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Report No. 3

Tea in the Pot: Building 'social capital' or a 'great good place' in Govan?

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The University of the West of Scotland-Oxfam Partnership: 'For a more equitable and sustainable Scotland'

The UWS-Oxfam Partnership is a formally established relationship between the two organisations, underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding. The Partnership emerged as a result of collaborative work between UWS staff and Oxfam and its community partner organisations, revolving around the development of Oxfam's antipoverty advocacy and campaigning in Scotland. The Partnership comprises:

- A Research and Knowledge Exchange linking UWS academics and Oxfam and its community partners in collaborative projects;
- A programme of placements and work-related learning and volunteering opportunities, enabling UWS students to contribute to the work of Oxfam and its community partners, while learning and developing their experience and skills;
- The UWS-Oxfam Policy Forum, which brings all of these partners together with a broad range of external organisations from across all sectors of Scottish society, to discuss key questions and to inform understanding and engagement with both existing and emergent issues.

The Partnership publishes a series of Collaborative Research Reports, edited by Chik Collins (UWS) and Francis Stuart (Oxfam), which, together with other information on the activities of the Partnership, can be found at the following link: http://uwsoxfampartnership.org.uk/category/oxfam/

Report No. 3: Tea in the Pot: Building 'social capital' or a 'great good place' in Govan?

This report focuses on a women's organisation in Govan called Tea in the Pot (TITP). The report is written in two parts, which can be read more or less separately. The first part presents research, designed and conducted by Maria Feeney, which examined the role of TITP in serving the needs of its local community. The report considers TITP in light of Ray Oldenburg's concept of the 'third place' as a 'great good place'. Based on interviews and focus group discussions with the women at TITP, it is suggested that TITP can be thought of as having 'improvised' a 'third place' in Govan, which has brought significant benefits to its members and to its wider community – on the basis of very limited resources. The second part raises the need for a viable common language which can allow local communities, policy makers, practitioners, NGOs, academics, etc. to speak together and to act together in confronting the problems in local communities. Drawing on the case study of TITP, it challenges the appropriateness of the language of 'social capital' which has been so prominent over the past decade and a half, and argues that a viable common language must be connected to the real history and experience of local communities. The report is a timely and challenging contribution to the debate amongst those who share the UWS-Oxfam Partnership's aspiration for 'a more equitable and sustainable Scotland'.

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INTRODUCTION

This report is a product of an ongoing collaboration in research and knowledge exchange between Tea in the Pot, a Women's Drop-In Centre and Support Service based in the Govan area of Glasgow, and the School of Media, Culture and Society of the University of the West of Scotland (UWS).[2] This collaboration is rooted in a broader collaboration between Oxfam Scotland, which counts Tea in the Pot as one of its community partners, and UWS. Based on a generous contribution from UWS, the UWS-Oxfam Partnership was able financially to support this specific collaboration with Tea in the Pot (henceforth TITP).

The report is presented in two parts. The first outlines the role and contribution of TITP in serving the needs of its members and its wider community. It draws heavily on the experiences and assessments of those who have made use of the services and support provided by the organisation. These experiences and assessments were recorded as part of a research project which received approval from the UWS Research Ethics Committee.

In order to provide some 'framing' for the consideration of TITP, our report makes use of Ray Oldenburg's concept of a 'third place'. Oldenburg (1999) describes such places as 'great good places' in local communities – fostering and facilitating social support and a sense of community beyond the home and the workplace. In what follows, drawing on the findings from a series of focus groups and interviews with group 'members'[3] and volunteers, it will be argued that TITP can usefully be seen as an attempt to 'improvise' a kind of a 'great good place' which can be accessible to women who really need such a place in contemporary Govan and Glasgow. The report will identify the positive impacts of the group and indicate the kinds of benefits that could be expected from the sustainable, long-term development of the group – and of other groups like it, in other places.

The second part offers some reflection on the terms which are used to talk about what happens in local communities. The observation that the terms used too often exclude, alienate and disempower people in local communities is a familiar and important one. This issue, moreover, takes on a particular salience in a context in which the Scottish Parliament is legislating for 'community empowerment'. This poses the challenge of finding a viable common language which local communities, policy makers, practitioners, academics and others can share in talking about and acting upon the profound human challenges which confront many communities. Over the past decade and more the terminology of 'social capital' has come to dominate much of the discussion about the development and 'resilience' of communities. The case study of TITP offers a useful perspective on this terminology, which, it will be argued, is more part of the problem than of any solution.

The two parts of the report can be read separately. The second part will be of less interest to some readers than the first, but the second part will probably make more sense for those who have read the first part.

[2] Our thanks to John Foster of Govan Community Council, and to Rachael Orr and Jamie Livingstone of Oxfam, for helpful comments and suggestions. Thanks also to Francis Stuart of Oxfam for his editorial contribution.

[3] Those who use the services and facilities of Tea in the Pot are referred to, and refer to each other, as 'members' – though there is no formal 'membership' process or status as such.

PART 1

TEA IN THE POT: A 'GREAT GOOD PLACE' IN GOVAN?

It might be appropriate to say that TITP could be seen as an attempt to *improvise* (creatively and empathetically) something like a third place which can be accessible to women who really need such a place in contemporary Govan and Glasgow. For that, its founders and its volunteers deserve immense credit. They don't require that, of course, to continue with their efforts, but they will very much need to be resourced, and for that to happen it is vital that potential funders appreciate, as we have come to do through our research, the nature and importance of the contribution they are making and want to be able to continue to make.

Tea in the Pot

This first part of our report provides a brief introduction to TITP, in terms of its origins, purpose and operation. It introduces the work of Oldenburg and some of those who have sought to apply his concept of the 'third place'. It then briefly describes the conception and design of the research, before going on to outline and to discuss the findings.

Tea in the Pot (TITP) began after a local lone parent completed a six month 'Regender' project run by Oxfam, through its UK Poverty Programme, and Govan Social Inclusion Partnership. She was able to complete the course due to free childcare being provided. At that time, in 2005, there were no women's groups in Govan. When she completed the course, it was decided in discussions with Oxfam that a women's group was needed in the area. In order to ascertain whether there would be a demand, 400 questionnaires were sent out in the G51 postcode area. From this, 158 responses were received, all of which indicated that such a group would be beneficial. Following initial meetings in December 2004, TITP was formally constituted on July 22 2005. In 2007 the organisation was granted charitable status. The group has just marked the tenth anniversary of its initial meetings.

From its inception, TITP has been regarded by both its members and by Oxfam Scotland, which has provided ongoing support and financial resource, as *an informal group* at which women can meet without being (or continuing to be) involved with statutory services, get involved in their community, and, should they wish to do so, expand their skill set. The group meets twice weekly in the Pearce Institute in Govan, a well-known meeting place for groups and community activities. Women of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds come to the group. Some women attend because they feel lonely or isolated, some have health issues, others have experienced abuse, but all come 'for the banter'.

In the first year there were 167 visits (based on twice weekly 'drop-ins') by women to the group, with numbers rising consistently over the following years. The latest available figures show 1,835 visits for the year between April 2013 and March 2014.

Oxfam Scotland has continued to work closely with the group, paying the rent for one of the two rooms in the Pearce Institute which currently provide the premises for the group and its various activities. Oxfam has also played a key role in organisational development, assisting with aspects of management, and helping the group share information and 'best practice' with other groups and projects, both locally and also more widely. However, due to changes within Oxfam's UK facing work, this funding is coming to an end – though Oxfam has provided transitional support which has helped the group to secure time-limited replacement funding from the Robertson Trust. This year there is an overlap in funding between Oxfam and the Robertson Trust, and this is allowing for the second room to be rented. However, from the end of this financial year (2014-15), as the group loses Oxfam's financial support, it will need to revert to the use of the single room. Oxfam is continuing at this stage to provide additional fundraising consultancy support.

