Understanding how volunteering creates stronger communities – A literature review

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Preface

This literature review forms part of an in-depth qualitative research project exploring how volunteering creates stronger communities, conducted by the Institute for Volunteering Research. This research project is embedded within Volunteering for Stronger Communities, a Big Lottery Funded programme delivered by Volunteering England in partnership with 15 Volunteer Centres. This £1.9 million initiative is designed to stimulate volunteering in communities affected by the recession.

The literature review was written by Nissa Ramsey, then Senior Research Officer at IVR. This revised version incorporates the comments from the project’s research advisory group.
Executive Summary

This literature review forms part of an in-depth qualitative research project exploring how volunteering creates stronger communities, conducted by the Institute for Volunteering Research. The literature review is designed to help explore research questions and inform the scope of the research project. The review aims to provide an accessible summary of relevant debates and concepts, and to establish a framework for research to build on. It looks at three main areas: Policy Drivers – Volunteering and the Big Society; Key Players – Volunteers, communities and infrastructure; and Theories of change – Community Cohesion, Social Capital and Resilience. These are each briefly summarised below.

Policy Drivers – Volunteering and the Big Society
There are often great expectations of what volunteering can achieve and policy makers also play a significant role in shaping volunteering and volunteer-involving organisations. This is as true as ever under the Coalition Government, with its Big Society agenda. In the context of the public spending cuts there are concerns that volunteers may be expected to fill gaps that used to be filled by paid employees.

Key Players – Volunteers, communities and infrastructure
There are three core principles which are seen as underpinning volunteering: that it is unpaid; it is of the volunteer’s own free will; and that it is of benefit to others. Volunteering is very diverse in terms of its participants, activities and outcomes. The perception of volunteering should not be limited to more formal contexts, such as regularly volunteering for an organisation, but should also include more informal activities and one off-acts. A more inclusive definition of volunteering is therefore vital to increase the knowledge and evidence base upon which policy and practice initiatives are based. There are also difficulties in simply defining and describing community, given that it can be a highly romanticised notion and often the location of potential social change. In addition, the evidence base for volunteering infrastructure, particularly around questions of impact, effectiveness and its role, remains insubstantial, fragmented and disparate (Macmillan, 2007). This is despite substantial investment, policy focus and debate. Yet it appears that volunteer development agencies are having an impact on improving the equality of access to volunteering, which is particularly significant when volunteering is considered in terms of work and employability in the current context of an economic downturn.

Theories of change – Community Cohesion, Social Capital and Resilience
There are various theories that seek to explain how and why community change happens. Three examples of this are Community cohesion, Social capital and Resilience. Community cohesion advocates people from different backgrounds, especially different ethnic backgrounds, coming together more. It has a complex history but is now disappearing from policy radars. Social capital looks at how peoples’ connections and activities, including volunteering, can have broader effects on communities. There are many different definitions of social capital and this concept alone is not sufficient to explain...
community change. Finally, the notion of community resilience appears to hold some promise as a theoretical framework to understand community change. Whilst volunteering is seen to play a positive role in building resilience, it cannot do this alone. In summary, none of these theoretical frameworks on their own can usefully account for, or help understand, the relationships between volunteering and stronger communities. Instead, they each offer useful perspectives from which to understand the value of volunteering in building stronger communities.

**Conclusions – Place, Action and Strength**

Overall, the literature review has come to three key conclusions, which will form the foundations for ongoing investigation of the ways in which volunteering builds stronger communities: volunteering is a situated practice; places and communities matter; and community change is relational and contextual.

**Volunteering is a situated practice**

Volunteering is a situated practice and a collective activity (Brodie et al., 2011). This collectiveness may be social (for instance, taking part in gardening at an allotment) or simply involved (for instance, volunteering using technology to complete a survey for a charity). Similarly, the situated nature of these activities can be considered in terms of peoples’ lives, their social relationships or the physical and social sites of their volunteering.

**Places and communities matter**

The romanticised vision of community is highly geographically located. There is substantial research which highlights that community is not a given or static concept. Indeed, people are widely acknowledged to belong to multiple communities, whether these are geographical or of interest and/or shared experiences. But it is important to recognise that volunteering happens in space and place, and that the community is simultaneously a location, a site of identification and a set of relationships.

**Community change is relational and contextual**

A stronger community is not premised wholeheartedly upon volunteering. Indeed, the notion of community resilience highlights how volunteering is just one aspect of social life, alongside other local conditions which contribute to a strong community. As such, volunteering, rather than a strong community, is the primary unit of analysis here. Indeed, this literature review has found various ways in which volunteering has been associated with improving various indicators of a strong community because of the social interaction involved.

Overall, this literature review has found that the community impact of volunteering remains elusive, in theory and in practice. As such, by investigating volunteering as a situated and social practice, the Volunteering for Stronger Communities research will seek to further develop understanding of community impact and, indeed, where and how this impact is located.
Section 1
Introduction
This literature review forms part of an in-depth qualitative research project exploring how volunteering can help create stronger communities, led by the Institute for Volunteering Research. This section outlines the aims of the research, the Big Lottery funded programme it is part of and the aims of the literature review.

Much is currently expected of volunteering and the difference it can make to communities. Indeed ‘the current weight of expectation about the contribution it [volunteering] can make to individual development, social cohesion and addressing social need has never been greater, and it has a more prominent place on the agenda of public policy than ever before’ (Rochester et al., 2010: 1). This literature review argues that this statement remains true today, particularly in light of the Big Society agenda and the extensive role of government policies in shaping volunteering infrastructure and funding initiatives which support volunteering and front-line community and voluntary organisations at a local level. In order to address all the concerns of the project, in addition to examining literature on volunteering, this literature review also looks at other work on what can make communities stronger.

This research project is embedded within Volunteering for Stronger Communities, a Big Lottery Funded programme delivered by Volunteering England in partnership with 15 Volunteer Centres. This £1.9 million initiative is designed to stimulate volunteering in communities affected by the recession. The success of this initiative is being evaluated by the Centre for Regional, Economic and Social Research.

This research has a different function. It will examine the theoretical assumptions behind this programme in more depth, asking how and why volunteering improves communities. This literature review represents the first stage of the research, exploring the key issues, concepts and theories of change which underpin both the research and the programme.

1.1 The Volunteering for Stronger Communities programme
Fifteen Volunteer Centres across England have developed innovative projects that respond to the local needs of the communities, volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations that they work with. Each project aims to:

- Support volunteers to contribute to meeting the needs of local communities that have arisen as a result of the economic downturn and subsequent spending cuts;
- Ensure that more individuals who are disadvantaged in the labour market access volunteering and the barriers to their engagement are identified and removed;
- Create more volunteering opportunities and improve the support provided.

As such, each of the projects developed by the 15 Volunteer Centres are unique in terms of their set up. Examples of projects delivered include:
A supportive brokerage offer for volunteers, involving training and support;
An intensive year-long mentoring scheme for young volunteers;
Time Banking;
An advisory panel of representatives from target groups to help with project delivery;
A county wide development officer to share best practice across a network;
Marketing campaigns to raise the profile of volunteering;
Development of a volunteer managers programme.

Volunteering England brings these projects together at key stages to share learning and will develop resources which can be shared with the wider voluntary network. The partners involved are Blackburn with Darwen CVS, Volunteer Bristol, Volunteer Centre Camden, Volunteer Cornwall, Exeter CVS, Volunteer Centre Dacorum, 2D (in county Durham), Voluntary Action Islington, Volunteer Centre Liverpool, Nottingham Community and Voluntary Services, Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action, Voluntary Action Sheffield, Volunteer Centre Tamworth, South Lincolnshire CVS and Volunteer Centre Sutton.

1.2 The research
This research will observe and explore the role and experiences of volunteering actors within the context of public spending cuts and the economic downturn. These volunteering actors include volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations (as well as volunteer-led groups), Volunteer Centres and other stakeholders, such as local authorities and other infrastructure support.

Aims
The research seeks to inform debates around volunteering at a national level, as well as providing useful insights for Volunteer Centres and practitioners who work to promote volunteering locally.

Objectives
Specifically, this research will:

- Observe and explore how a range of volunteering actors perceive and experience local change as a result of the economic downturn;
- Map the potential benefits of volunteering and the ways in which volunteering actors see their role in responding to local needs and creating community change;
- Examine the experiences of volunteering infrastructure in supporting local communities to volunteer.

