to agree on the need for multiple organisations to 'work together in a smarter way to make sure we coordinate the providers' (Senior Practitioner) and take 'a collaborative approach, where we all pool our resources and come up with something that works and benefits local people' (CS Manager).

As we questioned each other about the current situation and plans for development, we developed a critical awareness of the unequal power of the different partners in social prescribing and the burden of risk and responsibility. These risks included exclusion of lower income groups due to fees for activities (Senior Practitioner) with the burden of subsidy falling

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[77] Local Assets Coordinators have a role as 'link workers' to receive referrals from the GP, other primary care professionals and self-referrals, hold a conversation about what is important to the individual and assist them to take part in social and other activities (Polley *et al.*, 2017)

on the Local Authority rather than the Health Board (CS Chair), dependency on the LAC to establish and run community groups (CS Manager), and an administrative burden on environmental organisations and small community groups (Cluster Chair, People and Wildlife Manager, CS Manager). Additionally, a complex mixture of funding (from the Local Authority, Health Board and directly from Welsh Government) reduced local control, increased uncertainty over long-term resources and created competition amongst communities and organisations (CS and Cluster Chairs). As they drew out these inequalities, the co-researchers began to consider not only how to benefit *from* social prescribing but how to adapt their own activities in ways that benefitted the *other* partners. In doing so, they began to identify reciprocal benefits from this ethical behaviour. For example, if the General Practitioner (GP) took a preventive approach to 'prescribe volunteering' for people with *pre*-clinical needs[78], it would minimise the burden on environmental organisations to provide additional support (Cluster Chair). This increased flow of volunteers would also reduce the reliance on funding to manage nature reserves (NWWT CEO, CS Manager). Additionally, it would 'show almost the best improvement and value for money' in terms of health outcomes (Cluster Chair).

Despite this growing understanding of reciprocal benefits, awareness of the risk of marginalisation of environmental interests persisted. As the meeting closed, the Living Landscapes Manager questioned the AS Lead from NRW:

> Obviously, the well-being agenda is all part of what you're doing now, but what are you expected to do as far as Welsh Government is concerned? It's a great thing, obviously and joined up government is great. But if you're expected to deliver outcomes that are actually measured by the NHS or Public Health Wales, you're doing their job. When are they doing your job? (Living Landscapes Manager, Core research group, 29/05/2018)

The AS Lead's reflective response, that collaborative action rested on 'mutual benefits' for each partner, was accepted by the group with the Living Landscapes Manager describing it as a 'win-win.' However, the latter's hope that this project could be presented 'to a Welsh Government minister' indicated his awareness of the historical lack of contribution of other sectors to the environment but anticipation that the action research could be different. This motivated me to arrange a further meeting, as process facilitator, to understand how we could prioritise the environment.

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[78] Pre-clinical needs – the GP Cluster Chair gave the example of obese, inactive people who are pre-diabetic but capable of taking part in physical activity without support

Despite lengthy discussions at the close of the first meeting to agree a second meeting date, as the time approached many participants found it clashed with other work priorities, indicating a lack of operational capacity for these organisations to meet to coordinate their work. We agreed to postpone the meeting to July. So, during June and early July 2018 I met some group members individually and reflected with small groups of the main research partners on the social prescribing group's initial ideas, continuing my roles as knowledge broker and process facilitator.

These conversations developed an idea for joint working linked to social prescribing that progressively included each organisation's interests. The AS Lead sparked the basic idea. Over coffee at the University's Management Centre, he pitched his idea to me for a long-distance pathway across the centre of Anglesey (AS Lead, 14/06/2018). His initial aim was to draw in tourists from the coastal footpath, to increase spending in the inland villages and towns. As he had left the first social prescribing meeting, he had discussed this idea with two managers at NWWT who had considered how the route could be designed to link multiple nature reserves across the Island, improving local people's access and opportunities for nature-based activities. To create additional ecological and local community benefits, the AS Lead and I considered the potential to develop networks of local pathways, or 'green corridors' linking villages and nature reserves which over time would create the intended long-distance route.

I relayed the idea of green corridors to the Senior Practitioner by email (19/06/2018) and then by meeting at his office (22/06/2018). His initial aims were to coordinate the activities of multiple environmental organisations and communicate these opportunities to people who would benefit. He reacted to the AS Lead's idea positively, seeing it as providing a 'strategic incentive' to coordinate activities and to encourage the health sector to signpost people to them. He stated it complemented his own strategy of facilitating a 'Green Health' network of environmental and health organisations (part of a BCUHB initiative to increase physical activity, Let's Get Moving North Wales). He also saw how the idea supported the primary healthcare sector to engage communities in co-production by finding out 'what would drive the change' for population groups and 'then trying to work together across our respective organisations to fulfil their aspirations.'

The CS Manager (phone call, 27/06/2018) confirmed the relevance of the idea of green corridors to local needs in her area. The focus of public funds on maintaining the coastal path

and surrounding AONB[79] as a tourist destination meant inland footpaths and spaces for wildlife lacked resources. Working with local communities, her project had identified needs to link up pathways to create new routes and a need to encourage more volunteers to take part in such activities. She saw linking the green corridors idea to social prescribing as helping to meet both needs.

However, discussing the idea with PSB representatives and NWWT Trustees revealed constraints on staff time to take part in such collaborative activity. First, I met with the PSB representatives for NRW and Public Health due to the involvement of their staff in the core group. I invited the CEO of Anglesey CVC to join us, as her organisation managed the main social prescribing scheme on the Island, the LAC scheme (PSB_NRW, Anglesey CVC, Public Health, 05/07/2018). Although they agreed on the potential benefits to each organisation's strategic priorities, the Public Health Consultant raised concerns about 'governance arrangements, accountability and ownership' of the proposed project. She explained the need for 'reporting lines' so that staff of each organisation would not go beyond their job roles.

The next day I attended a workshop held by the PSB's climate change sub-group, also attended by the Senior Practitioner (PSB Climate Change, 06/07/2018). Discussing the idea of governance with him and with the NRW representative, they explained the need to report to line managers. We explored how such reporting could emphasise the mutual and reciprocal benefits of collaboration so each partner would justify their involvement according to the contribution to their *own* organisation's interests. I reflected (Journal, 06/07/2018) that 'to sustain the partnership this would necessarily mean that each partner had to consider how the project also contributed to *other* organisations' interests.' Reporting would therefore promote an ethically reflexive stance in the collaborating network rather than accountability to a dominant interest. In my role as process facilitator but also change maker, I drafted a possible reporting framework[80] by combining principles of 'agile project management[81]' with principles of developing interpersonal relationships for collaboration (as explored in Chapter Two). This received the PSB Public Health representative's approval, and she encouraged me to present the green corridors idea to the PSB (PSB_PH, 14/08/2018).

Soon after the conversation at the climate change workshop I met with NWWT Trustees (Trustees, 12/07/2018). The governance framework helped to allay their concerns about the

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[79] AONB Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, see footnote 58 Chapter Six
[80] Appendix 9 Reflexive governance framework
[81] Agile Project Management: an iterative process to change established practices, see Augustine, *et al.*, (2005)

idea of green corridors: how to fund such projects (Treasurer) and how NWWT would gain a competitive advantage from our research or be able to 'monetise' it (Wrexham Trustee #2). By showing how each partner organisation would focus on its own interests but also contribute to others, the Trustees shifted their stance from achieving competitive advantage to broadening the alliance of partner organisations who 'know how to collaborate' (Trustees Chair). The discussion prompted the Trustees to offer more of the Trust's resources for the research and permission for the CEO to prioritise the collaborative research over other tasks.

During this period therefore, the AS Lead's idea developed to include elements of economic benefit, doorstep activities for public health benefit, co-production with communities to meet their needs and increase the flow of volunteers, and the potential for ecological connectivity. These reciprocal benefits created a mechanism to coordinate environmental activities (to create local networks) and boost the health sector's communication with communities (to take up local opportunities for physical activity). Its development prompted the adaptation of reporting structures based on the idea of reciprocal benefit, encouraging a pluralist approach to governance by the PSB and Trustees.

July 2018 meeting

All the social prescribing group members except the AS Lead were available to meet mid-July, so we held our second meeting at NWWT's offices, this time in a room opening out into the wildlife garden as the more formal board room was already in use (Core research group, 17/07/2018). My hope was that we would agree upon a version of the green corridors idea and begin to plan how to act on it. Prior to this meeting I shared two documents with the co-researchers to aid mutual understanding and encourage a focus on joint action. First, a diagram summarising each organisation's strategies, priorities and main challenges. Second, a summary of articles about social prescribing[82] that I had gathered from the organisations' websites and from references to them in other meetings.

Our initial discussion confirmed the usefulness and relevance of these documents and created an opportunity to exchange contact details of colleagues in each organisation who could help the co-researchers. In addition, the Senior Practitioner and CS Chair confirmed that the model for social prescribing in my summary document, involving a link worker working closely with referrals from primary healthcare and supporting them to take part in social activities, was familiar to them. I then used a paper Ordnance Survey (OS) map of Anglesey, to recap the

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[82] Appendix 10 Summary of Green Social Prescribing

developing idea for green corridors. The group agreed on the benefits to the economy of drawing tourism inland, the value of engaging local people in determining new networks of pathways, and the importance of linking local networks to GP practices to encourage signposting to activities. We shared our knowledge of small projects working in local communities and the Local Authority's strategic plans to improve paths and Active Travel routes across the Island.

Despite this initial agreement, the value to wildlife and mechanism to link to healthcare were unclear. Acting as change agent, I therefore encouraged NWWT CEO to explain the strategic concept of ecological connectivity and the CS Chair to explain the idea of social prescribing. As they explained these concepts, the other co-researchers' questions drew out the barriers to ecology and public health caused by commonly held beliefs and practices. Conservation work to connect habitats and increase their permeability into the surrounding landscape was constrained by the view that 'agricultural land is seen as sacrosanct', limiting habitat creation to 'that scruffy bit around the edge' (NWWT CEO). Historical public health messages of a 'healthy lifestyle' placed responsibility on *individuals* to improve their health (NWWT CEO), but had ignored the way 'we, as a *society* have created environments that are not conducive for people to have a choice' (Senior Practitioner). The CS Chair explained how social prescribing aimed to address these barriers by linking people to social groups and opportunities for physical activity, particularly in natural environments. Co-researchers reiterated the need to reduce inequality of access, 'this is about inequality and it's only the people who've got the money and the education who can access it' (NWWT CEO), with the CS Manager pointing to the additional impact of being 'time poor.'

This realisation of the inequality of the current situation led the group to agree with the Senior Practitioner's conclusion that 'this is multi-faceted, and it has to be multi-organisation. That's why it's important to have this conversation.' Building on this commitment to collaboration, I encouraged the co-researchers to discuss the links between their organisations and with schemes for social prescribing on Anglesey. By exposing different perspectives, we began to identify barriers and ways to overcome them, including the lack of community groups, staff skills and time, and managerial capacity which limited inter-organisational relationships. In doing so, we further developed the sense of reciprocal relationships between the partner organisations that had been sparked in our May meeting. From practical suggestions to pooled contacts and local knowledge, and from ideas for local conversations to the Senior Practitioner's Green Health forum, we found ways to link the partner organisations and wider

landowners to coordinate activity at a landscape scale, to link multiple communities and local nature reserves. This discussion drew out the tension between protecting habitats and making them accessible to local communities. It provoked a creative suggestion to focus on the 'additional well-being benefit' of getting people to take part in conservation activity rather than simply visiting nature (Senior Practitioner).

As the meeting ended, I briefly raised the issue of governance and my suggested reporting structure. The co-researchers were all confident of their managers' support to continue with the research and future action. In addition, NWWT CEO recognised that the emphasis on mutual benefits had helped gain support for her involvement from the Trustees. The Senior Practitioner was glad to be able to share the document with his line manager, the PSB representative, emphasising the 'really tight performance management structure' he now had to work within. As I cleared the refreshments away, the co-researchers began to discuss with each other ways to begin to act on their ideas.

July – August 2018 interim discussions

In the weeks following the core research group's July meeting I kept in touch with the co-researchers by email, phone and short meetings to understand how they began to develop links between their organisations and with communities. As knowledge broker, I also attended a meeting of the main social prescribing (LAC) scheme on Anglesey, to understand their plans and share the research group's ideas.

These discussions revealed multiple barriers to the partner organisations' collaboration. The project managers for CS and NWWT's People and Wildlife strategy identified a lack of skills and confidence in the community to run nature-based activities and a lack of existing activities (CS and People and Wildlife Managers, 24/07/2018). In addition, although the People and Wildlife Manager was keen to bring together experienced and newer volunteers in events on Anglesey (following a suggestion from the Senior Practitioner), he had difficulty contacting the LAC scheme's manager to set up a referral process. Similar barriers were stated at the meeting of the LAC scheme. Held at the host organisation, Medrwn Môn's[83] premises, the meeting was attended by the LAC Manager, Cluster Chair and three representatives of health and social care referring organisations. They explained the need to develop more community groups and activities, enhance skills of local assets coordinators, increase the commitment of primary healthcare and establish referral systems (LAC, 07/08/2018).

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[83] Medrwn Môn is the third sector infrastructure organisation or CVC for Anglesey

My discussions with the co-researchers and the LAC group also revealed a tendency for health interests to dominate as partner organisations made efforts to overcome these barriers. The CS Manager pursued ideas to train volunteers and organisations' staff to lead activities but focussed on activities *in* nature (such as mindfulness) rather than practical conservation *of* nature. I questioned her approach, as it contradicted the suggestion in the July meeting that the latter would have more benefit to health as well as the environment. She referred to other green prescribing schemes in England which had focussed on similar activities and explained her intention to use their model on Anglesey. However, the People and Wildlife Manager agreed this would not incorporate NWWT's interests and risked shifting the focus away from ecology to health (CS and People and Wildlife Managers, 24/07/2018). His position was later repeated by NWWT CEO, (13/08/2018) and NWWT did not take up the offer of training. Similarly, as the LAC partners discussed the need for evaluation (LAC, 07/08/2018) they emphasised the benefits to health rather than to the community development partner hosting the scheme, reflecting the source of funding. The lack of focus on community development also constrained the LAC Manager's relationships with other organisations, as she expressed a sense of constant pressure to contribute to other needs. I reflected that this sense of instrumentalism combined with a lack of an online integrated referral system and time pressures explained the LAC Manager's delayed response to the People and Wildlife Manager (Journal 08/08/2018).

Despite this tendency for health dominance, the LAC partnership meeting and a discussion with NWWT CEO and Media Officer identified the potential to build mutually beneficial relationships with communities and other partners. At the LAC meeting (LAC, 07/08/2018), the LAC Manager explained the design of the Anglesey scheme and confirmed that the coordinators acted as a link worker, like the model in my summary of social prescribing. The coordinator focussed on holding 'what matters' conversations with individuals and supporting them to act on issues of importance to them rather than imposing a service. The LAC Manager continued, however, by explaining how (in contrast to the social prescribing literature) the LAC also identified needs and opportunities to *develop* community assets, whether soft skills of people, physical assets or social groups. I noted that: 'in this way, the community development interests of the third sector host are met as well as the health interests of the referring sectors' (Fieldnotes, 07/08/2018). Later, I discussed the core research group's ideas with NWWT CEO and Media Officer, as he had also expressed interest in learning from the research (13/08/2018). They focussed on helping communities take 'ownership' of their local nature reserves to manage the habitats themselves. We reflected on NWWT's new pilot project, 'Our Wild

Communities' which encouraged communities to look after their local reserves. I explained the LAC approach to identify needs and build assets together with communities, and we agreed to encourage the project team to adopt this assets-based approach to explore how the project could take account of communities' needs and capacities in mutually beneficial ways.

As the co-researchers began to plan action, I attended a meeting of the National Public Bodies network (NPB, 02/08/2018). Members explained that they had voluntarily established this network to explore how they could respond to the Well-being Act, especially as many did not have time to participate in all the PSBs. It included representatives with national responsibilities from NRW, Public Health Wales, National Museum Wales, WCVA, Wales Local Government Association (WLGA), Higher Education Council for Wales, the Future Generations Commissioner's Office (who included seconded staff from Arts Council Wales and Sport Wales) and Wales Audit Office. At this meeting I first heard of the Welsh Government's intention to open calls for a new grant focussed on cross-sector collaboration and the environment. In the light of this, I planned to contact the core research group again after their summer break to reflect on their action so far (as reflexive scientist) and discuss the potential relevance of the grant (as process facilitator).

Discussion of the social prescribing group's shared vision
The natural break afforded by a common period of co-researchers' holidays created an opportunity for reflection on the social prescribing group's experiences. Like the first core group, we had developed reflexive rationality and critical awareness as a community of practice. However, we were unable to take immediate action. I interpreted this as a lack of collaborative capacity, following Sullivan and Skelcher's (2002) analysis. However, I also inferred a power dynamic of hegemony (as discussed in Chapter Two, Part III) from the effect of prevalent beliefs and practices to limit the co-researchers' commitment to collaboration.

By late summer, this second core research group had reached agreement on social prescribing as a context for collaboration, through the process Jessop (2002) describes as reflexive rationality. We had increased mutual understanding through dialogue, repeatedly considered each other's perspectives and taken shared responsibility to develop a mutually beneficial plan for action. I observed that our growing critical awareness of the domination of ecological interests and inequalities in health motivated us to develop consensus based not only on gaining from the situation but on contributing to each other's needs (see earlier narrative, pp. 215–216). We thus developed both an associative and communal rationale for joint action, reducing the

risk of domination by a single interest, as I explained with reference to Weber (1968) in Chapter Two.

Through this critical and relational process, we created the human and social capital of a CoP and cross-sector alliance. Sharing our experiential and technical knowledge developed human capital which enabled us to define the problems for collaboration and develop creative solutions (pp. 215–216, 221–222), the result described by Agranoff (2008). Our critical awareness of the constraints on each organisation's action motivated us to form an alliance (p. 215), creating the social capital which Dow *et al.*, (2013) demonstrate can accomplish the co-researchers' desire to coordinate action at scale and influence policy. I interpreted these developments as the formation of a critical-relational CoP.

I observed that the core group's trust and commitment to collaboration also began to change relationships between their organisations and with meso-levels of management. At an interorganisational level, the co-researchers initially assumed a hierarchical relationship, with environmental interests subservient to health. As we combined the strategic principles of their various organisations, we developed a consensus based on reciprocal benefit. This reciprocity created an inherent incentive for the organisations to coordinate their work and to communicate with communities (p. 217). The shared vision therefore created the 'heterarchical' relationships or 'horizontal self-organisation' which Jessop (2002, p. 6) argues characterise reflexive rationality.

At the meso-level of governance, the core group's experiences provided evidence of the capacity of reflexive networks to create a reflexive orientation in meta-governance. This develops Jessop's (2003) analysis of the 'requisite reflexivity' of meta-governance by showing how this orientation can be generated by the interaction between the micro-relations of the network and meso-levels of management. The group's reciprocity developed the focus of line management from the effective delivery of a single interest to also support the democratic integration of interests (pp. 218–219). This provides evidence of a shift from conflicting to complementary principles of effectiveness and democracy, the result anticipated by Sørensen and Torfing (2005, 2009). The consequent increase in the co-researchers' confidence to collaborate strengthened their accountability to each other and reduced the extent of hierarchical control. The CoP thus resisted the tendency shown by Checkland *et al.*, (2013) for the managerial imposition of external priorities to dominate the network's internal negotiation of policy.

I concluded that the core group had developed a shared vision with the qualities of a philosophy of praxis, as I discussed with reference to Gramsci (1971, pp. 321–376) in Chapter Two. Our consciously negotiated consensus arose out of a growing critical awareness, created a new belief in heterarchical and reciprocal rather than hierarchical and instrumental cross-sector relationships, and adapted common-sense management practices to sustain these relationships. Following Sum and Jessop's (2013, pp.169–172) distinction, therefore, the negotiated consensus had the quality of a 'shared imaginary' rather than coercive ideology.

Despite the co-researchers' trusting and committed interpersonal relationships, reciprocal interorganisational relationships and identification of practical action to improve coordination and channel resources, they were initially unable to take joint action. Reflecting on my literature review in Chapter Two, I concluded this could be explained as a lack of collaborative capacity perpetuated by hegemony.

The co-researchers' reflections on their joint action identified multiple barriers (pp. 221–222). Applying Sullivan and Skelcher's analysis (2002, pp. 112–116) I interpreted these as a lack of collaborative capacity at multiple levels. They included limited *community* capacity to offer green health activities, a lack of staff skills or *practice* capacity, insufficient *operational* capacity to coordinate activities and a lack of *strategic* commitment from primary care practitioners. The developing strategy of 'green corridors' (pp. 217–218), the LAC scheme's reciprocal basis for community development and health benefits (p. 222) and NWWT's pilot project's approach to community engagement (pp. 222–223), all offered potential solutions to these barriers. Despite these creative ideas, though, no progress was made to establish 'green prescribing' activities.

I inferred a hegemonic culture from the effects of hierarchical and instrumental interorganisational relationships to perpetuate the lack of collaborative capacity, restricting joint action. The instrumental use of the environment that prioritised health over ecological needs explained the unwillingness of NWWT to take part in the CS Manager's planned training, preventing development of practice capacity (p. 222). An expectation of a lack of benefit to her organisation's aims explained the LAC Manager's delay in meeting with NWWT staff, restricting the development of community and operational capacity (p. 222). The prevalence of hierarchical and instrumental relationships was evident in other ways: the expectation that evaluation must focus on health benefits to gain resources (pp. 214–215, 223), the Living Landscapes Manager's questioning of the reciprocal contribution of health and other

sectors (p. 216), and NWWT Trustees' expectation of competitive advantage, limiting strategic commitment (p. 218). Thus, these cultural beliefs and practices hindered the development of collaborative capacity. They were adopted apparently by choice but masked the power of persistent hierarchies to support dominant interests, as Milbourne and Cushman (2015) argue.

In contrast to this dominant culture, I interpreted the co-researchers and LAC scheme's creative ideas, and NWWT's commitment to community engagement as an emerging reflexive culture. As change agent, to understand whether this alternative culture and the indication of forthcoming funding could overcome capacity challenges, change prevalent beliefs and increase commitment I continued to participate in action research with the core group.

PART II Planning joint action

In this section, I explore first how the PSB planned to deliver its well-being objectives and whether this created the opportunity to develop a collaborative culture in the face of the common dilemmas of governance networks. Then I describe how the core research group developed plans to improve their collaborative capacity and whether that changed the prevalent assumption of instrumental cross-sector relationships. I focus on how the capacity of the two groups for reflexive rationality affected this process and how these micro-relationships interacted with the external management of the groups and wider societal culture.

As the PSB prepared to publish its final well-being objectives, its members began to discuss how they would act together to deliver them. I describe these discussions from March 2018 and show how the Board's earlier failure to agree on a shared vision affected its negotiation of the common dilemmas of governance networks. I show how a hierarchical and specialist culture undermined the PSB's capacity to agree on joint action or to access resources. I describe the Board's growing alignment to hierarchically determined priorities and loss of accountability to local concerns. However, I show how opportunities for critically reflective practice and changes associated with the Well-being Act created the potential to generate reflexive rationality.

As the social prescribing group began to discuss the ENRaW funding in September 2018, I describe their reflexive approach and focus on place-based action and show how they further developed critical awareness and reciprocal interorganisational relationships. I show how these relationships changed the core group's access to resources and developed a broader cross-sector alliance. I describe changes associated with the Well-being Act that had the potential to create a supportive governance environment but show how prevailing beliefs and practices

continued to constrain the core group's collaborative capacity. I conclude by describing how critical reflective practice motivated the core group and a broader alliance of partners to identify opportunities for wider embedding of their critical beliefs and practices.

PSB March 2018 – June 2019

With the appointment of a new Partnerships Manager at the PSB and the finalising of the well-being objectives the Board's focus shifted from community engagement to establishing subgroups to develop action plans. Here, I describe the PSB's negotiations over the course of just over a year as its subgroups reported to the Board.

March 2018

As the PSB prepared to publish its well-being objectives (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2018), its members decided how to organise the process to plan joint action. In their spring meeting (PSB, 27/03/2018) they were joined by the previous Partnerships Manager's line manager ('Manager'), due to the delay in appointing a new Partnerships Manager.

Whereas the Board had previously expressed pride in its approach to community engagement, this meeting marked a shift. Commenting on the lack of public responses to the draft well-being objectives, Gwynedd CEO remarked that he placed more importance on the response of public bodies and Welsh Government. Members turned their attention to the PSB's relationship with other bodies and networks, establishing a hierarchy by clarifying the scrutiny process by the four statutory member organisations[84], Future Generations Commissioner and Wales Audit Office. The Chair (BCUHB representative) explained how a complex arrangement of task groups would report to the health-focussed Regional Partnership Board, but members were unsure whether the PSB and RPB were accountable to each other.

Turning to the process to plan action on the PSB's objectives, the Manager announced the intention to establish subgroups. With little discussion, the Chair declared that the RPB task groups would be an appropriate structure to determine the PSB's plans for action on its second (health) objective, and the Board members agreed to establish subgroups for each of the four priorities of its first objective (Welsh language, housing, poverty and climate change). Discussing the membership of these subgroups, some PSB members argued that subgroups should take 'integrated' and 'non-siloed' approaches to include members with new perspectives (Anglesey deputy CEO, BCUHB 2). Others argued that this risked being too broad an approach which would lose focus on specific actions. They tentatively agreed on the need

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[84] Details of the statutory organisations are given in Chapter One

for a balance and the Chair and Manager proposed that subgroups could include experts in the field of work but should be chaired by members of the PSB.

