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SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN VOLUNTARY SPORTS CLUBS

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand how social capital develops within voluntary sports clubs. It adopts a micro-perspective to examine how social capital, defined as ‘the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures’ (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 532), emerges from social interaction within voluntary sports club contexts. The thesis is informed by a critical realist perspective that focuses on the underlying social mechanisms involved and how they operate differently for different groups and individuals in different circumstances. The empirical analysis, which represents the main contribution of the thesis, is based on three case studies of voluntary sports clubs in the UK. These case studies were carried out over 18 months and involved a number of in-depth interviews with members and organisers and periods of observation at each of the clubs.

The analysis shows that members accessed a range of resources through the social ties they formed at the clubs. Interestingly, the analysis demonstrates that, as well as forming strong and weak ties, as standard network models would predict, members formed ‘compartmentally intimate’ ties at the clubs: strong ties that were domain-specific. The analysis reveals that several core mechanisms – reciprocity exchanges, enforceable trust, value introduction and bounded solidarity – operated at the clubs to develop social capital for members, but that these mechanisms were influenced in multiple ways by various elements of context. In particular, the analysis focuses on the socio-organisational context of the clubs and identifies several key elements, including the nature of the focal activity, the voluntariness of participation, the co-operative nature of engagement, the relative absence of hierarchy and the diversity of membership. Overall, the thesis provides support for an organisationally embedded view of social capital development and offers a rare example of critical realist research on social capital.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

'When you go to cricket, the main reason you go to cricket is for cricket. The other stuff's on top of that.' So I was told by a member of a voluntary cricket club in London; and, on the surface, it seemed straightforward. But what was this 'other stuff' he was referring to? What else do people experience through membership of a voluntary sports club beyond the opportunity to play sport? A member of a voluntary tennis club said to me, 'You know what? I've made all my money through here.' Meanwhile, the organiser of a voluntary football club said, 'You know, the club can actually give Larry and John and Fred and Paul and all the rest of them...a sense of achievement. You know, they win the title, fantastic. Togetherness, it's bonding, it's bonding.' So, is this the 'other stuff' that people experience? Financial rewards, achievement and a sense of cohesion?

In fact, research has suggested that people can access a huge range of resources through their involvement in voluntary sports clubs, just as they can from involvement in other types of organisations and other types of social networks. And, for the last 25 years or so, people have tended to use a particular term to describe this ability to access resources: social capital. But what exactly is social capital? How does it develop? And what role do voluntary sports clubs play? This thesis sets out to explore these questions. In particular, it focuses on the second and third. Through in-depth research at three voluntary sports clubs in the UK, it seeks to understand how and why people form social ties; how they develop the ability to access resources; how different elements of club life shape these processes; and how voluntary sports clubs are similar and different to other interaction settings.¹

This chapter sets the scene for the thesis. The first section introduces the concept of social capital and briefly traces its history and its different

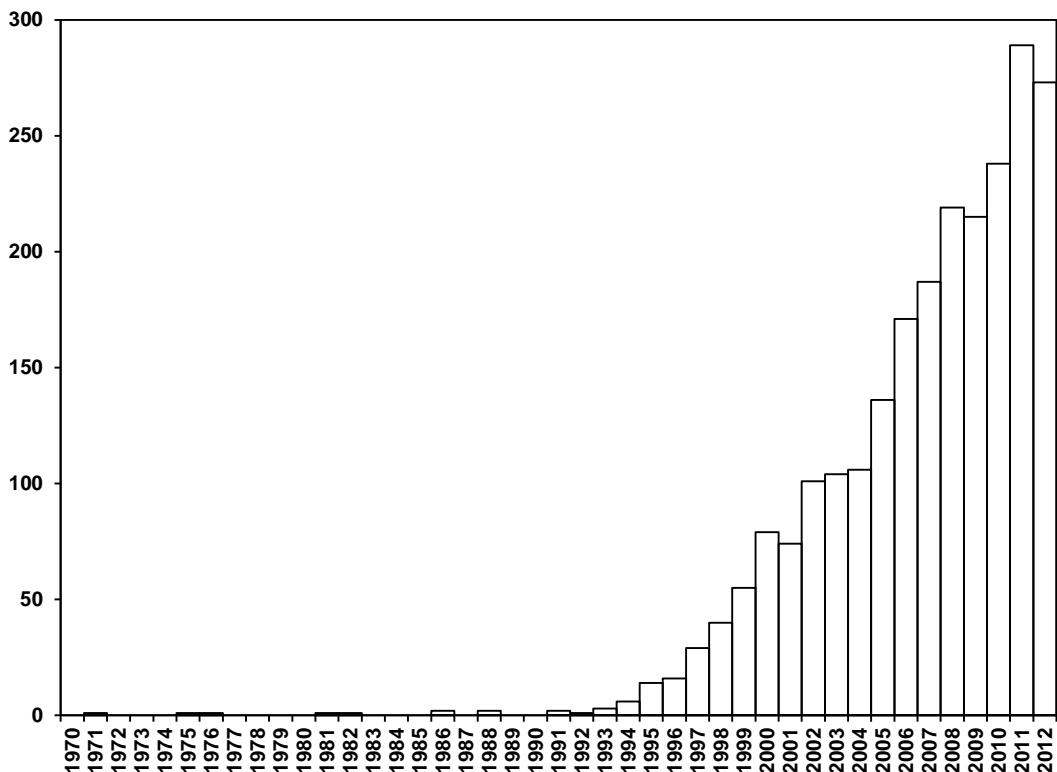
¹ Voluntary sports clubs are here defined as 'membership-based not-for-profit organisations that provide opportunities for community members to participate in organised sport' (Nichols and Collins, 2005: v).

versions. It then discusses three key issues within social capital research, namely the importance of careful conceptualisation, the need for analysis of how social capital develops and the methodological problems that afflict much of the existing work on social capital. The second section looks specifically at sport. It explains the significant academic and policy interest in social capital and sport; and it notes the calls for more in-depth, critical research on the subject – calls this thesis seeks to address. The third section introduces the philosophical framework that underpins the research: critical realism. It explains the key tenets of critical realism and discusses their implications for social science in general and for this research in particular. The fourth section follows directly from this and introduces the basic methodological framework within which the research was carried out. The fifth section sets out the structure of the thesis, describing the content of each chapter and highlighting some of the key findings.

BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

There is great and growing interest in the concept of social capital. This is true for academics across a number of disciplines, including sociology, political science, economics and management. It is true for politicians and policy makers in many countries around the world. And it is even true – atypically for a social science concept – for some of the general public who belong to neither of the above camps. Figure 1.1 overleaf shows (in a very crude way) how academic interest in social capital has grown over the last 40 years or so.

Figure 1.1 Academic articles per year from 1970-2012 with ‘social capital’ in the title



Source: *Social Sciences Citation Index*

Similar (and much more sophisticated) analyses could be undertaken with policy documents, newspaper articles, even novels. The point, however, is a simple one: social capital is a hot topic in the social sciences and beyond.

Tradition usually requires, at the beginning of any discussion of social capital, that the author trace the history of the concept and the contributions of the three main theorists, Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam. While I do not abandon tradition entirely here, I do not dwell on these issues, simply because they are well known and many excellent reviews already exist.² Tradition might also dictate that the author try to supply a clear definition of the concept at the outset. However, conceptualisation remains a knotty issue in social capital research, so I save

² See, for example, Field (2003); Fine (2001); Foley and Edwards (1999); Glanville and Bieienstock (2009); Halpern (2005); Johnston and Percy-Smith (2003); Portes (1998); Schuller et al. (2000); Stolle and Hooghe (2003).

such a discussion for later. At this point, it suffices to say that social capital, at a basic level, refers to networks of people or groups and various aspects of those networks.