The day-to-day running of TITP has, apart from one period of six months[4], been undertaken entirely by volunteers. These are, as well as the group's founder, longer- term members who seek to use their own positive experiences within the group to foster engagement and positive development for newer members. Although there are six members who volunteer to assist with the running of the group, the greatest proportion of the work is undertaken by two volunteers. One of these is the founder of the group, who facilitates the bi-weekly drop ins, acts as group secretary, keeps the Facebook and website pages up-to-date, and keeps records of numbers using the group – as well as contributing in other ways. The second key volunteer has been with the group for almost ten years and she helps facilitate group meetings, manages the group's funds and Twitter presence, and is also, like the founder member, an active participant in all of the group's activities. These key volunteers typically commit between twenty and thirty hours each per week to the group. The other volunteers contribute in a range of ways, as permitted by their other commitments. One is now working full-time, another is a full time student at university. One volunteer who is unable to attend regularly nonetheless keeps the group advised of wider social and political developments – such as welfare reform, poverty initiatives, and policy matters.

[4] During this six month period, the group's founder was funded to work on a part-time basis by Oxfam Scotland.

Oldenburg and the Concept of 'The Great Good Place'

In his book, *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg (1989/1999) identifies 'third places' as accessible spaces away from home and workplace (the 'first' and 'second places'). The subtitle of the first edition of his book gives a clear indication of the kinds of spaces he was thinking about: *Cafes, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day* (Oldenburg, 1989). The second edition saw a somewhat different title, conveying the same general point in a changed context: *Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (Oldenburg, 1999). As the latter subtitle in particular suggests, Oldenburg sees such places as providing a sense of belonging and community for those who frequent them. For him, they are the key 'anchors'[5] of a community, encouraging social interaction and civic engagement, helping to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, and playing a more generally important role in the formation and development of a civil society and democracy. Crucially, such places, for Oldenburg, have a socially 'levelling' function – they are *inclusively sociable spaces*, reducing the effects of social status and generating a greater social proximity between people.

Oldenburg's argument is that the processes of urban change in the post-war period (suburbanisation, clearance and redevelopment, urban motorways, deindustrialisation, decline of high streets and the rise of out of town shopping, etc.) impacted adversely on the availability and accessibility of such 'third places' in his own country – the United States of America. However, as we will outline in Part 2 of this report, we know that these kinds of processes were particularly marked in the city of Glasgow, and even more so in communities like Govan, and so his arguments might seem particularly relevant to the community served by TITP.

Utilising Oldenburg's model, an 'ideal-type' third place, we suggest, can usefully be thought of along the following lines. Such a 'third place' would be:

- Neutral – no one is required to play host and people can come and go freely;
- Non-hierarchical – social class and status outside the third place have less importance within it;
- Interactive – conversation is the primary activity for those inhabiting 'third places';
- Accessible and accommodating - ease of access (including affordability) and unstructured activity is crucial to third place interaction;
- Welcoming – regulars give the place its character and play a key role in welcoming newcomers into the group;
- Ordinary – third places are plainly decorated and unpretentious;
- Sociable – there is an emphasis on fun and playfulness;
- Comfortable – third places are like a 'home away from home'.

However, a less often discussed, but in this context very important, aspect of third places identified by Oldenburg, is the role they can play as 'political and intellectual fora' (Oldenburg, 1999, p. xxv).

Although Oldenburg's work is set in the American context, others have utilised and adapted his concept in examining the benefits of third places more widely. For example, Cheng (2002) examined the ways in which a fast food restaurant helped engender feelings of sociability through social interaction, and an overall sense of wellbeing for elderly patrons. In the same vein, Rosenbaum (2006, 2010), argues that, as older people tend to have suffered more from devastating life events such as death of a partner or illness, they often find themselves lacking in socio-emotional support networks. He also looked at a fast food restaurant and argued that because it provided a comfortable physical environment in which patrons felt that their needs for socio-emotional support could be met, the restaurant became their third place, a 'home away from home'.

Glover and Parry (2008), adapting Oldenburg's concept of third place to the non-commercial sphere, examined the links between health and place. They evaluated the therapeutic functions of Gilda's Club in Ontario – a non-profit organisation for cancer suffers and their families. Using semi-structured interviews, Glover and Parry found that the Club fostered sociability and a sense of belonging, thus helping sufferers and their families deal with feelings of isolation and loneliness. Gilda's Club was 'exclusive', in that it only catered for those affected by cancer, and in this sense it might seem not to exhibit a key feature of a 'third place'. However, Glover and Parry argued that Oldenburg's concept could usefully be adapted to consider and evaluate the role and contribution of the Club for those who frequented it.

[5] The terminology of 'anchors' in community life has been apparent also in more recent discussions around 'community empowerment' in contemporary Scotland. However, in the latter context they have been seen by at least one commentator as exemplifying the kind of unhelpful jargon – or 'gobbledegook' – that works to disempower people (Shannon, 2014).

Closer to home, the concept of third place has been mobilised by Hickman (2013) to examine local social interaction in deprived areas in the UK. Hickman notes that although there is a growing body of literature on the issue of social interaction and social networks in such communities (often invoking the notion of 'social capital'), the issues have not often been theorised in terms of the concept of 'third place'. He argues that as a result of austerity and recession, the number of third places in many such communities has rapidly declined. Hickman studied four local areas in the UK and was able to describe how people made use of parks, community centres and cafes as third places, but in fact it was local shops which served the primary 'third place' function. Those who made use of third places most often were the elderly, the unemployed, those in poor health and individuals with childcare responsibilities.

For Hickman, such third places fulfil three important functions in deprived areas. Firstly, they perform a social function in that they are valued by many residents. Secondly, they play an important functional role as service providers. Thirdly they have a symbolic role as a measure of the 'health' and 'vibrancy' of the community. Hickman called for further work to examine the ways in which social interaction in third places may affect the attitudes and behaviour of local residents in deprived areas, and the significance of that social interaction to their lives. These questions, he suggested, should be priorities for future research making use of the 'third place' concept – and their salience will be evident in what follows.

The Research and the Results

Drawing on the above discussion, we suggest that the benefits of 'third place' interaction might be thought about in four key areas[6]:

- Supporting social interaction;
- Engendering a sense of belonging;
- Reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness;
- Helping participants feel themselves to be part of the wider community.

Using the above model of third place as a basis for discussion, volunteers and attendees of TITP were invited to take part in focus groups and individual interviews, or to provide 'witness testimonies', to gather and to explore their views and feelings on what the group provides for them and others who attend, and on its impact in the wider local community.

Methods

Two focus groups were convened; the first in November 2013 had eleven participants, and the second in March 2014 had six participants. The group also provided records of statements made by group members over a number of years about the personal and social benefits of their participation. These statements had been collected by the group from time to time in an attempt to 'capture' at least some evidence of their role in and contribution to their community. Finally, one member and one volunteer each asked for their personal experiences to be the subject of individual interviews. Both the focus groups and the individual interviews took place in the Pearce Institute, and were recorded and the data archived in accordance with the 1998 Data Protection Act. In reporting the data, below, participants' names have been changed to ensure anonymity.

Supporting positive social interaction

It is well known that positive social interaction is vital to an individual's sense of well-being. Rosenbaum (2006), for example, argues that social interaction in a 'third place' has key, restorative benefits. At TITP such interaction is of fundamental importance to members and is linked to the alleviation, or at least lessening, of feelings of isolation and loneliness, and to the development of a sense of belonging. This is strongly evidenced in the views reported by the women.