Establishing a structure to control the work of the subgroups, Gwynedd CEO stated firmly it was the right of the PSB to decide its plans for action, that subgroups bring recommendations to the Board to 'commission.' In my fieldnotes, I noted the similarity with an earlier meeting of the Social Value Cymru network (SVC, 01/12/2016), in which representatives of Councils' social services explained their work as 'Commissioners' to issue contracts and evaluate the outcomes of external organisations' work. There was a brief discussion of the PSB's lack of resources to commission work, but Gwynedd CEO brought the discussion to a close by stating that the Board should choose what to commission and then consider the available resources. Although the University representative immediately offered to chair the Welsh language group, other members were reticent to offer to lead. The Manager agreed to contact PSB members to determine the chairs of each subgroup before the next meeting.

July 2018

The subgroups began to deliver their first reports in the PSB's summer meeting (PSB, 05/07/2018). The new Partnerships Manager introduced herself to the Board, but the meeting was led by her manager and the deputy Chair (Gwynedd Leader). In the absence of the Chair, another representative of the Health Board attended this meeting.

The Manager announced the chairs of the subgroups, and each updated the PSB on progress. The chairs reflected the specialist interest of each priority, with the Welsh language group chaired by the University representative (a well-known author in the field), the Housing group chaired by the representative of the social housing sector, Climate Change by NRW (the proposer of this priority), the group considering the effects of Poverty was chaired by the CEO of Gwynedd CVC, and the PSB's usual BCUHB representative was to report on progress on the second, Health objective. The specialism of the chairs was reflected in the early membership of the subgroups. The Welsh language and Housing group chairs reported that they had met with other experts in their fields and the Partnerships Manager updated the Board on the membership of the RPB task groups from social and healthcare organisations.

In the ensuing discussion, members questioned the narrow membership of the groups and their capacity to consider the needs of the different organisations on the PSB. NRW requested representation on the RPB health groups and announced her intention to hold a workshop with 'diverse partners' to consider social as well as environmental challenges for the climate change

subgroup. Similarly, the Public Health representative stated her intention to explore a 'cross-cutting' theme of 'well-being' as part of the work of the health objective, broadening the focus from health to wider social factors. Supporting these approaches, the Partnerships Manager reported that early discussions of the Poverty group had indicated the need for multiple subgroups to understand this 'complex' field.

The questions about the subgroups' authority to recommend actions led to a discussion of the process, with Gwynedd CEO repeating his demand to 'commission' work based on its anticipated 'added value.' Although other members talked of receiving recommendations, prioritising them and resourcing action there was no discussion of criteria for any of these processes. The ambiguity led to requests for a reporting template (NRW, University) and for an explanation of the reporting structure and terms of reference of each group (Public Health, Anglesey Leader).

Turning again to the external relationships of the PSB, members were critical and dismissive of recent correspondence from the Future Generations Commissioner setting out her well-being objectives. Gwynedd Leader commented he had stopped reading her reports, 'I don't understand them, they're too long', stated the Commissioner seemed 'more concerned with the process than with the outcomes' and questioned whether the PSB was required to contribute to these objectives. This assumption that the Commissioner had authority over the PSB, also expressed in the Board's previous meeting, was dispelled by the Welsh Government representative. Reassuring the Board that there was no legal requirement to align the PSB's objectives to the Commissioner's she nevertheless encouraged them to work closely with the Commissioner, as were many other PSBs due to their similar objectives.

I noted 'no-one questioned the statement about process – does this suggest a lack of understanding of the importance of the five sustainable development principles?' (Fieldnotes, 05/07/2018). Having attended two workshops held by the Commissioner's Office (FGCO, 29/03/2017, 17/07/2017), which included members and Partnerships Managers of PSBs I had noted that these tended to focus on dialogue around tables. I reflected 'perhaps the FGCO is taking notice of PSBs' priorities to determine her own – this indicates a reflexive dialogical and pluralist process' (Journal, 06/07/2018). Later that summer, I also noted that the PSB's assumption about WAO scrutiny (in their March 2018 meeting) seemed to be incorrect. At a meeting of the National Public Bodies network (NPB, 02/08/2018) the WAO representative explained the Auditor General had no specific power to audit PSBs, but only to receive copies

of their well-being assessments and objectives. Instead, the representative emphasised that PSBs should, at this stage, create a 'narrative' explaining the process by which they developed well-being objectives rather than a 'justification' of the contribution of these objectives to national well-being (NPB_WAO, 02/08/2018).

September 2018

The PSB continued to discuss the extent of diversity of membership of its subgroups and their reporting structure in its autumn meeting (PSB, 12/09/2018).

The Partnerships Manager presented a simple governance structure, depicting the reporting lines of the subgroups to the PSB and of the health task groups first to the RPB and then to the PSB. Discussing the inter-relationship of the subgroups, members were divided in their opinions. Some questioned the lack of 'cross-cutting' themes such as well-being or the environment, stating the PSB should take a 'whole systems approach' (Public Health, NRW). Others believed all the priorities contributed to well-being (Gwynedd CEO, Anglesey CEO) and that having diverse membership in subgroups or relationships between the groups would be 'duplication' and 'overlap' (Gwynedd CVC, BCUHB). The two Councils' CEOs had the final and apparently authoritative say, retaining the focus on expertise not diversity in the subgroups.

However, the subgroup chairs indicated a range of approaches to deciding action, from specialism to diversity. Each approach drew criticism from the Board, with no agreement on action. The more specialist groups faced questions about their inclusion of other organisations in decision-making. The more inclusive groups needed more time to reach a decision. For example, the Welsh language group's chosen project was questioned by the Gwynedd and Anglesey CEOs as assuming the involvement of their organisations in the future project without prior discussion with them, while Gwynedd CVC questioned the failure to include third sector organisations. In contrast, the Poverty and Climate Change chairs reported on the need to hold more workshops and share more information before being able to agree on priorities for action. Indicating future challenges in agreeing to action the PSB again questioned its responsibility for the climate change priority, referring to the 'environmental lobby' which got it onto the PSB's agenda (Gwynedd Leader) and calling for the PSB to lobby Welsh Government to take responsibility (University).

In response to this impasse, the PSB returned to its reliance on reporting structures, repeating the need for written reports, formal commissioning and terms of reference for the subgroups

(Gwynedd CEO, Partnerships Manager). However, there was no discussion either of these terms or the common vision which would guide the subgroups' recommendations and Board's approval. Although members agreed when the University representative pointed out the persistent failure of the PSB and its predecessor the LSB to act, they did not suggest a way to negotiate agreement. The subgroup chairs and other members' frustration with this lack of agreement was evident in their body language. In an acknowledgment of my position as participant-as-observer, one member emailed me afterwards to state 'I believe good collaboration amongst regional partners has happened *in spite of* not *because of* the Board in recent years' (PSB representative, email 12/09/2018, original emphasis).

December 2018
The PSB's winter meeting (PSB, 10/12/2018) highlighted the Board's lack of power, both to reach a consensus and to access resources.

Once again, the subgroups' reports were greeted by a chorus of questions about their lack of inclusion of PSB members' interests. Anticipating this, some subgroups justified their plans for action by claiming their contribution to other member organisations' priorities. The Housing chair presented his group's plans to increase the stock of social housing as having benefits for health and energy efficiency. The Poverty chair argued that considering the effect on poverty in every subgroup would 'add value' to the work of each group through preventive action. The Climate Change chair emphasised the impact that a lack of mitigation would have on all essential public services and infrastructure. The Public Health representative again called for a subgroup that could consider the contribution of each priority to well-being, although without explaining what she meant by well-being.

In addition to these efforts to gain approval for action based on mutual benefits, subgroup chairs also began to emphasise their capacity to access additional resources. The Welsh language project was applying for research funding but required the PSB's approval as collaborating partners. The Housing chair explained his group's efforts to gain 'economies of scale' by working with partners across North Wales. He also explained the subgroup's plans were 'aligned' to Welsh Government policy with the purpose of attracting grants. However, despite these potential future resources the PSB's lack of immediate resources was clear in the response to chairs' requests. The PSB was unable to approve funding for a project manager to take forward the Housing group's work, stating this should come from the pooled budgets of the organisations forming the subgroup. In response to the Poverty group chair's request to disband her group and pass responsibility to each subgroup, Gwynedd CEO urged the CVC CEO to

remain part of the PSB, noting that her organisation could access additional grants not available to the public sector.

As the PSB discussed considering poverty in each subgroup's work, they expressed contrasting perspectives on the meaning of impact and therefore on the definition of success. Gwynedd CEO stated that impact assessments were already made by public bodies with the aim of *minimising* the impact of policies on the poorest. The Public Health representative took a similar stance, agreeing that equality and health impact assessment tools could be 'flexed' to assess the impact on poverty. I reflected: 'these comments indicated 'impact' is *detrimental*, the result of a conflict between interests – a stance perhaps ingrained through a decade of budget cuts? But this contrasted with Anglesey CVC's comment that transport was the key to reducing poverty in rural areas, so she views impact as *beneficial* – this went unheeded by other members, indicating its lack of salience. Differences in interpretations of success may lead to critical awareness in the PSB' (Journal, 11/12/2018).

March 2019

In the spring meeting (PSB, 13/03/2019) the subgroup chairs continued to promote the multiple benefits of their plans and, anticipating lack of agreement, began to assert their capacity to attract funding by aligning their plans to the priorities of regional and national forums.

As the chairs reported, other members continued to question the inclusion of their own organisations' concerns in the more specialist subgroups' decisions. The more diverse subgroups continued to face delays to reaching agreement due to a need to consider multiple impacts of their work. For example, the Climate Change group needed to involve multiple partners to map the effects of flooding on the economy, public services, infrastructure and well-being. Navigating this dilemma, the Poverty group chair stated the need for all subgroups to consider the impact of their work on poverty based on shared data and better understanding of organisations' current approaches. She reached agreement to hold a workshop with the Public Health team (to provide data) and the two Councils (to understand existing strategies).

The lack of consensus on action, caused both by the lack of inclusivity and the need for greater mutual understanding, was exacerbated by suspicion that the search for resources and inclusion of external organisations would shift the focus away from the PSB's priorities. The interaction of these factors was illustrated in the PSB's discussion of its health objective. The Board received reports first from an Assistant Director at BCUHB on the Health Board's three-year strategy and then from the PSB chair on the work of the RPB task groups. Despite both

representatives' explanations of the multiple benefits of the planned work and links to PSB objectives, members questioned the relevance to local concerns. Gwynedd CEO pointed to the separation of local PSB objectives and regional RPB and BCUHB objectives. While he acknowledged the complexity of the task, he called for work to identify crossovers between these strategies. Questioning the RPB plans, members expressed concern that these were driven by funding criteria (Anglesey Leader). Gwynedd CEO made the point succinctly: 'is the tail wagging the dog?', and Anglesey CEO stated his opinion that the report from the RPB groups was a 'top-down approach' which did not include the PSB's local priorities.

June 2019

In early summer 2019, PSB members took part in two meetings. A small number attended a workshop[85] organised by Welsh Government (PSB workshop, 06/06/2019). This was shortly followed by the full Board meeting (PSB, 12/06/2019).

Like her predecessor, the second Partnerships Manager appreciated my relational approach to the research and invited me to join her at the workshop. This was facilitated by consultancy Academi, and was also attended by Public Health, Gwynedd CEO and Leader, Parc Eryri and Anglesey CVC representatives (PSB workshop, 06/06/2019). Most of these members had also participated in a workshop with me in 2018 to reflect on the road verges group's research and encouraged me to join in this discussion, further acknowledging my roles as reflective and reflexive scientist. Promoting dialogue, the facilitator helped us to consider the purpose and processes of the PSB. This gave the PSB members the opportunity to acknowledge the complexity of the issue of sustainable development, the multiple inter-related factors, their lack of understanding of each other's work in these fields, and the 'stuff of nightmares' (Public Health) that was the accountability relationships within the PSB and with regional and national bodies. Guided by the facilitator, but also in response to occasional questions from me, the members discussed their vision for the PSB and what would have to change to bring their organisations into a closer relationship. They agreed on the need for greater dialogue and Gwynedd CEO repeated a call he had frequently made during PSB meetings, for the organisations to structure this dialogue by considering the links between organisations' strategic plans and PSB objectives, to 'bring them to life and highlight challenges.' The workshop concluded with agreement to dedicate a PSB meeting to this structured dialogue.

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[85] Welsh Government offered all PSBs a workshop, delivered by consultancy Academi Wales, to improve the processes of working together. The Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB partially accepted this offer, opting for a half-day rather than full day workshop and only five members attended.

At the next meeting of the PSB (12/06/2019), all subgroup reports aligned their objectives with the aims of national or regional bodies rather than PSB priorities. The Housing group intended to work with housing associations across North and Mid-Wales to achieve economies of scale. The Welsh language and Climate Change groups intended to work with the regional forum for North Wales PSBs, the former to share good practice by seeking other research partners and the latter to take account of 'regional dependency' and funding. The Chair (BCUHB representative) delivered a presentation on the health objective showing how the RPB's plans responded to Welsh Government health and social care policies.

The Poverty group had disbanded and the PSB instead discussed the work of the two Councils to alleviate poverty. In my fieldnotes I noted: 'the discussion changed to dialogue with less opinion-stating' and that 'the most vocal members were those who had attended the Academi workshop – perhaps it gave them confidence to continue the reflective style at the PSB?' Members began to share ideas and converge on a plan which involved taking a similar approach across their organisations to develop local apprenticeships to address the need for higher paid employment. They recognised the benefits not only to reduce poverty but also meet the needs of their organisations, to fill skill gaps (NRW), increase the flow of Welsh speakers (Public Health) and redress the anticipated effects of Brexit (Parc).

The meeting concluded with reflection on their work, with members agreeing with Gwynedd CEO's claim that 'we have not achieved much in our first year.' Stating the need for members to 'know each other's priorities and understand how we can help each other', Gwynedd CEO also suggested they each consider how their organisation's strategic plans would contribute to the PSB's priorities. On this reflective note and having observed the PSB's determination of its well-being objectives and their development into plans for action, I decided to end my attendance at the Board's meetings. I self-reflexively acknowledged my continued attendance may begin to undermine my relationships with the members and critically, recognised the need for reflection on the connections between the PSB's experiences and the literature in the field of governance.

Discussion of the PSB's plans for joint action

Not only did the PSB struggle to agree on joint action, but during the period of a year it made a dramatic shift from pride in local community engagement to aligning all but one of its objectives to regional and national polices. I interpreted the Board's struggle as a response to multiple dilemmas of governance. The PSB's creativity was constrained by the continuing pressures of isomorphism and self-regulating governmentality that had limited its capacity to

develop a shared vision. The consequent lack of reflexivity enhanced the power of legitimisation to weaken the Board's authority over its well-being objectives.

The PSB's experiences were evidence of the multiple governance dilemmas identified by Stoker (2018) and Jessop (2000) (see Chapter Three, *dilemmas and reflexivity*). Establishing subgroups raised questions about their degree of independence from the PSB, the conflict between the groups' efficient decision-making and accountability to the Board, and the balance between inclusion of diverse interests to consider complexity and efficient agreement upon areas for action. The PSB attempted to navigate these dilemmas by appointing expert chairs to single interest subgroups and establishing a process of commissioning. These processes replicated the hierarchical and individualised structures of the PSB's organisations and the prevalent practice of managerial accountability to an elite interest. I therefore inferred the continued influence of the isomorphic pressures and self-regulating governmentality which had earlier constrained the Board's capacity to develop a shared vision.

The specialist subgroups and commissioning structure continued to constrain the Board's reflexive rationality (as defined by Jessop, 2000), perpetuating the PSB's lack of dialogue, individualisation of interests and rejection of shared ownership. Specialisation constrained the capacity of subgroups to consider diverse perspectives and created a culture of competing expertise rather than dialogue and facilitative leadership at the level of the Board. Commissioning made the subgroups accountable to the PSB, creating a focus on the means to achieve the Board's priorities which Jessop (2000) terms a hierarchical 'substantive' rationality.

I interpreted the PSB's specialisation and hierarchy as the pursuit of what Sørensen and Torfing (2009, p. 235) describe as the hegemonic European norm of 'effectiveness', which these authors have demonstrated risks conflicting with democratic inclusivity, or pluralism. My account of the PSB's meetings gives evidence of this conflict, through the loss of both informal accountability (to PSB members) and political accountability (to communities). The PSB's culture constrained the trust and social capital which Dow *et al*., (2013) and Romzek *et al.,* (2014) have shown are necessary to sustain informal accountability. In place of informal, or heterarchical accountability, commissioning implicitly established an elite, or hierarchical interest. However, I have shown that the PSB's lack of agreement on a shared vision meant it was unable to set criteria to govern the subgroups' plans, frustrating action and weakening members' confidence in the Board's legitimate authority. In addition, the PSB's focus on

accountability to public bodies weakened its commitment to community engagement (see earlier narrative, p. 227). Stoker (2011) has shown that the 'soft power' of political accountability, based on a shared vision, is necessary to sustain the legitimate authority of local governance networks. I concluded that the PSB's struggle to commission action plans was evidence of a loss of its soft power.

Checkland *et al.,* (2013) have shown that even where networks sustain their political accountability to members and communities, they risk the imposition of hierarchically determined policies. The PSB's loss of informal and political accountability reinforced this risk by restricting its access to the 'hard power' (Stoker, 2011) of pooled resources. In Chapter Two, Part III, I discussed with reference to Weber (1971, pp. 40–43) how legitimacy is created through a combination of associative and communal rationales. The PSB was unable to develop either an associative rationale to pool resources (based on deriving 'added value' or multiple benefits) or a communal rationale (based on the reciprocal benefits of contributing to solving a common problem). Specialist subgroups' attempts to demonstrate multiple benefits failed in the face of members' awareness of the risk of dominant interests (p. 231). Other subgroups' efforts to create a sense of common ownership by including diverse perspectives (such as the Climate Change group), failed as they encountered competing priorities at the level of the Board. The description of the climate change priority as a 'lobby' and decision to urge Welsh Government to take responsibility (p. 230) illustrated the PSB's lack of shared ownership of its objectives. The lack of consensus and resources undermined the PSB's aspiration to achieve 'positive changes to ensure the best possible future for communities' (Gwynedd and Môn Public Services Board, 2018). Success became implicitly defined as minimising detrimental impact rather than maximising well-being (p. 232). Developing Stoker's (2011) analysis, I concluded that the lack of soft power reinforced the lack of hard power, further weakening the PSB's legitimacy.

I interpreted the subgroups' efforts to create broader alliances outside the PSB and alignment to regional and national policies as the search for an alternative source of authority for the sake of expediency, to legitimise their plans. As the PSB had noted the tendency of external bodies to impose policies hierarchically rather than reflexively engage in 'negotiated re-evaluation of objectives' (Jessop, 2003, p. 8) with the Board, this enhanced the risk of domination. The lack of reflexivity in regional and national bodies' policy-making processes thus reinforced the lack of political accountability in the PSB, risking the Board's loss of legitimate control over its objectives. Therefore, I interpreted the crisis of legitimacy within the PSB as a process of

interaction with its higher-order governance. Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 169–230) find that meta-governance can restrict the heterarchical nature of networks. Developing this further, I concluded that a lack of reflexivity in the network *perpetuates* hierarchical meta-governance and the power of legitimisation.

Sørensen and Torfing (2007, pp. 95–110) argue that the dilemmas of governance increase critical awareness and motivate the creation of a heterarchical culture. From the evidence of a growing critical awareness and challenges to the Board's hierarchical culture, I infer a hegemonic struggle to change the underlying dynamic of isomorphism, governmentality and legitimisation. Members questioned the power of funders and national bodies to shift attention away from local needs (pp. 232–233). Critical reflection and dialogue afforded by the Academi workshop (p. 233) led members to express their awareness of the interdependence of their interests and the inadequacy of hierarchical processes to organise joint action. The refusal of the Poverty subgroup to shoulder the burden of responsibility and accountability (p. 234) challenged the Board's culture, encouraged members to begin to share ownership and created a focus on the relationships between organisations' strategies. Thus, the PSB began to develop the dialogue, understanding of diversity and interdependence, and shared responsibility necessary for reflexive rationality. I concluded that the PSB's emerging reflexive rationality developed by enhancing both criticality and relationality in the Board.

In addition to my interpretation of a growing critical awareness and reflexivity in the micro-relations of the PSB, my observations of national bodies are evidence of an emerging reflexivity in meta-governance. WAO's emphasis on collaborative processes rather than outcomes indicated support for inclusive dialogue and self-organisation in the PSB. The Future Generations Commissioner's communicative approach to engaging with PSBs offered a mechanism to co-develop national polices through inclusive dialogue. I concluded that the emerging reflexivity in the PSB and these national bodies offers an opportunity to develop a transformative ethically reflexive culture in the PSB. However, as Bevir and Rhodes (2007) have argued, the realisation of this culture will depend on the creative agency of the collaborating partners.

Social Prescribing group Sept 2018 – June 2019

As the core research group reached agreement on the potential reciprocal benefits of collaboration but experienced constraints on their capacity to collaborate, Welsh Government opened applications for its new grant, ENRaW (explained above, p. 200). In this section, I

explore how the grant focussed the core group's attention on developing plans for action. As new partners joined the co-researchers' alliance, I refer to them also as co-researchers based on their commitment to discovering ways to overcome barriers to joint action.

September 2018

As the summer ended, I arranged to meet the core group co-researchers to discuss the newly announced ENRaW funding. As NRW's AS Lead had not been present at the July meeting, I met with him in advance at his office. These meetings further developed my roles as knowledge broker and process facilitator. Later meetings, as the group's partnership grew, highlighted the need for me to act as reflexive scientist and change maker.

The AS Lead and I discussed the benefits to NRW of links to social prescribing, the potential for Area Statements (AS) to coordinate action in such contexts, and the practices that restricted the inclusion of diverse interests in the AS process (AS Lead, 21/09/2018). NRW had the potential to develop links to social prescribing at managerial level through the PSBs and at a local level through its land management and work experience teams. The AS Lead identified the LAC's role as the 'absolute key' to create the links at the local level. He also saw a role for NRW to fund other environmental organisations' provision of activities. To motivate these managerial, local and funding links he stated the need to understand the 'drivers' for NRW, such as the improvements to 'biodiversity, water quality, forests' to be gained from social prescribing activities.

We discussed how the AS process could fund and coordinate green prescribing activities. The AS Lead emphasised the 'co-productive' nature of AS, its inclusion of 'partners' and 'communities' and the 'equal weighting' given to their opinions. He explained how collaboratively agreed priorities in each AS would drive future funding as well as feed into future national strategies by informing NRW's SoNaR[86] report which in turn would inform Welsh Government's National Natural Resources Policy (NNRP). However, he cautioned about the strong influence of NNRP on Area Statements. Current NNRP priorities were determined prior to the stakeholder engagement process of AS, yet the process of developing Statements had to give regard to the NNRP priorities. He noted the 'bit of conflict' that this created and was 'sceptical' about the weight NRW would accord to third sector organisations and communities, due to NRW's responsibility to then deliver on the priorities. He also admitted that NRW's insistence on gathering 'the evidence base' of environmental features

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[86] SoNaRR (State of Natural Resources Report) and NNRP were introduced in Chapter One as policies linked to the Environment (Wales) Act 2016

had delayed the stakeholder engagement process by at least a year. Finally, he was unsure about NRW's capacity for collaboration, 'I can't help getting out of the back of my mind, how we all, you know big organisations, how we would all work with each other?' Already the influence of the NNRP on funding was clear, as the AS Lead pointed out that the NNRP priorities formed the ENRaW grant's criteria. However, he was also confident that these criteria supported the core group's current 'green corridors' idea with its economic, ecological and health benefits.

The following week I met with the co-researchers and structured our meeting in two parts to address the issues arising over the summer months. In the first part, we focussed on securing an ecological benefit from contexts of social prescribing and in the second, we discussed how the ENRaW grant could help develop collaborative capacity (Core research group, 28/09/2018). To broaden the environmental perspective and guide the grant discussions in the core group meeting, NWWT CEO and I invited two Trustees, the Conservation Manager and Fundraising Director from NWWT. The AS Lead sent a member of his team (AS Officer) to represent him as he was unavailable and the CS Manager attended, but unfortunately the other health sector representatives (Senior Practitioner, Cluster Chair and CS Chair) were not able to join us at the last minute due to other meetings. As I explain below, this weakened the confidence of NWWT staff in the health sector's commitment to collaboration.

I explained how the LAC scheme on Anglesey was designed to create a reciprocal benefit to community development as well as health. I encouraged the co-researchers to discuss how the current 'green corridors' idea and its link to social prescribing could similarly drive an ecological benefit. Recognising the LAC design as a 'clever' strategy (CS Manager) the group also acknowledged the need for a similar relationship with environmental strategies to motivate NRW and NWWT's involvement. Through a process of envisioning the network of pathways, planning how to create them, and reflecting on potential coordinating mechanisms, we began to negotiate a consensus for collaborative action based on benefits to each partner organisation.

Envisioning the pathways built the co-researchers' confidence in the ecological benefits. First, these networks were in an ecologically important location which reflected NWWT's priorities for Anglesey; second the networks had the capacity for ecological connectivity by creating 'at a minimum, hedgerows with trees following the path and every so often a bit of landmass to create a habitat' (AS Officer); and third, creating networks could raise awareness: 'people don't know what's on their doorstep, so for them to walk through it and appreciate what's there,

whether it's a nature reserve or just farmland that's been managed appropriately, it's the first step in raising awareness' (Conservation Manager). Planning how to create such networks helped us to understand the necessary link to the LAC scheme. We discussed the need to create doorstep routes (Anglesey Trustee) which would involve local communities in 'surveys and monitoring' (People and Wildlife Manager) to map 'the most important habitats in that area' and identify necessary improvements (NWWT CEO). Addressing her Conservation Manager's concerns about how to increase people's use of pathways, NWWT CEO realised the link to social prescribing stating: 'the GPs are helping to create the demand, aren't they?' As we considered how to involve multiple landowners and coordinate activity for the benefit of wildlife as well as the landowners' interests, the group identified new sources of funding and created a link with NWWT's Living Landscapes strategy. The project could access a wider range of community funds by including health as well as environmental benefits (Anglesey Trustee) and changes to agricultural support post-Brexit were anticipated to be linked to environmental improvements (NWWT CEO). CS Manager suggested the group adopt NWWT's Living Landscapes approach to identify the key habitats to manage to create a network across the Island. We agreed the Area Statements process could provide a forum to agree such an approach and had potential to also channel funding.