The first known use of the term social capital was in an article written in 1916 by L.J. Hanifan, a state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia. He defined it as follows:

In the use of the phrase social capital I make no reference to the usual acceptation of the term capital, except in a figurative sense. I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely, good will, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit. (Hanifan, 1916: 130)

Hanifan's use of the term, as Halpern (2005) observes, is notable for two reasons. First, it is not much different from current definitions, which illustrates broad continuity of thought for almost a century. Second, it was intended to facilitate discussions with businessmen by employing more 'economic' language, something that is paralleled today in discussions between social scientists and economic-minded policy makers. After Hanifan, for the next seventy years or so, the term cropped up only a handful of times, for example in Jane Jacobs's (1961) work on urban renewal in American cities. But in the late 1980s and early 1990s, through the work of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, the concept really came to academic prominence.

Bourdieu developed his ideas on social capital through his concern with social hierarchy and the creation and reproduction of inequality. In critiquing the prevailing economic orthodoxy, he argued that other forms of capital beyond economic should be considered – most significantly, cultural and social capital. He defined social capital as 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu, 1986: 248). In Bourdieu's account, social capital

functions to reproduce inequality and remains an asset of the privileged, enabling them to maintain their superiority (Field, 2003). Like other forms of capital, Bourdieu argues, individuals can deliberately invest in it.

Coleman's work on social capital extended from research on educational attainment and was located within an intellectual framework of rational choice theory. He initially conceptualised social capital as 'a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure' (Coleman, 1988: 98). As Field (2003) explains, social capital, in Coleman's account, is seen less as a private good and more as a public good, a by-product that can benefit people other than those whose efforts create it. In his more extended treatment of the concept, Coleman (1990: 306-13) identified a number of forms that social capital could take, including obligations and expectations, information potential, norms and effective sanctions, authority relations, appropriable social organisation and intentional organisation. In addition, he raised the possibility that 'constructed' forms of social organisation, established for specific purposes, could, in other ways, constitute available social capital.

Putnam is doubtless the best known proponent of social capital. His initial work on the topic came in his analysis of the performance of regional government administrations in Italy, *Making Democracy Work* (Putnam, 1993). He argued that the relative success of administrations in the northern regions was due to a higher level of social capital, exemplified by, among other things, a vibrant associational life. One of the key indicators he used to illustrate social capital in this study was the prevalence of membership in voluntary associations in each region. He later developed his conception of social capital in relation to the U.S., defining it, in *Bowling Alone*, as 'connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them' (Putnam, 2000: 19). Here, social capital is more a property of collectives than of individuals; and

the role of voluntary associations, sports clubs not least among them, is consistently highlighted.

This whistle-stop tour has so far featured only those who have used the term explicitly and those who have developed it most extensively. However, as Halpern (2005) and others have pointed out, one can find theoretical precursors to social capital in the writings of many of the founding fathers of contemporary social science, such as Emile Durkheim, Alexis de Tocqueville and Adam Smith. Furthermore, there are many concepts closely related to social capital, such as networks and trust, which have their own rich intellectual histories. A much longer tour would be needed to take in all of these contributions, something that will not be attempted here. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the existence of such antecedents and the close parallels between social capital and other concepts has generated criticism of the whole social capital ‘project’. Indeed, certain critics, such as Fine (2001), have argued forcefully that it represents nothing new. Field’s (2003: 138) adequate rejoinder to such criticism is that this, in itself, is ‘no reason for abandoning the concept, any more than we might dump the category of social class just because it existed before Marx came along’.

Issues in social capital research

This ‘old wine in new bottles’ charge, however, is just one of many issues that are raised in social capital research. In particular, there are three that demand attention. First, there is often a lack of careful conceptualisation. Portes (1998), among others, has identified that empirical researchers have too often failed to specify the concept precisely enough. Theoretical reviews (e.g. Foley and Edwards, 1999; Jackman and Miller, 1998) have demonstrated that this is often due to different traditions in social capital research and different understandings of the term. Whatever the reason, this lack of careful conceptualisation threatens the usefulness of empirical work and remains one of the most troubling issues in social capital research.

Second, there is a lack of understanding of how social capital is developed. To date, the majority of empirical research has concentrated on its effects, but recently a number of scholars (e.g. Herreros, 2004; Krishna, 2007; Small, 2009a; Stolle and Hooghe, 2003) have suggested that the most important question relates to the other side of the equation. Small (2009a: 9), referring specifically to social ties, argues: ‘a theory of network inequality cannot be content with demonstrating that social ties are useful: if some do better because they have more ties than others, then it certainly seems important to understand why they have more ties’. Significantly, he points out that knowledge in this case comes about not only from demonstrating associations, but also from explaining the mechanisms that give rise to them (more on this below).

Third, there is an issue around methodology. Research to date has been dominated by statistical analysis of quantitative data, but there is growing criticism of this type of work. Some of this criticism is directed at its technical aspects, such as the validity and reliability of statistical indicators (see, e.g., de Ulzurrun, 2002; Hooghe, 2003a; Paxton, 2002). However, some is more far-reaching. Authors such as Devine and Roberts (2003), Schuller et al. (2000) and Szczerter (2000) have suggested that statistical analysis of quantitative data is often inappropriate for investigating a multi-dimensional, context-dependent phenomenon like social capital. They argue that researchers need to explore the underlying mechanisms through which social capital develops through in-depth, process-based studies. However, what is often missing, even from this more far-reaching criticism, is an exploration of the philosophical frameworks that underpin empirical studies on social capital. This is part of a broader issue within the social sciences, namely the gap between empirical research and philosophical discussion.

This thesis seeks to address each of these issues. First, it takes the issue of conceptualisation seriously and seeks to explore the multi-dimensional nature of social capital. Second, it examines how social capital develops, focusing particularly on the mechanisms involved and the social settings within which they operate. As mentioned at the outset, it takes voluntary

associations – sports clubs in particular – as the broad context for investigating this question. Third, it aims to address some of the shortcomings of previous methodological approaches by adopting an appropriate research design that is built on a coherent philosophical framework. These contributions will be discussed in more detail below. In the following section, I shift the focus to sport. Specifically, I look at how the social capital concept has been picked up in sport and I discuss the implications of this for research and policy.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SPORT

Even a quick glance at the academic literature on sport shows that social capital is just as popular here as in other disciplines, perhaps even more so. Indeed, there are several reasons why a particular interest in the relationship between sport and social capital might have emerged, over and above the general fascination with the concept seen elsewhere. First, somewhat superficially, there is the title and image of *Bowling Alone*. As Field (2003: 4) points out, ‘the picture of bowling lanes peopled by people playing on their own – drawn from Putnam’s evidence on the decline of league bowling in the USA – neatly captured the idea of people’s steady disengagement from a common public life’. It can be argued that this vignette of the lone bowler has coupled sport and social capital in the academic and popular consciousness (Nicholson and Hoye, 2008a). Second, there is the strong emphasis in much of the social capital literature on membership of voluntary associations and volunteering. This has led to a particular focus on sport, simply because a vast number of voluntary associations are sports clubs and – related, of course – sport is one of the most common areas in which volunteering takes place.³

³ In England, for example, a comprehensive study of sports volunteering estimated that around 15 per cent of the adult population volunteer in sport and around 75 per cent of this volunteering takes place in sports clubs (Taylor et al., 2003). Moreover, the same study estimated that voluntary sports clubs in England boast around eight million members. Of course, these figures merely indicate voluntary activity and associational membership within sport and do not themselves constitute evidence of how social capital develops. Nevertheless, the sheer scale of this involvement helps to explain why social capital is increasingly being analysed in the context of sport.

Third, there is the long tradition of conceptualising sport as having a series of social benefits, such as tolerance, social cohesion, and adherence to moral frameworks (Smith and Waddington, 2004). Social capital, as a concept, is increasingly being incorporated into this tradition, often adopted as an umbrella term for many of the assumed social benefits of sport. This has led to a series of analyses of sport's relationship with social capital (e.g. Collins et al., 2007; Jarvie, 2003; Nicholson and Hoye, 2008b).