[6] These areas are clearly related and overlapping and it would be possible to combine some of them or to present them in other ways, but cumulatively these seem to us to capture the essence of 'third place' interaction.

On coming to TITP, Catherine had just left an abusive relationship in which she had felt 'silenced and invisible'. Becoming a member of TITP has enabled her to talk and interact with others in a way that she had been unable to do for a long time. This, she puts down to the very real sense of camaraderie and companionship among members – something that members more generally stressed and valued very highly. Coming to the group is a very important part of their lives. They explain that coming to TITP and interacting with others who share similar concerns, or just 'want to chat', has, over time, allowed them to build a greater sense of trust in others. The phrase, "whatever is said in the group, stays in the group", is something of a mantra. Linked to this trust, is the non-judgemental attitude members have toward each other in relation to the private issues which are often discussed. Lee sums this up well in saying that:

> *"I've seen me telling people things in here that I wouldn't go and say to my sister or any of them. In here people listen to you"*

Here, Lee is echoing a much wider sentiment within and about the group. The building of relationships of trust allows for the sharing of personal stories with an openness and frankness which would not otherwise be possible for participants. Moreover, such relationships provide the context in which contributors feel they are listened to rather than just heard – that what they say has value.

Theresa reinforces this perspective, saying (in this and other quotations, three dots in between words indicate a pause on the part of the speaker):

> *"I find it easier to come in (to TITP) and talk to people, and I wouldn't say strangers because now I would include them as friends... um... but it's easier to speak to them than to speak to family and friends because family have a vested interest. But sometimes it's easier to discuss it with people who can find things for you from their own life experience... it's not something just off the cuff, you know people are really interested... and they're concerned, that's quite important to me... it's another kind of lifeline".*

This use of the term 'lifeline' is a significant one – more than a casual metaphor – and it expresses a sentiment which was shared widely by group members. The group has allowed for the kinds of social interaction – both within the group and beyond it – which has allowed members to renew old hobbies and pursuits, and to find new ones, through the discovery of shared interests, and the offer of encouragement and support. All of this, of course, helps with self-confidence, which often has been, or is being, undermined or compromised by events and experiences in other aspects of members' lives. For some, the group provides almost the only opportunity they have for meaningful social interaction with others. In both these respects, reducing isolation and building confidence in oneself as a person, the group offers a 'lifeline' for its members.

On a lighter note, the women also spoke about the fun they have in the group. One member, Jean, expressed the views of members saying: "Coming to TITP is fun and you can have a laugh and a bit of banter".

Another member said that, at times coming to TITP was like playing 'musical chairs', because the conversations going on were so interesting that she felt she had to run from one chair to another to take part in more than one at a time. The women spoke about the social events that they have hosted as a means of raising funds and having fun. For example, the group has a Christmas party every year - and the members relish this. Other events have included a 'diamond and tiara' party, a 'roaring twenties night', a '70s night', a ceilidh and a Burns Supper. People dress up and enjoy themselves. For some, it is the only time they go out at night. Catherine talks about the effort that the volunteers put in to organising these events, including setting up the hall, preparing food, really entering in to the spirit of things and making everyone feel welcome. Linked to this, members of the surrounding communities are welcome to attend these 'wee nights'.

An 'engendered' sense of belonging

The literature on 'third place' demonstrates that membership of such places engenders a sense of belonging among participants. This is certainly strongly in evidence at TITP, where women come to feel that they are important members of the group. For example, if any of the women have not attended for a while, a volunteer will get in touch to find out how they are doing, to keep them up-to-date with what is going on at the group and also to offer support if needed. This is viewed, not as a form of intrusion into the private lives of group members, but as evidence that members are cared for – and that they 'belong'. Theresa sums up the views of the women more generally in saying that:

> *"It's not just an exercise, it's not just like 'ah well, she didn't turn up so she couldn't quite like it ', ehm you're kind of hunted, they track you down to make sure you are still breathing. It's good, it sounds horrible, but it is a really, it's a good feeling, it's a kind of security blanket...it makes you feel kind of important".*

Some members talked about having attended other groups where they had not felt this same sense of belonging, and said that, in comparison, TITP felt like a 'home away from home'.

The way in which the meeting room for the group is set up is very important to the members, and the volunteers have made every effort to make it feel comfortable, inviting and 'homely'. The room does not feel in any way like a meeting room in a community centre or some other local 'institution'. Crucially, the usual strip lighting is seldom used. Instead lamps cast a softer light against furniture and decoration which is more strongly reminiscent of a pleasant and inviting home environment. Jean sums up the views of the members in saying that the TITP premises are like "something you would like to be your home. When you come in here...you feel comfortable." Others likened coming to the group to "going to see your mammie", or coming "into a big living room... where you can have a cup of tea and sit by the fire". Women feel that they can come to the group and just 'be themselves'. Lee sums up this sentiment: "I've seen me just come in here on a Monday and just coming in and more or less sitting myself, and I just sit back and relax". Another member who had not been able to come the group for three years said that as soon as she came back she felt that she was 'coming home'.

What has further helped to engender this sense of belonging is the location of TITP. Members who had used or been referred to services which deal specifically with, for example, issues of domestic abuse or mental health problems, said that in some instances they felt 'like they were going into an office' where everyone knew why they were there. This made them feel exposed, vulnerable and isolated. However, coming to TITP made them feel as if they belonged to a group which, because it was located in a building which several other groups in the community also use, afforded them a degree of privacy. The women said that this alone made them feel like part of a group in which they felt safe and secure, thus fostering a sense of belonging. TITP made them feel valued, which had resulted in a raising of self-esteem and an increase in self-confidence for many members.

Reducing loneliness and isolation

Oldenburg (1999) argues that third places are particularly beneficial to the elderly and those on lower incomes – in helping combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. The vast majority of members of TITP fall into at least one of these categories. When setting up TITP, the volunteers, perhaps serendipitously, decided to hold the group on Mondays and Fridays. Volunteer, Tricia, explained that opening on a Friday benefits those who attend by:

> *"Giving them a wee boost for whatever they have to cope with at the weekend, be that a violent partner or coping on their own because they have no family or friends around them".*

She adds that Monday openings provide members with "'a place to offload". Several members say that they can cope better with evenings if they have been to TITP during the day and that TITP is an antidote to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Jackie believes strongly that if TITP were not available for women to attend, then:

> *"People wouldn't get out the house, nowhere to go. People depend on TITP to get out and that. So Tea in the Pot done well, well for me and everybody else here".*

Given that the majority of members are on lower incomes (including those who are retired), their choices of places to socialise are limited by their financial situation. TITP is a free service that provides women with the opportunity to meet and interact with others, which is viewed by members as being a crucial factor in helping them deal with social and emotional isolation. Members talk openly about loneliness and isolation leading to mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety, and argue that, for them, the best solution in dealing with these issues is not (only) to take medication but to mix with people, talk about their problems, and to seek and offer advice to others who have found themselves in the same position. Pamela offered her own very clear assessment:

> *"The health service will employ psychiatrists, psychologists and all the rest of it, your talking therapy, none of it's the same as coming (to TITP) and talking to people you trust, people that you can relax and really talk to."*

All agree that although it is by no means the only solution or a panacea, coming to TITP has been instrumental in helping them deal with isolation and loneliness and the resultant mental health issues this has caused for some members.