The research will be of wide strategic importance and seek to influence strategic policies on volunteering at a national level, as well as providing useful evidence and information to Volunteer Centres and practitioners who work to promote volunteering locally.
1.3 Aim of the literature review
The literature review is designed to help explore research questions and inform the scope of the research project. Whilst there is evidence that volunteering can bring various benefits, the ‘community’ impact is arguably the most elusive of these (Rochester et al., 2010). As such, this literature review considers the current policy drivers, components and concepts which underpin both volunteering and how this can contribute to building ‘stronger’ communities.

The literature review has two main aims:

- to provide an accessible summary and critique of community cohesion, social capital and resilience, alongside the discourse surrounding community, volunteering and infrastructure, in the hope that it will be of use to practitioners, policy makers and researchers/evaluators working in this field;
- to establish a framework for future research to build upon.

It will conclude with a set of core principles which need to underpin research into ‘Volunteering for Stronger Communities’.
Section 2: Policy Drivers
Volunteering and the Big Society

This section briefly outlines how communities and volunteering are prioritised in the Big Society agenda. In doing so it highlights the discourses which are shaping volunteering at a community level and the notion of building ‘stronger’ communities programme. These will be unpacked throughout the remainder of the literature review.

The Big Society was a central theme of the Conservative party manifesto, placing community at the centre of political debates. The three central planks of the Coalition’s ‘Big Society’ agenda are social action, public service reform and community empowerment. The logic behind this is the need for a ‘huge culture change’ where people ‘feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities’ (Cameron, 10th July 2010). There is still much confusion about the implications of the ‘Big Society’ amongst the public and service providers (Public Administration Select Committee on the Big Society, PASC, 2011), but the founding principles are being enacted through policies such as the Localism Act and programmes such as Community Organisers and the National Citizen Service. What these policies have in common is a focus on:

- **Giving communities more powers**, in the planning system, in decision making, in service provision, by training a new generation of community organisers to support the creation of neighbourhood groups, especially in deprived areas.
- **Encouraging people to take an active role in their communities**, by encouraging volunteering, social action, charitable giving and establishing a National Citizen Service for young people.
- **Transferring power from central to local government**, returning regional housing and planning decisions to local authorities and allowing greater financial autonomy.
- **Making government data available to the public**, creating a new ‘right’ to access crime statistics and other government-held datasets.

Overall, the Big Society is one in which the state plays a hands-off role, emphasizing community empowerment and participation. The question then, as Taylor (2010) asks, is how the ‘promise’ embedded in the language of community can be a solution for economic decline and social fragmentation.

Volunteering and the Big Society

David Cameron (Cameron, 10th July 2010), in his Big Society speech, stated that government policy ‘must foster and support a new culture of voluntarism, philanthropy, [and] social action.’ In other words, volunteers, or people giving their time for the benefit of others, are central to achieving the aims of the Big Society and by default, helping communities deliver this agenda. The Giving White Paper (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 4) states:
‘Volunteers work tirelessly to help others and make our communities stronger; givers know the pleasure of making a difference. Our society is strengthened by the relationships and trust that are built.’

Volunteers are seen to add value to public service delivery, as well as improving social cohesion and increasing civic engagement. To this end, the coalition has pledged to provide over £40 million in the next two years to support volunteering and social action. For instance, the Social Action Fund, from the Office of Civil Society, managed by Social Investment Business, has to date been given to 38 organisations to create new social action opportunities that will expand giving, of time, money, knowledge or assets in priority areas and groups. This aims to ‘help the most promising ideas to scale up, grow and become self-sustaining in the longer term’ (Cabinet Office, 2011a). Voluntary and community sector organisations (as well as local volunteering infrastructure to a lesser extent) are also acknowledged for their role in promoting and developing volunteering and helping improve communities in the process. As the Giving White Paper states:

‘Social action is not something we can or should compel people to do. Instead it has to be built from the bottom up through grassroots organisations and with opportunities to give which appeal to people’s motivations and interests.’ (Cabinet Office, 2011a: 9)

As such, the relationship between volunteering and stronger communities is strongly advocated in government policy. Moreover, policy discourse plays a significant role in shaping the volunteering movement. However, in the context of significant public spending cuts, the issue is whether this belief in volunteering is in fact founded upon its potential to replace public service provision or an idealistic vision of community, where the community fills the gaps. For this reason, the next section will unpack the assumptions surrounding communities, volunteering and infrastructure. This will highlight why there is a need for further evidence, not only to prove the impact of volunteering on communities but the contexts in which this flourishes, or indeed does not.
Section 3: Key Players
Volunteers, communities and infrastructure

Volunteers, communities and volunteering infrastructure are core components of this research. This section questions how each of these is defined in policy, practice and research, as well as highlighting the implications this can have for research.

3.1 Volunteering
There are three core principles which are seen as underpinning volunteering: that it is unpaid, it is of the volunteer’s own free will and that it is of benefit to others. A widely accepted definition of volunteering is:

‘An activity that involves spending unpaid time doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups (other than or, in addition to close relatives).’ (The Compact 2009: 7)

However, the notion of volunteering, and indeed its usefulness, has long been debated and its definition is in question now more than ever before (Paxton and Nash, 2002; Paine et al., 2010; Rochester et al., 2010). As new policies and initiatives seek to necessitate volunteering, such as the Work Programme and the National Citizenship Service, it has bought into question the free will or choice involved in volunteering. New ways to reward volunteering are also emerging, ranging from educational programmes, such as university degree modules, to corporate sponsorship initiatives, such as Orange Rock Corps and Blue Dot. These developments have bought the issue of volunteer motivations and benefits to the fore once again. Furthermore, policy, practice and research have tended to rely on a fairly narrow conception of volunteering focusing on more formal organised forms of volunteering (Rochester et al., 2010; Paine et al., 2010). For these reasons, it is essential to question how ‘volunteering’ is used as a concept. Lyons et al. (1998) identified two paradigms which shape this conceptualisation, with Rochester (2006) later adding the third of serious leisure:

- **The non-profit paradigm** (or ‘vertical’ model) is one where volunteers have distinct roles, working for significant time periods in large professionally staffed organisations, often in the field of social welfare. Here, volunteers are posited as having altruistic motivations (to benefit community or environment). This is the dominant view of volunteering in the UK and is the focus of most research and policy (Paine et al., 2010).
- **The civil society paradigm** (or ‘horizontal’ model) involves social activism, when a group of people decide to work together to tackle a common problem (it might involve campaigning or extending social welfare). It is informal and volunteer-led.
- **The serious leisure paradigm** involves volunteering based on personal interest and experience, or in other words, for intrinsic reasons. This often involves participating, performing or practicing sports, activities and arts. It is often project-based, casual or a non-work based career (Stebbins and Graham, 2004).
Rochester (2006) argues that the non-profit paradigm has dominated our understanding of volunteering in the UK and has formed the focus of much policy and research. Yet this typology prioritises the type of volunteering and indeed the motivations of volunteers. As a result, the extent of community impact is largely overlooked. Whilst each of these ‘types’ of volunteering are of interest to this research, an alternative framework is essential to better understand their relationship to community change.

Volunteering tends to be conceptualised in terms of; work, leisure, philanthropy, activism, care, participation and learning (Paine et al., 2010). The lens of work is pertinent in the context of this programme, which seeks to improve employability outcomes, particularly from those who are furthest from the labour market (for instance, the long term unemployed) or from ‘hard to reach’ groups (such as young people who are not in employment, education or training). The analytical lens of work shifts the emphasis from volunteers’ motivations, to the productive nature of activities involved in volunteering (Musick and Wilson, 2008: 111). It also recognises that individual benefits are increasingly important motivations for volunteers. However, this risks focusing solely on the professionalisation of volunteering and its management, situating volunteering strictly within the ‘non-profit paradigm’ (Stuart and Ellis Paine, 2008), as Thomson (2002: 23) argues;

‘Volunteering needs to move beyond its connotation of work for organisations; it needs to reclaim the informal mosaic of tasks that we believe were once the invisible glue holding the community together, and which were delivered by individuals to individuals. This is often styled ‘informal volunteering’ and is still widespread, although it has often been seen as the poor relation of formal volunteering and is not counted by many as volunteering at all.’