Finally, in the last 15 years or so, sport has risen up the political agenda. In particular, in the UK and several other countries, politicians and policy makers have focused on sport's supposed instrumental benefits in key areas of social policy, such as social exclusion, community cohesion and active citizenship (Coalter, 2007a; Collins, 2003). This has led to an increasing policy focus on sport and social capital, which, in turn, has reinforced the general academic interest in the subject. This has happened directly, through policy makers commissioning specific evidence reviews around the subject (e.g. Coalter et al., 2000; Collins et al., 1999) and indirectly, through policy-oriented academic writers publishing work on sport and social capital (e.g. Bloyce and Smith; 2009; Coalter, 2007a; b; Collins et al., 2007; Hoye and Nicholson, 2008).

So, sport academics and politicians and policy makers have embraced the social capital concept with a great deal of enthusiasm. Yet this has not always been accompanied by an equal degree of critical reflection. Indeed, Coalter (2007a: 49-50) argues that the use of the concept in policy statements is 'consistently vague, with no systematic attempt to articulate clearly its precise meaning and sport's role in its development'. Likewise, Hoye and Nicholson (2008: 81) conclude that there is 'a lack of conceptual clarity about the sources and benefits of social capital'. While this conceptual vagueness is more evident in policy statements, it is also present in some of the academic writing on sport and social capital. Indeed, many commentators have argued that the tradition described above of ascribing to sport a series of social benefits is based more on assertion than on rigorous sociological analysis. Summarising this view, Coalter (2007a: 9) refers to the

'mythopoeic' status of sport; he argues that positive conceptions of sport are akin to myths that 'contain elements of truth, but elements which become reified and distorted and 'represent' rather than reflect reality, standing for supposed, but largely unexamined, impacts and processes'. He and others maintain that researchers need to examine the underlying mechanisms through which sport might influence various social outcomes.

This thesis seeks to address some of the shortcomings of previous research on sport and social capital. As discussed earlier, it seeks to conceptualise social capital carefully. Furthermore, it aims to focus on the mechanisms through which social capital develops and the contexts within which they operate. Specifically, it seeks to do this through an analysis based on in-depth case study research at voluntary sports clubs in the UK. Below, I introduce the research in more detail. First, however, I turn to another significant issue, namely the philosophical framework that underpins the research.⁴

A CRITICAL REALIST FRAMEWORK

Huberman and Miles (1998: 181) argue that it is 'healthy medicine' for researchers to make their philosophical preferences clear, in order that readers of their work will know who they have 'on the other side of the table'. In this spirit, I declare myself a critical realist. That is, I locate myself within the broad realist philosophy of science and social science, whose basic tenet is that there is a world that exists independently of our knowledge of it. Further, I locate myself within the broad critical realist position that combines a realist ontology with an interpretive epistemology (Archer et al., 1998). Critical realism has recently begun to inform many areas of social science,

⁴ It may seem unconventional to engage in philosophical discussion in the first chapter of a thesis; such a discussion might usually be saved for a 'methods' chapter. However, Huberman and Miles (1998) and others argue that one's philosophical stance, whether it is articulated or not, will affect the whole research enterprise: the way one reads, understands and critiques previous research; the way one thinks about research design; the way one carries out research; the way one analyses empirical findings; and so on. As such, discussing ontological and epistemological beliefs up-front will (hopefully) enable greater coherence and allow the reader a better understanding of how the entire research process was conducted.

such as management studies (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000), economics (Lawson, 1997), sociology (Layder, 1998) and evaluative inquiry (Pawson and Tilley, 1997), and its advocates argue that it is the most coherent post-positivist philosophical framework.⁵

At root, making this commitment to critical realism is nothing more than taking a position, after considering various philosophical arguments, on what is real and what can be known in the social world. In that sense, I argue that critical realism is the most appropriate philosophical framework in which to ground empirical research simply because it corresponds to my worldview. However, I also argue that the appeals discussed in the chapter so far – i.e. for research on the mechanisms of social capital development and for a methodological approach that situates social capital within its real-life context – reflect critical realist concerns, even if those making such appeals do not always acknowledge them. I elaborate these arguments in detail in chapters two and three. First, however, it is necessary to delve a little deeper into the critical realist position.

Key tenets of critical realism

Critical realism has a long history and the philosophical debates that surround it are sufficiently complex that I cannot hope to cover them in detail here (see Manicas (2006) and Sayer (2000) for more comprehensive discussions). Instead, I will concentrate on certain key tenets and their implications for social science research. First, critical realism distinguishes between intransitive and transitive dimensions of knowledge. As Bhaskar

⁵ It is important, at the outset, to address the issue of labelling. As is entirely predictable in a complex area of philosophy, authors have used many different labels to describe slightly different positions. Indeed, Maxwell (2012: 4) points out that as well as ‘critical’, authors have used ‘experiential’, ‘constructive’, ‘subtle’, ‘emergent’, ‘natural’, ‘agential’ and ‘multiperspectival’ to describe their type of realism. Critical realism has usually been associated with the work of Bhaskar (1978; 1989), although, as Maxwell (2012: 4) notes, Bhaskar’s work, particularly his more recent development of critical realism as an emancipatory perspective, has often been criticised by others within the critical realist tradition. My position draws mainly on the work of Manicas (2006), Maxwell (2012), Miles and Huberman (1994), Pawson and Tilley (1997) and Sayer (1992; 2000); and, in the same way that Maxwell (2012: 5) does, I use the term ‘critical realism’ in a broad sense to include all these contributions.

(1975) describes it, the objects of science, that is, the things we study, such as physical processes or social phenomena, form the intransitive dimension, whereas our theories about them are part of the transitive dimension. The implication of this is that when theories change, this does not mean that the world changes. For example, there is no reason to believe that a change from a ‘flat earth’ theory to a ‘round earth’ theory resulted in a change in the shape of the world. As Sayer (2000: 11) puts it, the world should not be conflated with our experience of it.

Second, critical realism posits a stratified ontology. Specifically, following Bhaskar (1975), critical realists distinguish between *real*, *actual* and *empirical* domains. The *real* is whatever exists, regardless of whether it is an empirically observable object or whether we understand it; it is the domain of objects, their structures and their powers. The *actual* refers to what happens if and when those powers are activated. So, to take an example, labour power (the capacity to work) should be considered in the real domain, whereas labour (working) should be considered in the domain of the actual. The *empirical* is the domain of experience and can refer to either the real or the actual. For example, it may be possible to observe the structure of an organisation and/or what happens when it acts, thus giving access to the real and/or actual domains. However, it may also be possible that there are structures and mechanisms that are unobservable.

Third, critical realism provides a distinctive analysis of causation. It rejects the standard, covering law model, in which causality is understood as regularities of the type ‘if A, then B’. Instead it argues that causality is about the causal powers of objects, which may or may not be ‘activated’, depending on other conditions. As Sayer (2000: 14) puts it:

Causation is not understood on the model of regular successions of events, and hence explanation need not depend on finding them, or searching for putative social laws. The conventional impulse to prove causation by gathering data on regularities, repeated occurrences, is therefore misguided; at best these might suggest where to look for candidates for causal mechanisms. What causes something to happen has

nothing to do with the number of times we have observed it happening. Explanation depends instead on identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions.

This focus on mechanisms is a key element of critical realism. As Maxwell (2012: 9) notes, ‘For critical realists...the concept of “mechanism” (in the social sciences, “process” is the usual term) is central to explanation, and these mechanisms and processes are seen as real phenomena, rather than simply as abstract models’.⁶

Fourth, critical realism distinguishes between internal and external relations. For example, as Sayer (2000: 13) illustrates, what it is to be a tutor cannot be explained at the level of the individual; explanation and understanding of a tutor’s powers depend on her or his internal relations to students, the educational system and so on. On this view, positivism misrepresents society when it treats social phenomena as reducible to independent individuals. As well as internal relations, people can also be affected by external (or contingent) relations, i.e. their context. Given people’s sensitivity to their contexts – and their interpretation of them – social phenomena tend to be far less durable than natural phenomena. The implication of this is that social science descriptions are unlikely to remain stable across time and space. Hence Sayer (2000: 13) points out that ‘a preoccupation with conceptualization [in critical realist social science] is entirely to be expected and certainly not a sign of scientific immaturity’.