When she first came to TITP, Tracey thought that she was the "only person in the world" suffering from depression. She went on to say that:

> *"When I came here, I saw there was lots of other people, either in the same position or getting away from that and part of the reason they were getting away from that, was coming here (to TITP)".*

Pamela reflected the views of many members in saying that:

> *"You come (to TITP) for yourself, but after a while you, you're involved with people and you have that sense that... it's not all about you. You want to be helping other people".*

So, while TITP is at one level just a nice meeting place where members can relax, feel comfortable and have a cup of tea and a chat, it is at another level, very much more than that. For these women, it is an accessible and inclusive social space in which they are able to alleviate feelings of social and emotional loneliness and detachment, and the broader effects this has on their health and wellbeing, in an environment which is supportive, friendly and safe. And the latter very much requires the former.

Being part of a wider community

Liz stressed that at TITP, "You feel as if you're part of the community". Pamela added that "we get such a lot from it, you know, information about what's going on in the community". These views were strongly echoed by other members. But this is not simply about 'feeling' oneself part of a community, it is about active engagement with the concerns of the community. So, through their engagement with TITP, volunteers and members have, in varying degrees, taken up community-based issues and become involved with local political processes. For example, several group members and volunteers are engaged with organisations dealing with poverty, welfare rights and reforms, mental health, housing, and related issues. Information from meetings and events is then fed back to the group, keeping the women in touch with issues which have an effect on their lives and on the wider community.

Mary was keen to point out that the ensuing political and social debates and discussions taking place within the group not only inform but empower the women. Liz agreed and now believes in getting involved in the political sphere, because it has implications for people in the community:

> *"I've written to MPs about welfare cuts, you know the Remploy factories...because you know, a lot of it affects a lot of us... especially welfare. I wrote about the bedroom tax and rising power prices".*

Geraldine, a volunteer, said: "Through TITP I have become more socially and community engaged". She sees her role as gatherer of information of relevance to the group and the wider community, and as networking with other agencies in order to seek their engagement with, and support for, TITP – and to reciprocate. One particularly notable success for the group, and indeed for Scotland as a whole, was the petition to the Scottish Parliament started by Geraldine to make calls to NHS24 free from mobile phones. The petition was successful and this new service has been available since April 2014. Along with other volunteers, Geraldine has been involved in getting members of statutory, non-statutory and third sector organisations to speak to members of TITP about a variety of issues affecting them and the wider community.

Related to this is the increasing number of referrals of women to TITP from other organisations. Figures show that 284 referrals were made to the group in 2012-13, from mental health organisations, domestic abuse services, the Social Work Department, Job Centre Plus and GPs. Although every woman referred is welcomed, there is a widely held belief among the volunteers and members that TITP is used to support the work of statutory agencies, but without TITP itself receiving the level of support and resourcing to help them to undertake the support activities which are required. Tracey summed up this view:

> *"We just feel that everybody uses us but nobody is prepared to back us...You know that... it's just getting other agencies to realise the position that we're in. We run on a shoestring in here".*

Volunteers and members alike feel frustrated, because when they apply for funding they are most often rejected because, as they see it, although offering a vital service to women in the community, they do not fit neatly into the criteria set out by funding bodies. This is partly because the group is not a 'single service' group – like some of the better-funded groups who make the referrals to TITP. And it is partly because of the difficulties and pitfalls in securing funding – filling in detailed forms, providing 'evidence' of 'outputs' and 'outcomes' against the latest fashions, and facing the dilemma of securing funding which might take the organisation away from what it regards as its core purpose and its most important roles and contribution. This can leave the women at TITP feeling, as Tracey put it, 'used' by other agencies. A particular concern within the group is that their relative inexperience in 'business planning' might in the future leave them unable to secure even the limited funding they have been able hitherto to secure.

Making a difference

TITP has benefited members in a variety of ways beyond those discussed above. The group has amassed a wide range of skills and expertise among volunteers and members, ranging across health and gender issues, to food and hygiene training, anti-suicide training and training in holistic therapies. The group now has two qualified Reiki Masters/teachers who use their skills to benefit group members. There are also two retired nurses in the group, whose expertise and experience is of real value to members. A further two members are qualified hairdressers who are happy to give members a 'do' – payment is whatever can be afforded and goes toward TITP funds. Older members who paint have had their work displayed in Kelvingrove Art Gallery as part of an exhibition on mental health. At least two members have gone into Higher and Further education. The first has completed an HNC in Social Science and the other is currently undertaking a degree in community development.

Thumbnail stories of two particular TITP members are recounted briefly below, in order to try to illustrate the impact which the organisation has had on individual lives – providing 'a lifeline' which has been vital in helping them to find a way to flourish in really difficult personal circumstances.

Catherine's Story: Catherine, who has been coming to the group for over three years, had come from an abusive relationship. She notes that when she first came to the group, through a referral from a mental health charity, she was suffering with depression and anxiety. She was accompanied by a support worker because she did not feel strong enough to come on her own. Catherine did not feel able to take part in discussions in the group when she started, and was only able to sit in silence for a short time before feeling so anxious that she had to leave. Gradually, with the help and support of members and volunteers, she began to build her trust in members and to converse with them openly. Catherine is keen to point out that being a member of TITP has greatly helped her to grow in confidence and build her self-esteem. She now sings in a local community choir and has found some talent for acting, performing in a play enacted in the local shopping centre. Catherine continues to grow and develop adding that:

> *"See going here as well, we learn different skills. I've learned to crochet. We've all picked up wee different pieces. We've done aromatherapy. So it's not only about the talking aspect, you learn as well…I've got a sense of achievement …(and) whatever skills I've had, I've passed on to other people".*

Catherine, acknowledges the help she has had from some other groups, but she was keen to point out that these groups were 'stepping stones', whereas TITP offered ongoing support with no time limit – which was absolutely vital for her.

May's Story: Prior to coming to TITP, May had been diagnosed with a chronic bowel condition which left her feeling lonely and isolated. She met two of the TITP volunteers at a Health in the Community course and was encouraged to drop in. Geraldine notes that as a result of regularly attending TITP:

> *"My confidence began to return and I successfully campaigned in Govan to have public toilets reinstalled…TITP encouraged me to go to college and with their help, typing, and support, I graduated with an HNC in Social Sciences".*

It was around this time that she petitioned the Scottish Parliament on a key issue of concern which had implications way beyond Govan – at national (Scottish) level. May notes that "The petition was successful… (and) it was TITP's success as well as mine". She has now gone on to become a community activist with a well-known anti-poverty network, and an active participant in a range of other bodies and voluntary service providers (which we do not name here, for reasons of anonymity, required by our ethical approval constraints), and has lobbied politicians at various levels (local, Scottish and European).

May's life has now moved on really significantly – which is, of course, something which TITP very much aims for – but she was keen to point out that she maintains the connection with TITP, which still gives her that warm and welcome feeling, and sends her off recharged for her wider work: "I still drop in to Tea in the Pot when I am feeling down as I always leave here feeling happier as it is such a warm, welcoming and calm environment". Tea in the Pot is, moreover, in her view, "the only place in Govan where women can feel safe and get support when they need it".

Findings: Appreciating Tea in the Pot

This report has looked at the activity of TITP in light of Oldenburg's concept of the 'third place' as a 'great good place' in the life of a community. It is clear that there would be a good case for saying that TITP could be described as something like that – as a kind of a 'great good place' in Govan. Our research has enabled us to appreciate that the TITP volunteers have created, as we have seen described in the women's own words, a place of social interaction, which engenders a sense of belonging, helps members feel less isolated and lonely, creates a sense of community and provides a political and intellectual forum in which members can grow, develop, become productively engaged in the broader life of their community, and bring about changes which impact both within and beyond their community. We have seen that members do not encounter problematic hierarchical structures within the group, and nor are there any class or ethnic barriers. The volunteers are viewed as 'the characters', who provide a warm welcome to new members in a neutral place where no individual feels they have to take on the role of 'host'.