Whilst this statement perhaps overstates the value of informal volunteering, it usefully highlights the frustration surrounding the typically narrow definition of volunteering. Whilst the lenses of leisure, philanthropy, activism, care, participation and learning each provide useful insights in to volunteering they are also too narrow to capture its diversity (Paine et al., 2010). The Pathways through Participation research (Brodie et al, 2011) offers a helpful perspective here. This examined how and why individuals participate in different ways throughout their lives. It found that the peoples’ participation (the amount and type) is directly related to their life stage and circumstances. This perspective is useful because it moves beyond the issue of motivation and defined activities, recognising volunteering as a social activity within peoples’ social lives. It is also important to recognise that the nature of volunteering is changing and, indeed, so too are volunteers and their expectations and motivations.

In addition to these accounts, it is important to also consider micro-volunteering and other ‘episodic’ volunteering (Saxton et al., 2007; Paine et al., 2010; Anderson, 1991). This can have great value but often gets overlooked in favour of more formal and structured activities.
Research implications
This research will need to carefully consider how the notion of volunteering is best mobilised to ensure individuals and the voluntary activities they are involved in are not excluded. Specifically, differing perceptions of what counts as volunteering (between researchers and research participants as well as between common uses of the word volunteering) will mean that people will not always identify their activities as volunteering. For instance, those who volunteer for leisure, or who volunteer very occasionally in one-off roles (e.g. a fundraising social event) might not readily identify their activity as volunteering. This is apparent in research by Rooney, Steinberg and Schervish (2004), who found that a significant number of people who engage in what would conventionally be considered as volunteering (for example, coaching) answer no to the standard volunteering question, ‘do you volunteer?’ They trialed asking longer, more detailed prompts about behaviour and found much higher levels of volunteering activity. In other words, people overlook or indeed forget their involvement in volunteering.

Negative perceptions can also affect people’s willingness to self-identify as a volunteer (Brodie et al., 2011). For instance, the Voluntary Media Action Unit (2005) report that the media’s typical view of a volunteer is a ‘middle aged, middle class do-gooder’ (Machin, 2005). This is further highlighted by the media’s reporting on psychological research that found altruistic acts are treated with suspicion or resented for raising expectations that other people should follow suit (Telegraph Newspaper Article, Bingham, 25th August 2010). Another dimension to this negative image is its association with political action. This was reported in the Pathways through Participation research, which found that people did not want to be seen as ‘political’ because of their activities, even when these activities were inherently political in nature (Brodie et al., 2011). Given the increasing politicisation of volunteering within the Big Society and in turn, the negative public reception of this agenda (alongside increasing public spending cuts), it is important to recognise that people may explicitly choose not to identify or indeed not to take part in volunteering.

Summary
Volunteering is far from homogenous in its participants, activities and outcomes. It is important for this research to recognise its complexity, its boundaries (why it is different from other activities) and the assumptions which underpin different understandings of volunteering. It is clear that when examining volunteering, it is important to look beyond the formal activities undertaken to help a (charitable) organisation to deliver its services. A more inclusive definition is vital to increase the knowledge and evidence base upon which policy and practice initiatives are based. For these reasons, this research will follow the Compact definition as a starting point, but will use the term ‘volunteering’ broadly and cautiously given the preconceptions which accompany it.

3.2 Communities
It is widely accepted that people belong to communities, and that those communities are formed on the basis of geographical location, shared characteristics or common interests.
However, like volunteering, the term community is rarely uncontested. Instead it often carries a range of assumptions about how it should look and what it can deliver in terms of social outcomes. In light of the Big Society agenda and indeed government policy historically, communities are at the forefront of initiatives for social change, whether they are the focus for policy (an object of change) or an agent for policy (to deliver change). For these reasons, it is necessary to have a robust understanding of the ‘promise’ held by communities, along with its contradictions and complexity (Taylor, 2011).

Hillery (1955) documents 94 meanings of community. However, the meanings invested in community are very much situated in the perspectives and purposes of the people and institutions using the term. For instance, community has long been a focus of government policy initiatives, particularly in relation to volunteering (Home Office, 2002: 7)

‘If we are to realise our goal of world class public services we must tap into the accumulated wisdom of the voluntary and community sector and unlock the potential of volunteers and communities across the land.’

Whilst there is a long and evolving history of community, Taylor (2011) outlines four reasons as to why this continues to be mobilised a focus for public policy. Firstly, when people can access support through friends, families, neighbours and volunteers, it extends the reach of social care and reduces the need to depend on state provision of welfare. This is particularly pertinent in the current context of significant public sector spending cuts. Secondly, community is seen as a form of socialisation and therefore is central to the development of people’s moral responsibilities. In the wake of the riots in the summer of 2011, amidst rising unemployment and deprivation, a lack of familial and community involvement has been offered as a key causal factor. Thirdly, participation and belonging to a community is seen as a way to increase democratic participation in an era of fewer people voting and declining trust in political institutions. Finally, communities are now seen as central to sustainable development, with the knowledge and understanding of what needs to change in order to improve their circumstances.

In this light, the ‘community’ is a potential agent of change. Linked to this issue is the ‘system failure’ of policy initiatives to benefit disadvantaged areas. For this reason, maximising community participation is now seen as a vital route to ensure services and initiatives meet the needs of local people and circumstances. To this end, community development focuses on:

‘The participation of people themselves in efforts to improve their level of living with as much reliance as possible on their own initiative, and the provision of technical and other services in ways which encourage initiative, self-help and mutual help and make them more effective.’ (Report on the United Nations Seminar on Community Development and Social Welfare in Urban Areas, 1959:5, Tong, 1989)
However, the issue here is that communities are portrayed as lacking the ability to participate effectively in social, economic and political life, requiring intervention to achieve this (Taylor, 2011). Furthermore, the move towards community management has been critiqued for enabling government to justify withdrawal from public service delivery (Taylor, 2011). This raises the question as to whether top down ‘empowerment’ can genuinely work.

Within policy initiatives, the community referred to is one which is highly geographically localised. It assumes that those people who live in the same area constitute that community and indeed identify with and imagine themselves as a community (Butcher et al., 1993; Anderson, 1991). At this point it is helpful to consider the various ways in which community can be conceptualised. Taylor, Barr and West (2000) suggest that communities may be defined in terms of common characteristics. These can be based upon personal attributes (age, gender), beliefs (political, ideological), activities (arts, sports), use of services (patients) or circumstances (parents). However, they also point out that having common characteristics does not equate to a feeling of belonging to that community. Instead, this requires common interests such as a cultural heritage (often in faith or diasporic communities), social relationships (derived from friendships, a common residential base or experience), economic interests (for instance using a service) or experiences of power or oppression.

In other words, community is not a given or static concept or place. Indeed, people can feel they belong to or be identified with multiple and overlapping communities. However, the policy discourse highlights that there are certain expectations attached to ‘community’ as an agent of change or the location of a service intervention to achieve change. In other words, community is simultaneously a descriptive, normative and instrumental term (Butcher et al., 1993; Taylor, 2011).

The community in its idealised form is an imaginary place which is premised upon ‘close-knit’ personal social ties. In this context, community is assumed to contrast with the impersonality of mass society and the state and is also then better able to deliver social care and other services in comparison to the state. (Much of this thinking is based on the work of Nisbet, 1960). This idealistic vision also stems from the work of Tonnies (1957), who describes Gemeinschaft as a community premised upon close-knit relationships (through family and friendships developed over time) and imagined as both rural and traditional. In turn, Gesellschaft is described as a modern way of life as a result of post-industrial consumer society. Here social ties are based upon association and are therefore seen as weak and fragmented. Embedded in this typology is a sense of loss and a need to restore traditional communities. In other words, community is idealistic, nostalgic and encompasses assumptions about how we should live.

There are of course critiques of community and the ‘dark side’ this can have. Namely, when a community is too strong it can prevent change and exclude certain peoples’ voices as well as creating social divides between ‘us’ and ‘others’. This is particularly prominent
in community cohesion policy, discussed in section 4.1. However, the focus on commonality, cohesion and belonging continues to overlook diversity. For this reason, there must be space for a politics of difference within the notion of community and indeed recognises that there are multiple communities which may not seamlessly come together.

Research implications
The research for Volunteering for Stronger Communities is very much embedded in the discourses of ‘community’ as simultaneously descriptive, normative and instrumental. The challenge then is to define community as a research location and as a sample; given that this research will focus on two of the Volunteer Centres and the communities they are based in. A further issue then is where and how to locate the ‘impact’ of volunteering within the various communities people belong to.