Fifth, critical realism makes a further distinction between ‘closed’ and ‘open’ systems and argues that consistent regularities are only likely to occur in the former. According to Bhaskar (1975), a closed system is one in which two

⁶ It should be noted that there has been a general ‘mechanistic turn’ in the social sciences of late, which has encompassed other approaches beyond critical realism. As Gerring (2008: 164) points out, while philosophical support has come from realism, ‘the turn towards mechanisms embraces a wide variety of methodological and epistemological positions – quantitative and qualitative, experimental and non-experimental, formal and informal, nomothetic and idiographic’. As he goes on to note, ‘mechanism’ carries at least nine possible meanings within contemporary social science. However, he suggests that there is broad consensus around a core meaning of mechanism, namely ‘the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished’ (178). This is the basic meaning I adopt in this thesis.

conditions hold: the intrinsic condition, whereby the object possessing the causal power is stable; and the extrinsic condition, whereby the external conditions in which it is situated are constant. Even in the natural world, these conditions rarely occur, although natural scientists are often able to produce them artificially in experiments. In the social world, as Sayer (1992) explains, human actions modify social systems, thereby violating the extrinsic condition, and people have the capacity for learning and self-change, thereby violating the intrinsic condition. Critical realists thus argue that the social world is an open system and, as such, the absence of regular associations between ‘causes’ and ‘effects’ should be expected (Sayer, 2000: 14-15).

Sixth, critical realism considers that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful and, since meaning has to be understood, this implies that there will always be an interpretive aspect to social science. This suggests an alignment between critical realism and interpretivism (broadly defined). Indeed, critical realists accept the interpretivist argument that social science, unlike natural science, operates in a double hermeneutic (Giddens, 1976). However, unlike many interpretivists, this does not mean that critical realists reject the possibility of causal explanation. As Carter and New (2004: 3) argue, ‘once we understand the material setting and the cultural meaning of a social practice, we can hope to understand people’s options in relation to it and thus their reasons for acting in the ways they do.’

Implications of critical realism for social science

So, if those are the key tenets of critical realism, what do they mean for the practice of social science? On a critical realist view, the aim of all science is to provide an understanding of fundamental processes; explanation can then be built on this understanding (Manicas, 2006: 16). For example, science enables us to explain why water turns to steam, but our explanation is built on understanding the nature of water molecules and the way in which heat affects intermolecular activity. The same premise applies to social science. Carter and New (2004: 6) set it out as follows: ‘The realist view that we are

advocating is committed to an explanatory model in which the interplay between pre-existent structures, possessing causal powers and properties, and people, possessing distinctive causal powers and properties of their own, results in contingent yet explicable outcomes.' This contrasts with the statistical mode of 'explanation', which charts statistical relationships between variables, and, in realist terms, is not explanation at all (Carter and New, 2004; Nash, 1999). As Byrne (1998) says, at most statistical relationships can constitute 'traces of reality' – the beginning of explanation, not the conclusion.

But beyond the general aims of understanding and explanation, what do the key tenets of critical realism mean for empirical researchers who wish to carry out critical realist research? That is to say, what does critical realist methodology look like? Unfortunately (but unsurprisingly), there is no straightforward answer to this question. There are several explanations for this. First, as Yeung (1997: 56) points out, the likes of Bhaskar and others, who developed realism in the 1970s and 1980s, were not much concerned with methodology, as they were engaged primarily in a debate within the philosophy of science in opposition to the positivist position. Second, as Sarré (1987) argues, when empirical researchers have sought to 'adopt' critical realism, they have often found the philosophy itself too complex to serve as a practical guide to research.⁷ Third, as Sarré also points out, many social scientists already abide by some of realism's more accessible prescriptions, and thus find it hard to see that it provides a distinctive guide. Having said all this, several researchers (e.g. Maxwell, 2012; Pawson and Tilley, 1997; Sayer, 1992; 2000; Yeung, 1997) have sought to identify how critical realist empirical research might be undertaken. And while no-one presumes, nor desires, that this will lead to a single critical realist methodology, these discussions do offer greater guidance for researchers

⁷ The implications of this are serious. As Allen (1983: 26) observes, the relative accessibility of the positivist method is one of the reasons that 'positivism in its empiricist guise is alive and well, and winning more than its fair share of methodological battles'. This is despite its failure to resolve some of the fundamental philosophical problems in Humean empiricism and logical positivism, such as successive events as cause and the atomisation of human rationality (Yeung, 1997: 55).

(like me) who wish to incorporate critical realist insights into their empirical research.

CRITICAL REALIST METHODOLOGY

Critical realists are centrally concerned with careful conceptualisation, abstraction and specification of underlying social mechanisms. Accordingly, Yeung (1997) suggests that explanatory studies in the critical realist tradition ought to start with conceptualisation through an immanent critique of existing work. As he says, ‘this approach does not appear to differ much from the literature review method in any empirical studies conducted under the auspices of empiricism and positivism. It differs from them, however, in the elements of the critique and the ways in which such a critique is used for further reconceptualisation.’ (Yeung, 1997: 65) Specifically, such a critique should seek to examine carefully the way in which the object or phenomenon under investigation has been conceptualised in theoretical and empirical research. Where examination suggests that flawed conceptualisations have been employed, effort should be taken to reconceptualise the phenomenon as carefully as possible. The critique should also examine methodological problems in empirical studies and link these, where appropriate, to the explicit or implicit philosophical frameworks that underpin them. In addition, the critique should seek to identify relevant social mechanisms where they have been theorised or empirically tested.

Other guidance on how to incorporate critical realist ideas into empirical research has come from the evaluation literature. Authors such as Henry et al. (1998), Mark et al. (2000) and Pawson and Tilley (1997) have all proposed frameworks for undertaking empirical evaluation research that accords with critical realist principles. Indeed, in the same way that realism emerged from a philosophical critique of positivism, so ‘realist evaluation’ has emerged from a critique of positivist, quasi-experimental models of evaluation. Realist evaluation, as outlined by Pawson and Tilley (1997), seeks to answer the question, ‘what works for whom in what circumstances and why?’ As a methodology, it focuses on the mechanisms through which

policies or programmes work and examines the various outcomes these mechanisms produce when they operate in different contexts.

This thesis draws on these various guidelines around conducting critical realist research in order to investigate how social capital develops in voluntary sports clubs. It adopts Yeung's (1997) prescriptions on conducting a theoretical and empirical critique and Pawson and Tilley's (1997) broad framework of realist evaluation. Such an approach is apposite for a number of reasons. First, and most simply, it is grounded in critical realist philosophy and thus accords with my basic ontological and epistemological position. Second, it facilitates research on sport and social capital that focuses on mechanisms and contexts. Third, it responds to the need for a methodological approach that enables the investigation of a phenomenon (here, social capital) within its real-life setting, digging beneath empirical patterns to investigate the real structures and mechanisms that create observable events. I elaborate these arguments further in the next two chapters. In the next section, I outline the structure of the thesis.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The early part of this thesis prepares the ground for the empirical analysis. In chapter two, I offer a theoretical and empirical critique of the social capital literature, with a particular focus on sport. Following Yeung's (1997) prescriptions for critical realist research, this critique includes a careful (re-)conceptualisation of social capital and a critical analysis of the various methodological approaches that have been adopted in previous research. It also identifies and discusses certain key mechanisms of social capital development that have been posited in the literature. The chapter concludes by re-emphasising the need for in-depth, mechanism-based research on how social capital develops within voluntary sports clubs. In chapter three, I explain how I conducted this research. I discuss the basic methodological approach I took, namely critical realist case study research, and I explain why this was appropriate for the topic under investigation. I then discuss key elements of my research, including: the way I selected the case study clubs;

the data collection methods I used; and the data analysis strategies I employed. In addition, I discuss other key issues, such as research ethics and research quality.