Reflecting on the ideas so far, the Fundraising Director emphasised the need for funding as well as agreement: 'it's got to be about additional capacity or else no-one takes ownership. I totally accept that shared ownership is the best route for long-term solutions. But...I'll stop.' I reflected later (Journal, 29/09/2018): 'the Fundraising Director seemed to be trying to make sure we considered this point but was aware of the research focus and ENRaW requirement for collaboration so did not want to be obstructive.' However, although they still desired 'more of the environmental impact' NWWT CEO and Fundraising Director concluded they were 'much more positive about the role of the Wildlife Trust in this' (Director) and 'it would be really interesting and fantastic if we could do it' (CEO). After a short break for refreshments, we turned to discussing how the ENRaW grant could facilitate both shared ownership and collaborative capacity for the green corridors project.

I had discussed the ENRaW grant briefly with NWWT's Fundraising Director prior to this meeting, and he agreed to guide this discussion. This helped me to begin to transfer responsibility and ownership for action to the co-researchers (and later their chosen collaborative partners). Introducing the grant, the Fundraising Director noted its significance as 'the first direct funding of this scale for the environment for a long time, it's certainly

progressive stuff.' Together we agreed that it supported the aspirations of the green corridors idea: to give communities 'ownership' and involve farmers (NWWT CEO), bridge urban and rural communities (Anglesey Trustee) and create ecologically beneficial 'green infrastructure' (NWWT CEO). Uncertainty regarding the balance of benefits to ecology or health persisted, though. Pointing to the grant's requirement for a 'lead applicant' (Fundraising Director) led to the question: 'whose flag would the application come under?' (Anglesey Trustee) and the CEO's reply: 'I think it probably feels like a public health one; if the benefits are primarily for public health, then it should be them.' However, when I questioned: 'the benefits are pretty even, aren't they?' NWWT CEO agreed and allowed her Fundraising Director the time to draft an application.

Our discussion turned to the capacity of the collaborating partners to write the application and undertake the project. The group expressed their desire for 'buy in' of health sector partners (Fundraising Director), 'so that it was a true collaboration' (NWWT CEO) and a 'distinctive' application not 'just the usual suspects' (Fundraising Director). Uncertainty about the commitment of these partners was also reflected in the Fundraising Director's concerns about the 'sustainability' of pursuing a 'different grant route.' Discussing this concern, we decided to design the project as a pilot with a focus on Anglesey and create strong links with social prescribing schemes across North Wales so that its ecological principles might become embedded more widely and therefore be sustained beyond the immediate grant-funded period. The co-researchers present suggested the core group's public health partners did not have the expertise to lead the application and project (and this was confirmed by the Senior Practitioner in the next group meeting, 18/10/2018). To gain the necessary expertise, managerial capacity and links to social prescribing schemes on Anglesey, the co-researchers decided to invite managers of two further organisations to be partners in an application. The first was Menter Môn, as it was a social enterprise with expertise in leading large grants and the host organisation for the CS green prescribing project. The second was Medrwn Môn, as host organisation of the LAC scheme and third sector infrastructure organisation (CVC) for Anglesey. The AS Officer agreed to discuss NRW's contribution to the grant application with his line manager, the AS Lead. Closing the meeting, the Fundraising Director took ownership of the project and offered to write a one-page summary of the grant proposal idea, based on our earlier discussions of green networks and social prescribing.

As NWWT CEO had invited the Fundraising Director to lead the application writing process, I began to transfer facilitation of the project to him by not taking the lead on drafting a proposal or organising meetings and contacts with new partners. However, at his request (Fundraising Director email, 12/10/2018), to smooth the transfer of the project to him I made comments on his initial draft application, helped to contact partners and attended meetings, continuing as process facilitator and knowledge broker. As the work was now beginning to take on the form of a project and include new partners, I began to refer to meetings as the ENRaW group rather than core research group.

At the first project meeting the co-researchers and new partners focussed on creating a sense of shared ownership and a structure for managing the project. Attending this meeting were the key cross-sector partners, representing environmental, community, economic and health interests. From the third sector were NWWT's CEO and Fundraising Director, the CVC Medrwn Môn's CEO (also representative on the PSB) and Director of the social enterprise Menter Môn (in place of his CS manager and project chair). From the public sector were NRW's AS Lead and the Senior Practitioner in public health but the primary-care Cluster Chair was again unable to attend (ENRaW group, 18/10/2018).

As the group members discussed the green corridors idea, they drew out not only the benefits to each organisation but also the importance of contributing to each other's interests. The Senior Practitioner repeated the Cluster Chair's earlier suggestion (Core research group, 29/05/2018) of focussing green social prescribing on a target group of people on lower 'tiers' of medical need, which would reduce footfall to GP practices and reduce the support burden on environmental organisations. The Fundraising Director noted this would also attract a 'new cohort' of people into environmental activities. The AS Lead and Senior Practitioner encouraged co-production with communities to promote a sense of ownership of local nature reserves and build community assets. Menter Môn's Director pointed out to Medrwn Môn CEO how this would benefit the LAC scheme's approach. As the partners discussed the benefit of involving diverse local groups, including arts, heritage and Welsh language, Medrwn Môn CEO remarked that this diversity would build 'social capital and networks' as well as redress the long-term downward trend in volunteering. Uncertainty about the 'direct ecological benefit' (NWWT CEO) persisted and partners were keen to provide reassurance on this. They emphasised the value of developing 'long-term pro-environmental values by getting people into nature' (AS Lead) and the potential link to future agricultural payments to engage farmers

(Menter Môn Director). The Senior Practitioner indicated the reciprocal value to public health of contributing to ecological improvements, 'we know that *being* in a green space is good for people's well-being but doing something to *improve* that space is even better.'

Considering management and oversight, I engaged as reflexive scientist in a discussion of ways to sustain the diversity of interests in the project through shared leadership rather than establishing accountability to a single organisation. The Senior Practitioner and Menter Môn Director agreed with the AS Lead that Area Statements could provide a coordinating mechanism. In addition, the group suggested that combining these Statements with the Council's Active Travel and Public Rights of Way improvement plans could aid planning by identifying locations for pathways of ecological, health, social and economic value. The Senior Practitioner suggested the Green Health network offered a forum to reflect on the project's progress and engage other environmental partners. The Fundraising Director and Menter Môn Director proposed a steering committee to monitor each organisation's contribution and benefit, with one organisation responsible for the finance and administration of the grant. The partners agreed with my suggestion to set up data sharing protocols to enable joint evaluation reports to the steering committee.

As part of my relational approach, I had recently discussed the proposed application with PSB representatives (NRW, 16/10/2018; Public Health, 17/10/2018) and a Director of the Health Board with responsibility for social prescribing (BCUHB Director, 01/10/2018). I reflected on these discussions with the ENRaW group. The NRW representative had recommended the project report to her on its contribution to Area Statements priorities (PSB_NRW, 16/10/2018). The Public Health representative had suggested the project steering group also report to a PSB subgroup, which would provide a 'multi-agency' body to reflect on the benefits to *multiple* interests (PSB_PH, 17/10/2018). The BCUHB Director advised the project to communicate not only with him but engage with a wider range of interest groups by joining a social prescribing 'Community of Practice' for North Wales, facilitated jointly by him and Glyndŵr University[87] (BCUHB Director, 01/10/2018). Reflexively, the ENRaW partners decided to adopt these suggestions as a reporting structure for the proposed project that would sustain its accountability to multiple interests.

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[87] Glyndŵr University is situated in Wrexham and developed out of the North East Wales Institute of Higher Education (NEWI), gaining university status in 2008 (About the university - Wrexham Glyndwr University, accessed 08/04/2022)

The ENRaW meeting closed with agreement on a name for the project, suggested by the Fundraising Director as 'Llwybrau Gwyllt: Wild Pathways' in acknowledgement of the strategy's roots in the road verges core research group's work. As the group had supported the idea of a network of green corridors, agreed upon a management structure and the Fundraising Director had taken a lead on writing the application, I suggested to them that I would reduce my involvement in facilitating meetings. However, at the Fundraising Director's request I agreed to continue to support him with information for the application based on the core group's earlier discussions.

November 2018

Although I expected to observe rather than further participate in the project development, as the collaborating partners began to work on a joint grant application, they continued to include me in their discussions and emails. In this section, I explore how contrasting approaches soon emerged which the co-researchers agreed risked losing the mutual benefits of the Wild Pathways strategy. In late October and throughout November, as reflexive scientist I engaged in further meetings with the co-researchers and partners to understand this development. Through this engagement, as change agent, I became involved in negotiating relationships with a broader alliance of partners to help support the ENRaW group's continued progress on their application. As I explain below, this postponed my exit from the project, but offered crucial insights into the difficulty of sustaining the core group's ethically reflexive culture in the face of a lack of collaborative capacity and a prevalent assumption of a lead partner's dominant interests.

Acting as knowledge broker, following the October ENRaW meeting I collated information from previous core group meetings into the appropriate sections on the ENRaW grant form and sent it to the Fundraising Director (email, 22/10/2018). I also wrote a summary for NWWT's Trustees which I circulated to the core group and partners for their comments (ENRaW email 29/10/2018). The Senior Practitioner's response underlined his growing appreciation of the reciprocal relationship between public health and ecological interests:

> Getting people of all ages engaged with the landscapes that surround their communities, helping them to understand the needs of wildlife those landscapes support, and involving them in maintaining and sustaining those spaces will truly provide the 'nature-based solutions' that enhance their own well-being, their sense of belonging and will help to protect the habitats and species within them, both now and into the future. (Senior Practitioner, email, 29/10/2018).

In reciprocal fashion, NWWT's Living Landscapes Manager had earlier emphasised the importance of involving people to sustain ecological resilience:

> It's ultimately a recognition that, at the moment in the UK, if we are to 'save species' by having bigger, better and more connected habitats (as recommended by conservationists and backed up by the Lawton report) we need to work with people to achieve this. (LL Manager, email 24/10/2018).

In the meantime, the Fundraising Director met twice with the Menter Môn Director to discuss the latter's capacity to take lead partner role in the project. However, in reaching agreement on Menter Môn's role, the proposal changed significantly. It began to reflect the social enterprise's priorities but excluded many of the other partners' concerns. The Fundraising Director and I agreed that on the same day that I circulated a summary of our Wild Pathways proposal, he would forward Menter Môn's revised proposal to the ENRaW group. The new proposal had a new name, a focus on jobs and training rather than health or community development, a different geographical location on Anglesey, no link to social prescribing and intervention directly on nature reserves rather than on the connections between them (Fundraising Director email, 29/10/2018).

I discussed this change with the Fundraising Director and NWWT CEO and began to understand how the grant's requirement for a 'lead partner' coupled with organisations' lack of collaborative capacity sustained a culture of dominant relationships. Reflecting his historical experiences of dominant interests in partnership working, the Fundraising Director initially put the changes down to 'the realities of collaboration' (email, 22/10/2018). Later, he acknowledged the lack of inclusion and anticipated that: 'some of those present at the [ENRaW group] meeting would prefer any application to take a different route, perhaps more closely aligned to the meeting discussions' (email, 29/10/2018). However, the reasons for the turn to Menter Môn due to a lack of operational capacity became clear in a meeting with the NWWT CEO and Director (31/10/2018). They emphasised a lack of 'capacity' (Fundraising Director) that constrained NWWT from leading such a large and complex collaborative project. Discussing the ecological, social and health benefits of the original proposal, NWWT CEO pointed to NRW's responsibility for multiple aspects of well-being and its capacity to develop 'strategic links' through the PSBs. She expressed her frustration at the unwillingness of this public body to manage the project, 'we're just a small charity; they're a massive public body; why us?' (NWWT CEO and Fundraising Director, 31/10/2018).

Due to the lack of NWWT staff time and my existing relationship with multiple organisations, I agreed to act on the Fundraising Director's suggestion that I contact the co-researchers and other potential partners to identify an alternative lead organisation. The ensuing conversations underlined the lack of operational capacity that created the ENRaW group's dependency on Menter Môn. Despite commitment to the project from NRW, the Public Health team and the AONB[88] team at Anglesey Council (through an introduction by NRW staff), none was able to be lead partner. Each was prevented by people in positions of authority: NRW by a 'directive from senior management, or perhaps Welsh Government' (Partnerships Officer, 01/11/2018), Public Health by a lack of senior management experience (Senior Practitioner, phone call 01/11/2018) and, after long consideration, the AONB team due to a 'lack of capacity' in the Council to 'line manage additional staff' (AONB email, 21/11/2018).

The idea of Wild Pathways, however, received continued support from managers with both regional and national perspectives. Following the Senior Practitioner and AS Lead's suggestions, I discussed the project again by email with NRW and Public Health PSB representatives, continuing my relational approach. These representatives repeated their support for the Wild Pathways idea and recommended any project should report to the 'well-being' subgroup which they were trying to agree with the PSB. The Public Health representative stated: 'this project would fit neatly into and be a large chunk of the first priority [of] green health/ mental well-being/ physical activity – adults' (PSB_PH email, 6/11/2018). Further support for the idea of Wild Pathways came as I attended a second meeting of the National Public Bodies network as part of my Wales-wide enquiry. The network's agenda had three main items: Social Prescribing, Green Infrastructure and the ENRaW grant (NPB, 26/10/2018). Discussion of these items endorsed the ecological, health and community development interests of the ENRaW group. In addition, the core research group's efforts to find ways to contribute to each other's interests were echoed by the NPB members' general desire to demonstrate their contribution to each other's objectives, and specifically a growing strategic relationship between NRW and Public Health Wales.

In the meantime, Menter Môn arranged a further meeting with NRW, Public Health and NWWT representatives, which I observed (ENRaW group, 12/11/2018). Menter Môn Director was unwilling to lead on the original proposal, but the group were unable, in the space of this single meeting, to find a way to include all their priorities in a single proposal, resulting in a

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[88] AONB: see footnote 58 above

decision to write two applications. One proposal focussed on the economic benefit (which included NWWT but not public health or the LAC scheme) and the other on the original Wild Pathways project (which Menter Môn eventually decided not to join).

The Fundraising Director and I began to work with the ENRaW group to develop a grant proposal for Wild Pathways. While he and I waited for the AONB Manager to discuss the role of lead partner with his organisation (Anglesey Council), we contacted the ENRaW advisory team (emails 12/11/2018 and phone call, 13/11/2018). We decided to hold another meeting with the partners interested in the Wild Pathways proposal and were joined by representatives of NRW (the Partnerships Officer from the first core research group and the AS Officer), the Senior Practitioner and the AONB Manager (ENRaW group, 13/11/2018). I relayed the ENRaW advisor's support for the 'quality and fit' of the project to the criteria of the grant and his assurances that we did not need to demonstrate economic outcomes or give a high level of detail on the proposed pathways or capital expenditure. I conveyed the impression I had gained from the PSB representatives and NPB of a general environment of support for our idea and our approach of creating reciprocal relationships. The group, including the new partner AONB, agreed on the relevance of the proposal to each organisation's concerns. We decided, given the grant deadline, to begin to co-write an application while, at the time, anticipating confirmation of AONB's lead role. The Fundraising Director welcomed my offer to coordinate this process (continuing my role as process facilitator) to relieve pressure on his time.

Over the following fortnight we pooled ideas and information and identified new partners who could contribute to and benefit from the project (ENRaW group emails, 13–27/11/2018). During this correspondence, we agreed to adopt the idea of a steering committee but extended it to include community representatives. We agreed to report to a PSB subgroup and developed a reporting process that would reflect multiple aspects of well-being. These developments built on the governance framework we had created in July to encourage a reflexive orientation in the management and oversight of the network. I contacted the CEO of Anglesey CVC, as she had been unable to attend the November meeting, and she confirmed her support for the project's direction and the suggestion of reporting to a well-being subgroup at the PSB (phone call, 14/11/2018).

With barely a fortnight to go until the grant deadline, the AONB Manager emailed me to say he was unable to lead the project, although committed to being an operational partner: 'I don't have the capacity to be the lead partner and line manage the staff due to other embedded current

and future work' (AONB email, 21/11/2018). I forwarded this to NWWT CEO and Fundraising Director, who discussed the situation with the Trust's Treasurer and replied to say: 'given all the work that has been undertaken to date, NWWT are reluctantly prepared to be officially named as lead partner for the purpose of submitting the application' (Fundraising Director email, 21/11/2018). He went on, however, to explain that NWWT left open the possibility of declining the position if the final grant conditions created an unmanageable level of responsibility and risk for NWWT. The named partners on the bid responded positively and we finalised the application in time for the Fundraising Director to submit before the deadline, having again received assurances from the ENRaW advisory team of its fit with the grant criteria and the satisfactory level of budget details (ENRaW Advisor, 29/11/2018).

Following this struggle to combat the lack of operational capacity and risk of dominant interests, the NRW AS Lead offered practical support to NWWT. He accompanied me to the next meeting of the Trustees, the first time since the establishment of NRW (in 2013) that a representative had met with this Council. He explained the commitment of his team and the practical contribution they would make to facilitate the project if successful. We discussed the supportive strategic environment and given this clear commitment and support, the Trustees confirmed their backing for the application (Trustees, 05/12/2018).

March 2019

Following the submission of the grant application I thanked all the co-researchers for their contribution to the research, wished them well with the application and suggested we meet up in the summer to reflect on the research findings. In March 2019, the Fundraising Director received the news that neither the Wild Pathways nor the alternative Menter Môn ENRaW application had been successful. Reflecting on the feedback we received from the grants team, I recalled other forums and events I had attended which helped to explain the outcome.

The Fundraising Director, NWWT CEO and Chair of Trustees' immediate reaction to the news was one of disappointment (NWWT emails, 15/03/2019), but determination to keep in contact with the collaborating partners: 'if we can and there is an appetite for it, keeping in contact in readiness for another opportunity' (NWWT CEO, 15/03/2019). Feedback on the proposal described it as 'a very clearly described project in terms of what it will change and deliver with a good fit to the national priorities and themes of action' (Environment Grants Team, 30/04/2019). Despite the assurances prior to submission from the ENRaW advisors, the judges wanted more detail to assess whether 'the costs outlined are competitive and represent value for money' and more consideration of 'economic and cultural benefits' to enable 'potential

investment from across sectors based on where the benefits accrue.' Discussing this briefly with the Fundraising Director (30/04/2019) we agreed these conditions went against the rationale of the project. Detailed costings would only have been possible if path networks had been determined in advance, but this would have undermined the project's aim of deciding on and co-producing pathways with local communities. The second requirement ignored the detailed ecological, public health and community assets benefits presented in the application and implied these were valuable only in as much as they contributed to economic and unspecified 'cultural' benefits.

Reflecting on other meetings I had attended helped explain the rejection of the community-based approach and the prioritisation of economic (although not cultural) interests. As I explore next, NWWT's pilot project, 'Our Wild Communities' (OWC) showed that taking a community-based approach required a change in an established culture of linear project planning where targets are set in advance. In addition, meetings of two health-sector forums, Green Health and Social Prescribing Community of Practice (SP CoP) (see above, p. 243), provided evidence of a lack of familiarity with negotiating a common vision that created a tendency for the environment and third sector to be treated instrumentally. I show how Welsh Government strategies reinforced this culture of instrumentalism and prioritisation of the economy.

Since the previous summer I had participated as observer in NWWT's OWC team meetings attended by project staff, NWWT CEO, Conservation Manager, and People and Wildlife Manager. These revealed that taking a community-based approach was unfamiliar to both project staff and community groups. The NWWT team welcomed as 'radically different' the practice of taking account of community groups' interests as well as the needs of nature reserves to plan volunteer activities (OWC, 31/08/2018). Later in the project, they reflected on their experiences (OWC, 11/12/2018). They noted the difficulty in reaching agreement on activities that benefitted both the community group and the wildlife needs of the local nature reserve, with community interests tending to dominate. Discussing this issue further, the team drew the conclusion that both internal management of NWWT strategies and external management of the project by its funders (NRW) needed adjustment. Internally, rather than create separate 'Conservation' and 'People and Wildlife' plans, these needed to develop concurrently by taking the interests and needs of both communities and wildlife into account. Externally, the NRW representative attending this meeting noted that this would require his

organisation to be flexible by setting targets to reflect the emerging needs identified by this co-productive approach.

The two health-sector forums encouraged dialogue amongst multiple perspectives. However, the development of a shared vision was limited, resulting in a tendency for health interests to dominate third sector or environmental interests. Rather than develop a common purpose, SP CoP set out the Health Board's policy for social prescribing as 'preventative healthcare that empowers people to improve their own health and wellbeing' (Post Conference report, SP CoP 25/10/2018). In my field notes, I reflected: 'presentations and updates by the largely third sector delegates focussed on their contribution to health rather than on the strategic aims of the third sector organisation' (SP CoP, 25/10/2018). The Green Health forum was attended by multiple public and third sector environmental organisations and facilitated by public health staff. In the first meeting I attended they agreed their aim was to 'increase footfall to green spaces', with the intention of increasing physical activity (Green Health network, 06/09/2018). The network decided against the need to include an ecological benefit when I asked if their environmentally focussed organisations needed to ensure such an outcome.

These forums' tendency to create dominant interests, despite the members' enthusiastic sharing of information, recalled my experience at the NRW funding event during the first phase of action research (see Chapter Six, *November*). I had noted: 'delegates are dissatisfied with NRW's choice of priorities and suspicious that Welsh Government wants to shift responsibility for the environment to the third and private sectors' (Fieldnotes, NRW, 27/11/2017). Seeking further evidence of Welsh Government's stance I turned to its national strategy, 'Prosperity for All' (Welsh Government, 2017b). Although the strategy described its themes of 'prosperous and secure', 'healthy and active', 'ambitious and learning' and 'united and connected' as the government's 'well-being objectives', each theme was framed as contributing to economic prosperity (Welsh Government, 2017b, p. 3), establishing the latter as an elite interest. I reflected: 'the primacy of the economy is evident, cross-sector networks are unfamiliar with the process of negotiation needed to reach a common aim, and an expectation of evaluation forces a linear approach to projects that is incompatible with the iterative approach needed to involve multiple partners and communities' (Journal, 10/05/2019).

Having understood the rejection of the Wild Pathways strategy in the context of this wider culture and not simply as a failure to provide sufficient detail, I turned my focus to a final event to help my research partners and co-researchers reflect on our experiences.

June 2019

After hearing of the unsuccessful grant application, I raised the idea of a workshop with my two research partners, NWWT (Trustees, 18/04/2019) and the PSB (emails, Partnerships Manager, NRW, Public Health, Anglesey CVC, 19/03/2019), We decided to focus on planning joint action based on pooled resources and in readiness for future funding. In Chapter Five, *sustaining and scaling change*, I explained how I co-developed the workshop with the co-researchers, our successful application for ESRC funding, the range of cross-sector organisations attending and how these created a 'whole system in the room' perspective. Here, I describe our main conclusions and the organisations' plans for joint action.

We held our workshop in June at the University as a central location and to emphasise the reflective and reflexive purpose of our discussions (ESRC workshop, 07/06/2019). In the first part of the meeting, the co-researchers gave short presentations about the relevance of the Wild Pathways strategy to their organisations' strategic objectives. This created opportunities for informal discussion and reflection on the process of reaching a shared vision, the strategy and the lack of ENRaW funding. In the second part of the meeting, I facilitated a roundtable discussion focussed on overcoming the interorganisational barriers and lack of collaborative capacity we had identified through the work of the social prescribing core group. This generated multiple ideas for joint action based on gradually extending understanding of the ethically reflexive approach of the core research groups to the workshop participants' colleagues, managers and wider networks. We used 'post-it' notes to record our ideas and points of interest, discussing together how to group these into categories on large flipcharts. Following the meeting, I wrote up these notes in the form of an action plan with named contacts and specific actions and circulated a draft to the participants for comments. I draw on this Action Plan[89] here to describe the participants' reflections and plans, so in general I have not attributed the ideas to specific participants.

The workshop participants focused on ways to coordinate multiple cross-sector organisations' work (Action Plan 07/06/2019). We agreed on the need for cross-sector networks to share information and systems to collate and access that information. The participants recognised that existing networks (whether local, such as the AS process, regional, like the Green Health forum, or national, such as the NPB) were constrained in their capacity to facilitate dialogue and include diverse perspectives because of the limitations on staff time to attend. Constraints

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[89]Action Plan: due to the extent of personal information and contact details included in this plan, I have not attached it as an Appendix as redaction would leave little useful information

on the third sector were largely due to funding being linked to specific projects with no allowance for the development of ideas for collaborative working. Similarly, the Public Health PSB representative acknowledged the limitations of the PSB as a multi-agency body to oversee and coordinate action. She explained that her proposal to establish a cross-cutting well-being subgroup with the NRW representative had been turned down (ESRC workshop 07/06/2019).

We also identified a need for frameworks and processes that would facilitate joint planning. On this point, NWWT CEO and NRW AS Lead acknowledged that their organisations had been unable to provide such a framework to guide this workshop, which relied instead on my skills to facilitate a critical and relational discussion. The planning frameworks currently used by participants' organisations tended to be based on 'PRINCE II' types of project management[90]. We agreed these processes were less suitable for multi-organisational planning as they assumed accountability to a single organisation or 'sponsor' with authority, rather than mutual accountability to communities and other organisations (ESRC workshop 07/06/2019).