Volunteering has been described to benefit communities because it involves providing services, such as social care, working for charitable organisations or simply by involving interaction across social divides (Ockenden, 2007; Rochester et al., 2010). As a result, research which has focused on the impact of volunteering at a community level tends to be geographically located (often at a local authority level). However, research into communities more generally is useful to help extend this understanding.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has explored people’s sense of community (and indeed the issues within this) at the level of a housing estate (Pearce and Milne, 2010). This reported strong feelings of belonging, alongside a feeling that community had been lost.

In a different vein, the Young Foundation have focused on neighbourliness as a way to explore community belonging and interaction (Cordes and Hothi, 2008). This highlighted peoples’ perceptions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ relationships with people living in close proximity in terms of their social involvement. Both of these studies focus on a highly localised sense of community, as geographical and as a set of social relations. In doing so, they highlight the conflicts inherent within people’s sense of belonging, as well as the tensions which can accompany social diversity and living in close proximity with ‘others’.

Summary
This discussion has raised the question as to how and why community has such a high profile in everyday life and public policy. It has highlighted the difficulty in simply defining and describing community, given that it can be a highly romanticised notion and often the location of (potential) social change. This research is embedded in these same discourses. It is helpful therefore to acknowledge this and continue using community as a unit of analysis, but to recognise that community is simultaneously a location, a site of identification and a set of relationships. Whilst this offers a useful starting point for this research, it is important to define community as a research location and focus in terms of the theories of change associated with it. Therefore, community cohesion, social capital and community resilience are discussed in depth in section 4.
3.3 Volunteering infrastructure

In the past ten years a vigorous debate, both within and outside of the sector, has emerged about how volunteering infrastructure can best be organised, coordinated and deliver services. This questions its effectiveness, capacity and sustainability (Macmillan, 2007). However, there has been substantially less research and theory building in this area compared to that of volunteering. It is therefore necessary to consider why and how this landscape is shifting in order to situate the impact of volunteering in context of the agencies and policies at play.

The landscape

Volunteering infrastructure exists to support, develop and increase volunteering. Volunteering infrastructure organisations can be defined as:

‘Voluntary organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of infrastructure functions (support and development, coordination, representation and promotion) to front-line volunteer-involving organisations.’ (OPM/Compass Partnership, 2004: 7).

As such, their purpose is to provide volunteer-involving organisations with resources and support in order to ensure they have the capacity to engage with current and potential volunteers from all sectors of the community. The landscape of volunteering infrastructure is highly complex. It can operate at a national and local level, as well as including a range of generalist volunteering infrastructure (organisations focused entirely on developing and supporting volunteering) and specialist volunteering infrastructure (organisations focused on particular types of volunteers, such as young people). To illustrate this complexity, a recent study found that in London ‘154 different organisations [were] identified as providing services for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations at local, sub-regional, regional and national level’ (Penberthy and Forster, 2004: 36).

At the local level ‘volunteer development agency’ provides the most inclusive term to describe the network of support provided for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. The main providers are:

- **Volunteer Centres (VCs).** These have six core functions, including: brokerage, developing volunteering opportunities, marketing, good practice development, strategic development of volunteering and campaigning (including policy response). Most Volunteer Centres are members of Volunteering England, the national development agency for volunteering.
- **Councils for Voluntary Services (CVS).** These are local infrastructure bodies dealing with organisational issues in the voluntary sector, such as funding or staff training. They are represented as members of the national infrastructure body, NAVCA. In total, 72% of 276 Volunteer Centres are integrated with a CVS (Ramsay, 2012).
An intertwined relationship with government policy

Public policy has been one of the major drivers towards the set up and reconfiguring of volunteer development agencies. Kendall (2003) explains how in 2003 the voluntary sector occupied centre-stage in UK public policy for the first time. Zimmeck (2010) further outlines how New Labour created ‘horizontal’ policies for volunteering, building volunteering performance measures, to increase the percentage of people involved in formal volunteering at least once a month into local authorities’ Local Area Agreements (LAAs). As a result, volunteer development agencies have proved essential to their objectives. This led to significant funding for a series of initiatives aimed at strengthening the infrastructure of volunteering. Moreover, it led to increasing government interest in the function and effectiveness of volunteering infrastructure (Rochester et al., 2010). For instance ‘ChangeUp - Capacity Building and Infrastructure Framework’ (Home Office, 2004) outlined the government’s ten year strategy for capacity building and infrastructure. This aimed to ‘reconfigure’ the nature and organisation of support provided for frontline voluntary organisations and community groups. Implicit in this view is that volunteering infrastructure had developed in a haphazard and ad hoc manner over time. As such, government intervention was posited as essential to reduce duplication and avoid gaps within national and local infrastructure (Macmillan, 2007).

Volunteering England also came in to existence during the same phase in 2004, representing a merger between the National Centre for Volunteering, Volunteer Development England and the Consortium on Opportunities for Volunteering, and received strategic government funding. Shortly after, Building on Success (Penberthy and Forster, 2004) was published, setting out a development agenda for local volunteer development agencies, outlining six core functions they should pursue, which now form the basis of Volunteering England’s quality accreditation framework, and calling for collaboration.

The government’s interest in the role of infrastructure was accompanied by investments of £80 million up until 2006, followed by a further £70 million up until 2008. This has also been matched through funding initiatives in the Third Sector. For instance, the Big lottery Fund launched its Building and Sustaining Infrastructure Support (Basis) programme which aims to ensure that community and voluntary organisations have access to support which is high quality, sustainable, consistent and meets the needs of excluded groups (BLF, 2008). In other words, these programmes aimed to create outcomes for the sector, differentiating them from those which tend to focus on communities and individuals (Paine et al., 2011).

Volunteering infrastructure is arguably less important in the Coalition Government’s Big Society Agenda with its focus on replacing ‘top-down’ state support with ‘bottom-up’ social action. At the same time, volunteer development agencies face an uncertain future. NCVO estimates in Counting the Cuts (2011) that the voluntary and community sector will lose around £911 million in public funding a year by 2015-16. Similarly, local authorities, a
major funder of many voluntary and community groups, face an average budget reduction of 28 per cent over the following four years (NCVO, 2011). In turn, a recent survey of Volunteer Centres found they had lost an average of 12% funding from their local authority in 2010/11, although they had gained new funds from grant-making bodies (Ramsay, 2012).

Yet, whilst there is an expectation the government will no longer seek to influence and shape the sector, there are new programmes of activity and support, led by the Office of Civil Society (OCS). These similarly embody a drive for volunteer development agencies to rationalise and collaborate, whilst becoming sustainable (without government funding). For instance, the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) is now implementing the Transition Fund, which will help ‘civil society organisations which deliver high quality public services adapt to the different funding environment’ (see http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/transitionfund). Similarly, the recent launch of the Transforming Local Infrastructure fund, again delivered by BLF on behalf of OCS equates to a further £30 million investment. This is funding partnerships of local volunteer development agencies to transform and integrate the support which they provide to frontline civil society organisations, as well as working towards long-term sustainability. BLF has recently conducted a consultation as to how best support Voluntary and Community Services (including social enterprise) to become more effective (BLF, 2011). This highlights BLF’s important role in this new policy environment, as well as the continuing role of government policy in shaping the sector (Paine et al., 2011).

Research implications
An integral part of this research will involve examining the role of volunteer development agencies in supporting volunteering at a community level. Yet despite the substantial investment, policy focus and debate around infrastructure, the evidence base, particularly around questions of impact, effectiveness and its role, remains insubstantial, fragmented and disparate (Macmillan, 2007).