The next five chapters – the analysis of my empirical findings – represent the main contribution of the thesis. These are set out according to the basic methodological framework of realist evaluation described above. That is to say, they are arranged around contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. In chapter four, I discuss the outcomes people experienced through their involvement at voluntary sports clubs. Although outcomes are not the primary focus of this thesis, the chapter provides an important starting point for addressing the main research question, i.e. how social capital developed at the clubs. In chapter five, I explore the social ties people formed at the clubs. The analysis shows that people formed ties through a basic mechanism of social interaction that was largely structured by the clubs. Further, the analysis shows that people formed different types of ties: strong and weak ties, as standard network models might predict, but also ‘compartmentally intimate’ ties. The chapter also examines the fundamental processes underpinning tie formation, namely propinquity and homophily; and explores the purposive and non-purposive elements of tie formation.

In chapter six, I move from examining tie formation to an analysis of the broader mechanisms of social capital development. Drawing particularly on Portes (1998), I show how principal social capital mechanisms operated at the case study clubs. The analysis illustrates several interesting issues, namely: that there are different possible ‘readings’ of the mechanisms; that various mechanisms are bound up with one another and with processes of tie formation; and that different ‘types’ or ‘levels’ of social capital might emerge from interaction within organisations. In chapter seven, I move on to analyse contexts. Following the critical realist emphasis on mechanisms operating in particular contexts to produce outcomes, I show how various elements of personal and socio-organisational context shaped the principal mechanisms of social capital development. These elements include: life-stage and personal circumstances; level of sporting ability; level of club

involvement; pre-existing values around club membership; length and frequency of member interaction; and club culture. Finally, the chapter explores the actions of the clubs and suggests that clubs acted both purposely and non-purposely to facilitate tie formation and social capital development.

In chapter eight, I seek to explore the interaction between contexts and mechanisms in more detail, by explicitly comparing how people interacted in the clubs with how they interacted in other settings, such as work, other organisations, among family, friends and so on. Analysis of my empirical findings identifies several ‘tangible’ and ‘intangible’ elements of socio-organisational context that shaped interaction, including size and structure; the nature of the focal activity; the voluntary nature of participation; co-operativeness (or competitiveness); hierarchy; and membership diversity. In line with critical realism, the analysis demonstrates that mechanisms operated differently for different people in different circumstances (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Finally, in chapter nine, I draw conclusions from the foregoing analysis. I sum up the main findings and the main contributions of the thesis; and I examine the implications of these findings for research on social capital and for wider organisational research. I also discuss the limitations of the research. Finally, I broaden the discussion by exploring several possible avenues of future research.

Overall, the main finding of the thesis is that social capital development is organisationally embedded. Small (2009a: 177) identified this ‘organisational embeddedness perspective’ in previous research on social capital and explains that it ‘suggests, above all, that what researchers have called a person’s social capital depends substantially on the institutional practices of the organizations in which the person routinely participates’. I elaborate this perspective throughout the empirical analysis and show, in close detail, how various elements of context shaped the mechanisms of social capital development. This is a study of voluntary sports clubs – the empirical analysis is based primarily on my interviews and observations at the clubs –

but, in a broader sense, it reveals many aspects of social capital development in organisational settings.

CHAPTER 2: CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

This chapter provides a theoretical and empirical critique of social capital research. First, I look at theoretical work. As discussed in chapter one, social capital has been conceptualised in different ways, but often, its critics allege, it has been poorly or under-conceptualised. I examine a series of conceptual debates and, in line with critical realist prescriptions, offer a careful (re-)conceptualisation of social capital. Second, I look at empirical work. I show how conceptual difficulties, along with a number of methodological issues, have hampered some of the empirical research into how social capital develops. I ground this critique in critical realism and emphasise the importance of empirical work which seeks to explore the mechanisms of social capital development. I then identify certain key mechanisms that have been posited in the social capital literature.

The chapter then narrows its focus to sport and replicates the pattern above. Thus, third, I look at theoretical work on sport and social capital. I note that researchers in sport have drawn on both Putnam's and Bourdieu's conceptualisations and that they display consistent interest in the role of voluntary sports clubs in the development of social capital. Fourth, I examine empirical work on sport and social capital. I note that quantitative research suffers from issues of data quality and insensitivity to process and context. Finally, I show that in-depth, qualitative research has started to explore the mechanisms through which social capital develops in voluntary sports clubs and I examine some of this research as a backdrop to the current study.

THEORETICAL CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

In social capital research, there is now a widely accepted distinction between 'network' and 'attitudinal' approaches. The former, influenced largely by Coleman (1990) and Lin (2001), tends to focus on actors within networks and elements of social structure that facilitate various actions. The latter, associated mainly with Putnam (1993; 2000), tends to concentrate on values

and attitudes, such as trust and reciprocity. This division also runs along broad disciplinary lines: sociologists and applied social scientists have tended to follow the network approach; political scientists and economists the attitudinal. Of course, not all research fits neatly into one approach. Nor are the approaches necessarily incompatible. However, the distinction is one that has been drawn in several theoretical reviews of social capital research (e.g. Foley and Edwards, 1999; Jackman and Miller, 1998; Stolle and Hooghe, 2003) and it is useful in illustrating key differences in the way that social capital has been understood.

First, there is a difference in operationalisation. Studies in the attitudinal approach frequently employ indicators of social capital, such as generalised social trust, which are quantified through large-scale survey research and then analysed in relation to macro-level data (e.g. on health or economic performance). By contrast, studies in the network approach tend to operationalise social capital as access to resources in networks and examine it on a smaller scale, in relation to groups or individuals. Second, and more fundamental, is the difference in conceptualisation. By aggregating individual survey responses in order to measure the social capital of a region or nation, attitudinal studies tend to treat social capital as ‘an individual attribute that constitutes a fully portable resource, the value of which does not fluctuate as the individual moves in and out of numerous social contexts’ (Foley and Edwards, 1999: 149). This clearly contradicts Coleman’s (1990) conception, in which social capital is seen as embedded in relations, not borne by individuals wherever they might go. These differences in conceptualisation have important implications, so it is important to explore them in more detail. To do so, we need to return to the basic formulations of social capital.

The network (or sociological) conception of social capital sees it as various aspects of social structure that facilitate action. Coleman (1990: 306-13) described various forms of social capital: obligations and expectations; information potential; norms and effective sanctions; authority relations; appropriable social organisation; and intentional organisation. Significantly, and in contrast to other forms of capital, he argued that social capital does

not inhere in individuals or physical implements of production, but in the structure of relations between and among persons. In particular contexts and for particular people or groups, various elements of social structure facilitate certain actions. As and when they do, they can be conceived of as social capital. His classic example of the wholesale diamond market in New York City (see Coleman, 1988: 98-99) illustrated the point. Dense networks of relationships and the trustworthiness of the social structure enabled one merchant to hand a bag of stones to another for inspection without requiring contracts or insurance. This can be seen as social capital, but it must be understood in its context.

The attitudinal (or political science) conception of social capital, which originated with Putnam (1993), but which has since been appropriated by many others, appears to take a different view. Putnam actually quoted Coleman as a key source in his development of the concept, but he used social capital to explain outcomes at a much higher level. His study of regional governments in Italy suggested that the difference in their performance extended from differences in the underlying stocks of social capital in the various regions. Putnam's theory, drawing on Tocquevillian tradition, was that attitudes, such as trust and reciprocity, which are developed through involvement in social networks, had an effect on society through individual behaviour, but at an aggregate level. As such, social capital in the attitudinal approach tends to be conceived of as something that inheres in individuals (i.e. particular norms and attitudes). This no doubt relates to the traditional research approach in political science, which relies almost exclusively on aggregating individual responses to survey questions. Still, the problem is that this conceptualisation often fails to take account of the contexts and social structures in which norms and attitudes are embedded and in which they might facilitate action and therefore constitute social capital.