Having discussed the idea, the TITP women quickly recognised themselves very much as a 'third place' – a place beyond the 'first' and 'second' places of home and work which provides a space for people to meet, interact and to develop and *feel* a sense of belonging and community. That said, this is not straightforwardly a 'third place' in Oldenburg's terms. It caters solely for women, most obviously. But clearly, it is providing to the members vital aspects of the 'third place experience' – and many of the benefits that go with that, both to the women, and to the wider community. Indeed, the *raison d'etre* of Tea in the Pot is in part that too few places like that exist in Govan, and for many women those that do exist are not easily accessible – either for financial reasons (£5 for a latte and a scone is not affordable for many) or for the kinds of personal reasons which have been outlined in the preceding sections of this report.

It might be appropriate to say that TITP could be seen as an attempt to *improvise* (creatively and empathetically) something like a third place which can be accessible to women who really need such a place. For that, its founders and its volunteers deserve immense credit. They don't require that, of course, to continue with their efforts, but they will very much need to be resourced, and for that to happen it is vital that potential funders appreciate, as we have come to do through our research, the nature and importance of the contribution they are making and want to be able to continue to make.

PART 2

'BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL' OR 'IMPROVISING A GREAT GOOD PLACE'?

If we look at poor communities and say that the problem is that they lack 'social capital' – indeed that their health outcomes and life expectancies would be significantly improved if they only had more of it – then our attention and action will be focused in a certain limited kind of way. Unfortunately, this is a way which will tend to mislocate the actual source of problems and point towards 'solutions' which will not address the problems. Worst of all, it will produce a predictable tendency to focus on local communities themselves as the source of their own problems, and in so doing, to 'responsibilise' them for finding their own solutions – thus letting others 'off the hook'.

In this report we have invoked the idea of TITP as a 'third place'. To some, this may seem like yet more jargon – or 'gobbledegook' – of the kind which tends to plague discussions about what needs to happen in local communities affected by poverty (Shannon, 2014). However, in this second part of our report we argue that the application of the idea of the 'third place' to TITP actually helps us to open up some much needed discussion around the kind of language which too often excludes and disempowers people. As indicated in the introduction to our report, this issue takes on a heightened significance when the Scottish Parliament is legislating for 'community empowerment' – with the much-discussed Community Empowerment Scotland Bill currently in process[7]. This context poses the challenge of finding a credible and viable common language which local communities, policy makers, practitioners, academics and others can actually share. How close are we to being able to actually do that? In what follows, focusing critically on the terminology of 'social capital', we suggest that there is a way to travel.

What is 'social capital'?

In recent years, when academics and policy makers have talked about the problems of communities which have been damaged by poverty, deindustrialisation, unemployment, and the kinds of social, housing and environmental problems which are so often associated with them, they have often spoken about the need to build 'social capital' in these communities. This is evident across the UK in general (see for example, ONS, 2001; Babb, 2005; Foxton and Jones, 2011), as well as in Scotland specifically (e.g. Crowther, Tett and Edwards, 2008; Ormston and Reid, 2012; Ormston, 2012; ONS, 2001) but also very much more widely (Cote and Healey, 2011). The wide salience of the idea reflects its 'high level' propagation by the World Bank, which we will discuss below, and also the 'popularisation' of the idea in academia, primarily through the work of Robert Putnam (2000).

The term 'social capital' is at best a vague one, which has multiple definitions, and at times little definition at all. [8] Generally, it is intended to refer to social relations and networks which are seen to form the basis for a positive kind of community life with good levels of mutual trust and reciprocity. Nonetheless, almost a decade and a half ago the term was already prominent enough for both the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) to have a shared official definition, and its influence has shown little sign of waning. The ONS followed the OECD in defining 'social capital' as: "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups" (Cote and Healey, 2001).

The importance of 'social capital' in our context is that is believed to have close links with community well-being and 'resilience' – and with health in particular. Thus, Scottish Government research has attempted "to provide a greater empirical understanding of the social capital assets of different groups in Scottish society", on the grounds that "understanding the distribution of social capital may help policy makers develop further strategies to support the development of strong, resilient communities and individuals" (Ormston and Reid, 2012, p.2). In relation to health more specifically, it has led to research to "explore the Scottish evidence for a link between social capital and health outcomes in order to inform the ongoing development of an assets based approach to addressing health problems and inequalities". This research found "further evidence of the potential relationship between social capital assets and better health" and made the case that "improving … social capital … even a little might, therefore, have significant impacts for … health and wellbeing". It also, however, added the caveat that this "assumes that … lower levels of general health stem from – rather than being a cause of … relatively low levels of social capital assets" (Ormston, 2012, p.14).

One can see clearly the potential appeal to policy makers here. If we can only encourage and support people to improve their social networks and connections, then so much more that is desirable would seem to be likely causally to flow – strong, resilient and healthier communities with higher levels of well-being, placing lower demands on health and other social services. It certainly seems to 'sound good'.

[7] This will be discussed further below.

[8] In introducing a special edition of a journal dealing with 'social capital', its editors noted with apparent approval the fact that none of the contributing authors "spend a lot of 'ink' in defining social capital" (Knorriga and van Staveren, cited in Fine, 2008, p.262)

Problematising the language of intervention?

At the same time, in recent decades there has been rather a lot that has 'sounded good' in the language deployed around policies for communities dealing with poverty and its associated problems – 'regeneration', 'participation', 'new life', 'partnership', 'social inclusion', 'community planning', 'community engagement', 'community enterprise', 'community empowerment', 'mixed communities', 'vibrant communities', and so on. If any of it had been even close to being as good as it had sounded, then the problems facing communities would have by now been much closer to having been addressed.

Instead, however, we have seen the intensification of poverty. The percentage of UK households falling below what the public believe to be the minimum standards everyone should have, increased from 14% to 33% in the 30 years to 2012 – while the size of the economy doubled.[9] This has inevitably meant a sharpening of inequality between people and between communities. It has also brought new kinds of social *exclusion* (not least through the application of 'welfare reform' and sanctions), and a serious deterioration in the vitality of positive community organisation. All of this has both reflected and contributed to a deepening 'disempowerment' of local communities (Collins, 2008b). These problems of poverty, inequality, social exclusion and disempowerment have contributed rather a lot to the need for a community organisation like TITP in Govan.

Moreover, research has demonstrated how these outcomes have been closely connected to the policies which were presented in language which 'sounded good'. So, to take one well-researched example, Kintrea (1996) found that in one of the four flagship Partnership projects (Ferguslie Park in Paisley) under the *New Life for Urban Scotland* programme (1988-1998), while the ideas of 'partnership' and 'community participation' lent legitimacy to the project, in practice the local community was "set aside" while central government and others pursued their own interests and agendas. Three years later, consultants reported that this had continued to the stage where, notwithstanding the rhetoric of 'partnership', a "chasm" had opened up between 'partners' which was "threatening the future of the estate itself" (Cambridge Policy Consultants, 1999, ps. 155, 181). And Collins has detailed how the attempt to generate an enterprise culture in the estate led to the decline of positive social networks in the community, and the strengthening of profoundly anti-social networks – implicated in very serious criminality (Collins, 2008a). These networks were certainly strong and resilient, and they showed a 'culture of enterprise', but not of the kind which actually helped the work of 'regeneration' or the reputation of the estate – or indeed of the town of Paisley itself. The language of 'partnership', 'community participation' and 'community enterprise' had, to many, 'sounded good'. But in practice, behind that language was the intention to use a community for reasons and for interests which were very remote from those of the local community itself, and, perhaps unsurprisingly, the outcomes were not good.