Evidence continually suggests that at best, a static level of formal volunteering has persisted during the past ten years and at worst, that there has been a decline in people’s involvement (Rochester et al., 2010). This argument has been used to suggest that investment in volunteering development agencies (and indeed the effectiveness of those agencies) has not paid off. However, McCulloch, Mohan and Smith (2010) highlight that the statistics behind this analysis are unreliable. They demonstrate that definitional and methodological issues significantly affect the measurement of volunteering activity in their comparative analysis of national datasets. An alternative critique levied at local volunteer development agencies is that only a small proportion of volunteers use them to find their way into volunteering (Howlett, 2008). However, figures produced by Volunteering England demonstrate that Volunteer Centres are particularly effective at targeting those groups which conventionally have low levels of volunteering, namely those who are unemployed, from BME communities and young people (Howlett, 2008; Ramsay, 2012). In this context, volunteer development agencies are having an impact on
the equality of access to volunteering, which is particularly significant when volunteering is considered through the lens of work and employability, in the current context of an economic downturn. Similarly, the role of volunteer development agencies extends far beyond a simple brokerage function and includes helping volunteer-involving organisations to develop opportunities, marketing volunteering, good practice development, local strategic development of volunteering support and campaigning for volunteering. Howlett (2008: 14) identifies the importance of this broad impact:

‘To overcome information asymmetries prospective volunteers need a source of good quality information. But more than this, volunteer-involving organisations need a place to post opportunities, a place to find good practice advice and training; funders and policy makers need a source of information and cajoling if they are to make the right decisions to increase volunteer numbers.’

In other words, the impact of volunteer development agencies extends beyond the number of volunteers placed and indeed volunteering levels more generally. Here is it important to state once again that volunteers and volunteering as an activity are not homogenous. For these reasons volunteer development agencies must be recognised as the starting point for this research, rather than a boundary for it, particularly in terms of recruiting research participants and the community level impact. Whilst volunteer development agencies work within a geographical community, they are particularly effective at targeting groups with lower levels of volunteering and removing the barriers these groups face, such as a lack of understanding, confidence, time, information or the stereotypes attached to volunteering (Rochester et al., 2010).

Summary
Overall, it is important to acknowledge that volunteer development agencies are a key focus of, and audience for, this research. Furthermore, the role and even the existence of volunteer development agencies could look very different in the coming few years, given policy and funding agendas focusing on collaboration, rationalisation and modernisation. This research will need to improve understanding of volunteering in a way which adds value to local support, delivery and policy, as well as having strategic importance. However, the primary units of analysis here are volunteering and communities, rather than the impact of volunteer development agencies per se. Instead this research will examine the role of volunteer development agencies in supporting volunteering at a community level, particularly in terms of ‘hard-to-reach’ groups and their role in removing personal, social and local barriers to volunteering.
Section 4: Theories of change
Community Cohesion, Social Capital and Resilience

Previous sections have analysed literature on the practical components behind this research into volunteering and community change. Key themes have emerged around the romanticisation of ‘community’. This section explicitly addresses the key theories of change behind this ideal and highlights why volunteering is assumed to play a key role in achieving this vision of a stronger, more cohesive, more connected and more resilient community.

4.1 Community cohesion

A political agenda
The concept of community cohesion is very much a political one. It emerged in the aftermath of rioting in Pennine mill towns of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham over the summer of 2001. The independent Community Cohesion Review Team, chaired by Ted Cantle, produced the ‘Cantle Report’ (2001) to explain the causes. This drew attention to polarised and segregated communities, in which people led ‘parallel lives', self-segregating into religious and ethnic groups. The lack of interaction between groups was argued to undermine a common sense of belonging and purpose, allowing misunderstanding and suspicion to flourish. The idea that increased ‘contact’ would improve this situation was the founding principle of community cohesion. This is perhaps unsurprising given concerns surrounding integration and multiculturalism, dominant in political discourse throughout the 80s and 90s. However, the first ‘official’ policy definition of community cohesion appeared in a guidance document for local authorities in 2002 (LGA, 2002). This defined a cohesive community as one where:

- There is a common vision and sense of belonging for all communities;
- People’s diverse backgrounds and circumstances are positively valued;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities;
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighborhoods.

A number of agencies began to develop responses to the emerging community cohesion agenda, most notably the Local Government Agency (LGA), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), The Home Office, The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and the Inter Faith Network. In 2005, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion was set up to address practical ways in which local areas could make the most of diversity, whilst responding to the tensions it may cause (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). Following their recommendations, the Department for Communities and Local Government produced a revised Cohesion Delivery Framework (CLG, 2008b) outlining:

‘Community Cohesion is what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together. A key contributor to
community cohesion is integration which is what must happen to enable new residents and existing residents to adjust to one another.’

This revised understanding recognises how communities which appeared cohesive are now considered problematic if their ‘sameness’ means that they are unable to cope with difference and change (CLG, 2008b; CLG, 2007). The result has been a broadening of the concept of community cohesion and the communities which are considered to be experiencing problems with cohesion. This is encapsulated in the Cohesion Delivery Framework which also sets out a vision of a cohesive community, based on three foundations:

- People from different backgrounds having similar life opportunities;
- People knowing their rights and responsibilities;
- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly.

In addition, there were key ways of living together identified:

- A shared future vision and sense of belonging;
- A focus on what new and existing communities have in common;
- A recognition of the value of diversity;
- Strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds.

This highlights a significant shift from the ‘contact hypothesis’ as a solution to the problematic ‘parallel lives’ identified in the post-riots (2001) period, to notions of community belonging and involvement. However, the launch of the Prevent strategy in 2007 complicated the community cohesion agenda. In particular, many Muslim groups felt they were being stigmatised by association with violent extremism. Similarly, the Face to Face report (CLG, 2008a) on inter-faith dialogue continues to conflate cohesion in relation to specific ethnic and religious communities.

Overall, community cohesion seeks to promote a more inclusive notion of citizenship, identity and belonging. Yet its operation in policy initiatives has been top-down, engineering social contact without encapsulating the multifaceted nature of social fragmentation. With the Coalition Government coming to power, community cohesion has faded from public policy discourse and moreover, its founding principles are mobilised in very different ways (McGhee and Pathak, 2012). The Prevent strategy has been revised, separating policies on integration (led by the Department for Communities and Local Government) from policies to prevent terrorism (Office, 2011b). Community cohesion has been replaced by the ‘Big Society’ and a bottom-up emphasis on local civic engagement and involvement. This was particularly evident following the 2011 riots, where local and familial support were cited as integral to young people’s belonging and responsibility. Whilst a lack of social cohesion is cited as a problem, it in itself has not been cited as a policy initiative or solution in the same way as community cohesion was under the previous government.
Measuring community cohesion

Whilst community cohesion no longer features in policy discourse, it is helpful to explore how research and academic debate has operationalised this term.

Community cohesion has primarily been measured in England and Wales by the national Citizenship Survey (this survey has now been cancelled, with fieldwork concluding in 2011). This measures cohesion according to whether people feel that people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area. Whilst this is a fairly narrow definition of cohesion, the Citizenship Survey Community Cohesion Topic Report (CLG, 2010) covers a much wider range of indicators. These include:

- **Views on immediate neighbourhood** (self-defined): The extent to which people enjoy living in their neighbourhood, feel a sense of belonging, believed people can be trusted, share the same values and would pull together;

- **Views about local area**, (defined as 15-20 minutes walking distance): The extent to which people feel a sense of belonging, believe that residents respect ethnic differences and feelings as to whether the area had got better or worse to live in;

- **Fear of crime**: The extent to which people worry about being a victim of crime;

- **Interaction with people from different backgrounds**: Social interaction with people from different backgrounds, across a range of locations (home, work, child’s school, shops, place of worship, formal and informal volunteering);

- **Social networks**: People’s friends with different incomes or ethnicity;

- **Attitudes to immigration**: Views as to whether numbers should decrease;

- **Belonging to Britain**: The extent to which people feel they are part of Britain.

These indicators acknowledge the multiple communities which people belong to, which may or may not be ties to their immediate locality. However, the notion of cohesion, in this case, whether people from different backgrounds get on, remains fairly limited.

A psychological sense of community has also been subject to a great deal of research. For example, McMillan and Charvis (1986: 9) define this as:

‘A feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.’

In other words, they break down a psychological sense of community into four key indicators; membership (belonging); influence (believing that individuals matter to the group); fulfillment of needs; and emotional connection (shared history). This conception has since been developed into a ‘Sense of Community Index’, which includes 12 questions to quantitatively measure the extent to which people positively identify these four indicators in terms of their neighborhood.

A significant issue with the notion of community cohesion at a macro level is its preoccupation with a singular notion of identity and belonging (within one group), as well
as shared consensus, which leaves little space for difference (whether in terms of voices or identity politics). There is an argument therefore to better understand the role of diversity and difference in community cohesion.