Foley and Edwards (1999: 151) illustrate this difference in conceptualisation by using Coleman's example of a Jewish woman, who moved from the U.S. to Jerusalem primarily because she considered that in the latter people

tended to look out for unattended children more. In the example, Coleman (1988: 99) argued that the presence of norms ensuring unattended children were looked after by adults in the vicinity constituted social capital for the woman, as it enabled her to let her children travel alone on the bus. In this sort of example, attitudinal researchers might seek to measure the distribution of such norms in a given area and use this as a measure of social capital. Yet, as Foley and Edwards (1999) explicate, even if such norms were widely distributed in that area, they would not themselves constitute social capital. Only if they were embedded in certain social structures in particular contexts for particular people could they be conceived of as social capital. Parents would need to know such norms were active for *their* children in *their* neighbourhood. It is true that the wider the distribution of such norms, the more *likely* they may constitute social capital, but context is fundamental. In fact, simply knowing that one individual possessed of such a norm is in a particular place may enable another to allow their child to go out unattended and thus constitute social capital for that person.⁸

(Re-)conceptualisation of social capital

So, there are strong arguments to suggest that the network conception of social capital, i.e. access to resources in networks, is more theoretically coherent. Yet there are still several issues that demand attention. First, as Foley and Edwards (1999: 164) make clear, networks are ‘a necessary, but not sufficient, component of social capital’. Knowing that networks are present and/or knowing the size, shape and intensity of networks and/or knowing people’s positions within them does not tell us what resources are available, nor whether people can access them, and so does not tell us whether social capital is present. Furthermore, networks can mean different

⁸ The same premise that applies to such norms applies to generalised social trust. This is often considered a ‘rough-and-ready’ indicator of social capital by those in the attitudinal approach (Halpern, 2005: 34). However, research has shown that social trust is highly mediated by local context and should not be regarded as a basic and unified personality trait (Jackman and Miller, 1996; Newton, 1999; 2001; Tarrow, 1996). Below, I look at trust in more detail. Here, the point is that an aggregate measure of individual survey responses around trust does not in itself constitute social capital. We need to know who has access to such trust under what conditions.

things at different levels of analysis. For example, personal networks are embedded in larger networks that may be characterised by patterns of inequality, which can affect the distribution of resources and people's access to them.

Second, following on from the above, the issue of access is key. Portes and Landolt (2000: 532) define social capital as 'the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures'. But, as they say, 'there is a common tendency to confuse the *ability* to secure resources through networks with the resources themselves. This can easily lead to tautological statements, where a positive outcome necessarily indicates the presence of social capital, and a negative one its absence.' (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 532, emphasis in original) In an earlier article, Portes (1998: 5) illustrated this with the following example:

Saying, for example, that student A has social capital because he obtained access to a large tuition loan from his kin and that student B does not because she failed to do so neglects the possibility that B's kin network is equally or more motivated to come to her aid but simply lacks the means to do. Defining social capital as equivalent with the resources thus obtained is tantamount to saying that the successful succeed.

Portes, it appears, is arguing that social capital – 'the ability to secure resources' – can be understood as the willingness of other people in someone's network to provide that person with resources, even if they do not currently have that resource to provide. Others do not share this view. For example, Finsveen and van Oorschot (2008: 296) argue that 'the fact that B's network does not contain the necessary resource means that B lacks social capital for achieving the goal of getting a loan'. This is not to say (and the authors do make this point) that social capital is only about actual access. It is about potential access too: 'If student A in Portes's example had not used the possibility of getting a loan from his or her network, and had provided for it in some other way, the social capital would still be there' (2008: 296). But from Portes's perspective, potential access would also encompass one or

more people in someone's network *willing* to provide some particular resource, but who do not currently have that particular resource.

The issue at stake is whether, as Portes wants to do, you can conceive a generalised notion of social capital as an 'ability to secure resources' as distinct from a specific resource (such as a tuition loan). It seems to me that you can; but you need to be clear about what you mean by 'resources'. That is to say, certain social resources, such as an obligation of reciprocity, *constitute* an ability to secure (other) resources, such as a tuition loan. Indeed, some theorists have made just such an argument. For example, Herreros (2004) considers that the core of social capital is the obligations of reciprocity and the information potential derived from membership of social networks. These social resources can be seen as constituting 'the ability to secure resources', i.e. social capital, as defined by many in the network tradition. Such a formulation, importantly, enables us to maintain an analytical separation between social capital and its outcomes.

The third issue that needs to be considered is the relation of trust to social capital. This is a 'hot potato' in social capital research, as scholars have debated whether trust should be understood as a part, an antecedent, or an outcome of social capital. Any attempt to summarise the debate here will inevitably miss much of the nuance. Nevertheless, it is an important consideration in seeking to carefully conceptualise social capital, so I will offer a sketch of the basic positions. In one approach, trust is located within a rational choice framework. So, Coleman proposed that someone would make the decision to trust when the ratio of the probability of being right about someone else's trustworthiness over being wrong was greater than the ratio of the potential losses from being wrong over the potential gains of being right. However, as he himself and others (e.g. Hardin, 2002; Herreros, 2004) emphasise, this is the *decision* to trust, rather than trust itself. Trust, in this approach, is actually reflected in the expectation about the other person's trustworthiness. It is, as Herreros (2004: 8) puts it, 'a more or less well-grounded expectation about the preferences of other people'.

In another approach, trust is conceptualised as ‘an orientation toward society and toward others that has social meaning beyond rational calculations’ (Tyler and Kramer, 1996: 5). Such a conceptualisation is rooted in a moral development framework informed by psychology (Rushton, 1980). It suggests that people’s attitudes concerning their obligations to others, regardless of how these attitudes first came about, become distinct from short-term calculations of self-interest. That is to say, trusting attitudes ‘develop a functional autonomy over time’ (Tyler and Kramer, 1996: 5). This kind of non-instrumental understanding of trust incorporates a focus on its motivational and affective dimensions, whereas the instrumental, expectation-based understanding of trust focuses on its cognitive dimension. There are two key points that arise from this brief discussion. First, there is no clear consensus over whether trust is a part, an antecedent, or an outcome of social capital – most analysts argue that they operate in a tight, reciprocal relationship (Field, 2003). Second, these different conceptualisations of trust are underpinned by different mechanism-based explanations. I return to this in subsequent chapters.

The fourth issue is the role of perception. Research has shown that people’s perceptions of their own and others’ network positions within groups and organisations diverge from ‘objective’ network measures (Casciaro, 1998; Kadushin, 2012; Kilduff et al., 2008; Krackhardt and Kilduff, 1999). Likewise, research has indicated that people’s perceptions of diversity can diverge quite significantly from given demographic characteristics (Nichols et al., 2013; Vermeulen and Verweel, 2009). Furthermore, such studies have shown that people’s actions (including whether or not they are willing to provide, or seek access to, resources) are linked to these perceptions. The implication of this is as follows: if social capital is broadly understood as access to resources in networks, then it must be acknowledged that ‘access’, ‘resources’ and ‘networks’ are at least partially determined by people’s perceptions of them. This returns us to one of the key tenets of critical realism discussed in chapter one, i.e. that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful and therefore there will always be an interpretive element to social science.

The fifth issue is that theoretical treatment of social capital has often accentuated its positive aspects and ignored its negative consequences. This has been rightly criticised and there is now a general recognition that social capital can have a ‘dark side’. This has led some social capital scholars to suggest that more differentiated versions of the concept need to be employed in theoretical and empirical work. The clearest example of this is the now quite common distinction between ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital, terms coined by Gittell and Vidal (1998), but popularised by Putnam (2000). The latter describes bonding social capital as a kind of ‘sociological superglue’, reinforcing exclusive identities and homogenous groups, and bridging social capital as ‘sociological WD-40’, encompassing people across diverse social cleavages.

While such insights are useful, they need to be handled carefully. In keeping with the conception of social capital described above, i.e. the ability of people to secure resources, these distinctions might be thought of not as different forms of social capital *per se*, but as different intermediate outcomes. As Portes (1998: 15) says, ‘the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals and groups as social capital can have other, less desirable consequences’. He identifies from previous research four such negative consequences, namely: exclusion of outsiders; excess claims on group members; restrictions on individual freedoms; and downward-levelling norms. Again, the crucial issue here is context. As Foley and Edwards (1999: 148) point out, all such distinctions should be seen as ‘extensions of the insight that the value of social capital at any given level depends on the larger context, including the insertion of the individual or group in question into networks of relations at higher levels’.