Despite the limitations of existing networks and frameworks, the participants discussed ways to improve interorganisational relationships in the context of social prescribing. They identified multiple programmes compatible with social prescribing and with the strategic principles of Wild Pathways. These included NWWT's Living Landscapes, NRW's Area Statements, the public health and primary healthcare model of community health, WCVA and the local CVCs' assets-based community development, as well as with the PSB's well-being objectives and regional and national bodies' strategies for rural development, sport and active travel (Action Plan, 07/06/2019).

As the workshop closed with a celebratory buffet, participants had informal discussions to plan their next steps to create links between these programmes and with social prescribing schemes. As I received their responses to the draft Action Plan, I updated it to include these ideas, which focussed on arranging meetings with colleagues, exchanging information and attending cross-sector forums. Although I received occasional feedback on progress, I left further coordination of action to the organisations involved as I turned to reflecting on and writing up the research.

Discussion of the social prescribing group's plans for joint action
The core group's struggle to include new members in the critical-relational CoP while sustaining all interests cannot be explained simply by a lack of collaborative capacity or

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[90] PRINCE II is a project management process used widely across sectors in the UK and worldwide. It creates a standardized linear project planning process with a 'start, middle and end' for use in the 'controlled environments' of single organisations (What Is PRINCE2? The Definition, History & Benefits | UK, accessed 09/04/2022)

reflexivity. It is better understood as the interaction of reflexive micro-relationships and changes in the wider cultural and structural environment of meta-governance. The CoP's persistence in developing interorganisational relationships even in the absence of grant funding can be explained as the power of a philosophy of praxis to motivate the wider embedding of critical beliefs and practices.

The core research group sustained the ethically reflexive relationships of a critical-relational CoP as we entered this period of planning joint action. Reflexively, each co-researcher explicitly sought to uphold their organisation's interests, indicative of the 'self-care' that Jessop (2020, p. 159) argues is essential for 'ethical and self-emancipatory participation in civil activities.' Critically, we prioritised the weakest, ecological interest as we took a place-based approach to plan our action (see earlier narrative, pp. 239–240), an ethically reflexive stance that further enhanced our understanding of the potential for reciprocal relationships. Relationally, we developed the human capital typical of a CoP (Agranoff, 2008) as we identified social prescribing as the context to create relationships between our organisations and the role of the 'link worker' as the essential mechanism to enhance our collaborative capacity (pp. 238, 240).

Our ethically reflexive stance and shared accountability reduced the power of resource dependency to create an elite interest, the result that Romzek *et al*., (2014) predict. By developing our ideas based on combined strategic principles we reduced the power of the ENRaW grant to impose priorities, sustaining our reciprocal relationships (p. 241). New partners initially adopted this relational stance (pp. 242–243) and following Amirkhanyan (2009) we suggested collaborative management processes to sustain the inclusion of diverse interests. We therefore averted the hierarchical dominance and loss of trust which Milbourne (2009) has shown to result from competitive and centralised evaluation practices. I conclude that this initial extension of our critical-relational culture to include new partners provisionally demonstrated the power of our philosophy of praxis to become a 'conscious and critical' conception of the world, as Gramsci (1971, p. 323) argues.

The strategic-relational nature of the interaction between the core group's culture and wider cultural and structural constraints was evident as we planned joint action. The interaction of the CoP's culture with structural constraints was evidenced by the co-researchers' identification of greater access to funding (pp. 240, 242). By developing the associative and communal rationale that motivates a collaborative alliance, the group was eligible for local,

regional and national funding including the ENRaW grant otherwise inaccessible as single organisations. I concluded that the CoP's ethically reflexive culture enabled the partners to adapt strategically to change the structural constraints on their interests, as Jessop (2007, pp. 21–53) argues.

The interaction of the core group's culture with wider cultural constraints was evidenced by the effects of the requirement for a 'lead partner' in the grant application (p. 245). The public sector partners' unwillingness to lead shifted risk and responsibility to the third sector organisation with greatest operational capacity. This changed the heterarchical relationships of the CoP to dependency on the lead partner. Whereas that partner had previously engaged in reflexive dialogue (pp. 242–243), now they asserted their own interests at the expense of others (p. 245). Thus, dependency of both public and third sectors risked replacing negotiated consensus with compliance, showing that not only can larger third sector organisations dominate smaller, as shown by Milbourne (2009), but they can also dominate public bodies' interests. Guided by Archer's (1995, pp. 308–324) morphogenetic approach, I concluded that the prevalent practice of requiring a lead partner created 'cultural stasis' which risked perpetuating structural constraints.

Re-asserting the reflexive agency of the CoP changed the structural (resource) and cultural constraints on our operational capacity at both micro and meso-levels of governance. At a micro-level, by pooling resources, including my own abilities as process facilitator and knowledge broker, to co-write a grant application, we created additional practice-level capacity. Our pooled information enhanced our understanding of the benefits of collaboration and increased our commitment, creating human capital. This extended our alliance to new partners, enhancing social capital. Thus, restoring heterarchical micro-relations increased the resources available to the CoP. Our broader alliance continued to extend our collaborative managerial processes to include the perspectives and interests of local communities (p. 247). This further enhanced the reflexive orientation of meso-levels of governance (through the proposed PSB well-being subgroup) by including the interests of an additional PSB member. I drew the conclusion that the CoP's experiences corroborate Archer's (1995, p. 308) assertion that if either the cultural or structural domain is static then change in one may invoke change in the other and that change depends on agential choice.

Despite these cultural and structural changes in micro and meso-level governance relationships, structural constraints were sustained by the persistence of a hierarchical and instrumental cross-

sector culture at a societal level. The feedback on the rejected grant application (p. 248) was evidence of a hierarchical culture which excluded communities' interests and treated ecological, public health and community assets instrumentally as resources for the economy. The constraints on reflexive rationality that this culture imposed were identified by the 'whole system in a room' workshop (pp. 251–252). The associated practices of linear project management and hierarchical line management limit dialogue and pluralism by restricting time for cross-sector meetings and constrain heterarchy by conflicting with co-productive approaches to community engagement. From the prevalence of these beliefs and supporting practices, their uncritical acceptance by third and public sectors alike, and their influence on and through Welsh Government's national strategy (see above, p. 250), I concluded that the cultural stasis had the power of hegemony (as discussed in Chapter Two, Part III).

The potential of the CoP's philosophy of praxis to challenge this hegemony was evident in the collaborating partners' plans to align strategic work programmes to create greater reciprocity (p. 252). However, the interactive and adaptive nature of this process was revealed as we identified wider cultural and structural changes needed to support the transformation of cross-sector relations. Sustaining the reflexive micro-relations of NWWT's pilot 'OWC' project required greater interaction between NWWT's own strategic work programmes and a reflexive orientation in the funder's (NRW) meso-level governance (p. 249). Developing reciprocal work programmes required multiple cross-sector CoPs. However, existing cross-sector forums needed to develop relational dialogue and critically reflective practice to enhance their capacity to reach a negotiated consensus on a long-term project (p. 250). To support CoPs, Agranoff (2008) identifies the need for a wider governance network, creating a meso-level of governance. However, reflecting the PSB's lack of reflexive rationality, its failure to establish a cross-cutting subgroup restricted the Board's capacity for reflexive oversight. The co-researchers acknowledged that changing the structural constraints on collaborative projects required funding streams and their associated national policies to be developed iteratively through reflexive dialogue (pp. 238–240). This requires a reflexive approach to Welsh Government's well-being objectives, but from the instrumental treatment of diverse aspects of well-being and the primacy of economic development in Welsh Government's national strategy (Welsh Government, 2017b, p. 3), I inferred a lack of reflexivity in its development.

In the face of these governance dilemmas, Jessop (2000) identifies the need for a 'romantic public irony' to sustain networks' requisite reflexivity. The core research group's experiences provided evidence of the emergence of such a stance at managerial level in the collaborating

organisations. NWWT's CEO expressed a desire to continue to develop collaborative relationships with public and third sector organisations, despite the rejection of the joint funding application (p. 248). NRW's AS Lead was committed to co-production despite his scepticism about the capacity of NRW to give equal weight to third sector and communities' interests and knowledge (pp. 238–239). The PSB had earlier (see discussion section, p. 237) shown its commitment to collaboration despite awareness of the challenges of changing power relationships and organisational structures.

From the social prescribing group and PSB's experiences, I concluded that developing and sustaining critical-relational CoPs is a strategically adaptive process. It requires reflexive rationality and critical awareness in the CoP, interaction with meso-levels of governance to encourage a reflexive orientation and a romantic public irony to generate iterative changes to wider societal culture and structures to change ideology to a shared imaginary.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given a rich description of the PSB and the social prescribing core research group as each network made efforts to develop a shared vision and plan joint action with its collaborating partners. I have explained their experiences with reference to my literature review and theories of governance. Through this explanation I have shown how the fieldwork substantiated my perspective on the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration. I conclude here with a summary of the contribution to my theoretical stance.

In Part I (*developing a shared vision*), I focussed on the capacity of the PSB and core research group to develop reflexive rationality and negotiate consensus. I explored the power relations within each network and its relationship with external bodies to understand how these affected this capacity.

The PSB's experiences provided evidence that a lack of reflexivity in meta-governance by governors restricts reflexivity in the network. Regional and national bodies' lack of dialogue and engagement in the development of their strategies created an environment of hierarchical meta-governance. This environment exacerbated isomorphic pressures on the PSB to adopt a hierarchical and individualised approach to developing a shared vision. The PSB's self-imposed requirement to 'add value' and 'be accountable' created a self-regulating governmentality, reinforcing the isomorphic pressures. Consequently, the PSB's well-being objectives were a series of competing priorities which disguised the Board's limited dialogue, open conflict and rejection of feedback from community engagement. I concluded, like

Schmachtel (2016) that the PSB's objectives portrayed a 'rationalised myth of partnership' rather than a shared vision.

The second core research group's approach to developing a shared vision added to the understanding of a critical-relational CoP gained from the first group (see Chapter Six). Guided by my research design, I reflexively encouraged the development of a relational and critical approach to create the conditions for co-learning in the core group. Our development of a shared vision through reflexive dialogue provided evidence of the heterarchical nature of interorganisational relationships which emerge from this process. In addition, the process demonstrated the interaction of reflexive rationality in the micro-relations of the network with reflexivity in its direct meta-governance, which I term meso-level governance. It showed that reflexivity in the CoP can lead to adapted managerial practices which encourage the 'requisite reflexivity' in direct meta-governance investigated by Jessop (2003). The co-researchers and my encounters with prevalent beliefs and practices as we attempted to act on our shared vision demonstrated my argument that meta-governance is also exerted indirectly through societal culture, in line with Davies' (2011) arguments. The adoption of a hierarchical and instrumental culture prevented the development of collaborative capacity, revealing the power of this hegemonic culture to support dominant interests. I concluded that the core group's shared vision demonstrated the qualities of a philosophy of praxis (as discussed with reference to Gramsci, 1971 in Chapter Two, Part III) but that collaboration risked being constrained by the dominant societal culture.

In Part II (*planning joint action),* I explored how the PSB and core research group negotiated governance dilemmas, focussing on how the extent of reflexive rationality of each network affected its response. Through this exploration, I showed how the micro-relationships of the network affected its interaction with the direct and indirect meta-governance exerted by governors and by societal culture, whether ideological or not.

The constraints on the PSB's capacity to agree plans for action substantiated the need for reflexivity in networks not only to develop a shared vision but also to motivate joint action. The Board's structure of specialist subgroups and a commissioning process further restricted its reflexive rationality, leading to members' frustration at the lack of agreement on plans for action. The adoption of this structure demonstrated the power of prevalent cultural beliefs and practices to exert hegemonic rather than transformative meta-governance over the network. The Board's lack of inclusivity undermined the soft power of consensus, consequently

restricting the PSB's access to resources. This loss of internal legitimacy re-asserted the hierarchical dominance of external bodies as the subgroups aligned their plans to regional and national polices. This domination, despite the aspirations of the Well-being Act for PSBs to become self-organising networks developing local well-being objectives, established more firmly the power of societal culture to act as meta-governance regardless of the ideological orientation of government.

The co-researchers and my experiences of planning joint action further advanced understanding of the adaptive interaction between reflexivity in the CoP and the wider cultural and structural environment. Our capacity to develop a broader alliance demonstrated the power of our critical beliefs and practices to become more widely established, as a philosophy of praxis. The change in access to resources that this ethically reflexive culture created provided evidence of the strategic-relational nature of the interaction between the network culture and societal structures. Expanding the concept of a strategically adaptive process, the re-emergence of a hierarchical culture with the requirement for a lead partner changed the relationships amongst the group members, demonstrating the effects of societal culture to constrain reflexivity in the network. The core group's reassertion of reflexive agency showed the capacity of reflexive micro-relations to change structural and cultural constraints at the micro and meso levels of governance. However, the hegemonic nature of a hierarchical and instrumental cross-sector culture continued to restrict the CoP's access to resources, perpetuating structural constraints on collaboration. The co-researchers' discussion of further collaboration with their broader alliance of partners revealed their tacit understanding of the power of wider societal culture to constrain collaboration. Their plans demonstrated the strategically adaptive and iterative nature of the process of embedding the critical beliefs and practices of the philosophy of praxis more widely in society.

I concluded my discussions of the PSB and core groups' shared visions and plans for action with reflections on whether they demonstrated an emerging transformative culture of reflexivity or a persistent hegemonic culture of hierarchical domination. Encountering the constraints of their hierarchical and individualised culture, PSB members expressed their critical awareness of the risks of domination. Demonstrating reflexive agency, they began to develop a relational focus on their joint contribution to well-being. This embryonic critical and relational reflexivity in the micro-relations of the PSB was accompanied by evidence of an emerging reflexivity in meta-governance by national bodies. In addition, the core group's experiences showed the power of a philosophy of praxis, developed through reflexive

rationality, to motivate efforts to transform societal culture and structures. Supporting this wider embedding of a reflexive stance, the PSB and core group's experiences provided evidence of a 'romantic public irony' at managerial level in third sector and public sector organisations. I therefore conclude that the PSB has the capacity for reflexive rationality, but that developing this will depend on its members' choice to sustain a relational and critical culture. This choice is supported by the emerging reflexive orientation in the environment of meta-governance (by national bodies) but the current lack of reflexivity in Welsh Government policies constrains cultural and structural change.

Chapter Eight Conclusion

Transformative action in critical-relational communities of practice

Introduction

Cross-sector collaboration is central to achieving the ambitions of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015). Yet public bodies and the third sector in Wales face twin challenges. First, a risk of a loss of democracy by the exclusion of communities and dominance of some interests and second, the marginalisation of ecological outcomes relative to other aspects of well-being. The urgency of the need to address these challenges persists, with the publication of the IPCC's Sixth Assessment Report which points to the 'interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies' and calls for 'society and ecosystems to move over (transition) to a more resilient state' (IPCC, 2022, pp. 5–6). My main aim in this research was to understand whether public and third sector bodies can overcome these twin challenges. I had two supplementary aims, to enhance my research partners' expertise and to contribute to the field of knowledge and develop theory. My overall objective to achieve these aims was to create an in-depth case study to answer the main research question: '*whether and how can cross-sector collaboration transform power relations to support action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being in Wales?*'

With my research partners, North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT) and Gwynedd and Anglesey Public Services Board (the PSB) I have engaged in action research and a Wales-wide enquiry to address their concerns and answer the research question. My research partners' concerns reflected themes in a large body of literature which shows that cross-sector collaboration tends to perpetuate historically dominant interests and that prevalent managerial practices create multiple lines of accountability. Through our participation in action research, we co-created knowledge to enhance my partners' expertise and develop theory. I have expressed this knowledge as a theoretical statement of the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration.

In this, my concluding chapter, I first summarise how the chapters of this thesis address my research aims and objectives. This synopsis explains how a participatory 'meta-interpretation' approach enabled me to synthesise a large body of literature by developing increasing levels of conceptual abstraction in my review and enabled my research partners to express their pragmatic concerns. This section also reviews how I identified the potential for a strategic-relational approach (SRA) to address a gap in understanding in governance theory and how this helped me to refine my research question. It explains how the SRA informed my critical-realist approach to build theory using an abductive logic of enquiry that combined explanatory

and interpretive approaches. This section explains how my design of action research in a critical-relational systemic enquiry delivered this methodology by creating five streams of enquiry centred on two consecutive core research groups and the PSB. It goes on to show how I developed my self-reflexivity and the ethical reflexivity of the core groups to sustain a reciprocal dynamic between the critical and relational aspects of the research design. Finally, this overview shows how my research partners and I participated in action research to co-create the knowledge needed to answer our research questions. It summarises the major insights emerging from our collaborative research and explains how I abductively built the theoretical statement from a dialogue between the fieldwork and the literature review and governance theories.

Second, this chapter answers my overall research question and my research partners' pragmatic concerns. It explains how the research partners and others can collaborate to generate action directed at ecologically sustainable national well-being by developing critical-relational communities of practice (CoPs). It clarifies how a strategically adaptive process of embedding critical beliefs and practices changes the relationship between the cross-sector network and its wider governance. I contrast and explain the core research groups and the PSB's capacity to develop reflexive rationality and plan joint action as cross-sector networks. In this section, I also show how I addressed four conceptual questions arising from the literature review to clarify and expand the findings of existing literature in the field of cross-sector collaboration.

In the third section of this chapter, I explain how my thesis draws out key concepts which clarify theory and can inform practice in the field of cross-sector collaboration and network governance. I begin by explaining how my literature review creates a new conceptual framework for future synthesis of literature in the field of cross-sector collaboration. Then I examine how the three key arguments of my statement use concepts of reflexive rationality, critical-relational CoPs and strategically adaptive cultural embedding to clarify the interaction between the micro-relations of the network and its meta-governance. Through this examination, I also explain how my action research design and expansion of the concept of a CoP create a foundation for future governance practice and research.

I close this thesis with reflections on future directions for research and practice. I focus on whether and how the embedding process can be sustained to create action at scale directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being.

Synopsis of the arguments

In the **Introductory Chapter** I explained how the Well-being Act and concurrent legislation in Wales created an urgent need for research with a focus on cross-sector collaboration, which I defined as *joint action between public and third sectors that includes diverse interests in pursuit of national well-being*. I highlighted the twin challenges to delivering such joint action, of including diverse interests and reconciling ecological and other aspects of wellbeing. I explained how my design of action research underpinned a case study with relevance to a wide range of public bodies and environmental third sector organisations. I then introduced my two research partners, NWWT (a regional environmental organisation) and the PSB (established under the Well-being Act) and described the socio-economic and environmental context for the case study.

My first step towards our collaborative research was to synthesise the large body of work in the field of cross-sector collaboration. In **Chapter Two** I explained how I adapted a strategy of 'meta-interpretation' to create a participatory approach that guided the literature review and enhanced my research partners' contribution and commitment to action research. I conducted three rounds of review with increasing levels of conceptual abstraction in response to the research partners' questions and the emergent insights. The first round describes the multiple factors affecting cross-sector collaboration as a type of system, with interacting domains of the collaborative process, interorganisational arrangements and the wider societal environment. The second focusses on the interaction between these domains, creating three conceptual categories of management of interpersonal relationships, management of interorganisational arrangements and the effects of power. The third, most abstract level of the review, explains the continual re-emergence of dominance in cross-sector relationships but potential transformative capacity of cross-sector collaboration, as the contingent effects of power dynamics created by interacting forces of hegemony, isomorphism, legitimisation and governmentality. Each round of review was guided by my reflections with my research partners about their experiences and by the conceptual questions arising from previous rounds. This participatory process drew out the research partners' questions about the risk of domination of ecological interests and the expectation of accountability, as well as four unresolved conceptual questions related, like these concerns, to the effects of power on inclusivity and accountability. The meta-interpretation broadened the applicability of the research to networks in which *dependent but autonomous organisations from multiple sectors form an institutional framework to negotiate diverse interests and define problems, visions and plans that will*

contribute to policy and the common good. This broader applicability locates the study in the wider field of network governance, to which I turned next to understand better the contingent power dynamics of cross-sector collaboration.

My review of governance theory, in **Chapter Three** was the second step in achieving my objective of a case study to answer the remaining conceptual questions and my research partners' concerns. It revealed an important issue to address through the research: the divergence in theories but the potential for SRA to bridge this divide. Theories of governance as hegemony argue that cross-sector governance networks perpetuate the centralisation of power, creating a culture of consensus that disguises conflict and undermines the capacity for resistance to domination. In contrast, theories of democratic network governance argue that in encountering the dilemmas of governance, networks develop critical awareness and construct a new culture that counters dominant interests. Neither strand of theory can explain whether and how networks can overcome the ever-present tendency for hierarchical domination. The SRA offered a way forward by creating a focus on reflexive rationality as underpinning the capacity for strategic creativity in networks. Applying this approach to the Well-being Act, I discussed its ambiguous effects on reflexive rationality and explained why changing the power dynamics of cross-sector collaboration is vital to generate action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being. Accordingly, I formulated my overall research question: '*Whether and how can cross-sector collaboration transform power relations to support action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being in Wales?*' Answering this question required a development of theory and Chapter Three sets out the statement derived from critical reflection on the literature review, interdisciplinary perspectives on governance and the participatory research. This statement of my theoretical stance focusses on the creation of reflexive rationality in communities of practice (CoPs) to develop a philosophy of praxis and how the latter's wider embedding interacts with societal culture and structures, changing the power of hierarchical meta-governance.

The third step towards my objective was to determine a research approach and design, guided by the SRA, for the fieldwork and analysis. This was undertaken in Chapters Four and Five. In **Chapter Four** I explained how a critical-realist approach using an abductive logic of enquiry enabled me to infer hidden power dynamics from experiences of cross-sector collaboration. Understanding the complex and contingent nature of the real effects of power required a combination of interpretation and explanation. I combined morphogenetic explanation with dialogical interpretation to form the abductive dialogue with evolving theory.

Morphogenetics provided a logical framework through which to infer changes in the dynamics of power from changes in culture and structures. The dialogical approach enabled me to integrate multiple perspectives and meanings into a collective interpretation of cross-sector collaboration. I set out how the design of the action research as a critical-relational systemic enquiry informed this combined analysis, meeting my research aims of enhancing my research partners' agency and developing theory by co-creating knowledge with my partners. The critical approach enhanced our understanding of the hidden exercise of power. The relational approach developed ethically reflexive cross-sector relationships. The systemic aspect has important implications for the quality of the research. On the one hand, it increased the applicability of the research to other PSBs and third sector organisations across Wales by taking the wider societal context into account. On the other hand, it increased pressure on my capabilities to engage with multiple local, regional and national bodies and individuals to understand the socio-cultural context, while also taking a critical approach to power. Allowing time to develop these systemic relationships extended the fieldwork to more than two years.

Chapter Five discussed how I negotiated the critical, relational and systemic aspects of the research design by taking a reflexive stance. This stance offered flexibility for the design to evolve and to adopt multiple data collection methods but demanded a high level of self-critical awareness. My strategy was to establish two core research groups with my research partners and others (supporting the participants to become co-researchers) and to develop a further four streams of enquiry with multiple participants. In this way, I increased the diversity of perspectives to develop a rich understanding of the context and create a collective dialogical interpretation of our experiences of cross-sector collaboration. By taking a grounded theory approach, the initial inductive interpretation of the data raised new conceptual questions through abductive dialogue with theory. This process guided further data collection through evolving methods and lines of enquiry and by developing the cycle of action and critical reflection in the core groups. In this way, the process strengthened my self-reflexivity and developed ethical reflexivity and critical awareness in the core groups. The research design thus enabled me to participate with my research partners in the praxis of cross-sector collaboration, co-developing knowledge and building my theoretical statement. It led me to create the concept of a critical-relational CoP and identify the strategically adaptive nature of the interaction between the internal culture of networks and the external environment of their meta-governance. Finally, the participatory approach supported the transfer of ownership and

responsibility for collaborative action to my co-researchers and research partners as the research ended.

Chapters Six and Seven share the findings of the fieldwork and discuss how these substantiated my developing theoretical frame of reference. These empirical chapters show the progression from understanding the situated meaning of the core groups' experiences and diverse perspectives to developing the level of abstraction needed to explain the hidden and dynamic domain of power relations.

Chapter Six gives a rich description of the action research I conducted with the first core research group, focussed on road verges, over the course of nearly a year. This chapter highlights the importance of a CoP in cross-sector collaboration and produces two major insights. First, a crucial characteristic for the transformative power of a co-learning CoP is a critical-relational culture which enhances the network's creativity and capacity to act. I show how the core group members created a CoP and became critically reflective co-researchers. Second, capacity to change prevailing power dynamics can be built by supporting the network's beliefs and practices to become a critical philosophy that changes the environment that governs the network (its meta-governance). Chapter Six demonstrates how my engagement with the co-researchers in cross-sector collaboration revealed nascent changes in power relations, but how wider societal culture and prevalent managerial practices created continuing constraints. My co-researchers and I turned our attention to embedding our critical beliefs and practices more widely in their organisations and to facilitate this I sought to establish a second core research group.

In **Chapter Seven** I examine the experiences of my research partner, the PSB, over the course of more than two years and compare these with the second core research group to understand the influences on internal micro-relations of networks. I draw upon findings from my extended enquiries across Wales to understand changes in the socio-cultural environment. The findings discussed in this chapter enabled me to conceptualise the relationship between reflexive rationality in the CoP and a similar orientation in meta-governance as a dynamic strategically adaptive process. I show how the hierarchical and individualised culture of the public sector limited the PSB's capacity for creativity, reflexivity and political accountability. I contrast this culture with the core group's freedom, by virtue of our critical-relational stance, to develop an empowering culture which created reciprocal interorganisational relationships. Using a morphogenetic approach to form abductive dialogue with theory, I demonstrate how a lack of

cultural change in the PSB reinforced the structural constraints created by regional and national policies and limited the Board's capacity to develop a mutually supportive alliance with regional and national bodies. In contrast, I show how the core group's cultural change from the hierarchical and instrumental norm changed its relationship to the structures controlling access to resources and motivated the development of a broader alliance of interests. I show how the emergence of critical awareness and relational approaches to planning action in the PSB have the potential to be supported by evidence of a reflexive orientation in meta-governance by national bodies. I close the chapter by concluding that the PSB has the capacity to develop reflexive rationality, supported by reflexive meta-governance. However, this development will depend on PSB members' agency to sustain a critical-relational culture. The Board's capacity to transform wider culture and structures risks being constrained by a lack of reflexivity in Welsh Government policy-making processes.