Volunteering and community cohesion
In terms of volunteering, community cohesion is widely cited as a core benefit (Ockenden, 2007; Kearney, 2003). Volunteering is argued to bring people in to contact with one another (particularly those from different backgrounds) to interact in a positive and meaningful way. For example, Kearney (2003) explains how volunteering provides a network of social relationships that connect people to their own communities. The Volunteering Impact Assessment toolkit, one of the very few evaluation tools aimed specifically at volunteering, similarly measures community impact in terms of an increased sense of community, ethnic, faith or religious identity and an increased appreciation of diversity of cultures. However, there is limited evidence to clarify whether indeed volunteering does benefit the community in this way. At present the Citizenship Survey Community Cohesion Topic report (CLG, 2010) is the primary source of evidence in this field. The 2008-9 survey report found that 19% of respondents mixed socially with people from different backgrounds in sites of formal volunteering and 17% through informal volunteering. However, shops (61%) and work, school or college (52%) were more effective sites for people to interact with those from different backgrounds. What this tells us is that cohesion is not a uniform concept and can differ on a local level according to the sites of activities and the people involved. Similarly, McCulloch et al. (2010) have found that social status is the highest predictor of volunteering. Rochester et al. (2010) also explain the need to make volunteering more inclusive, given the lower rates of volunteering amongst younger people, older people, people without formal qualifications and for those born outside the UK, although there are differences in participation amongst BME groups.

As such, existing research on community cohesion raises the question as to what types of volunteering lead to what kinds of (positive) social relationships and why. If cohesion is understood as improving the amount and quality of interaction between different social groups, there is a question mark over the extent to which it is comparatively better than other activities at creating a positive impact. The current evidence base is primarily statistical or represents a form of impact measurement. For this reason, qualitative research could add a great deal of value to our understanding of relationships created through volunteering and why these matter.

Summary
Overall, this section has shown how community cohesion has a complex history, one which is now disappearing from policy radars. It has also highlighted a need for qualitative research into how and why different types of volunteering can improve relationships between and within communities, in order to make them stronger. Belonging, relationships and understanding are useful concepts to take forward. However, an alternative framework to community cohesion is essential in order to understand the
impacts volunteering can have on communities without the associated ideological connotations.

4.2 Social capital
Social capital is one of the most pervasive theories to explain the ‘strength’ of communities and indeed the benefits of volunteering on a community level. Intuitively, this concept refers to the ways in which friends, family and associates help each other to make the best of current circumstances, where;

‘...the well-connected are more likely to be hired, housed, healthy and happy’
(Woolcock, 2001)

This term has a long history within the social sciences, but is generally associated with Putnam (2000: 22), who describes this on a community level as:

‘Features of social life - networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.’

The key indicators of social capital include social relations, formal and informal social networks, group membership, trust, reciprocity and civic engagement. However, there are many definitions of social capital and it is important to recognise how these tie in to the normative assumptions of ‘community’ discussed above. As such, social capital is not necessarily a panacea and that the relationship between volunteering and social capital is not straightforward.

A personal and moral agenda
Whilst Putnam (originally an essay in 1995 entitled Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital; now see Putnam, 2000) is widely cited and associated with the notion of social capital, the term has a long history which inflects its current meaning. An early recorded use is by Lyda Hanifan, an American political reformer who, in 1916, described why people need social contact and in turn, how cooperation benefits communities (Fukuyama, 2000; Putnam, 2000). In 1961, Jane Jacobs, in her classic study The Death and Life of Great American Cities (Jacobs, 1997) highlighted mixed-use urban neighborhoods as representing a form of social capital which could promote public safety and trust within communities. The term was also used in the 1970s to analyse the problems of inner-city development (Fukuyama, 2000). Bourdieu (2000) used the concept from the early 1980s to explore the way in which different forms of capital (economic, cultural and social) influenced patterns of power and social status. Overall, social capital has always been used to describe how social relationships can benefit individuals and groups.

Social capital as it is used today heavily relies upon Putnam’s (2000) work, Bowling Alone. He argues that norms of reciprocity and trust created through face-to-face association (through voluntary associations) ‘spill over’ into society, creating capacity for collective action in pursuit of shared goals. For Putnam (2000), social capital is a moral resource
which is essential to modern democracy. In other words, the individuals who have strong social networks, formed through face-to-face interaction and involvement in voluntary associations equates to communities with high levels of civic engagement. It is important to note therefore that Putnam makes his argument with the view that democracy is declining as a result of urban sprawl, commuting, television and a decline in voluntary associations. As such, his concerns chime with the nostalgic view of ‘close-knit’ rural communities.

A substantial body of work has set about developing this understanding of social capital in the social sciences. This has broadened the scope of social capital to understand the importance of trust and positive perceptions of community. The literature tends to differentiate between three forms of social capital (ONS, 2001; Woolcock, 2001).

- **Bonding social capital** describes the strong relationships between people, such as family members or those of the same social group, generally characterised as homogenous. This is recognised as essential for people ‘getting on’ in life and their sense of belonging. However, this type of social capital is often posited as negative, particularly in the wake of debates around community cohesion, where it is argued to be a causal factor of ‘parallel lives’.

- **Bridging social capital** is characterised by weaker cross-cutting ties between friends of friends, business associates and people known through associations, good for ‘getting on’ (progressing) in life. This is seen as essential to the ‘strength’ of communities because they describe connections between social groups, particularly those based upon ethnicity. As such, bridging social capital has been integral to and positively promoted through the discourse of community cohesion.

- **Linking social capital** refers to the connections between individuals and groups in different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups (Cote and Healy, 2001). This is concerned with people’s capacity to leverage resources and access ideas and information from beyond immediate communities.

The pervasiveness of social capital is perhaps unsurprising given its potential to describe and explain social change, with a growing body of evidence linking social capital to lower levels of crime, economic development, improved community cohesion and innovation in industry (Kearney, 2003; Halpern, 2004; ONS, 2003). Similarly, a lack of social capital has become cause for concern, where risks potentially include susceptibility to poverty, deprivation, increased crime and social exclusion.

However, the relationship between social capital and stronger communities is not as straightforward as it appears (Portes, 1998; Smith et al., 2002). Whilst there is evidence that communities characterised by severe economic deprivation are increasingly cut off from mainstream society (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998), strong social capital can be found in areas of high deprivation (Pearce and Milne, 2010; Dawkins, 2006). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has conducted a great deal of research into social cohesion in
disadvantaged neighbourhoods and has found strong bonds of reciprocity exist between family and friends, informal social support, mutual aid and a close attachment to the area (Beider, 2011; Forrest and Kearns, 1999; Pearce and Milne, 2010; Osborne, 1999). This finding problematises the assumptions that social capital improves community development. Indeed this community is perhaps closer to the idealistic vision, despite the wider problems involved. Whilst there is extensive evidence that people still feel a strong sense of belonging (CLG, 2010; Taylor, 2011), it is important to acknowledge that this can be multi-faceted, relating to different aspects of their community (Phillipson et al., 2001).

The ‘buzz word’ status of social capital warrants some scepticism in its explanatory value, particularly in relation to volunteering. Specifically, the assumption that volunteering involves more social interaction, which will create higher levels of trust, employment and lower deprivation. For instance, statistical analysis has found that social status and living in an area of low deprivation are both core predictors of volunteering. McCulloch et al. (2010) suggest that as a result, it is wrong to assume that volunteering will improve social status or deprivation. Similarly, Timbrell (2007) questions whether social capital is an outcome of volunteering, or in fact whether volunteering is an outcome of social capital.

Measuring social capital
The measurement of social capital incorporates similar indicators to those of community cohesion, but is slightly broader. This includes peoples’ psychological sense of community and belonging, as well as their trust in local democracy and their relationships with people in different social groups, as discussed above.

Given the link between social capital and community development, there has been significant interest and research into statistical measurement indicators. The World Bank social capital implementation framework lists five dimensions of social capital: groups and networks, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation, social cohesion and inclusion, information and communication. The Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2003) has a slightly narrower conception, measuring:

- **Levels of trust**, for example, whether individuals trust their neighbours and whether they consider their neighbourhood to be a place where people help each other in times of need;
- **Membership**, for example, how many clubs, societies or social groups individuals belong to and their involvement in voluntary activity;
- **Individuals’ networks and social contact**, for example, how often individuals see family and friends, as well as social contact between people from different groups.