The case of Ferguslie Park is in some respects an extreme one, but it nonetheless encapsulates the kinds of problems and experiences which have resulted from interventions in areas of poverty more generally in recent decades – of language that misleads and deceives, of outcomes which never match the aspirations and promises, of 'unintended outcomes' which defeat the purposes, and a failure to reflect and to learn (see Boyle et al, 2008; Kintrea, 1996; Hastings, 1996; McWilliams, 2004; Cambridge Policy Consultants, 1999; Collins, 2003, 2004, 2008b). And these problems and experiences highlight the need to reflect critically on language that 'sounds good', and to try to establish what might actually 'lie behind' it. So, what lies behind the language of 'social capital'?

What lies behind social capital?

The concept of 'social capital' as it is currently invoked emerged in the context of a redevelopment of the conceptual framework of 'new right' market economics in the later 1980s and 1990s. It became a key element in the progression from 'the Washington Consensus' in economic thinking, associated with the philosophies of Thatcher and Reagan, to 'the post-Washington Consensus' associated with Clinton and later Blair. It emerged from the thinking of James Coleman, which in turn drew on the prior work of James Buchanan, and was later popularised by Robert Putnam.

[9] See http://www.poverty.ac.uk/editorial/scottish-poverty-study-calls-governments-tackle-rising-deprivation

Buchanan, a product of the Chicago School of Economics, and also a Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Cato Institute and one-time president of the Mont Pelerin Society[10] , developed 'rational choice' or 'public choice' theory. The main thrust, as Bloomberg noted, when using Buchanan's obituary to attack Obama-care, was to challenge the whole logic of government intervention and to make the case that societies would be best served by maximising the scope of private enterprise.[11] Working within this framework, James Coleman, also of the Chicago School, theorised networks and trust as prerequisites for the development of a free enterprise economy – indeed as a way of recreating something of the founding spirit of American free enterprise in a new and more 'rationally reconstructed' society (Coleman, 1988, 1993). He theorised reciprocity, trust and networks, as 'social capital', the possession of which, it was suggested, places people in a position in which they can behave as rational actors making 'rational choices' which work to the benefit of everyone in society, thus expanding the scope of 'the social', and pushing back the frontiers of the state. This was to lead to the view that certain kinds of 'backward' – or 'dependent' – communities could be encouraged to develop such 'social capital' in order to be able to appreciate and enter into the spirit of free enterprise. It was Robert Putnam (1996) who was later to popularise this perspective – arguing that a decentralised state and strong 'civil society' allowed for a high level of reciprocity across society, which in turn allowed for the rational actions of individuals to be of benefit to the public as a whole.

All of this was in turn linked to, and actively promoting, a wider real world development – in which the state was further withdrawing from supporting people in communities damaged by deindustrialisation, unemployment and poverty. This would require, the argument went, people and communities to develop a certain kind of 'resilience' to be able to cope with the rigours of the free enterprise economy – and 'social capital' was seen as the key to that.

Prior to this time, particularly in the UK, social democratic perspectives on welfare had led to an attempt protect individuals from at least the worst of these rigours. It was understood that markets did not work, spontaneously or otherwise, in the interests of the public, and that those who did not possess capital were inherently vulnerable and needed to be given some degree of security in the face of the power of those who did. This required a degree of public ownership, market regulation, a reasonable environment for trade union organisation, and a welfare state. However, the view of the proponents of 'social capital' was that these were unreasonable and coercive infringements against 'free enterprise' and 'personal liberty', which fostered 'dependency'. The possession of 'social capital', on the other hand, would allow the poor to become 'free' and to participate in the market economy, making rational choices which would contribute to the public good, as well as their own personal interests. This thinking is clearly seen today in the work of the 'Centre for Social Justice' [12] and in the UK coalition Government's welfare reform agenda (HM Government, 2012).

All of this points to a very clearly political and ideological agenda behind the idea of 'social capital' – an agenda which is in fact deeply bound up with the problems in poor communities, and has intensified those problems. But the idea itself would not have become so prominent were it not for the fact that it was taken up and promulgated from within the World Bank from the 1990s. The idea was taken up, not because it had been found to be a robust one – because this proved not to be the case – but because it served a purpose for a certain element within the Bank (see Fine, 2008; Fine and Lapavitsas, 2004).

In the World Bank at that time, those who wanted to challenge 'the Washington Consensus' deployed the term 'social capital' as part of their strategy. The 'Washington Consensus' was associated with what has been called the 'roll back' phase of neoliberalism, which sought to create markets largely by destroying impediments to their formation. By the end of the 1980s this approach was being challenged by others within the World Bank who thought that government action should seek actively to create and support markets. The old approach was seen to be a bit 'primitive' and the idea of 'social capital' – notwithstanding the problems inherent in the idea – was deployed in pursuit of something more 'constructive' and 'civilised'. However, given the origins of 'social capital' in Chicago School economics, clearly the pursuit of 'civility' was not anything that would challenge the fundamental pursuit of a marketised society – indeed the whole purpose was to extend and deepen such marketisation (Fine, 2008). This was 'roll out' neoliberalism (Peck and Tickell, 2002).[13]

[10] The Chicago School of Economics was perhaps the key source of the economic neoliberalism which shaped the policies of Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher. The Cato Institute is a US libertarian think tank, and the Mont Pelerin Society is an international bastion of economic neoliberalism, associated with Friedrich Von Hayek of the Austrian School and Milton Friedman of the Chicago School (see Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007).

[11] "The economic school he founded, known as public-choice theory, casts a sceptical eye on government officials and bureaucrats and points out that their work might serve the public less than a very private enterprise" (Shlaes, 2013).

[12] See: www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk

[13]More recently, a phase of 'roll-with-it' neoliberalism has been identified (Keil, 2009).

Those who propagated the term 'social capital' in the World Bank later 'confessed' to this intellectual 'ruse' (see Fine, 2008). However, by that time, the concept had already acquired a life of its own, beyond their control – and it has since been used as if it were actually a well-developed, social science concept, rather than a, perhaps in some ways well-intentioned, strategic manoeuvre deployed within the World Bank.

Problems with 'social capital'

One might find this kind of ruse slightly less unpalatable if there were not such clear problems with it. Most obviously, *it did not work* in generating a more 'civilised' approach. It arguably made an impact in some places as part of a 'social inclusion' agenda (for instance in the UK) for a period of time, from the later 1990s and into the early 2000s; but thereafter, it quickly became apparent that this was limited and not going to be sustained. In the UK context, inequality was clearly getting worse even in the early New Labour years (Dorling et al, 2007; Lansley, 2012). The limited improvements in poverty for some sections of the population during the earlier years of that government had, by around 2005, already began to run out of steam and then slip away (Palmer et al, 2007). Neo-liberal economics – and 'trickle down' theory – had become more, not less, dominant (Dorling, 2010; Lansley, 2012), and 'welfare reform' became ever harsher and more punitive (see, e.g. Collins et al, 2009). And since 2008, with the banking collapse and bail out, it has become even more clear that there has been no conversion of those who shape and make policy to any 'civilised' idea that people matter in the way that 'economic assets' do – policies of austerity are a clear demonstration of the opposite of that (see Harvey, 2011; Karanikolos et al, 2013; Kentikelenis et al, 2014).