Answering the research questions

In seeking to answer my main research question, I also addressed my research partners' pragmatic concerns. For NWWT, the concern was *how can NWWT sustainably maximise its contribution to national well-being through cross-sector collaboration while at the same time increase the focus on wildlife*? For the PSB, the concern was *how can Gwynedd and Anglesey PSB members collaborate in a way that adds value to the work of their individual organisations?* Both concerns reflected the prevalent experience in cross-sector collaboration of a hierarchy of interests, with some organisations or sectors' interests becoming dominant and others subservient.

My overall finding is that the research partners and others who engage in cross-sector collaboration can generate action directed towards ecologically sustainable development which integrates multiple sectors' interests when they develop and sustain reflexive rationality and critical awareness. Collaborating partners can *develop* these attributes by (re)shaping their cross-sector networks into a critical-relational community of practice. Doing so produces the critical problem-solving conditions to negotiate consensus on the immediate steps to take that have the greatest potential for sustainable, or integrated, national well-being. The network partners can *sustain* reflexive rationality within the CoP by developing a shared vision with the quality of a 'philosophy of praxis.' These critical beliefs create reciprocal relationships between collaborating organisations, supported by adapting prevalent practices in encounters with the dilemmas of governance. The critical philosophy changes the dynamics of hidden power

relations as it becomes more widely embedded through the collaborating partners' interactions with the wider socio-cultural environment that governs the CoP.

In the case of this research, building reflexive rationality and critical awareness with cross-sector partners enabled NWWT to assert its ecological interests while enhancing the joint contribution to national well-being. These collaborating partners' negotiated consensus had the quality of a philosophy of praxis. It was motivated by critical awareness, created a belief in reciprocal not dominant cross-sector relationships and changed common practices to sustain these relationships. Their shared vision therefore had the capacity to add value to the work of their individual organisations while also enhancing the power of marginalised interests. In contrast, a lack of reflexivity in the PSB constrained its collaborative action and risked the Board losing legitimate authority over its local well-being objectives. The Board's superficial consensus on a series of competing priorities disguised inherent conflict and created a 'rationalised myth of partnership' rather than a shared vision.

Through action research with two consecutive core research groups, I defined three key characteristics of a critical-relational CoP. The first is that such strategic partnerships include not only those with a strategic perspective but, as Agranoff (2008) describes, technical specialists or practitioners from multiple sectors who create a self-organising network. Action research in the core groups demonstrated that facilitating practitioner-level experts to engage in critical reflection on practice generated the iterative dialogue amongst diverse perspectives and shared ownership that creates reflexive rationality. In contrast, the PSB's focus on its organisations' strategic priorities excluded practitioners' reflective feedback, restricted dialogue and delegated responsibility to individual organisations.

Second, a critical-relational CoP enables members to reflect on the effects of prevalent beliefs and practices that disadvantage some groups of society (the critical aspect). By taking a reflexive approach, to incorporate practitioner-level and strategic perspectives, the core groups' process of negotiating a shared vision took the shape of *critical* problem-solving. It provided socio-technical solutions to a problem by developing mutual understanding of the collaborating partners' strategic principles. Critically, it also defined and developed ways to overcome the wider cultural and structural barriers which perpetuated that problem by constraining collaborative action. In contrast, the lack of critical reflection in the PSB led it to accept the constraints of financial austerity. The Board implicitly redefined its goal from maximising the well-being of local communities to minimising detrimental impacts and aligned its plans for

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action to regional and national bodies' policies, driven by resource-dependency rather than strategic planning.

Third, a critical-relational CoP enables members to develop a shared vision supported by adapted practices that create reciprocal relationships amongst the collaborating partners (the relational aspect). Raising critical awareness motivates the development of a relational network culture through shared boundary-spanning and facilitative leadership. This relational culture is characterised by ethical self-care and empowerment of each other's interests and the inclusion of citizens. The core groups' awareness of the power exerted through national policies motivated them to persist in negotiating a shared vision. The co-researchers took shared responsibility to consider each other's interests as they co-developed plans for action in the contexts of road verges and social prescribing. Their reflection on situated practice led them to develop reciprocal relationships with each other and with communities, transforming needs into assets. In contrast, the PSB's focus on prioritisation of objectives rather than a common vision created inherent conflict in the network. The lack of shared responsibility and reciprocity restricted the Board's access to the pooled resources of its members. The consequent shift to align its objectives to regional and national bodies' policies undermined the Board's pride in community engagement and capacity for strategic action.

The action research demonstrated that the CoP's critical-relational culture motivates collaborating partners to embed their philosophy of praxis more widely, enhancing their collaborative capacity. The core research groups revealed the iterative and adaptive nature of this process as they initiated and interacted with changes in culture and structures to create a supportive, reflexively oriented governance environment. Changes in *cultural* beliefs initiated by the Well-being Act motivated the research partners' search for a broader alliance. The co-researchers' *relational* vision of reciprocally beneficial cross-sector collaboration motivated the inclusion of more diverse interest groups. The resultant broader alliance enhanced their capacity to access pooled resources and new sources of funding, changing the *structural* constraints on collaborative capacity. Changes in *structures* controlling access to resources, associated with the Well-being Act and concurrent legislation, motivated the core groups to negotiate plans for joint action. The co-researchers' *critical* problem-solving approach identified the prevalent hierarchical and individualised culture that constrained operational capacity. The collaborating partners changed these *cultural* constraints by adapting the underlying instrumental managerial practices, to focus instead on enhancing mutual understanding and convergent interests.

By answering the overall research question and my research partners' concerns, this critical-relational systemic enquiry also answers the four conceptual questions arising from my review of literature on cross-sector collaboration. In this way, it shows how the critical-relational CoP can change the underlying power dynamics of cross-sector collaboration, as follows.

How do interpersonal relationships and interorganisational arrangements interact with the anticipated outcomes of cross-sector collaboration?

Reviews of cross-sector collaboration in Part I of the literature review (Chapter Two) focus on the important qualities of interpersonal relationships and organisational processes that produce agreement on a long-term joint project (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012). These reviews imply that, but do not specify how, collaborative arrangements influence interpersonal relationships to drive collaborative outcomes. The core research groups' experiences clarified this relationship. Organising as a critical-relational CoP created interorganisational arrangements that produced the necessary interpersonal qualities to negotiate agreement on the anticipated outcomes of the network.

Other articles in Part I of my review point to the influence of the environment of meta-governance or oversight of the network on its interorganisational arrangements and anticipated outcomes (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009; Mohan, 2011). Through my observation of the PSB meetings I found that this meta-governance also affected the network's interpersonal relationships and capacity to negotiate agreement on the desired outcomes. The PSB's assumption of hierarchical scrutiny by, rather than joint decision-making with, external bodies created a focus on accountability. This focus curtailed opportunities for dialogue to enhance mutual understanding, constraining members' capacity to create productive relationships and delaying joint action.

How can networks overcome the continual re-emergence of a competitive and hierarchical culture to sustain their political accountability to diverse stakeholders?

In Part II of the literature review, articles were divided between a focus on *managing interorganisational arrangements* and *managing interpersonal relationships* (both within the network and with communities) to enhance the sectors' capacity for collaboration. In each case, studies find a continual re-emergence of a competitive and hierarchical culture in networks (Gazley, 2008; Romzek *et al.*, 2014; Bartels, 2018). The action research helped to develop insight into the *interaction* between interpersonal and interorganisational approaches, adding nuance to Sullivan and Skelcher's (2002, pp. 99–117) treatment of these as separate processes. On the one hand, I found further evidence that a focus on accountability as the main tool to

manage organisational arrangements produces interpersonal conflict and excludes communities. On the other, I found that facilitative leadership focussed on interpersonal relationships must also address the network's organisational arrangements to sustain political accountability within the network and to communities.

The effects of a focus on accountability were evident in the PSB's adoption of the hierarchical and individualised structures of its member organisations to guide its own relationship with its subgroups and with external organisations. It resulted in conflict, lack of mutual understanding and a shift away from engaging communities that caused a loss of its members' commitment to collaboration. These findings echo those of studies of public-third sector contracting (Milbourne, 2009) but here show accountability causes a similar loss of trust in inter-public sector relationships. The PSB's shift in focus from local engagement to alignment to regional and national policies provided further evidence of Checkland *et al*.'s (2013) finding of a tendency for hierarchical control to dominate political accountability. However, Matthews (2014) notes that some strategic networks nevertheless sustain engagement with communities, meaning the PSB's acceptance of hierarchical control was not inevitable.

The need to combine shared facilitative leadership with conducive organisational arrangements was evident in the core groups' capacity to resist the imposition of hierarchical control. The co-researchers' critically reflective practice motivated them to take shared responsibility to enhance mutual understanding and form convergent goals. These are the characteristics of facilitative leadership usually attributed to individuals (Keast *et al.*, 2004; Williams, 2013; Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014), providing evidence in support of the arguments of Stout, Bartels and Love (2018) that facilitative leadership must become a group disposition. Changing the imposition of hierarchical control, however, also required the development of *shared* responsibility for boundary-spanning to change the managerial arrangements *governing* the core group. This contrasts with Williams' (2013) focus on boundary-spanning as *individual* skills aimed at creating connections amongst the collaborating partners *within* the group. As the co-researchers and I engaged with our wider networks of colleagues, managers and other organisations we changed the governance arrangements, showing how the supportive network environment called for by Agranoff (2008) can be achieved. This corroborates Dow *et al*.'s (2013) finding of the need for wider cultural change to sustain cross-sector links or bridging social capital in networks.

How might cross-sector networks change the power relationships between collaborating partners which constrain collaborative capacity?

The *power accounts* of cross-sector collaboration in Part II of the literature review explained unequal inter-sectoral relationships as the result of both direct and hidden power. In my analysis of the theoretical foundations of these accounts, in Part III, I set out how power is maintained by ideologies and prevalent managerial practices which benefit the interests of an elite group. My review of governance theory, in Chapter Three, explains how beliefs and practices affect networks directly through meso-levels of managerial governance and indirectly by the meta-governance created by societal culture, whether or not this is ideological. The SRA highlighted the role of reflexive rationality (the collaborative capacity to adapt strategically) to overcome the constraints created by meso and meta-governance. However, existing governance theory is divided on whether and how such reflexive rationality might develop in cross-sector networks.

My discussions of the experiences of the core groups and the PSB established a link between meso-levels of governance and multiple levels of collaborative capacity. I demonstrated that a focus on accountability to superordinate bodies, a 'governance-level' capacity (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002, p. 112), constrained not only political accountability (as shown by Checkland *et al*. 2013) but also strategic, operational, practice and community levels of collaborative capacity. I concluded that a culture of hierarchical accountability creates an asymmetry of power in *inter-public* sector relationships. This extends the finding by Milbourne and Cushman (2013) that resource dependency and contractual arrangements create an asymmetry of *public-third* sector relationships.

The action research also demonstrated that prevalent beliefs and practices create a hidden culture of meta-governance that constrains reflexive rationality. Societal norms of effectiveness and 'added value' created isomorphic pressures to adopt hierarchical and competitive cultures in the core groups and the PSB. This finding provides further evidence of the persistence of such cultures (as shown by Milbourne and Cushman, 2015) despite appeals decades earlier for diversity in the management of cross-sector collaboration (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and despite evidence that situated practice and creative adaptation of cultural institutions can support democratic networks (Bevir and Rhodes, 2007). This finding supports Davies' (2011, pp. 101–124) analysis that the acculturation process in governance networks perpetuates hegemony.

My abductive dialogue between the fieldwork and governance theory drew the conclusion that changing the ubiquitous hierarchical culture requires the reflexive rationality argued by Jessop

(2000, 2003) to create negotiated consensus, but also critical reflection on practice to create the trust and empathy needed to persist in these negotiations. The core group's critical reflection motivated each co-researcher first to assert their own organisation's interests and then through reflexive dialogue to develop an understanding of the inter-relatedness of their own and others' objectives. This finding contradicts the assumption that the negotiation of convergent goals must di-prioritise self-interest to move organisations towards network objectives (Amirkhanyan, 2009; Romzek *et al.*, 2014). On the other hand, it confirms the suppositions of Milbourne and Cushman (2015) and Schmachtel (2016) that those most disadvantaged by the hierarchical culture of accountability will realise this through situated practice and resist its imposition.

How might networks resist hegemony and integrate multiple interests?

Part III of the literature review showed that changing from ideological beliefs and common-sense practices to critical beliefs and adapted practices shifts power dynamics from hegemony to emancipation, from legitimisation to legitimacy and from self-regulating governmentality reinforced by isomorphism to ethical reflexivity supported by new cultural institutions. However, the reviewed literature was unable to explain how collaborative networks create the deliberate intent to change power relations and to what extent the micro-relations of the network affect societal beliefs and practices.

My discussions in the empirical chapters demonstrate that the critical-relational character of the CoP generates the reflexive rationality and critical awareness necessary to develop a shared vision with the quality of a philosophy of praxis. In contrast to the core groups, the PSB's hierarchical and individualised culture represented the uncritical adoption of a dominant ideology or 'common-sense.' While the PSB's culture constrained its capacity to negotiate a consensus, the core groups' ethically reflexive vision conflicted with Davies' (2011, p. 119) argument that the socio-cultural conditions of neoliberalism prevent the development of an ethico-political imaginary. It therefore indicated the emergence of a hegemonic struggle to assert an alternative imaginary, as Milbourne and Cushman (2015, p. 481) suggest.

The abductive dialogue demonstrates the power of a philosophy of praxis to change the hidden dynamics of power exerted through societal culture. The core research groups' ethically reflexive culture interacted with changes in culture and structures associated with the Well-being Act in three main ways. First, the Act's discourse of integrated national well-being motivated us to engage in reflexive dialogue to develop an alliance based on reciprocal relationships, resisting *isomorphic* pressures to adopt a hierarchical and instrumental culture.

Second, the establishment of the PSB and expectation of cross-sector collaboration changed the organisational structures governing the co-researchers, facilitating our continued negotiation of plans for action. Sustaining this change, we developed a communal rationale for collaboration which oriented our plans for action towards contributing to each other's interests. I therefore inferred a change in the dynamics of *governmentality* away from self-regulation and compliance with hierarchical priorities and towards ethical reflexivity. Third, the discourse of sustainable national well-being changed the structures controlling the environmental sector's access to resources but required a cross-sector alliance of diverse interests. The core group's critical appraisal of grant criteria according to the capacity to support each partner's interests, rather than adaption of their strategic priorities for expediency, indicated a change in the dynamics of *legitimisation* from domination by elite interests to legitimate integration of diverse interests.

Contributions to theory and practice

The preceding sections have offered an overview of the main aims, objectives, questions, approach and findings of this thesis. In formulating my answers to the research questions, I have already started to discuss how these are situated within, clarify and expand the existing literature. In this section, I explain how this thesis contributes to the conceptual understanding and practice of cross-sector collaboration. I begin by explaining how my meta-interpretation creates a new conceptual framework for the synthesis of literature in the field of cross-sector collaboration. Next, I consider how the three key arguments of my theoretical statement bridge the divide in governance theories, create synergies between the practice of action research and cross-sector collaboration, and advance understanding in governance theory of the relationship between the micro-relations of the network and macro-relations of meta-governance.

A new conceptual framework

Following Weed's (2008) literature review strategy of meta-interpretation enabled me to synthesise a large body of work in the field of cross-sector collaboration by conducting three rounds of review to refine ideas and increase the level of conceptual abstraction. Through this process I developed a new conceptual framework for the synthesis of the literature.

Previous reviews (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012) have focussed on categorising the diverse and numerous factors affecting the process and outcomes of cross-sector collaboration. Yet, these reviews are limited in their capacity to guide practice due to the difficulties in defining factors and a lack of understanding of interactive effects. By building on Emerson and colleagues' (2012) depiction of these factors

as a system (in Part I of the meta-interpretation) I developed a conceptual framework of a system with domains of the collaborative process (which includes interpersonal relationships), interorganisational arrangements and the societal environment. Whereas Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012) focus on the dynamic interactions within the collaborative process, I extended the review to consider the interactions within and between each domain. By concentrating on these interactive effects, I further developed my conceptual framework to categorise accounts of cross-sector collaboration as focussing on the management of interpersonal relationships, the management of interorganisational arrangements, and the effects of direct and hidden power (in Part II). Whereas the accounts focussing on power variously identify resource dependency, linked to hegemony, legitimisation, isomorphism and governmentality as explaining the continual re-emergence of domination, they do not account for transformative effects. By theorising the conditions for transformation, I have created a typological framework (in Part III) to understand the interactions between the management of interpersonal relationships, management of interorganisational arrangements and the exercise of power or transformation. This categorisation thus provides a new conceptual framework for future syntheses of the literature.

Contribution to governance theory and practice

My meta-interpretation of the literature developed an analysis of the dynamics of hidden power exerted through cross-sector collaboration by the forces of hegemony, legitimisation and governmentality supported by isomorphism. My reflection on the work of Stoker (2011, 2018) and Jessop (2000, 2003, 2020) showed that changing these dynamics requires the development of reflexive rationality and critical awareness. However, the divergent strands of governance theory epitomised by Davies (2011) and Sørensen and Torfing (2007) are unable to explain whether and how cross-sector networks can develop and sustain the requisite reflexivity and critical awareness in the face of the exercise of power through meta-governance.

To understand the capacity of networks for transformation required a development of theory. Following Jessop's (2007) strategic-relational approach provided a heuristic to incorporate cultural as well as structural explanations of the exercise of power. My critical-relational systemic research design made it possible to engage in the everyday situated practice of the research partners to co-develop workable knowledge. By creating a dialogue between the primary research and theories of governance, my expansion and combining of theoretical concepts was grounded in the data. In my resultant statement, I take a position on the dynamics of cross-sector collaboration which reconciles views of network governance as either

centralising power or democratically transforming the process of government (Davies and Chorianopoulos, 2018; Sørensen and Torfing, 2018).

While I have elaborated the theoretical statement in full in Chapter Three, here I explain its contribution to theory by focussing on its three key arguments. First, I show how the focus on reflexive rationality bridges cultural and structural explanations of governance. Second, I show how the principles of action research are fundamental to the transformative capacity of cross-sector networks, creating a foundation for future research and practice. Third, I explain how the statement develops governance theory by reconceptualising the interaction between the network and its meta-governance as a strategically adaptive process.

The first argument of the statement is that reflexive rationality in networks supported by a similar orientation in their meta-governance creates the transformative capacity of network governance.

Following Jessop (2000), I define reflexive rationality as the process of iterative dialogue amongst a plurality of interests in which each has equal or heterarchical control, to reach a negotiated consensus that coordinates action. Reflexive rationality is thus the collective reflexive agency of the collaborative network to take structurally oriented action which can transform the network from hierarchical accountability to an elite interest, to political accountability to diverse interests. Following Sørensen and Torfing (2005, p. 204), I argue the capacity for such creative agency emerges from the regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary culture of the network. This culture can be sustained by the reflexive use of meta-governance by governors (as shown by Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). However, in line with Davies (2011, pp. 101–124), I argue that hegemony, or the uncritical adoption of prevailing ideology, constrains the network's capacity to develop a reflexively rational culture and obscures the structural effects of power. Thus, meta-governance is also exerted by the hidden power of a prevalent culture. As Jessop (2003) has argued, this cultural meta-governance must exhibit a reflexive orientation to prevent the continual re-emergence, shown by Sørensen and Torfing (2007), of hierarchical meta-governance by governors.

My focus on the capacity of the network for reflexivity and its interaction with meta-governance therefore acknowledges both the democratic potential of governance networks (Sørensen and Torfing, 2018) and the way network culture has the capacity to disguise networks' perpetuation of the centralisation of power (Davies and Chorianopoulos, 2018). The concept of reflexive rationality thus bridges the divide in these governance theories.

The second argument is that reflexive rationality is created in critical-relational forms of communities of practice (CoPs).

I combined the principles of action research with the three dimensions of practice which enable co-learning, to develop two core research groups as cross-sector networks. The dimensions of practice, of mutual engagement, joint enterprise and a shared repertoire, supported the principles of action research, of participation in iterations of action and reflection. In this way, the core groups developed the characteristics of a CoP (drawing on Wenger, 1998). At the same time, I encouraged a reflexive stance in the groups to create a reciprocal dynamic between the critical and relational aspects of my action research design (following Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, pp. 1–17). In this way, the core groups developed the reflexive rationality and critical awareness that transform governance networks from hegemony to emancipatory cross-sector collaboration.

I developed the *critical* aspect of the CoP based on the aim of action research to create cycles of action and reflection which include diverse perspectives (Dick, 2015). These cycles developed a shared repertoire of skills, beliefs, management practices and stories. The iterative process revealed the need to include practitioners in the network, as they have the experiential knowledge needed to engage in critical reflection on place-based practice, bringing to light their tacit knowledge and hidden assumptions and raising awareness of power relations.

I developed the *relational* aspect of the CoP based on the aims of action research to facilitate mutual understanding, create a shared vision and initiate joint action (Greenwood and Levin, 2007, pp. 133–150). Encouraging mutual engagement developed the relational forms of communication (iterative dialogue and equal inclusion of diverse interests) that can produce the creativity needed to negotiate consensus on a long-term project (Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018). This approach benefitted from the inclusion of those with a strategic perspective to understand how to combine strategic principles for reciprocal benefit.

The core groups developed an *ethically reflexive stance* as I encouraged the co-researchers to assert their perspectives and reflect on practice, to develop a joint enterprise. This supported them to adopt the normative aspiration of action research of promoting social change and empowering marginalised groups (Bartels and Wittmayer, 2018, pp. 1–7). The emerging critical awareness of the effects of power on each partner's interests motivated the co-researchers to take shared responsibility to negotiate a shared vision that developed reciprocal relationships amongst their organisations and with communities. This process created a group

disposition of boundary-spanning and facilitative leadership. Thus, the critical and relational approach engendered the dialogical, pluralist and heterarchical character of reflexive rationality identified by Jessop (2003).

The reconceptualization of transformative cross-sector networks as critical-relational CoPs therefore, creates a central role for action research in the future development of governance practice and theory, as I explore later in the final section in this chapter.

The third argument is that developing a critical philosophy of praxis in the CoP changes the relationship between the network and its meta-governance through a dynamic strategically adaptive process of cultural embedding.

This third argument draws on the strategic-relational and morphogenetic approaches to theory, to explain the change in power amongst social groups as a strategically adaptive process (Jessop, 2007, pp. 21–53) in which interest groups both initiate and respond to changes in culture and structures (Archer, 1995, pp. 308–324). Whether initiating or responding to change, the power of the changing configuration of strategic relations to constrain or enhance collaborative capacity depends on the network's reflexive agency (Archer, 1995, p. 308). The process of creating a reflexive orientation in meta-governance is therefore more akin to an adaptive process than the 'organised counter-hegemonic movement' gaining control over coercive hegemony anticipated by Davies (2011, p.119).

The critical-relational culture of the CoP can create the political consciousness needed to provoke resistance to hegemonic cultures, forming a caveat to Davies' (2011, pp. 101–124) argument that the ideology of neoliberalism and the acculturation process of governance networks prevent politicised resistance. The CoP's development of a philosophy of praxis through critical reflection on practice concords with Sørensen and Torfing's (2007, pp. 95–110) analysis that the dilemmas of governance networks can provoke an awareness that power is exercised through cultural beliefs and practices and, consequently, create innovation in the culture of the network.

The CoP's ethically reflexive culture and belief in reciprocal relationships can motivate it to embed its critical beliefs and practices more widely, to create a broader alliance and a supportive, reflexive orientation in meta-governance. Creating a broader alliance requires this embedding to take the same critical-relational approach as the CoP's process of negotiating consensus. It therefore embeds the CoP's ethically reflexive culture more widely in society in a politically democratic not hierarchically hegemonic way. In this way, it changes the focus of

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meta-governance from the effective achievement of hierarchically determined goals to building the capacity for future collaboration, as anticipated by Sørensen and Torfing (2009, p. 242). The process of embedding can thus achieve a reflexive orientation in meta-governance even within existing European ideological norms of effectiveness and democracy.

The development of a conceptual framework in my literature review, my critical-relational approach to the development of reflexive rationality and critical awareness in the CoP and my theoretical statement therefore all contribute to the theory and practice of cross-sector collaboration. They also indicate the need for future research in this area, as I consider next in the final section of this chapter.

Future research

This is the first detailed empirical study of the collaborative practices of a Public Services Board in Wales and sets these in the context of system-wide enquiry. It has contributed to the theory and practice of cross-sector collaboration through the development of the concept of transformative critical-relational communities of practice. My aim in this thesis was to understand whether and how the Well-being Act could motivate collaborative action that could combine both human-centric and ecological approaches to well-being without the former dominating the interests of the latter. I showed how this required the development of reflexive rationality in networks and a process of strategic adaptation to embed this culture more widely in society. Although the core research groups developed the characteristics of transformative networks, a similar culture in the PSB was more embryonic in nature. Additionally, although the core research groups began to engage in a strategically adaptive process to enhance their creative reflexivity, their collaborative capacity continued to be constrained by the need to enhance reflexivity more broadly in society. Thus, the Well-being Act has initiated cultural and structural change, but this must be sustained by a focus on reflexivity in the PSB and a broader embedding of the critical-relational culture and belief in reciprocal cross-sector relationships.