A methodological issue here is that social capital is conceptualised as a community characteristic, but is measured by asking questions of individuals and aggregating their replies (Baron et al., 2000).
Recent research into social capital avoids this individualistic focus by mapping peoples’ social networks and relationships. The RSA (2010) ‘Connected Communities’ project uses Social Network Analysis to measure and identify social connectedness. This provides a visual representation of the ways in which individuals (nodes) are connected to one another (links), indicating patterns of inclusion and exclusion. However, in seeking to avoid unhelpful geographic definitions of ‘communities’, this approach denies local specificity, ‘flattening’ the spatial, geographical and social distances which characterise people’s relationships. As such, it cannot account for differential power relationships or the social divisions of gender, ethnicity and class which are inherent to peoples’ experiences of those relationships.

Perhaps the issue with this analysis is precisely the meta-level focus and the need to explain the big picture. This ‘snapshot’ approach overlooks the fact that people’s social networks and their participation in voluntary organisations varies as a direct result of their life stage (Brodie et al., 2011; Brodie et al., 2010). For these reasons, Back (2009) argues that there is a need to study community using methods of observation and analysis attentive to everyday life, rather than relying upon interviews and survey discourse caught up in its ‘moral project’. His analysis specifically focuses on experiences of living with difference. Whilst there is a substantial body of practice-orientated research across the social sciences (Schatzki et al., 2001), this lens has only been used to a limited degree to analyse people’s involvement and experiences of volunteering (See Jupp, 2008). There is a growing interest in exploring how the actual ties and relationships which bring social capital about are spatially and socially organised (Blokland-Potters and Savage, 2008). This has shown that elements of social capital, such as trust, are not stable attitudes of individuals but are realised through ongoing relationships. For instance, Savage et al. (2008), examine the functioning of two voluntary associations in Manchester, to find that higher levels of trust exist in the organisation with more internal feuding and difference in opinions. These studies provide powerful demonstrations of social capital in the context of voluntary activity.

Summary
Social capital, as the by-product of social relations, is an integral component to understanding the community impact of volunteering activity. There are as many definitions as there are approaches to researching social capital and this term has become a panacea to improve social problems, with the risk of explaining too much and too little at one and the same time (Woolcock, 2001; ONS, 2001). To this end, there is a need to understand more about how volunteering builds trusts, norms, relationships and networks.

4.3 Community resilience
The notion of community resilience has its roots in emergency planning and disaster management. The Strategic National Framework on Community Resilience (Cabinet Office, 2001: 1) defines this as:
‘Communities and individuals harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency, in a way that complements the response of the emergency services.’

Community resilience is becoming increasingly popular in public policy, public management and third sector discourse in the UK. The idea is that resilient individuals, organisations and communities are able to draw on their resources in order to cope with change, whether it is sudden or gradual and cumulative. There is a growing interest in measuring resilience, both to predict the strength of communities and therefore their susceptibility to shock, as well as to plan interventions which can reduce the potential for or impact of negative events. Volunteering is embedded within resilience measurement, but is taken for granted as an indicator of social capital and cohesion. For this reason, it is necessary to consider the value of community resilience as a concept and indeed the potential of volunteering to contribute to this theory of change.

**A transformative agenda**

The recent economic downturn has prompted fresh interest in what protects or helps communities overcome shock. Moreover, the Coalition Government’s interest in self-reliance, community empowerment and localism makes the concept incredibly appealing. It provides an operational framework to measure and assess the characteristics of a resilient community, as well as a rallying call that communities can influence change (Shaw, 2012).

Resilience thinking has its roots in ecology and disaster management. As such, the definitional emphasis on ‘bouncing back’ from shocks means that in relation to communities, resilience has increasingly been posited as the ability to change, learn and adapt (Walker and Salt, 2006). Whilst community cohesion and social capital are theories of change which depend upon gradual improvement, resilience is more open, describing the potential for transformative social change. In other words, a resilient community will respond to shock in a way which prevents its reoccurrence, rather than a return to the same situation where the shock could happen again. For instance, if a major local long-term employer closes down, a transformative change could promote a more diverse local economy.

There is a danger however, that resilience can be seen as a panacea for communities experiencing multiple issues with public spending cuts, unemployment and social fragmentation. The concerns surrounding the notion of community resilience are summarised in a review by Cutter, Burton and Emrich (2010: 1) who state that there are:

‘Lingering concerns from the research community focus on disagreements as to the definition of resilience, whether resilience is an outcome or a process, what type of resilience is being addressed (economic systems, infrastructure systems, ecological systems, or community systems), and which policy realm'}
As this quote highlights, there are substantial challenges in transferring a term established in ecological systems literature into a public policy domain. There is a normative assumption that it is a good thing for communities to be resilient enough to withstand negative events, yet Shaw (2012) points out that the result could be an avoidance of change which needs to happen. There is an issue with defining resilience at a purely local level, denying the influence of and relationship to national context and broader social and economic issues. Similarly, issues of power and inequalities are overlooked, in terms of who gets to define the resilience agenda, what this should involve and who it benefits. However, community resilience is appealing because it offers a more holistic theory of community change and self-reliance. A review by the Carnegie Trust (Wilding, 2011) has defined this in terms of four elements:

- **Individual resilience** (healthy engaged people): supporting individuals’ physical and psychological well-being;
- **Economic resilience** (localised economy within ecological limits): securing entrepreneurial community stewardship of local assets and institutions;
- **Cross-community links** (Bridging social capital): fostering supportive connections between inter-dependent communities;
- **Cultural resilience** (inclusive creative culture, bonding social capital): generating a positive, welcoming sense of place.

Theories of social capital and community cohesion are in fact integral to this notion, including their problematic assumptions discussed earlier. Yet resilience thinking extends beyond a focus on the relationships between people, to factor in the importance of local economic, physical and material circumstances. For instance the Commission on Integration and Cohesion argued that local action can build resilience to the effects of poverty, and that cohesion is strengthened if ‘key resilience factors’, such as shared community facilities, are established. They argue that these types of facilities ‘provide the opportunities for people to interact’, acting as ‘the locus for shared activities’ (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). Whilst the imagery of building a community hub plays to the ‘quick-fix’ solution, resilience does recognise that assets and context play a significant role in community change, alongside the social relationships intertwined with them.

Finally, it is worth pointing out the temporality (notion of time) within resilience thinking. The language of shock and preparing for the unexpected have a sense of urgency and rapid response attached, making it appealing to policy makers and practitioners looking for active solutions. However, it is important to note that the past remains important and similarly, building resilience can take time. For instance, the Young Foundation’s research into ‘Happiness’ highlights the importance of the school curriculum in developing individual resilience in childhood (Bacon et al., 2010). Furthermore, Hothi (2008) observes
that those households who can draw on ‘extended families and wider networks of friends’ are more likely to be resilient to economic shocks that ‘might push others further into difficulty’. In other words, the factors which play a role in the lack of resilience in people or communities can prove challenging to rectify.

**Measuring community resilience**

There are an increasing number of resilience toolkits which are geared towards measuring resilience and identifying weakness areas. Carnegie for instance has developed a resilience compass (Wilding, 2011), using the indicators described above, as a tool to use in participatory workshops. Typically however, indicators are premised upon secondary datasets. For instance, Experian, for the BBC (2011) measured the resilience of 324 English councils, collecting datasets for four indicators of:

- **Businesses**: e.g. business closures, sectors, types of firms and diversity;
- **People**: e.g. working age population, life expectancy, earnings, management jobs;
- **Community**: e.g. neighbourliness, deprivation, long-term unemployment;
- **Place**: e.g. house prices, crime rates, green space.

The results are weighted and used to rank the performance of local authority areas. As such, resilience here is an outcome, rather than a process. The Young Foundation (Bacon and Mguni, 2010) take this a step further in their Wellbeing and Resilience Measurement (WARM). The first stage of this is to measure individuals’ well-being in terms of how people feel about their lives, networks and infrastructure to achieve their aspirations in the community. The second stage creates a visual asset map (like social capital) and vulnerabilities (such as social isolation) in the community. The results are used in a benchmarking process and then to inform planning initiatives (whether they are led by communities, business, political leaders or partnerships) in terms of what is working well and where the gaps are. Despite the implicit role of social action, social capital, cohesion and relationships within community, the role of volunteering and community resilience has yet to be unpacked or fully explored. However, a range of case studies cited as initiatives to build resilience are premised upon formal and informal volunteering, as well as participation more broadly (Wilding, 2011).