Another associated problem is the fact that the 'social capital' perspective involves, inherently, a 'deficit model' of local communities – foregrounding what they themselves *lack* or have *failed to develop or sustain*. This can perhaps be brought out by transposing the idea to another community not far from Govan. In other parts of the south side of Glasgow, there are streets full of late 19th century mansions which people come to and go from in nice cars without seeming to interact with each other much at all. They lock their doors all the time and have expensive security systems in their houses and cars. They don't seem to do much in terms of providing reciprocal social support. In fact, there is barely any sign of what some might call 'social capital'; but it is difficult to imagine anyone giving those who live in these properties a pep talk about how they need to think about developing some. Nonetheless, in communities like Govan, which have lost out so badly from the same kinds of economic and social processes that have privileged their not-too-distant south side neighbours, it seems almost *de rigeur* for policy makers to talk about the need to build 'social capital' – even as the kinds of social networks and relationships which they are trying to highlight and strengthen are undermined by the poverty and inequality which result from the decisions of those same policy makers.

But there is a perhaps deeper problem. The concept of 'social capital' concedes rather a lot to the 'uncivilised bankers' against whom it was strategically deployed. Indeed, it has a logic about it which seems even less 'civilised' than earlier 'New Right' thinking. Rather than insist that people matter *because they are people* it concedes that their value lies in their willingness to reconstruct themselves as individuals equipped for participation in the market. So, what happens, then, when those who make economic and social policy decide that *actually* certain communities, perhaps in the context of recession and an austerity programme, are in fact *surplus to market requirements* – that they have no actual or even potential value as 'capital' or for capital? In such cases, investing in communities would seem like 'throwing good money after bad'. Perhaps such communities should just be 'written off' and left to decline? Those within them who have something of 'economic value' to contribute *somewhere else* could be encouraged to take their leave and to seek work in a place which is worth investing in. And in that kind of context, it might even be argued that perhaps the best way to 'help' people would be to *force* (if necessary applying 'sanctions') some of them to become 'employable' – so that they might acquire the 'capacity' to 'swim' rather than 'sink'. At least that way some might be able to save themselves.

And if all of this sounds a bit extreme, then it is important to realise that this is precisely the kind of thing which is actually happening in the UK today (Deeming, 2014; Watts et al, 2014). In England, the terms of the policy discussions around 'regeneration' and 'localism' are such that it has been laid out pretty clearly (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2011). The 2011 policy statement for England signalled an approach focused on the pursuit of local economic growth which would, as Pugalis and colleagues put it, "be in danger of leaving some places to sink or swim". Given that it would also tend to "divert attention and resources away from the most disadvantaged areas", some of these were most likely to be sinking. Voluntary and community organisations, they argued, would continue to be "either sidelined or overlooked" as "irrelevant" to local economic growth. (Pugalis et al, 2012). The implementation of this approach has, moreover, fulfilled these predictions. Localities are expected to get their acts together and to compete, "with the fittest flourishing and the weakest withering" (Deas, 2013, p.73).

Recent research comparing England with Scotland finds that while the *terms of the discussions* in Scotland are significantly different (with a more social democratic tone), what is happening *in practice* is in fact strikingly similar to what is happening in England, with both governments:

> *"pursuing broadly localist agendas, characterised by greater autonomy and increased responsibilities for local authorities for the framing and delivery of regeneration strategies at the same time as funding is being cut" (McGuinness et al, 2014, p.10).*

In other words, the key difference between Scotland and England is *how clearly we are able to perceive what is in fact happening.* In England, the language maps pretty straightforwardly to the substance. In Scotland, the language tends to obscure the substance. In both cases, "policy learning" (i.e., learning from past experience) has "little influence", resources to support local communities are reducing, available resources are "increasingly targeted on economic growth (backing winners) over ameliorating poverty and deprivation", and localities are abandoned to deal with their own problems – or, to put it another way, they are subject to "responsibility dumping" (McGuinness et al, 2014, p.10).

The language of 'social capital' does not provide much of a basis for a challenge to any of this – quite the contrary.

Talking the same language?

Perhaps, it might be argued in response to all of the above, this is taking a concern with the language too far. 'Social capital' is really just a commonly agreed way for talking about things which we all know about and accept as being important – and we should just accept the term as serving that purpose and live with it. But this is rather to miss the point that the terms which we use to speak about people and their relationships are important and they have real effects in the world. This point is well known and commonly accepted – and it is seen as having a particular importance when we are talking about groups of people who are disadvantaged in terms of power, income and wealth. And if we look at poor communities and say that the problem is that they lack 'social capital' – indeed that their health outcomes and life expectancies would be significantly improved if only they had more of it – then our attention and action will be focused in a certain, and limited, kind of way. Unfortunately, this is a way which will tend to mislocate the actual source of problems and point towards 'solutions' which will not address the problems. Worst of all, it will produce a predictable tendency to focus on local communities themselves as the source of their own problems, and in so doing, to 'responsibilise' them for finding their own solutions – thus letting others 'off the hook'.

As previously indicated, the current context in Scotland is one in which we are talking about legislating for 'community empowerment', in the form of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill which is currently progressing through the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Government says that its intention is twofold. Firstly, "empowering community bodies through the ownership of land and buildings and strengthening their voices in the decisions that matter to them"; and secondly to "support an increase in the pace and scale of public service reform by cementing the focus on achieving outcomes and improving the process of community planning"[14] .

There is a lot packed into that description which might be seen to be problematic. What is meant by "public service reform" and who will that benefit? Will ownership of land and buildings 'empower communities', or see them 'dumped' with the responsibility for 'assets' which turn out to be liabilities? What is meant by a 'community body' and to whom will they be accountable? To what extent might such an approach tend to exacerbate inequalities rather than reduce them? Is an outcomes approach really appropriate? And is 'community planning' likely to deliver the changes required?

But let us focus here on the aspect of 'strengthening the voice of communities in the decisions that matter to them'. The Local Government and Regeneration Committee's Stage One Report on the Bill [15] stresses repeatedly the need for the terms which we invoke in talking about the problems of local communities to be intelligible and practically meaningful to the people in those communities. So, when the women who volunteer at TITP organise a social night in the Pearce Institute and then report on that to others – including funders – do we really want them to have to describe this activity as one in which they set out to 'build their social capital'? They are, in their own terms, *having a 'wee night' in Govan*. Of course, they are, as they themselves are very fully aware, doing more than that. So, how might that usefully be talked about and conceptualised – so as to be practically significant and meaningful to them, as well as to policy makers, practitioners in public and voluntary agencies, academics, and so on?

[14] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_Bills/Community%20Empowerment%20(Scotland)%20Bill/b52s4-introd-en.pdf

[15] http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_LocalGovernmentandRegenerationCommittee/Reports/lgR-15-02w.pdf

Making sense of history and experience

The suggestion arising from this research is that the terms given to us by Oldenburg, while they might not be perfect, would certainly be very much better than the language of 'social capital'. The women at Tea in the Pot, as we have seen, understood and embraced very quickly Oldenburg's terms. And this was because the terms connected in a meaningful way with the history of their community and their experience of its changing. They know that their community was very seriously affected by the programme of clearance and redevelopment which took place in Glasgow in the post-war decades (Keating 1988; Smith and Wannop, 1985). This was a process, driven from Edinburgh by the Scottish Office – under both the Conservatives and Labour – which saw the highly selective clearance of younger and skilled population to new towns and other 'overspill' areas, and the shifting of many others to peripheral housing schemes around the city. It also led to a huge loss of local employment. The city's key industries were officially designated as 'declining' – and that served to ensure that they did decline, so forcing the pace of population loss (Foster, 2003). Businesses were also actively encouraged to leave the city and relocate elsewhere. Many of them, however, particularly the smaller ones, took the compensation and closed down entirely (Henderson, 1974).