So, after this extended theoretical discussion, can we now offer a clearer definition of social capital that can usefully inform empirical research? I have argued for the greater theoretical coherence of the network conception, so I naturally lean towards that. In addition, I agree that, where possible, one should seek to separate social capital from its sources and consequences.

As such, following Portes and Landolt (2000: 532), I understand social capital as ‘the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures’. Furthermore, I readily agree that social capital can have both positive and negative consequences. In the next section, I move on from this predominantly theoretical discussion to examine previous empirical work on social capital.

EMPIRICAL CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

To date, empirical research on social capital has largely concentrated on its effects. Whether it is educational performance, job procurement or the health of a nation, the spotlight has tended to shine on the outcomes social capital is presumed to produce. However, as discussed in chapter one, the most important question may well lie elsewhere – specifically, in seeking to understand how social capital develops. So far, this question has been addressed in different ways, often in accordance with the different approaches discussed above. In what follows, I examine this work and provide an empirical critique. As this thesis seeks to explore how social capital develops within voluntary sports clubs, I pay particular attention to empirical research on voluntary associations.

In the attitudinal approach, researchers, following Putnam, have often addressed the question of how social capital develops by empirically examining the relationship between associational membership and social capital. This has produced mixed results. While studies have often found that associational membership has a statistically significant effect on various presumed indicators of social capital, this effect is usually weak, particularly in comparison to other variables, such as education, age, gender and religion (Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Hooghe, 2003a; Mayer, 2003; Newton, 1999; 2001; Stolle and Rochon, 1998). Many authors have argued that this raises serious doubts about the role of voluntary associations in developing social capital. However, there are several methodological issues with this kind of work, which need to be examined.

Methodological issues in attitudinal research

First, several authors have identified serious flaws in the way that associational membership has been measured in large-scale survey research. For example, de Ulzurrun (2002) has questioned the reliability and validity of many the measures used, arguing that question wordings seem to have a substantial impact on responses; that multiple memberships and ‘political’ memberships are regularly underestimated; and that error measurements are much more common than expected. She concludes her critique by noting that ‘scholars should be very cautious with making strong theoretical claims with weak data, especially when doing comparative analyses’ (de Ulzurrun, 2002: 516). In addition, Hooghe (2003a) has criticised the conventional measure of associational membership used in most surveys, which comprises a very few questions on the number of associations a respondent is currently involved in. He argues that this is an insufficient measure, as it provides no information on the intensity of involvement or the goals of the organisation, and is subject to strong temporal influence.

Hooghe (2003a) clarifies this by comparing the conventional measure of associational membership with the conventional measure of education. Whereas the former only takes account of a respondent’s current membership(s), the latter takes account of a respondent’s entire educational history. As such, a respondent who may have been a very active member of a sports club for the whole of her adult life, but who may have withdrawn just around the time of the survey, would simply be registered as a ‘non-member’. Hooghe argues that, as with education, a valid measure of associational membership should include a respondent’s entire associational history. He illustrates his critique through an analysis of Flemish survey data. When associational membership was measured in the conventional way, its effect on (attitudinal) social capital was weak. However, when it was measured in a fuller way, i.e. with questions on type of involvement (e.g. active, passive, board member) and previous memberships, its effect was significantly higher. Indeed, on four of the five scales measuring civic

attitudes, the fuller measure of associational membership had the largest effect, greater than age, gender, education and religion. As Hooghe (2003a: 58) points out, this is ‘the first time that the assertions about a very powerful effect of voluntary associations are actually supported by survey data’.

Second, several authors have noted how social capital studies in the attitudinal approach often rely on single-item measures. For example, studies like Knack and Keefer’s (1997) often use single questions on trust as indices of social capital and then link them through sophisticated regression analyses to broad measures of national economic performance. As Woolcock and Narayan (2000) point out, such measures cannot hope to capture the multi-dimensionality of social capital, which incorporates different levels and units of analysis. Reviewing such work, Schuller et al. (2000: 26-7) argue that ‘social capital is a prime example where social scientists deploy techniques that the quantity or quality of the data available cannot sustain’. Although there are now many examples of improved statistical analysis, such as Letki (2008), Narayan and Cassidy (2001), Paxton (1999), Sabatini (2008) and Smith (1999), there are also plenty of studies that still rely on single-item measures.

Third, attitudinal research on social capital often suffers from problems of aggregation. That is to say, researchers often bundle up indicators without careful consideration. As discussed above, it is not necessarily problematic to conceptualise social capital as having effects at multiple levels. However, doing so raises a series of questions that are often completely ignored in empirical studies. For example, van Deth (2003: 87) asks:

do aggregate survey data about individual trust really measure the amount of trust available as a collective good for all citizens? And what is measured if we simply count the number of voluntary association memberships of each respondent and compute the average membership in voluntary associations in a society?

It is necessary to be specific about the level at which social capital is being investigated in order to design measures appropriate to that level. As Letki

(2008: 120) says, ‘analysis and operationalisations focusing on only one dimension or only one level of analysis are unlikely to yield satisfactory and informative results. Nor would they do justice to the complexity and multidimensionality of the theoretical construct of social capital.’

In sum, then, we can argue that one reason researchers have failed to uncover a robust statistical relationship between associational membership and (attitudinal) social capital is that there are validity issues with some of the data and some of the data analysis techniques being used. Another, arguably more fundamental, reason is that different associations and different types of engagement within associations may simply have different effects. Indeed, there is evidence within the attitudinal approach to support such a view. Stolle and Rochon’s (1998) cross-sectional analysis of survey data from the U.S., Germany and Sweden found differences between type of group and levels of generalised trust, community reciprocity and tolerance. Furthermore, Eastis’s (1998) ethnographic study of two choral groups in the same city found different social capital effects emerging from each group. As Foley and Edwards (1999: 162) note, ‘this makes clear the analytical risks inherent in treating even two ostensibly similar groups as equals with respect to social capital’.

The case for alternative approaches

In the context of this debate, Hooghe and Stolle (2003) argue that the major shortcoming of the social capital literature is that the precise mechanisms through which social capital is presumed to develop are often unspecified and rarely subjected to empirical investigation. Although they do not ground their critique in critical realism (more on this below), Hooghe and Stolle’s (2003) discussion of mechanisms is particularly relevant to a critical realist critique of social capital research. They argue that, in attitudinal research, mechanism-based explanations of social capital development tend to fall into one of two categories: ‘society-centred’ accounts or ‘institution-centred’ accounts. The former consider that social capital development is mostly located in various forms of social interaction, such as membership in

voluntary associations. The latter consider it to be ‘embedded in, and shaped by, governments, public policies and political institutions’ (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 3).

Society-centred accounts draw out and elaborate Putnam’s basic theory. As such, the basic mechanism proposed is one of individual-level socialisation: members of voluntary associations are socialised into democratic, civic-minded patterns of attitudes and behaviour and this socialisation effect ‘spills over’ into society, leading to more generalised positive civic attitudes (Stolle, 1998). Some empirical studies have found support for such a mechanism. For example, Hooghe (2003b) examined the effects of group interaction through a representative face-to-face survey conducted in Belgium and suggested that socialisation may occur in voluntary associations through incremental and reinforcing processes of value polarisation. And in the Flemish study described above, the same author highlighted the significant impact of previous associational membership on attitudinal social capital (Hooghe, 2003a). Although cross-sectional in nature, Hooghe suggests that the strength of this impact might very well indicate a socialisation effect similar to that of education.

In contrast, institution-centred accounts posit macro-level mechanisms, in which governments or other political arrangements institutionalise trust and other civic attitudes. For example, Rothstein (2003), drawing on Swedish survey data, suggests that in a society where it is ‘common knowledge’ that government institutions responsible for the implementation of laws and policies are uncorrupted and impartial, people respond by trusting ‘most other people’. Although most institution-centred accounts suggest that voluntary associations do not play a significant role in the development of social capital, some suggest they do, but at a macro, rather than a micro, level. For example, Wollebæk and Strømsnes (2008) argue that associations might institutionalise social capital through their visibility in society, in particular by demonstrating the rationality and utility of collective action; representing a democratic infrastructure; and creating cross-pressure and moderating overt conflict.