**Summary**

Whilst community resilience appears to holds some promise as a theoretical framework to understand community change, its appropriation as a local authority performance measure and its reliance on quantitative datasets distract from this. Whilst volunteering is seen to play a positive role in building resilience, it cannot equate to or add up to this. As such, resilience as a concept which encompasses local economy, physical resources and assets as well as social relationships is slightly too broad for the scope of this research. Despite this, resilience is useful in recognising the interplay of local socioeconomic conditions and the fact that place matters. This is something neglected within social capital and community cohesion as analytical frameworks.
Section 5: Conclusions

Place, Action and Strength

This literature review has sought to provide an overview into the extensive debates and well-worn concepts which underpin the role of volunteering in creating ‘stronger’ communities. This has sought to integrate literatures on volunteering and literatures on community change in order to move towards an understanding of the relationship between them and found that this remains elusive. Emerging from this review are three key conclusions which will form the foundations to this research project as it progresses.

Summary

Over the past twenty years there has been a consistent government policy interest, investment and interference in volunteering, based upon the difference this can make to communities. The expectations of people to take part in volunteering in order to benefit their communities (albeit in a slightly different form) are substantial. However, this expectation is somewhat misguided given the elusive relationship between volunteering and community change (Rochester et al., 2010). This literature review has found substantial quantitative evidence measuring levels of volunteering, trust, belonging and interactions between social groups, captured at an individual level and aggregated nationally, often as a result of policy interest. It has also documented in-depth qualitative research in to people’s social relationships at a local level, which demonstrates the tensions and complexity that exist in these indicators. In other words, this literature has found that there is no single theoretical framework which can fully account for or help explain the relationships between volunteering and stronger communities. Instead, it has found that each offers different analytical strengths. Overall, this literature review has come to three key conclusions, which will form the foundations for ongoing investigation of the ways in which volunteering builds stronger communities.

5.1 Volunteering is a situated practice

This literature review has confirmed that there is a need to keep questioning definitions of volunteering and in turn, to mobilise these definitions in their broadest sense in order to understand the difference this can make to communities. Whilst there are core foundations to volunteering which will always remain the same (that it is unpaid, of a person’s own free will and intended to benefit others), its interpretation is often somewhat narrow in focus. Much literature and policy has focused on formally constituted activities for large organisations and indeed, on volunteers’ altruistic motivations as a defining feature. This is likely to shift with the Big Society agenda prioritising grassroots social action, alongside the growth of social enterprise and self-managed volunteering, using technology. However, it is important to avoid simply moving from one way of thinking about volunteers (the non-profit paradigm or vertical model) to another (the civil society paradigm or horizontal model).

A key conclusion therefore is that volunteering is a personal, social and located activity. It is first and foremost undertaken by individuals in the context of their lives. As such,
individuals’ experiences will need to be at the heart of understanding how volunteering benefits communities. However, volunteering is not frozen in time or space and neither is it solely an individual experience. Instead volunteering is a situated practice and a collective activity (Brodie et al., 2011). This collectiveness may be social (for instance, taking part in gardening at an allotment) or simply involved (for instance, volunteering using technology to complete a survey for a charity). Similarly, the situated nature of these activities can be considered in terms of peoples’ lives, their social relationships or the physical and social sites of their volunteering. This allows the emphasis to shift from individual volunteering, ‘placing’ individuals within their communities, whether they are defined in geographical, shared interests or as an agent of change.

Focusing on volunteering as a situated practice also allows room to understand what types of personal and social relationships are created through what types of volunteering (as well as recognising the role of diversity and difference) and to question why they are important for the community. Whilst much of the literature focuses on volunteering as a mechanism for establishing positive personal relationships and social networks, some has usefully provided insights to the ‘negative’ aspects of volunteering in practice. This is not to suggest that volunteering does not improve communities, but that the nature, expectations and outcomes of these relationships are not straightforward. Moreover, this perspective allows room to understand the various other agencies which play a role in peoples’ volunteering, whether this is a local volunteer development agency, the organisation a volunteer works with or the social problem which instigated their volunteering. Overall, conceptualising volunteering as a situated practice helps understand how and why the various relationships involved have value.

5.2 Places and communities matter
This literature review has shown how and why community is rarely a just descriptive term, particularly in the context of volunteering. Both involve assumptions about the value of personal relationships involved, offering a return to a community which is ‘close-knit’, where people have strong feelings of belonging, trust and reciprocity with those who live in close proximity. This romanticised vision of community is highly geographically located. There is substantial research which highlights that community is not a given or static concept. Indeed, people are widely acknowledged to belong to multiple communities, whether these are geographical or of interest and/or shared experiences. Qualitative research has further demonstrated the complexity and contradictions of peoples’ sense of belonging, trust and neighbourliness, given their varied associations with communities. However, community itself, despite its elusiveness, is inescapable as a unit of analysis, whether this is used in descriptive (for instance, a geographical community or a community of shared interests/experiences), normative (how community is imagined and romanticised) or instrumental (how community becomes an agent of change, or is designated as such by an intervention) terms.

The issue here then is not how to avoid the use of community, but to be aware of these complexities and in turn, to think carefully about how to locate the impact of volunteering
at a community level. For instance, this could be understood geographically (in the sites of activity, the locations of an organisation’s services or the local authority area in which volunteering takes place) or in terms of social relationships (for instance, between volunteers, volunteers and service users, volunteers and their families, volunteers and their neighbours).

This literature review has clarified that whilst the community impact remains elusive, it is important to recognise that volunteering happens in space and place, and that the community is simultaneously a location, a site of identification and a set of relationships, with a history and with a certain set of social and economic circumstances.

5.3 Community change is relational and contextual
Whilst there is substantial debate about volunteering (and its benefits), as well as peoples’ sense of community (variously defined), there has been relatively little in-depth consideration about the complexity of the relationship between them. As such, this literature review has outlined a wealth of research into and theorisation of social capital, community cohesion and resilience as ways to understand the factors which contribute to a stronger community. However, none of these theoretical frameworks in their totality can usefully account for, or help understand the relationships between volunteering and stronger communities. Instead, they each offer useful perspectives from which to understand the potential value of volunteering in building stronger communities.

In terms of community cohesion, strength refers to the amount and quality of interactions between people within and across various communities. This raises the question as to what types of volunteering lead to what kinds of positive social relationships and why. Here people’s sense of belonging and views towards their community and relationships within it offer a useful approach to understand the value of volunteering. However, the issues to be avoided here are simplistic assumptions about ‘contact theory’ and its prioritising of ethnicity to define communities (albeit in a geographical location). Furthermore, this review has shown how cohesion and unity are not necessarily indicators of a ‘strong’ community and in turn, that diversity and difference have a complex role to play in feelings of community.

Theories of social capital help extend the individualistic focus of cohesion on people, to their networks and patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Here, a strong community is one in which can include notions of belonging and relationships, but prioritise their networks, social contact and involvement in organisations and in volunteering. However, this avoidance of geographical community is both the strength and weakness of social capital. It simultaneously flattens social distance which characterises social relationships, as well as differential power relationships. Similarly, individuals’ networks are seen as aggregates of community health, taking a snapshot rather than understanding their contextual formation through activities such as volunteering.
Finally, community resilience, despite its origins as an emergency planning tool and its use as a local authority performance indicator, is conceptually useful for acknowledging the interplay between social and local conditions. This includes physical, economic and social circumstances on a local level as well as the indicators of social capital and cohesion. Whilst the notion of recovery or ‘bouncing back’ from sudden disasters is slightly problematic, it does help focus on change and indeed, whether or not volunteering can transform communities (Shaw, 2012).

In summary, a stronger community is not premised wholeheartedly upon volunteering. Indeed, the notion of community resilience highlights how volunteering is just one aspect of social life, alongside other local conditions which contribute to a strong community. As such, volunteering, rather than a strong community, is the primary unit of analysis here. Indeed, this literature review has found various ways in which volunteering has been associated with improving various indicators of a strong community, namely because of the social interaction involved.

This literature review has found that the community impact of volunteering remains elusive, in theory and in practice. As such, by investigating volunteering as a situated and social practice, this research will seek to further develop understanding of community impact and, indeed, where and how this impact is located.
References