All of this had a *devastating* impact on the city – which by the 1970s was a case study of deprivation, decline and urban crisis (Checkland, 1976, Gibb 1983). The local community in Govan found itself at the heart of all of this, both in terms of the damaging effects and also in terms of protest and resistance against the impacts it was having. Govan was at the heart of the defence of the older industrial infrastructure with the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders Work-In of 1971-72, and became a site of intense political contest between the Labour Party and the Scottish National Party for the remainder of the decade, and to an extent ever since – a contest over contrasting visions of the future of Scotland as a whole.

So, by the end of the 1970s, Glasgow as a city, and within it communities like Govan, had already lost a staggering number of people[16] , and a great amount of industry and employment. The city had also created for itself a *new* housing crisis in the attempt to solve its old one – through the building of the peripheral estates and the huge number of tower blocks (Keating, 1988). And all of this was a very direct result of seriously 'misguided' central government policies towards the city and the housing of its people (Gibb, 1983).

But things were in fact about to get worse. The policies of the Conservative government elected in 1979 ensured this. It forced the pace of industrial closure. So, between 1971 and 1983, Glasgow lost nearly half of its manufacturing jobs – and most of it was lost in the recession of the early 1980s (Keating, 1988, pp.168-169). Mass unemployment ensued. In Strathclyde Region it doubled between 1979 and 1982 – from under 10% to over 20% (Keating and Boyle, 1986, pp.8-9). In Glasgow, male unemployment by that time was over 25% – more than 56,000 men unemployed and over 20,000 women. Three fifths of these men, and almost three quarters of those women, had not worked in over a year (McGregor and Mather, 1986). None of this was 'inevitable' or 'necessary' (Lansley, 2012; Harvey, 2011).

At the same time, the city's desperate need to address its housing crisis was radically undermined by the Thatcher government's housing policies – which might not as effectively have concentrated poverty and deprivation had they been specifically been designed to do so. Glasgow lost over a third of its Housing Revenue capital budget between 1980 and 1985 – at a time when tenants desperately needed investment to address what were in a good many cases *lethal* conditions in the council stock. To add insult to injury, the poor and benefit recipients were then attacked and stigmatised as feckless and 'dependent'. In the words of one community activist, it amounted to a "war without bullets" (McCormack, 2009). In all of this, communities like Govan felt that they were paying the price for having stood up to the Conservative government of Edward Health a decade earlier – when that government had tried, and failed, to close the shipyards on the Upper Clyde.

Nonetheless, during the 1980s, within the City of Glasgow, the Scottish Development Agency and the City Council itself didn't seem very interested in local communities which were battling all of these problems. They focused their energy elsewhere – in the Merchant City and the city centre more generally – and marketed the city as 'miles better' (Keating, 1988; Boyle et al, 2008). Govan didn't seem to help with that marketing project. Things were not getting better in Govan. And as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, the fact that that they were not getting better for the people of Glasgow more generally, and particularly its very large proportion of poor households and communities, began to be registered in the health and mortality statistics for the city. The phenomenon of what later became known as 'the Glasgow Effect' was emerging. This is the 'excess mortality' – i.e. higher level of death – compared to other, apparently similar, cities in north-

[16] The population of the city declined from almost 1.1 million to just over three quarters of a million between 1951 and 1981.

west England (Liverpool and Manchester). It is particularly in evidence in poor communities – some of which have seen an actual fall in life expectancy in recent decades. A particularly distressing aspect of this has been the increase in deaths of younger people, due to alcohol, drugs, violence and suicide – all of which are eminently preventable and too familiar to people in Govan and the women at TITP (Walsh et al, 2010).

When New Labour came to power in 1997, the promise was that things *would* – indeed *could only* – get better. For some groups within the community, including the elderly and families with children, at least for a time, things did get a bit better. Poverty reduced for these groups – though for others (like unemployed people with no children) it certainly did not. But, as outlined above, by the mid-2000s, such improvements were running out of steam and slipping away. Around the same time, Govan Community Council was actually addressing the Public Petitions Committee of the Scottish Parliament to draw attention to the ways in which economic development agencies were in fact *compounding* these problems (Scottish Parliament, 2004). Their activity in the local area was increasing the rate of population loss, further undermining the already weak basis for the provision of services by both the public and the private sectors. Govan was losing the most fundamental requirement for a viable community life – its people.

Conclusion: Language, Learning and Listening

The women at Tea in the Pot, by and large, know all about this. Many of them have lived through it. It is writ large in the experience of their families and in the fabric of their community life. And our argument in this report is that it is all of this that accounts for the problems faced in Govan – not the failure of the people in Govan in 'building their social capital', but the subjection of the local community to policies and agencies inspired (at times in ways in which the agencies themselves hardly seem to appreciate) by the same market-ideology which gave birth to the idea of 'social capital'. These policies and agencies have adversely impacted on the fundamental fabric of community and individual lives in many areas over several decades. Unfortunately, some of the agencies which have overseen these changes, weakening and rendering vulnerable both individuals and the community as a whole, then talk to local people about 'resilience'.

So, what kind of terms and concepts might actually fit with the reality of this history and experience? Oldenburg's terms, as we have seen, at least have an appeal in opening up a certain perspective on how things have come to be how they are, as a way of engaging with the present and as a way of beginning to think about the future. The terms were developed to fit with and shed light on some of the kinds of developments which have impacted on Govan – the processes of economic, social, political and urban change which have undermined the existence of the 'third places' which are so important to the kind of 'vibrant' community life which the policy makers have over the years been so keen to aspire towards.

There are no doubt other terms which might be as good as, or better than, Oldenburg's terms. But whatever those terms may be, they must help us to identify both the underlying problems faced in our local communities, and their causes, and the actions which we might take to address them. The terms need to have a credible provenance and be intellectually robust. They also need to be intelligible and practically meaningful for local communities. The term 'social capital' may be used to talk about important things that genuinely matter, but it fails – demonstrably – to meet these criteria. It actively hinders rather than helps the kind of discussion that needs to be had and the kinds of action that need to be taken. It may 'sound good', but it is really part of the problem faced in Govan and elsewhere.

In closing, and when thinking specifically about language, it is perhaps useful to remember this. In confronting economic and social problems in the past, working class communities like Govan – indeed, the community in Govan in particular – elaborated a *language of their own* which they used both to analyse and understand their world, to envisage something better, and to organise and motivate themselves (and others) to work for change. It is important never to romaniticise the past, for inevitably there are aspects of it to which we would not wish to return – even if that were possible. But it is equally important to learn from it more broadly too.

When we look to that past, we find a language which expressed the need for, and spirit of, cohesive communities, strong networks, mutual support, and reciprocity – often expressed as a kind of 'ethic' of *solidarity*. This language of solidarity fully appreciated the connection between economic development, strong communities and the welfare of the people. But it was also a language which carried within it an understanding of how economic development had in the past failed to serve the welfare of the people, and of how it could be more generally damaging to the fabric of working class community life. It also appreciated the need for solidarity in addressing issues of power – not least the power of those who benefitted from economic development that simultaneously harmed working class communities.

All of this reflected a process of learning through which communities had become able to distinguish what might 'sound good' from what might actually 'be good', together with the ability publicly to unmask the former and the collective strength to campaign for the latter. This learning became, for quite a long time in the post war period, part of the 'common sense' of a broader culture which aspired to ensure welfare 'from the cradle to the grave' – it literally changed the world.

That learning came out of places like Govan. And if we listen to people in places like Govan today, there is still a lot to be learned from them. We might usefully begin by stopping forcing inappropriate language onto them, pinning back our ears, and listening up.

Some might suggest that we have already been doing that. But, if that were the case, would we be speaking the language of 'social capital'?

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