These research findings indicate the need for further research in this field and the conceptual framework for literature review and research design of critical-relational systemic enquiry offer new approaches to guide this research. In addition, the urgent need to generate collaborative action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being is no less today than at the start of this PhD project. To close this thesis, I offer some reflections on future directions for research to address the twin challenges of reconciling diverse interests and generating action directed towards ecologically sustainable national well-being.

My literature review synthesised a large body of literature on cross-sector collaboration. It demonstrated the extensive analysis that exists of approaches that focus on managing interpersonal relationships, managing interorganisational arrangements and the exercise of power. Investigating the theoretical basis for the power accounts revealed the contingent dynamics that sustain or transform cross-sector power relations. Yet despite this contingency, there is a paucity of literature examining the capacity of cross-sector networks to shift these dynamics towards sustained transformation. This research has shown the capacity to change these power dynamics by developing reflexive rationality and critical awareness in a CoP in collaboration between environmental and public health sectors in the context of a national discourse of national well-being. Further research is needed to examine whether and how a critical-relational CoP can be developed with a more diverse range of partners and in other national contexts. This could draw on literature in the fields of social learning and action research to examine the CoP's capacity to develop a culture that resists isomorphic pressures, to co-locate legitimacy in the network to resist the legitimisation of dominant interests, to develop the ethical reflexivity that transforms self-regulating governmentality, and to develop a philosophy of praxis that motivates a strategically adaptive process of culture change.

Such future research could usefully contribute to and build on the body of work in the field of just transitions to sustainable development. This field was touched on in this research, with reference to Eckersley's (2020a, 2020b) work on the key challenge for ecological transitions, which she frames as the legitimation of environmental problems relative to other political problems. This legitimation must be achieved at multiple levels of governance from the very local to global. My research design of a critical-relational systemic enquiry inspired by the principles of action research offers a valuable approach for this research, as I explore next.

At the very local level, Eckersley (2020a) proposes that environmental problems can resonate with citizens by connecting the challenges of everyday life with their indirect ecological consequences. She argues that this can enliven participatory democracy at the same time as enhancing ecological awareness and action. The development of a critical-relational CoP in this research demonstrated how the action research approach facilitated social learning by engagement in the everyday situated practice of practitioners in the field and with local communities. However, this approach faced the risk identified by Eckersley (2020a) that such ecological materialism remains local and does not achieve larger system change at scale. Further critical-relational research could examine whether and how establishing local CoPs using the co-researchers' proposals of cluster development or alignment of strategic work

programmes, or other strategy could sustain the ethically reflexive approach to critical problem-solving.

At a national and global level, Eckersley (2020b) proposes a '*critical method'* to build political traction for transformational changes. This requires a process of '*conjunctural analysis*', to identify situations where multiple social, economic and environmental challenges create opportunities for transformation. This analysis must be coupled with and guide '*critical problem-solving*' to identify ways to transition towards an ecologically sustainable state. The latter requires the identification of social institutions which can take collective societal responsibility for transition, a critical approach to social relations that produce inequality and marginalise interests, and the inclusion of diverse standpoints to anticipate problems and build political support (Eckersley, 2020b, pp. 11–15). The systemic perspective of this research revealed opportunities for conjunctural analysis in the multiple regional and national cross-sector networks in Wales. My analysis of the Well-being Act identified PSBs as having the potential to take collective societal responsibility for just transitions. However, the research revealed the cultural constraints on the PSB and other cross-sector networks that currently limit their capacity to take a critical approach, include diverse perspectives and assume joint responsibility. This lack of reflexive rationality in these networks also created an environment of meso-levels of governance that constrained the capacity of the CoP to act at a local scale. Further critical-relational systemic research is therefore needed to understand first, whether and how regional and national cross-sector networks can undertake conjunctural analysis and generate popular counter discourses of ecologically sustainable national progress; second, whether and how PSBs can develop reflexive agency to resist isomorphic pressures; and third, whether and how CoPs can sustain the strategically adaptive process that engenders a reflexive orientation in meta-governance and how that process affects the capacity to scale up locally situated critical practice.

This thesis has demonstrated the potential for emancipatory cross-sector collaboration in the context of the new discourses and practices of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015). Further research is needed to develop both theory and practice to sustain just transitions to an ecological state at a national scale.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Letter of Support

To whom it may concern

21st November 2016

YMDDIRIEDOLAETH
natur
WILDLIFE TRUST
GOGLEDD CYMRU
NORTH WALES

Ymddiriedolaeth
Natur Gogledd
Cymru

Prif Swyddfa: 376 Stryd Fawr,
Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 1YE
01248 351 541

Dear Sir or Madam

Research Proposal – "Developing collaboration between public sector and third sector organisations" – Elizabeth Woodcock

I am writing to express our support for the above research.   We believe that for Welsh society to effectively manage our environment for the future well-being of people, biodiversity and their environment, collaboration between the third sector and public bodies is essential.

North Wales
Wildlife Trust

Head Office: 376 High St,
Bangor, Gwynedd, LL57 1YE
01248 351 541

With new legislation in place, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act, this is a good time to be investigating novel ways of working, and this research will help us make the best of the new legislation.

nwwt@wildlifetrustswales.org
www.northwaleswildlifetrust.org.uk

We are delighted to be recognised as an organisation which can contribute data and understanding which hope to be valuable to ourselves, public bodies, and also other Wildlife Trusts in Wales through the Wildlife Trust movement.

We are willing to contribute staff, volunteer time and funding towards this research, and ensure adherence to our Safeguarding and Data Protection policies through the process.

Yours sincerely

Frances Cattanach
Trust Director

Charity Number: 230772
Company Number: 773995

Rhif Elusen: 230772
Rhif Cwmni: 773995

This technical document accompanies the meta-interpretation, Chapter Two: Literature Review. It contains:

- An overview of the process followed at each stage of the literature review
- Tables with details of each round of the review, including
    - Search parameters, inclusion and exclusion criteria
    - The articles selected with their main dimensions of variation

Overview of the stages of the meta-interpretation

Table 4 Stages of meta-interpretation

Stage of meta-interpretation	Process followed
Identify research area	Chapter One explains the choice of research area of cross-sector collaboration – defined as *joint action between public and third sectors that includes interests in pursuit of national well-being*
Identify initial illustrative studies	Selected to maximise variation in academic and research contexts, from reading lists of an experienced researcher in the field
Thematic and context analysis	The thematic and context analysis is included in the synthesis, Chapter Two Parts I and II
Exclusion/ inclusion criteria	See Tables 5,7,10 and 12 below
Iterative searches	4 rounds of search – see Tables 6,8,9,11 and 13 below. Round 1: Initial illustrative studies (Chapter 2 Part I) Round 2: Conceptual issues and the research partners' experiences (Chapter 2, Part II) Round 3: Ongoing review based on conceptual issues and experiences arising during the empirical research (Chapter 2, Part II) Round 4: Theoretical bases for 'power accounts' (Chapter 2, Part III)

Literature searches

Table 5 Search criteria round 1

Search round 1	Initial illustrative studies
Search parameters	I sought advice from researchers with expertise in the field of research – cross-sector collaboration. I defined this in the context of the Well-being Act as *joint action between public and third sectors that includes interests in pursuit of national well-being.* I selected a small number of illustrative studies from reading lists for lectures on 'public value governance'.
Inclusion criteria	I confined my choice to lists headed 'collaboration' and 'third sector' to focus on the research area of collaboration as described by the Well-being Act. From these lists I selected seven studies to maximise the variation in contexts of the research sites and of the academic, temporal, ideological, political, and disciplinary contexts, and of the study methods.
Exclusion criteria	The narrow definition of cross-sector collaboration excluded broader literature on other forms of multi-organisational arrangements, including partnership, co-production, privatisation, and decentralisation.

Table 6 Search Round 1: selected articles

Article (reference)	Main dimensions of maximising variation	Definitions of cross-sector collaboration
(Agranoff, 2008)	Grounded theory Spain/ USA context for case studies	(pp.322-323) formal and informal structures comprised of representatives from governmental and nongovernmental agencies working interdependently to jointly formulate and implement policies and programs, usually through their respective organizations
(Ansell and Gash, 2008)	Literature review: focus on joint action California, USA	(p.544) a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets
(Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006)	Literature review: focus on governing arrangements Minnesota, USA	(p.44) the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome

Article (reference)	Main dimensions of maximising variation	Definitions of cross-sector collaboration
		that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately
(Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012)	Conceptual framework: internal dynamics USA	(p.2) the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished
(Macmillan, 2013)	Third sector perspective: quantitative analysis UK	
(Mohan, 2011)	Third sector perspective: qualitative analysis UK	
(Sørensen and Torfing, 2009)	Conceptual framework: external governance Denmark /European Union context for studies	(p.236) A stable articulation of mutually dependent, but operationally autonomous actors from state, market and civil society, who interact through conflict-ridden negotiations that take place within an institutionalized framework of rules, norms, shared knowledge and social imaginaries; facilitate self-regulated policy making in the shadow of hierarchy; and contribute to the production of 'public value' in a broad sense of problem definitions, visions, ideas, plans and concrete regulations that are deemed relevant to broad sections of the population.

Table 7 Search criteria round 2

Search round 2	Conceptual issues and research partners' experiences
Search parameters	The conceptual questions arising from the synthesis of Round One and the research partners' experiences during this period of review.
Inclusion criteria	These are described in Chapter Two, Part I, 'Conceptual issues and research partners' experiences.' The articles were selected according to (i) their relevance to the conceptual questions arising from the first round of meta-interpretation, (ii) their relevance to my interpretation of the research partners' pragmatic experiences, gained through my participatory approach, and (iii) their capacity to add to the diversity of the literature review.
Exclusion criteria	I used Proquest database to search for studies using the terms collaboration, partnership, cross sector, cross-sector. This yielded over 3,000,000 results at its most broad, as illustrated in Table 8. To increase the specificity of the search I narrowed the selection to studies published post 2008, due to the continued growth in publication of articles between the decade 2000 – 2009 (22,098 articles) and the decade 2010 – 2020 (38,441 articles at the date of the first search in 2018). I assumed that later studies would build on or contrast with the findings of earlier studies and that many significant concepts would be already included in the 2 literature reviews of round 1. The studies in *Round 1* were drawn from authors in USA, UK, and Europe (Denmark and Spain). I narrowed the search in *Round 2* to UK-based authors and USA-based authors for this second round only. Again, this increased specificity but in a way that could be expected to add to the diversity of the first round (and of the on-going literature review in round 3). The Proquest returns showed that articles with indexing information were overwhelmingly located in the United States/USA (nearly 7000) with UK authors (2190) disproportionately high compared to Europe (2120), Asia (1353) and China (1148). Output from other countries across the whole period, from 1915 to present was less than 1000 papers in any one country. Given the UK's position within the European Union, social practices in the UK can be expected to interact with broader practices in Europe and UK-based authors can be expected to reflect on these comparisons. Given the 'special relationship' between the UK and USA, but differences in the positions of their respective governments on the political spectrum, it is useful to compare practices in each country to uncover any ideological differences. These filters resulted in 3440 USA-based and 942 UK-based articles. I searched titles for relevance to the search criteria, reviewed abstracts and removed duplicates. This resulted in 20 USA-based articles and 9 UK-based articles, 29 in total.

Table 8 Search returns, Proquest

Search terms	Number of results
collaboration OR partnership	3,065,356
'cross sector' OR 'cross-sector'	333,325
(collaboration OR partnership) AND ('cross sector' OR 'cross-sector')	111,855
collaboration AND ('cross sector' OR 'cross-sector')	65,797

Table 9 Search round 2: selected articles

Article (reference)	Dimensions of variation and relevance				
(Afzal, Witherspoon and Trousdale, 2016)	Peer reviewed	Board members	USA	Practitioners' framework of recommend-ations	Children's Environmental Health
(Ameli and Kayes, 2011)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	USA	Case study	Inter-organisational learning
(Amirkhanyan, 2009)	Peer reviewed	Researcher	USA	Theoretical framework; qualitative data	Public management; performance measures
(Bergstrom *et al.*, 2015)	Peer reviewed	Practitioners and researcher	USA	Recommend-ations	Community development
(Bingham and Walters, 2013)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	UK	2-stage mixed methods	Income diversification
(Bolden and Bagnall, 2009)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	UK	Participative action research	Education; leadership
(Bradley, Orr and Rapson, 2017)	Grey literature – edited	Business/ non-profit leaders	USA	Roundtable discussion	Economic regeneration
(Crutchfield and McLeod-Grant, 2012)	Grey literature – edited	Business consultants	USA	Recommend-ations	Shared leadership in non-profit sector
(Davies *et al.*, 2014)	Peer reviewed	Chief Medical Officer	UK	Adaptation of public address	Public health
(Dow *et al.*, 2013)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	USA	Mixed methods	Climate change adaptation

Article (reference)	Dimensions of variation and relevance				
(Eccles and Saltzman, 2011)	Grey literature – edited	Researchers	USA	Recommend-ations	Integrated reporting
(Forrer, Kee and Boyer, 2014)	Professional journal	Researchers	USA	Typology	Public management;
(Gazley, 2008)	Peer reviewed	Researcher	USA	Mixed methods	Public management; Informal accountability
(Huggins and Hilvert, 2013)	Professional journal	City managers	USA	Recommend-ations from research	Public management; community engagement
(Huybrechts and Nicholls, 2013)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	UK	Case study	Third sector-private sector collaboration
(Jing and Savas, 2009)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	USA/ China	International comparison	Meta-governance; typology
(Jones and Liddle, 2011)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	UK	Qualitative case study	Public management; strategic commissioning
(Kania and Kramer, 2011)	Grey literature – edited	Practitioners	USA	Reflective practice	Education; interorganisational arrangements
(Liebman, 2013)	Professional journal	Researcher	USA	Adaptation of white paper; policy recommend-ations	Policy institute; accountability and funding
(Mattessich and Rausch, 2014)	Peer reviewed	Director, project manager	USA	National survey	Health; impact assessment
(Milbourne, 2009)	Peer reviewed	Researcher	UK	Case study	Welfare services; organisational change
(Milbourne and Cushman, 2013)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	UK	Multiple case studies	Welfare services; trust
(Milbourne and Cushman, 2015)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	UK	Multiple case studies	Welfare services; third sector compliance

Article (reference)	Dimensions of variation and relevance				
(Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller, 2008)	Grey literature – editors	Editors	USA	Editorial	Social innovation
(Plough, 2015)	Peer reviewed	Senior officer	USA	Philanthropic foundation's research funding framework	Public health
(Romzek *et al.*, 2014)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	USA	Multiple case study	Conceptual framework; informal accountability
(Silverman and Patterson, 2011)	Peer reviewed	Researchers	USA	National survey	Advocacy
(Wernham, 2011)	Peer reviewed	Project director	USA	Recommend-ations from case study	Health; impact assessment
(Williams, 2013)	Peer reviewed	Researcher	UK	Exploratory paper	Boundary spanning leadership

Table 10 Search criteria round 3

Search round 3	Ongoing review based on conceptual issues and experiences arising during the empirical research
Search parameters	Conceptual questions and issues prompted by the experiences during the empirical research. See Chapters 6 and 7 for the context for these parameters.
Inclusion criteria	Relevance to the conceptual questions and issues arising. Includes articles recommended by other experts in the field.
Exclusion criteria	Articles focusing primarily on local government reform rather than on collaboration between sectors.

Table 11 Search round 3: selected articles

Article (reference)	Dimensions of variation and relevance		
(Bartels, 2018)	Peer reviewed	Netherlands	Participatory evaluation	Socio-spatial deprivation
(Checkland *et al.*, 2013)	Peer reviewed	UK	Multiple case studies	Health; accountability
(Davies, 2005)	Peer reviewed	UK	Literature review	Network typology; conflict
(Durose and Lowndes, 2010)	Peer reviewed	UK	Case study	Conceptual framework; community engagement
(Eckersley, 2020a)	Peer reviewed	Australia	Literature review	Everyday practices; ecological democracy
(Keast *et al.*, 2004)	Peer reviewed	Australia	Case study	Network structures
(Marks, 2007)	Peer reviewed	UK	Snapshot semi-structured interviews	Governance networks
(Matthews, 2014)	Peer reviewed	UK	Interpretive policy analysis	Strategic partnership working; community empowerment
(Schmachtel, 2016)	Peer reviewed	Denmark	Ethnographic case study	Education
(Stout, Bartels and Love, 2018)	Peer reviewed	USA/ UK	Logic model critique	Collaborative governance regime;
(Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002)	book	UK	Literature review and case studies	Interorganisational management

Table 12 Search criteria round 4

Search round four	Theories underpinning the literature reviewed
Search parameters	Theories drawn upon in the literature reviewed in the 'power accounts' category
Inclusion criteria	Theories pertaining to power relations referred to in the reviewed literature
Exclusion criteria	

Table 13 Search round 4: theoretical bases in the power accounts

Literature (reference)	Main theoretical concepts used in the meta-interpretation
(Gramsci, 1971)	Hegemony, philosophy of practice
(Weber, 1968)	Legitimisation, legitimacy
(DiMaggio and Powell, 1983)	Isomorphism
(Foucault, 1991)	Governmentality, self-emancipation

Action Research Project Report

Wild Pathways: Connecting People and Wildlife

"Beautiful road verges rich in wildlife contribute to the landscape in Anglesey and Gwynedd. The project engages local groups to inspire their communities about these verges and to start to explore and protect these and other pathways and networks on their doorstep. Together we learn how social, health and environmental groups can collaborate to help us all be more active, have a greater sense of belonging and protect the wildlife around us."

Project details

Project name

        Wild pathways: Networks of connectivity for people and wildlife

Project group

        North Wales Wildlife Trust member, Arfon

        North Wales Wildlife Trust member, Anglesey

        Senior Biodiversity officer, Gwynedd Council

        Partnerships officer, Natural Resources Wales

        Consultant, BCUHB Public Health Team, Public Health Wales

        Senior Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales

        Postgraduate Researcher, Bangor University

Purpose

        To learn how to collaborate across sectors through practical action aimed at inspiring local communities about the value of road verges for wildlife and encouraging them to start to explore and protect these and other pathways and networks on the doorstep.

Approach

"[Connectivity is] for example, a verge and hedgerow linked by a footpath and cycleway to a small wood, churchyard, village green, playground, common land, country park etc." NWWT Member

- **Direct action:** Using our existing networks, experience and knowledge we will identify local places where there are resources and possible cross-sector partners to develop activities to improve connectivity for wildlife and people
- **Strategic planning:** We will develop a GIS map with layers to represent natural, social, cultural and economic capital as well as community resources across Anglesey and Gwynedd to identify future potential places for collaborative working across sectors to enhance connectivity

Project outcomes

    ✓ Prototype GIS map suitable for continual development and use by multiple organisations and groups

    ✓ Marketing material to raise awareness of local communities of the benefits to people and wildlife of positively managed networks

    ✓ Identification of Key Places in Anglesey and in Gwynedd for initial pilot projects

    ✓ Identification of funds and structures for long-term embedding of the project

    ✓ Reflection with project team and organisational leads and embedding of the project long term

Well-being outcomes

"We know that these are the things that can enrich people's lives and sustain better health and well-being, thus contributing to a healthier, happier Gwynedd and Anglesey." Senior Public Health Practitioner.

Contribution to well-being drivers

Our collaborative place-based approach integrates the interests of all groups of the community to improve connectivity networks for wildlife and people. This enhances the assets and resources people and communities draw upon to improve their well-being:

- **Ecosystem resilience**: Enhancing connectivity between wildlife rich sites builds species' resilience to extreme weather events, development, pollution etc.

- **Cultural ecosystem services:** Exploring and protecting local wildlife pathways provides educational, recreational, aesthetic and spiritual experiences.

- **Welsh language:** Reducing barriers to participation increases socialisation in Welsh

- **Physical health:** Using nature on the doorstep to inspire activity reduces barriers and increases participation in healthy behaviours eg active travel

- **Mental health:** Nature-based activities increase positive drivers such as confidence and decrease negative effects such as depression.

- **Social cohesion:** Nature-based activities decrease social isolation and anti-social behaviours. They develop pro-social and pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours.

- **Civic engagement:** Outdoor spaces help diverse groups of the community to come together for shared experiences, leading to greater social equality.

- **Economic:** Environmental resilience supports agriculture and high value tourism. Nature-based activities develop educational opportunities and social and practical skills.

- **Personal well-being:** Nature-based activities offer the Five Ways to Wellbeing (connect, be active, take notice, learn, give) which improve psychological wellbeing.

Contribution to Anglesey and Gwynedd PSB well-being objectives

Welsh language: Environmental doorstep activities bring new groups of people together, increasing the possibilities for socialisation in Welsh.

Poverty: Activities on the doorstep enable equality of access to an environmental resource that is currently undervalued and underused, reducing the cost of participating in society.

Climate Change: Encouraging active travel and outdoor fitness encourages long term pro-environmental behaviours, reducing emissions of CO_2. Enhancing wildlife resources increases the resilience of the environment to the effects of climate change.

Health: Doorstep activities inspired by wildlife re-engage people in their neighbourhood without the need for equipment, regular commitments, joining fees or prior expectations. This removes many of the barriers to healthy activity faced by different groups across the life course facing challenges from childhood obesity to dementia.

Summary of project activity

[Redacted]

Strategic approach

GIS map

The GIS map layers show the natural, social, economic and cultural resources of places in Anglesey and Gwynedd to underpin place-based collaborative working. The GIS map layers reflect the project collaborators' and community partners' interests:

Interest group	Layer
Geographic	OS map
Wildlife	AONB
	National Parks
	Ramsar
	Special Areas of Conservation Interest
	SSSI
	Local Nature Reserves
	Woodlands
	Wildlife Sites
Social and Cultural (Information tabs)	Community Assets (Anglesey wards)
	Hubs (Seiriol ward)
	Agreed community and public sector partners
Connectivity networks	Conservation verges
	Public Rights of Way
	Coastal Path
	Designated Travel Areas
	Open Access Country
	Active Travel Approved Routes
Economic (Information tabs)	Confirmed private sector partners

Other 'layers' we used, but were not able to map in GIS:

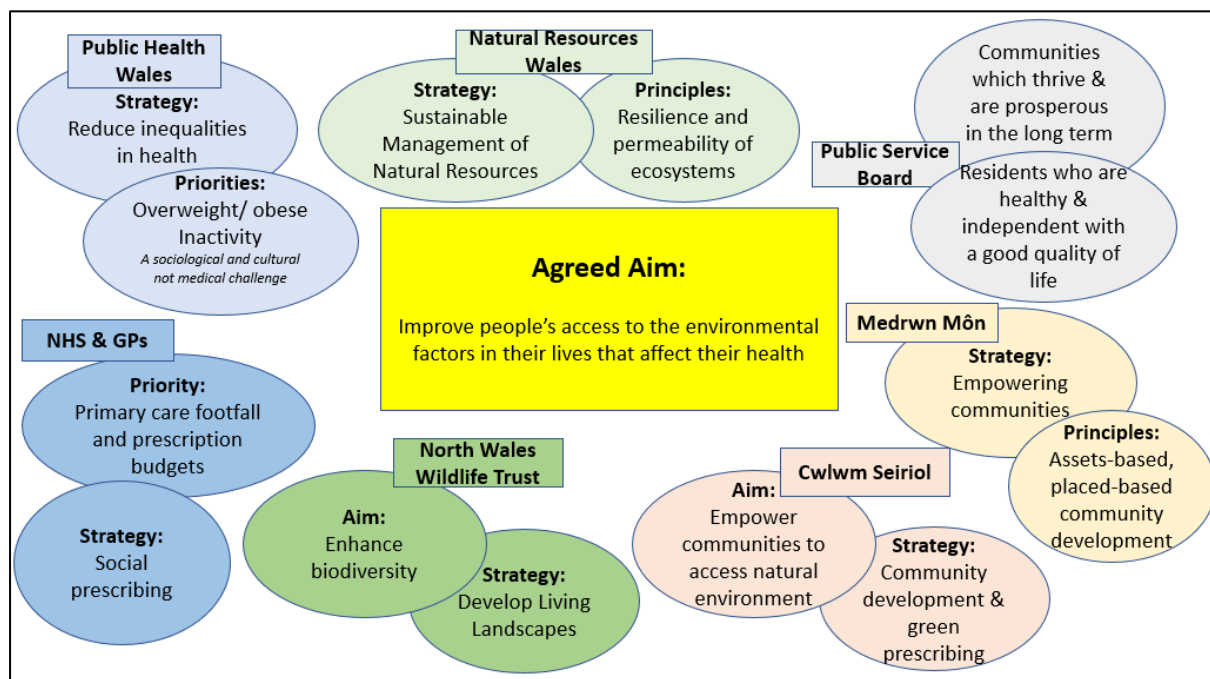| Health	Childhood obesity
Economic	WIMD overall
Cultural	Sites of interest/ heritage

Embedding wild pathways and cross-sector collaboration
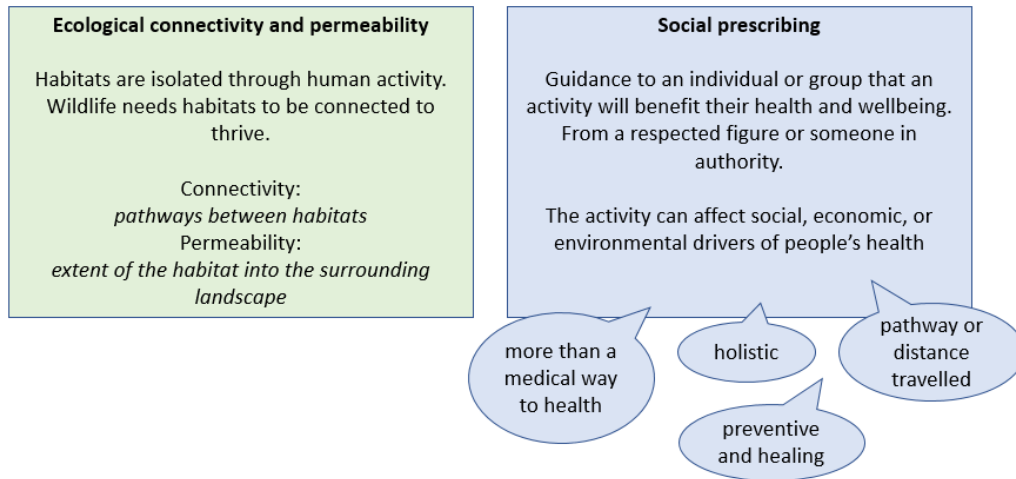
[Redacted]

Appendix 4 Extract from the Project Report: Social Prescribing

CRYNODEB PROSIECT
Presgripsiynau Gwyrdd ar Ynys Môn
PROJECT SUMMARY
Green Prescribing on Anglesey

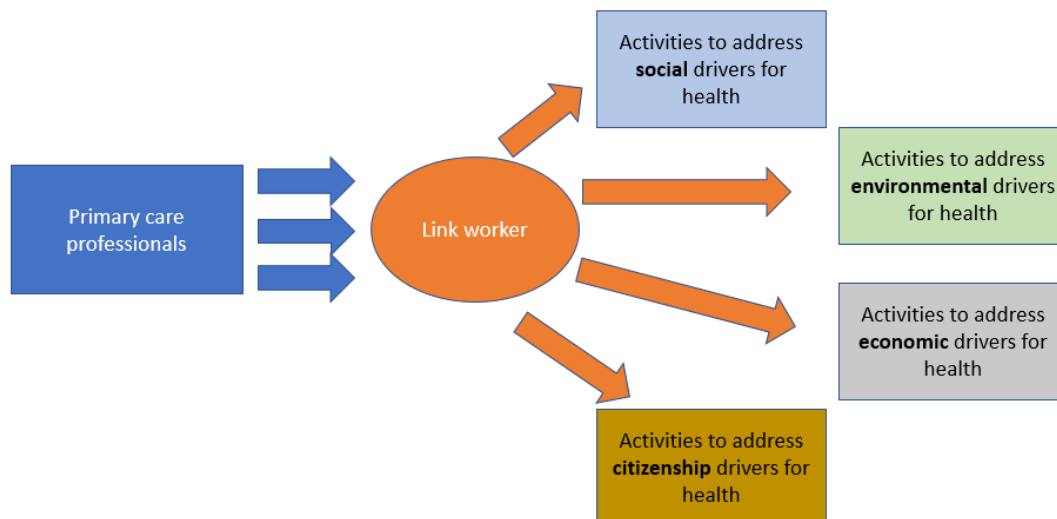Diweddariad: 17/07/2018
Update: 17/07/2018

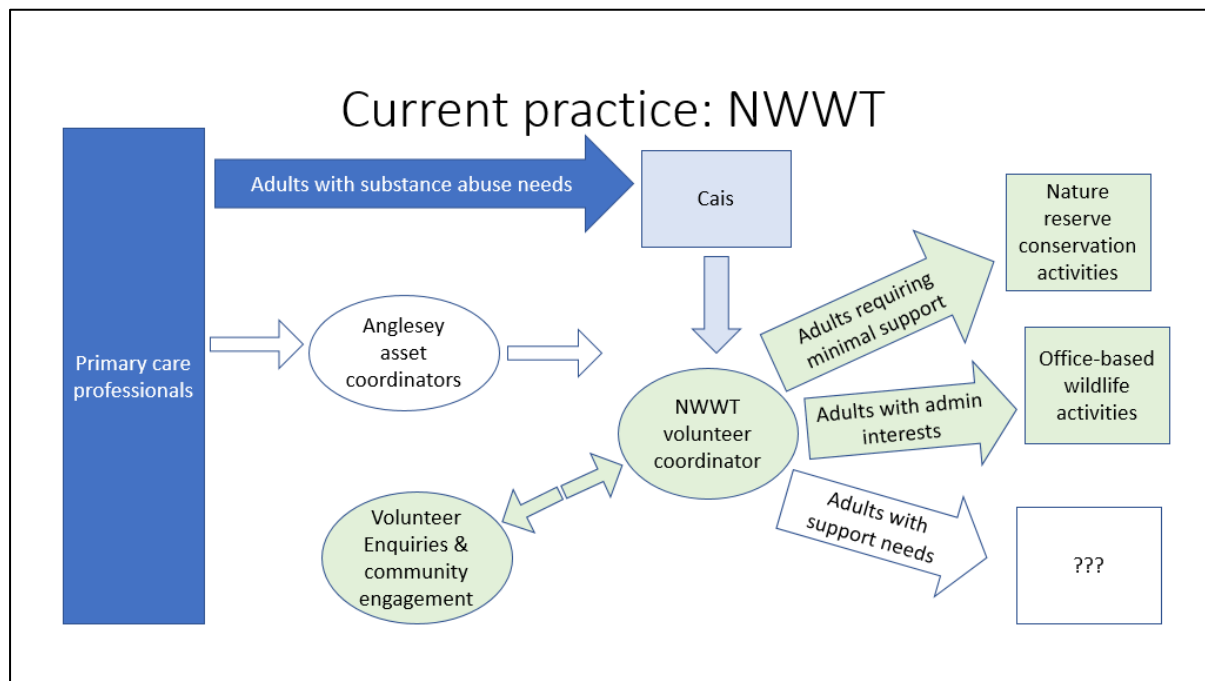Elizabeth Woodcock, Postgraduate Researcher
e.woodcock@bangor.ac.uk

Key concepts

Ecological connectivity and permeability

Habitats are isolated through human activity. Wildlife needs habitats to be connected to thrive.

Connectivity:
pathways between habitats
Permeability:
extent of the habitat into the surrounding landscape

Social prescribing

Guidance to an individual or group that an activity will benefit their health and wellbeing. From a respected figure or someone in authority.

The activity can affect social, economic, or environmental drivers of people's health

more than a medical way to health

holistic

pathway or distance travelled

preventive and healing

The 'ideal' model for social prescribing

Primary care professionals

Link worker

Activities to address **social** drivers for health

Activities to address **environmental** drivers for health

Activities to address **economic** drivers for health

Activities to address **citizenship** drivers for health

Current practice: NWWT

Agile Project Management Principle	Governance principle for the action research project	Contribution to communicative capacity
Dynamic small teams	We choose to take part in the project based on reciprocal benefit: our participation benefits our own and each other's work	Social capital: Development of commitment, legitimacy, trust
Guiding vision	Together we produce a short statement of the purpose of our project to communicate to all stakeholders	Common vision: Integration of each partner's interests in the project purpose
Simple rules	Each of us is accountable to our own organisation for the use of our time and the procedures we follow in our actions	Boundary spanning: Integration of the strategic interests of our organisations
Information sharing	We share information with each other openly and freely	Social capital: Developing interdependence Boundary spanning: Enabling communication, coordination, innovation, network building
Facilitative management	Project management is not directive but based on joint deliberation over action to enable flexibility and risk management	Developing common vision: Through experiential learning and empowerment
Adaptive leadership	Each partner in the project shares the responsibility to contribute to each of the above characteristics	Social capital, common vision, boundary spanning: Through flexible, shared leadership

COLEG BUSNES, Y GYFRAITH, ADDYSG A GWYDDORAU CYMDEITHAS

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, LAW, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PRIFYSGOL
BANGOR
UNIVERSITY

27 October 2016

Dear Elizabeth

Re: Developing collaboration between an environmental third sector organisation and public bodies in Anglesey and Gwynedd, North Wales

Thank you for your recent amended application to the CBLESS Research Ethics Committee.

The committee has considered your application and I am now able to give permission, on behalf of the CBLESS Research Ethics Committee, for the commencement of your research project.

I wish you well with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Diane Seddon

Chair, College Ethics Committee

cc – Professor Howard Davis

Appendix 6 Information Sheet and Consents Form

COLEG BUSNES, Y GYFRAITH, ADDYSG A GWYDDORAU CYMDEITHAS	COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, LAW, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Elizabeth Woodcock, myfyrwraig PhD Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol, Prifysgol Bangor. e.woodcock@bangor.ac.uk	Mae'r ymchwil hwn wedi cael cymeradwyaeth gan Is-bwyllgor Ymchwil Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithas Prifysgol Bangor. Cyfeirnod E16-55

Datblygu cydweithio rhwng sefydliadau'r trydydd sector a'r sector cyhoeddus

Taflen wybodaeth i gyfranogwyr

Gwahoddiad i gymryd rhan yn yr astudiaeth

Hoffem eich gwahodd i gymryd rhan mewn astudiaeth ymchwil.

Mae'r daflen wybodaeth hon yn egluro pwrpas yr ymchwil a beth fydd yn ei olygu i chi. Rwyf yn barod iawn i ateb unrhyw gwestiynau sydd gennych.

Pwrpas yr astudiaeth

Amcan yr astudiaeth yw helpu Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gogledd Cymru a chyrff cyhoeddus i gydweithio i' wneud y cyfraniad mwyaf at nodau llesiant cenedlaethol Cymru.

Pam ydw i wedi cael gwahoddiad?

Mae'ch profiad a gwybodaeth am weithgareddau YNGC neu am gydweithio'n gallu helpu fi i ddeall cyfraniad YNGC at y nodau llesiant cenedlaethol a/neu sut mae gwahanol sefydliadau'n gallu cydweithio.

Beth fydd yn digwydd os byddaf yn penderfynu cymryd rhan?

Gallwch gymryd rhan ai beidio, a chewch dynnu'n ôl o'r astudiaeth ar unrhyw adeg heb roi rheswm. Cewch, ar unrhyw adeg, ofyn i weld y wybodaeth yr wyf wedi ei chasglu amdanoch a chewch ofyn i fi ddinistrio/dileu'r wybodaeth hon.

Byddaf yn cynnig ffurflen i chi lofnodi i gymryd rhan mewn cyfweliad neu drafodaeth grŵp neu i mi wylio eich gweithgareddau fel grŵp neu gyfarfod.

Bydd hyn yn rhoi caniatâd i fi ddefnyddio'r hyn rydych yn ei ddweud yn fy adroddiadau ymchwil a chyhoeddiadau eraill. Ni fyddwn yn defnyddio eich enw heb eich caniatâd, ond byddaf yn defnyddio eich teitl swydd os ydych mewn rôl gyhoeddus.

Dim ond at ddibenion yr ymchwil y byddwn yn defnyddio'r wybodaeth a gasglwn.

Os byddwch yn rhannu gwybodaeth sy'n awgrymu y gallai fod risg i chi neu eraill, bydd y wybodaeth hon yn cael ei throsglwyddo i'r awdurdod perthnasol.

Beth fydd yn digwydd i ganlyniadau'r astudiaeth hon?

Byddaf yn defnyddio'r wybodaeth o wylio gweithgareddau a chyfweliadau i weithio gyda YNGC a chyrff cyhoeddus i ddeall y ffactorau sydd yn effeithio cydweithio.

Caiff y wybodaeth ei defnyddio mewn adroddiadau ac mewn thesis terfynol ar gydweithio rhwng sefydliadau trydedd sector a'r sector cyhoeddus. Os dymunwch, cewch grynodeb o ganlyniadau'r ymchwil.

Cedwir pob gwybodaeth yn ddiogel ar systemau cyfrifiadurol y Brifysgol wedi'i amgryptio neu mewn storfa diogel.

Pwy sy'n trefnu a chyllido'r ymchwil?

Mae'r ymchwil yn ffurfio'r sylfaen ar gyfer fy PhD, yn yr Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithas, Prifysgol Bangor. Mae'n cael ei harwain gan yr Athro Howard Davis a Dr Koen Bartels, a gan Frances Cattanach, Cyfarwyddwr YNGC.

Beth fydd yn digwydd os bydd gennyf unrhyw bryderon am y project?

Os ydych yn bryderus ynghylch unrhyw agwedd ar y project hwn cysylltwch â'r Athro Martina Feilzer, Pennaeth Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithas. M.feilzer@bangor.ac.uk 01248 388171

Person cyswllt i gael gwybodaeth bellach

Os hoffech ragor o wybodaeth cysylltwch â fi, Elizabeth Woodcock: Ffôn: 01248 382961 e-bost: e.woodcock@bangor.ac.uk

COLEG BUSNES, Y GYFRAITH, ADDYSG
A GWYDDORAU CYMDEITHAS

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, LAW, EDUCATION
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Elizabeth Woodcock, myfyrwraig PhD Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithasol, Prifysgol Bangor.
e.woodcock@bangor.ac.uk

Mae'r ymchwil hwn wedi cael cymeradwyaeth gan Is-bwyllgor Ymchwil Ysgol Gwyddorau Cymdeithas Prifysgol Bangor. Cyfeirnod E16-55

Developing collaboration between third sector and public sector organisations

Participant Information Sheet

Invitation to the study

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study.

This information sheet explains why I am doing the research and what it will involve for you.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

The purpose of the study

The study aims to help North Wales Wildlife Trust and public bodies to collaborate to maximise their contribution to the national well-being goals of Wales.

Why have I been invited?

Your experience and knowledge of NWWT activities or of collaboration can help me to understand NWWT's contribution to the well-being goals and/or the ways in which different organisations can collaborate.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

You are free to participate or not, you may withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason. You can, at any time, ask to see the information I have collected from you and you can also ask me to destroy/ delete this information.

I will give you a form to sign to agree to take part in an interview or group discussion, or for me to observe your activities as a group or meeting.

This will let me use what you say in my research reports and other publications. I will not use your name without your permission, although I will use your job title if you are in a public role. If you share information that is suggestive of risk to yourself/ others, this will be passed on to an appropriate authority.

I will only use the information I collect for the purposes of the research.

What will happen to the results of this study?

I will use the information from observations and interviews to work with NWWT and public bodies to understand the factors that affect collaboration between them.

The information will be used in reports, presentations and in a final thesis on collaboration between third sector and public sector organisations.

If you wish me to, I will send you a summary report of the research findings.

All the information will be stored securely on encrypted University systems or in a locked store.

Who is organising the research?

The research forms the basis for my PhD, based in the School of Social Sciences, Bangor University.

My supervisors are Professor Howard Davis and Dr Koen Bartels, and Frances Cattanach, Director of NWWT.

What happens if I have any concerns about this project?

If you are concerned about any aspect of this project please contact Professor Martina Feilzer, Head of School of Social Sciences. M.feilzer@bangor.ac.uk 01248 388171

Contact for further information

If you would like more information, please contact me, Elizabeth Woodcock: Tel: 01248 382961 email: e.woodcock@bangor.ac.uk

COLEG BUSNES, Y GYFRAITH, ADDYSG A GWYDDORAU
CYMDEITHAS

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, LAW, EDUCATION
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

PRIFYSGOL
BANGOR
UNIVERSITY

Protocol yr Astudiaeth

Datblygu cydweithio rhwng sefydliadau'r trydydd sector a'r sector cyhoeddus
Ffurflen Gydsyniad Cyfranogwr – cyfweliadau grŵp/unigolyn

Rhowch tic yn y blwch

1. Cadarnhaf fy mod i wedi darllen a deall y daflen wybodaeth ar gyfer yr astudiaeth uchod. Rwyf wedi cael cyfle i ystyried y wybodaeth a gofyn cwestiynau ac wedi cael atebion boddhaol.

2. Yr wyf yn deall ac yn cytuno i gymryd rhan mewn trafodaeth grŵp a/neu chyfweliad gyda'r ymchwilydd. Rwy'n cytuno iddi wneud nodiadau ac rwyf yn cydsynio i nodiadau'r ymchwilydd gael eu defnyddio wrth ysgrifennu adroddiad am yr astudiaeth. Rwy'n deall na fydd fy enw yn ymddangos mewn unrhyw ran o'r adroddiadau, cyflwyniadau neu bapurau sy'n seiliedig ar yr ymchwil hwn, ond bod modd adnabod fy teitl swydd neu rôl cyhoeddus.

3. (Dewisol) Rwy'n cytuno i'r ymchwilydd ddefnyddio dyfais **recordio ddigidol clywedol** i recordio'r trafodaeth grŵp.

4. (Dewisol) Rwy'n cytuno i'r ymchwilydd ddefnyddio dyfais **recordio ddigidol fideo** i recordio'r trafodaeth grŵp a/neu chyfweliad.

5. Rwy'n deall fy mod yn cymryd rhan yn wirfoddol ac y gall dynnu'n ôl ar unrhyw adeg, heb roi rheswm a heb i hynny effeithio ar ein hawliau. Hefyd os na fyddaf yn dymuno ateb unrhyw un o'r cwestiynau, gallaf wrthod gwneud hynny.

6. Rwy'n deall y gallaf ofyn i weld y wybodaeth a gasglwyd gan yr ymchwilydd, yn unol â'r Ddeddf Gwarchod Data, a gallaf hefyd ofyn i'r wybodaeth honno gael ei dinistrio neu ei dileu.

7. **Rwy'n cytuno i gymryd rhan yn yr astudiaeth uchod ac i'r ymchwilydd wneud nodiadau ac iddyn nhw ac unrhyw recordiadau sain neu fideo gael eu defnyddio wrth ysgrifennu adroddiad am yr astudiaeth**

_____   _____   _____

Enw'r sawl sy'n cymryd rhan   Dyddiad   Llofnod

Study Protocol

Developing collaboration between public sector and third sector organisations

Participant Consent form – group/ individual interviews

Please tick box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I agree to take part in a group discussion and/or an interview with the researcher. I agree for her to make notes and I give consent for the researcher's notes to be used within the study write up. I understand that my name will not appear anywhere in the reports, presentations or papers which are based on this research, but that my job title or public role may be identified.

3. (Optional) I agree for the researcher to use an **audio digital recording** device to record the group discussion and/or interview.

4. (Optional) I agree for the researcher to use a **video digital recording** device to record the group discussion and/or interview.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.

6. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask to see the information that the researcher has collected, and I can also request the destruction/ deletion of that information if I wish.

7. **I agree to take part in the above study and for the researcher to make notes and to use these and any audio or digital recordings within the study write up**

| Participant Name | Date | Signature |

GWEITHDY Cynllun Gweithredu Llwybrau Gwyllt

Dydd Gwener 7fed Mehefin 2019　　　　　**Cledwyn 3, Prif Adeilad, Prifysgol Bangor**

Llwybrau Gwyllt
Datblygu asedau gwyrdd trwy presgripsiwn cymdeithasol

09:30	Lluniaeth	
10:00	Cyflwyniad i'r Prosiect Ymchwil	
	Egwyddorion cyd-weithio	**Elizabeth Woodcock**, Ymchwilydd
	Ein Cymuned Wyllt a chydweithio	**Chris Baker**, Rheolwr Pobl a Bywyd Gwyllt, Ymddiriedolaeth Natur Gogledd Cymru
	Ein strategaeth cymdeithasol-ecolegol	**Justin Hanson**, Arweinydd Tîm Cynllunio, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
		Aled Hughes, Uwch Ymarferydd, Tîm Iechyd Cyhoeddus, Betsi Cadwaladr
	Cwlwm Seiriol, heriau'r strategaeth	**Delyth Phillips**, Rheolwr Prosiect Cwlwm Seiriol, Menter Môn
10:30	Cwestiynau a thrafodaeth	
10:45	Anerchiad croeso	**Yr athro Martina Feilzer**, Cyd-Gyfarwyddwr WISERD@ Bangor
10:50	Trafodaethau cynllunio	**Hwylusydd: Elizabeth Woodcock**
	Y grŵp ymchwil: *Beth ydyn ni'n gallu wneud o fewn adnoddau presennol?*	
	Rheolwyr sefydliadau a fforymau: *Pa awdurdod sydd gennym ni i newid strategaethau?*	
	Cynrychiolwyr cenedlaethol: *Oes strategaethau a chynlluniau cenedlaethol ar y gweill?*	
12:00	Lluniaeth	
12:30	Cynllun gweithredu	**Hwylusydd:** Elizabeth Woodcock
1:30	Cinio	

WORKSHOP Wild Pathways Implementation Plan

Friday 7th June 2019   **Cledwyn 3, Main Arts building, Bangor University**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">**Wild Pathways**</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" align="center">Building green assets with social prescribing</td></tr>
</table>

09:30	Refreshments

10:00	Introduction to the research project	
	Principles of collaboration	**Elizabeth Woodcock**, Researcher
	Our Wild Communities & collaboration	**Chris Baker**, People & Wildlife manager, North Wales Wildlife Trust
	Our social-ecological strategy	**Justin Hanson**, Planning Team Leader, Natural Resources Wales
		Aled Hughes, Senior Practitioner, Public Health team, Betsi Cadwaladr
	Cwlwm Seiriol, strategic challenges	**Delyth Phillips**, Cwlwm Seiriol manager, Menter Môn

10:30	Questions and discussion

10:45	Welcome address	**Professor Martina Feilzer**, Co-Director WISERD@ Bangor

10:50	Planning discussions	**Facilitator: Elizabeth Woodcock**

The research group: *What can we do within current resources and structures?*

Organisational & forum leaders: *Which structures do we have authority to change?*

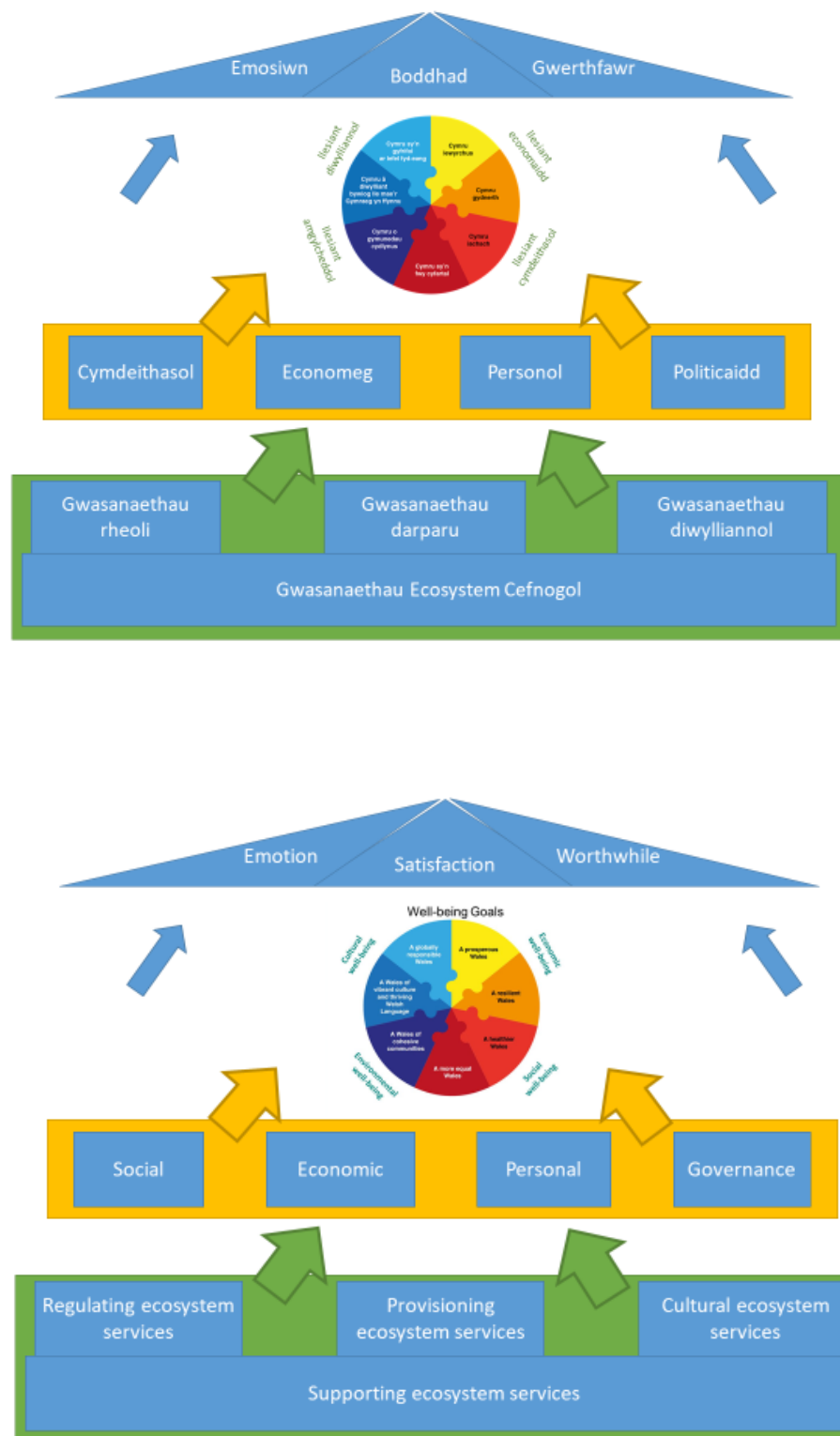National representatives: *What strategies and plans are being developed nationally?*

12:00	Refreshments

12:30	Implementation plan	**Facilitator**: Elizabeth Woodcock

1:30	Lunch

Appendix 8 Well-being Domains

Project name: Green Prescription on Anglesey

Project time frame: May 2018 – October 2018

The governance of the action research project reflects the principles of agile project management (APM). This approach is suitable for projects in complex real-world situations which need to deliver workable solutions in a short time frame (Augustine *et al.*, 2005). It enables the project to overcome the 'stable systems' effect where organisations' established processes restrict innovative responses to changing situations.

In this context of cross-sector collaboration, governance must also enable the project group to develop the characteristics of relational communication: building social capital, developing a common vision, and addressing external interests (boundary spanning). So, the project group's governance principles combine the principles of APM and relational communication.

Agile Project Management Principle	Governance principle for the action research project	Contribution to communicative capacity
Dynamic small teams	We choose to take part in the project based on reciprocal benefit: our participation benefits our own and each other's work	Social capital: *Development of commitment, legitimacy, trust*
Guiding vision	Together we produce a short statement of the purpose of our project to communicate to all stakeholders	Common vision: *Integration of each partner's interests in the project purpose*
Simple rules	Each of us is accountable to our own organisation for the use of our time and the procedures we follow in our actions	Boundary spanning: *Integration of the strategic interests of our organisations*
Information sharing	We share information with each other openly and freely	Social capital: *Developing interdependence* Boundary spanning: *Enabling communication, coordination, innovation, network building*
Facilitative management	Project management is not directive but based on joint deliberation over action to enable flexibility and risk management	Developing common vision: *Through experiential learning and empowerment*
Adaptive leadership	Each partner in the project shares the responsibility to contribute to each of the above characteristics	Social capital, common vision, boundary spanning: *Through flexible, shared leadership*

Reporting Structure

Each member of the Action Research Project group reports on the use of their time to their line manager. Each is free to withdraw from the research at any time, without having to give an explanation.

The Researcher reports on the quality of the research methods to her supervisor. She also reflects on the direction of the project with the PSB representatives whose staff are involved, and with the CEO of North Wales Wildlife Trust.

The research action and findings are reported to the NWWT Trustees and to the PSB for their information and opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the research.
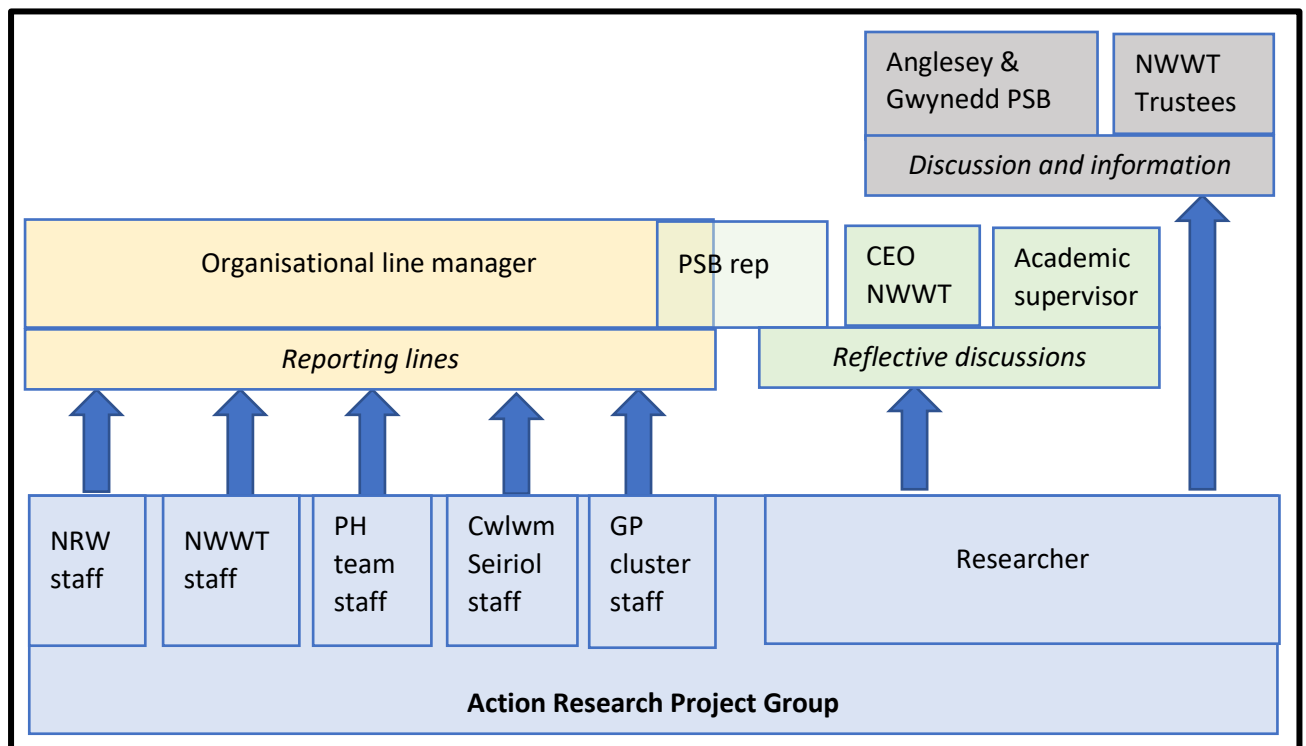
Social prescribing, green health and activity

Introduction

This is a summary of widely available literature examining the move towards social prescribing and outdoor exercise. The purpose of this review is to understand the current influences on public bodies and third sector organisations in this field, rather than to assess the evidence for social prescribing or physical activity in natural environments.

I have included articles from health-focussed websites of the King's Fund, NHS primary care one, Public Health Wales, Public Health Wales Observatory; from non-medical national organisations, Natural Resources Wales and Sport Wales; and from third sector organisations The Wildlife Trusts and Actif Woods. Research participants referred to these documents during the action research projects and their prominence on these websites mean they are likely to influence assumptions, beliefs and practices.

<u>Executive summary</u>

1. **Social prescribing addresses the social, economic and environmental determinants of health, rather than the medical drivers.** • Social prescribing reflects the GP model of person-centred care to consider the holistic physical, social and psychological welfare of the patient. • Models tend to be based on a non-medical link worker aligned with specific GP practices with good local knowledge, and boundary-spanning and managerial skills • Health inequalities are linked to social exclusion, so social prescribing which enhances social networks can reduce inequalities in health
2. **Physical inactivity, diet and obesity levels are the biggest behavioural contributors to disability in Wales and these factors are worse in more deprived areas. Increasing physical activity can have benefits for a range of diagnosed health conditions.** • Systemic and environmental factors underlie the current trend towards physical inactivity • Physical inactivity is 'a large scale cultural and sociological challenge' • Increasing physical activity has benefits for cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, raised blood pressure and obesity. There is sufficient evidence to act. • Exercise by referral schemes have the greatest health impacts for those who are both inactive and have a diagnosed medical condition
3. **Nature-based activities have benefits for physical and mental health, and can be designed to be both preventive and therapeutic.** • Health benefits of natural environments occur directly, through the quality of air, water etc.

• Factors of physical inactivity, obesity, dementia and social isolation that contribute to health conditions can be managed through activity in natural environments and this activity can reduce health inequalities
• Nature-based activities improve personal drivers of health: mental health and wellbeing, positivity, physical development and levels of physical activity
• Nature-based activities improve social, economic and environmental drivers of health: social cohesion, volunteering, opportunities for employment, nature relatedness and pro-environmental behaviour
• The health benefits of natural environments take effect through increased physical activity, social contact and community networks.
• Five interacting elements encourage participation in sport and physical activity: awareness, access, motivation, confidence and experience
4. Successful social prescribing schemes have four critical characteristics of long term funding, cross-sector collaboration, diverse range of health professionals involved, and personalisation of support. • Continuity of funding to enable long term relationships • Cross-sector collaboration to coordinate and maximise the range of social opportunities • Commitment of a range of health professionals to maintain momentum of referrals/ introductions • Individually-tailored advice and support from a link worker • The conclusions of previous projects to involve people in nature-based activities provide a framework to guide the design of future projects.
5. Social prescribing, nature-based activities, and encouragement of physical activity all need integrated, cross-society strategies to achieve systemic change. • International and national policy documents create a consistent approach promoting the use of green space for health • Integrated campaign strategies can create systemic change to the child's and adult's environment to encourage physical activity • Expanding nature-based activities for health requires the inclusion of nature in wider social, environmental and health policies • Public health planning is advised to integrate nature-based activities • Strategic planning and design to encourage activity and programmes to engage communities encourages outdoor exercise • National and local spatial planning can target resources to improve access to green space in areas of high deprivation or high rates of BAME communities to maximise health outcomes and reduce inequality • Widespread evaluation of the health outcomes of nature-based activities can increase awareness and integration into public bodies' planning
6. Social prescription schemes benefit a variety of interest groups, but the benefit to the environment is only indirectly considered, and the primary care focus on individuals may conflict with the social prescription focus on groups.

- Individuals' health: benefits from the preventive and therapeutic effects of physical activity, social contact and community cohesion
- Primary care providers: social prescribing schemes involving a link worker linked to GP practices can scale-up GPs' action to refer people to appropriate social groups, reducing demand for healthcare services. This expectation is based on an estimated 20% of patients visiting the GP for primarily social problems. There is an expectation of reduced pressure on public spending budgets.
- Social: Health inequalities are linked to social exclusion, so the social prescribing model works to improve public health by improving social networks, enabling communities to access the wealth of skills, knowledge and organisations that they have. Improving social networks within and across sectors strengthens the influence of the third sector.
- Economic: Social prescribing to encourage physical activity and contact with nature has economic benefits to society, through increased job opportunities and reduced costs of treatment and lost work days. It also reduces social inequality through disproportionate returns of such activities to lower socio-economic and BAME groups.
- Environment: A growing awareness of the value of conservation activities is a significant motivator for sustaining participation in social prescribing of nature-based projects, increasing pro-environmental behaviour and nature connectedness. The direct human health benefits of a healthy environment are shown to be greater when these are at a landscape scale, which is consistent with strategies to increase biodiversity, resilience and permeability, key environmental interests. There are calls to denote environmentally protected areas as 'health care centres'.

7. **Calls for evaluation of social prescribing focus on the effect of national policy and strategy. The main identified need for evaluation of nature-based schemes is to understand how to encourage people to engage with nature.**
- The impact of physical activity on health is not in doubt, but the effectiveness of policies and strategies to increase physical activity needs evaluation and the development of set of indicators. The focus of such evaluations is at the national level.
- Evaluation of strategy and policy focusses on reducing demand for primary care.
- There is a need for more replication and dissemination studies to inform the application of interventions in real world complex contexts
- The key barrier to nature-based activity is to establish an effective mechanism to match supply with demand and this can be addressed through cross-sector collaboration.
- Current evaluations of nature-based activities focus on their health outcomes rather than on cost savings
- There is insufficient evidence of the effectiveness of link worker models of social prescribing to justify the momentum for their use, and future evaluation needs careful design with explicit parameters.

> - Evaluation of social prescription should consider the effectiveness of the process, the experience of those involved and the outcomes to the individual, community and health care services.

Conclusion

Physical inactivity is a cultural and sociological problem requiring integrated strategies for systemic change. Social prescribing is one model to address this problem by focussing on the social, economic and environmental drivers of physical activity for health. The model needs extending across sectors to achieve systemic change, requiring cross-sector collaboration.

The current focus of recommendations is on raising greater awareness and gaining evidence of the health benefits of natural environments. However, there is sufficient evidence of the health benefits of physical and nature-based activity to act. Evaluation of *local* social prescribing schemes must focus on how these schemes change the social, economic and environmental factors affecting physical activity. Evaluation of the *health* outcomes of a strategy of nature-based physical activity should be at a *national* level.

Full documentary analysis

The King's Fund, Social Prescribing Conference 18/05/2017 "*From Rhetoric to Reality*"

Papers from the conference present a view of social prescribing as meeting the *individual's* health needs for a 'good life' rather than the community's needs or national well-being. There are clear roles, with individuals described as at risk of dependency on services and needing to build resilience, the third sector expected to evaluate physical and mental health benefits to individuals, and public bodies having a responsibility to direct people to independent lifestyles (Ash and Chandegra, 2017; Bird, 2017; Cameron-Smith and Clark, 2017; Fox, 2017; Stokes-Lampard, 2017; Wheatley, 2017).

Models of social prescribing fit with the GP model of person-centred care that considers the holistic physical, social and psychological welfare of the patient (Stokes-Lampard, 2017; Wheatley, 2017). The GP has a central role to refer or 'introduce' people to coordinators aligned to GP surgeries. These coordinators can scale up, enhance the GP's effectiveness and bring in local knowledge. Social prescribing reduces demand for primary and secondary healthcare and increases networking or funding opportunities for the third sector (Cameron-Smith and Clark, 2017; Wheatley, 2017).

A systematic review sounds a note of caution in response to this conference. In 'Social prescribing: less rhetoric and more reality' the authors find most studies of social prescribing are 'small scale and limited by poor design and reporting'. While there is no evidence that social prescribing is ineffective, they conclude that there is insufficient evidence to justify the growing popularity of this approach to health. In future evaluations of social prescribing schemes they recommend the use of five questions, (Bickerdike et al. 2017, p.15, citing Lamont et al,2016):

- Why – establish the aims and evidence for the scheme
- Who – early stakeholder identification and engagement

- How – design and methods
- What – choose activity, costs or outcomes
- When – time results to maximise impact

<u>NHS primarycareone</u>

The website for primary care professionals in Wales has a section on social prescribing, http://www.primarycareone.wales.nhs.uk/social-prescribing-evidence. I review an overview of social prescribing and a local case study here.

A guide to social prescribing commissioned by NHS England gives an overview of the key elements of good practice (Polley *et al.*, 2017). It identifies four factors:

- continuity of funding to enable long term relationships;
- cross-sector collaboration to coordinate and maximise the range of help;
- the commitment of health professionals;
- the provision of individually-tailored advice and support from the link worker

The authors also recommend building evaluation into the planning process to consider:

- effectiveness of the referral process
- experience of those involved
- outcomes

This article emphasises the purpose of social prescribing to reduce demand in the health service through addressing social, environmental, economic, political and personal factors rather than medical determinants of health. Although this is consistent with a medical model of health, it places the emphasis of evaluation on demand rather than on enhancing the quality of these non-medical factors. The expectation of reduced demand is from analysis that 20% of patients visit their GP for primarily social problems.

An evaluation of a local scheme has limited use to inform local practice more widely due to conflicts of interest and a failure to address the factors listed above (Lloyd, no date; Social Value Cymru, no date). Analysis of this evaluation indicates the significant challenges to the third sector to undertake a reliable evaluation of these types of schemes. The organisation delivering the scheme also employed the evaluators. The evaluation used a Social Return on Investment (SROI) framework that they and the host organisation were promoting widely across North Wales. Both factors risk conflicts of interest. Although the SROI framework aimed to understand the users and other stakeholders' experiences, it was limited in its capacity to capture the effectiveness of the process, as recommended by Polley et al (2017). The evaluation's overall conclusion was that the scheme was beneficial to users and that its outcomes contribute to the national well-being goals. However, the latter claim is unsubstantiated, and the evaluation did not assess the success factors listed by Polley et al (2017). The report indicates serious weaknesses of the scheme without explicitly recognising these elements. Short term funding forced a change mid project, risking a loss of continuity and relationships. The range of help offered is narrow and includes few physical activity options, so limiting the range of patients who could benefit. There is no evaluation of the

commitment of health professionals to the process or the scale of the project's coverage. There is no indication of the degree of 'personalisation'.

Public Health Wales Observatory

The website does not contain publications specifically about physical activity or social prescribing, however there is a summary of Health and its Determinants in Wales (Public Health Wales Observatory, 2018). This report's messages inform Public Health strategy and policies. It finds that being overweight or obese is the highest behavioural contributor to disability in Wales and that physical inactivity, diet and obesity contribute significantly to disease. There is widening inequality in levels of physical activity and healthy food consumption between groups of the population in the most deprived areas of Wales. It states that climate change is the top threat to global health.

Let's Get Moving (formerly, Getting North Wales Moving)

Public Health Wales' website hosts a page under the banner 'Getting North Wales Moving' (http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/92311). There is a short selection of references to public bodies' reports and strategies to support the aim of increasing activity for health, but no discussion of risks or potential negative outcomes. The focus is on encouraging activity, rather than on the model of social prescribing.

It portrays a consistent message that all parts of society are becoming more sedentary and increasing physical activity can reduce the risks of health conditions of cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, raised blood pressure and obesity. The time is right for change, 'we know enough now to act on physical activity' (Department of Health Physical Activity Health Improvement and Protection, 2011, p. 8). **This message has diverse support from** the World Health Organization, the four Chief Medical Officers of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Public Health England and Public Health Wales, and the charity British Heart Foundation.

Despite this statement, there is a persistent call for evidence and for replication and studies of dissemination (Milat *et al.*, 2011). The WHO recommends that strategies, at a policy level, to change activity levels are based on best practice and scientific evidence and refers to a set of EU indicators as providing a framework for monitoring and evaluation. In Wales, there is a call for the development of key indicators to monitor changes in physical activity levels so that the contribution to the national well-being goals and to the Public Health Outcomes framework can be evaluated (Public Health Wales and Sport Wales, 2017).

Physical activity is set in its social context, 'Lack of physical activity is not a medical condition but a large scale cultural and sociological challenge for every community in Wales.'(Public Health Wales and Sport Wales, 2017, p. 9). Systemic and environmental factors cause inactivity (World Health Organization, 2015), barriers to increased activity relate to safety, culture and access (Department of Health Physical Activity Health Improvement and Protection, 2011), and land-use planning, transport and education are the major influences on people's behaviour (Public Health Wales and Sport Wales, 2017). Despite this emphasis on the

social context, the strategies tend not to focus on changing the structures of society but on improving leadership and governance.

Exceptionally, Public Health England explores the ways in which communities can be developed to improve the health of the people within them (NHS England, 2015). It focusses on developing community assets of skills, knowledge, networks and organisations to help people participate in planning and decision-making processes.

NRW projects

Natural Resources Wales' strategic aim is to 'make sure that the environment and natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained' (https://naturalresources.wales/about-us/what-we-do/our-roles-and-responsibilities/?lang=en). One of its roles to fulfil this aim is to act as 'partner, educator and enabler' to help a wide range of people use the environment.

NRW's 'Come Outside!' project is a potential project to link to social prescribing schemes. In this project, NRW facilitators link community groups and service user groups with outdoor activity providers to embed physical activity in the outdoors in a wide range of interest groups. It reflects the principles of collaboration based on reciprocity as well as NHS England's recommended community-building approach. The evaluation meets the requirements of NHS guidance on social prescribing schemes, to consider the process, experience and outcomes of the project. It makes practical recommendations for future projects,

- Link (third sector) outdoor activity providers with existing community groups and especially with service groups
- Need for a skilled facilitator or link worker to help groups communicate and collaborate, and to motivate people
- Allow time to address lack of knowledge, experience and confidence
- Allow time for projects to accumulate based on the principle of becoming self-sustaining
- Tailor outdoor activity to the interests of the group to embed in mainstream practice long term
- It is possible to adapt outdoor activities to people's needs

Sport Wales

Sport Wales makes a clear link between physical activity and health, but also creates a link to wider society. Physical activity improves children and young people's health and life span, whereas inactivity is a cost to society in terms of treatment and lost workdays.

The website refers to NICE guidelines for the general population and for children (NICE, 2009, 2014). NICE recommends integrated campaign strategies at all levels of society, from national policy to local planning, to organisations' planning and practitioners' delivery (NICE, 2009). NICE guidelines for Exercise by Referral focus on the effectiveness of this scheme to increase physical activity (NICE, 2014). They find that these schemes do not generally have sufficient effect on people's health compared to other methods to be cost-effective except with people

who are both inactive and have specific health conditions. Addressing the wider social model of health, NICE also sets out guidelines to encourage activity in the natural and built environment. This approach aims to manage chronic health conditions and reduce the costs of inactivity to the NHS and wider society (NICE, 2018). They recommend a strategic approach to engage communities, taking account of the impact on health when planning new developments, and changes to the architecture that enables outdoor exercise. To implement these strategies, NICE emphasise the need for partnership working between departments, sharing of good practice and the use of behaviour change principles.

Sport Wales support their arguments for health benefits through the example of the charity, Fields in Trust's strategy for the protection of public parks and green spaces (Fields in Trust, 2018a). The charity's strategy is to address the risks to parks from development and budget cuts by influencing society's conversation and government policy (Fields in Trust, 2018a). The charity evaluates the economic and health benefits of these open green spaces (Fields in Trust, 2018b). They conclude that such places of are greater value to lower socio-economic groups, therefore contributing to social equality, and have health benefits to the individual which generate cost savings to the NHS through fewer GP visits. Like NICE, they recommend a strategic planning approach, to provide these facilities in areas which have the most impact on individuals, i.e. where there are higher levels of lower socio-economic and BAME groups.

Sport Wales also publishes a systematic review of the elements of successful engagement (Didymus *et al.*, 2017). It finds extensive empirical support for each element and some key issues within each element that enable or restrict engagement in sport. These elements and the key issues are:

- Awareness – which requires opportunities, knowledge and communication
- Access (both opportunity and resources) – consideration of both barriers and facilitation as well as cultural factors
- Motivation – which is dependent on factors of autonomy, competence, awareness of the benefits of exercise and relatedness
- Confidence – an outcome of self-concept, self-efficacy and self-esteem
- Experience – participation is affected by both positive and negative experiences

The Wildlife Trusts

The UK wide movement, The Wildlife Trusts, has developed a research partnership with Essex University to examine the contribution of the Trusts' work to physical and mental health. Three reports focus on the direct health impacts of the process and activities that the Trusts undertake (Bragg *et al.*, 2015; Wood *et al.*, 2016; Rogerson *et al.*, 2017).

The first report, a systematic review, shows evidence of the physical and mental health benefits of contact with natural environments and some evidence of the additional impact of biodiverse environments (Bragg *et al.*, 2015). Activity in natural environments can assist the management of physical inactivity, obesity, dementia and social isolation, and reduce health inequalities. The report recommends a strategic approach to integrate nature-based activities into public health planning.

Secondary data of evaluations previously made by 17 of the Wildlife Trusts indicates the contribution of these Trusts' activities to public health and to the health of people with diagnosed illnesses (Wood *et al.*, 2016). The report recommends promoting nature-based activities in terms of their health benefits, the wide spread systematic evaluation of the health and wellbeing impacts of the Trusts' work, raising awareness of the Trusts' contribution to health and wellbeing, and extending the range of activities to include more groups with diagnosed therapeutic needs.

The third report collects primary evidence of the physical and mental wellbeing impacts of Wildlife Trusts' projects over the course of a year and develops a methodology to use across the Trusts to gather future data (Rogerson *et al.*, 2017). It finds evidence of improved mental wellbeing, health, positivity, nature relatedness, pro-environmental behaviour and physical activity. The main motivating factors are a growing awareness of the value of conservation activities and of learning new skills. The report recommends that the Trusts increase the awareness of external organisations of their non-medical service.

Actif Woods Wales – benefits of green space

Ongoing research reports (at the time of writing) with Actif Woods Wales refer to a variety of evidence of the benefits of nature-based activities for mental health (Gittins, Morrison and Wynne-Jones, no date). The charity's website (http://www.coedlleol.org.uk/external-evidence-for-the-benefits-of-the-work-of-actif-woods-wales/) includes reports by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and two for Natural England, together creating a consistent approach across several levels of policy (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Brink *et al.*, 2016; Maxwell and Lovell, 2016; Bragg and Leck, 2017). The focus of the Actif Woods research is mental health, so the evidence reflects this aspect of health, but many of the findings relate to the model of social prescribing more generally.

There is uncertainty over the comparative cost of nature-based and medical interventions for mental health. The Defra report (Maxwell and Lovell, 2016) suggests financial benefits of nature-based initiatives occur through averted health costs, personal health benefits, and improved quality of life but recognises that there is little evidence to support this.

The IEEP and Defra reports list both direct and indirect health benefits of natural environments although there is no comparison with the effectiveness of other interventions (Brink *et al.*, 2016; Maxwell and Lovell, 2016). The quality of the environment e.g. clean air and water improves health, and environmental quality is at a landscape scale, e.g. catchment area, enhances this benefit. Nature also affects mental health and wider drivers of well-being, through preventive and therapeutic effects on mental health, enhancing physical development, social cohesion and volunteering, and providing opportunities for employment (Brink *et al.*, 2016). Pathways for these effects on health are increased physical activity, increased social contact and community cohesion, and environmental quality (Maxwell and Lovell, 2016). This report too, shows that although lower socio-economic groups have higher barriers to use of natural environments, they receive disproportionately higher benefits. There appears to be a 'dose-response relationship' in that greater exposure to natural environments increases benefits

at a higher rate, not with diminishing returns. Both reports encourage greater evidence of the link between nature-based activities and mental health, but IEEP recognise that such evaluations must take a 'common-sense' approach as they happen in non-controlled contexts. The Defra report identifies the main research need as understanding how to encourage people to engage with nature, an issue which is addressed by the Sport Wales systematic review above (Didymus *et al.*, 2017).

Each report refers to the growing incidence of mental ill health and the increase in prescriptions and demand for psychological services. They recommend contact with nature as an alternative therapeutic and preventive solution, although whether to divert demand or to improve outcomes is unclear. The IEEP report indicates the motivation is primarily to divert demand as it sets out the context of 'considerable pressure on public spending budgets' (Brink *et al.*, 2016, p. 1). The two reports for Natural England echo the view that nature-based interventions offer a new therapeutic solution to the growing demand for mental health services (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Bragg and Leck, 2017). The authors conclude that the mechanism to refer people to environmental activities needs improvement as both demand for and supply of activities is increasing. They recommend the use of consistent terms for green care, direct funding for third sector providers, and a standardised referral mechanism. They also recommend greater collaboration within the environmental sector to expand provision, collaborative promotion of the concept by national environmental networks, and the sharing and dissemination of evaluations across sectors.

Both IEEP and Defra reports recommend more integrated policy approaches. IEEP focusses on policy and planning, calling for natural environments to be used more widely in preventive public health policy, public health to be linked to nature and conversely, and for nature to be integrated into wider environmental, social and health policies. The Defra report focusses on delivery and encourages an expansion of nature-based activities for health at all spatial scales. IEEP go as far as to suggest denoting protected areas, such as national parks and Natura 2000 sites as 'health care centres.'

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