Some empirical studies in the attitudinal approach suggest that social capital develops through both micro- and macro-level mechanisms. For example, Krishna (2007) conducted a longitudinal study in India, using panel data constructed from repeat interviews with more than 1,700 participants. He found that the growth of social capital was assisted by the presence of four factors: (i) communities forming self-initiated local organisations; (ii) communities developing rules to manage collective enterprises among themselves; (iii) having available leaders who can help initiate organisation building and rule development; and (iv) low inequality. In a similar vein, de Hart and Dekker (2003) carried out a comparative study in the Netherlands, which found two distinct dimensions of social capital – networks and trust in others – each with its own background, correlates and local patterns. This kind of research, the authors acknowledge, is much more closely aligned to original, sociological conceptions of social capital and indicates the embeddedness of social capital in social contexts.

This brings us back to the issue of how social capital is conceptualised. So far, in this empirical critique, I have concentrated mainly on attitudinal research, since this has explicitly addressed the question of how social capital develops and has also started to examine the mechanisms involved. However, as discussed earlier in the chapter, much of the research in this vein tends to operationalise social capital as generalised civic attitudes, a sort of portable resource that individuals carry with them in and out of different social contexts. As Foley and Edwards (1999: 155) point out, such a conceptualisation ‘may miss the real meaning and scope of social organization for individual and group efforts. Social organization, both formal and informal, provides multiple resources to individuals and communities.’

Network research is more aligned to this latter view and therefore tends to address the question of how social capital develops in a different way to attitudinal research. For example, some network researchers argue that voluntary associations simply are a form of social capital, insofar as people are able to use them as such. Coleman (1990) illustrates this with reference to a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). He argues that the whole school

might benefit from high disciplinary standards promoted by the PTA, constituting social capital for parents, teacher and pupils. This does not rely on the widespread development of trust or other civic attitudes among members of the PTA; it is simply a public-good by-product of the organisation. Greeley (1997), building on Coleman's approach, empirically investigated the role of religious associations in volunteering and found that religious structures, both organisational and inter-personal, were responsible for a significant proportion of volunteering. He concluded from this brief analysis that, in this specific context, religious associations could be seen to generate social capital.

However, there is a danger that this kind of research might blur key analytical distinctions. As discussed earlier in the chapter, it is important to try to separate the sources of social capital, social capital itself and its various outcomes (both positive and negative). By considering PTAs or religious associations as social capital because they facilitate various outcomes, such work tends to define social capital as the resources obtained through it. Of course, research needs to pay attention to the way in which specific contexts shape the use value of social capital and broker access to it. However, where the particular concern is with the sources of social capital, research needs to pay attention to the mechanisms through which it is created in certain contexts for particular individuals and groups. For example, in the study just mentioned, Greeley (1997: 590-591) says: 'Probably attending church with others and belonging to organizations with them creates structured relationships that facilitate volunteering'. His survey-based study does not allow him to explore these processes, but it is precisely these processes that are of interest when considering how social capital develops.

This implies a more fundamental methodological critique, namely that quantitative research is insufficiently attentive to issues of context and process. As Sreter (2000: 58) says:

Social capital is an abstract property of relationships and is multidimensional. It is manifest through certain kinds of attitudes and dispositions towards fellow citizens

and civic institutions, through networks of contact and association and through participation in civic and public institutions. Empirical work which aims to measure and quantify can observe social capital, indirectly and inferentially, through examining the character and incidence of these phenomena. But ideally considerable contextual knowledge is required for unambiguous interpretation.

Such an argument suggests that alternative, qualitative approaches may be better suited to the empirical investigation of how social capital develops.

Indeed, several authors have expressed such a belief. For example, in reviewing the measurement challenges posed by social capital, Schuller et al. (2000: 27) make a ‘conventional, but nonetheless crucial, plea for an appropriate mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches’. Likewise, van Deth (2003) argues that social capital researchers ought to make much more use of multi-method and multi-level strategies. Devine and Roberts (2003), building on such arguments, make an extremely convincing case for the benefits of qualitative research on social capital. They argue that ‘a consideration of the processes by which social capital is formed and constantly reformed is central to empirical research’ (Devine and Roberts, 2003: 94, emphasis in original). In considering the role of voluntary associations, the authors advocate various qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews, which can take account of the experiences of association life and the different, and conflicting, norms and values that might arise from them. They also suggest that detailed observation and community studies could help illuminate the collective dimensions of social capital.

Grounding the critique in critical realism

So, there is a strong case for in-depth, process-based research on social capital. However, this case is rarely grounded in philosophical debate. On the one hand, this is quite surprising, because there are clear synergies between the methodological critiques discussed above and the broader critical realist critique of positivism discussed in chapter one. On the other hand, it is not quite so surprising, because, as mentioned in chapter one,

there is often a gap in the social sciences between empirical research and philosophical discussion.⁹ In what follows, I explore the synergies between the methodological critiques of social capital research and the broader critical realist critique of positivist social science. I argue that by making these synergies more explicit, researchers will be able to explore the development of social capital more coherently.

As we have seen, many social capital studies, particularly in the attitudinal approach, seek to identify statistical relationships between variables, as if this will lead directly to causal explanation. However, as discussed in the last chapter, critical realists would argue that this statistical mode of ‘explanation’ is not really explanation at all (Carter and New, 2004). In this respect, it is interesting to note that the example Manicas (2006) uses to illustrate his entire critical realist critique of empirical social science is *Bowling Alone*. What is missing from *Bowling Alone*, he argues, is an account of the mechanisms through which community engagement is presumed to have declined. In the book, Putnam (2000) draws on large-scale survey data to argue that generational change explains half of the overall decline in social capital. But, as Manicas (2006: 89) argues, ‘the fact that generational change is correlated with measures of social capital tells us nothing about causality. Thus, what are the changes in the beliefs and conditions of persons of different generations, why did they change, and how do these result in changes to “social capital”? No effort is made in this direction.’ This exemplifies a basic critical realist critique of much quantitative research on social capital. As Manicas (2006: 89) argues, ‘generalizations, including significant correlations, provide neither explanation nor understanding; they need explaining’.

⁹ Indeed, Layder (1990: 1-6) discusses precisely this tendency and offers two explanations for it: first, that social science researchers often consider themselves sufficiently knowledgeable about such ‘philosophical’ issues, so they leave them alone to get on with ‘hands-on-the-data’ work; or, second, that they adopt defensive positions because they assume that engaging in abstract philosophical argument automatically means one is attacking the whole notion of empirical research. Either way, it can have serious consequences if it leads to overly defensive postures and unreflexive research.

But what about social capital research that claims to go beyond this? As discussed above, Hooghe and Stolle (2003) have explicitly stressed the importance of understanding the mechanisms through which social capital develops. Indeed, in considering the role of voluntary associations, they argue:

We need to know which types of social interactions cause the development of social capital and how. Are all associations alike in their democratizing effects? What aspects of group life are particularly beneficial for generating norms of reciprocity and trust? What is the causal mechanism involved, and why would associations have a much stronger influence than other socialization contexts? (Hooghe and Stolle, 2003: 9)

Such questions, with their focus on mechanisms, context-dependency and careful conceptualisation, suggest a critical realist perspective. However, the empirical studies that follow this approach (some of which I discussed above) do not really reflect this.

For example, Stolle (1998) explicitly seeks to identify the mechanisms through which membership of voluntary associations might lead to the development of generalised trust. This leans towards critical realist thinking, in that she attempts to pick apart what it is about voluntary associations and people's involvement in them that might produce these outcomes. However, there is no acceptance or acknowledgement of critical realism's stratified ontology or generative view of causality. For Stolle (1998), the sole criterion for judging whether mechanisms operate appears to be statistical correlations in empirical data. She undertakes a survey of 570 members of 32 voluntary associations, asking questions about length and type of involvement and trusting attitudes, and then uses this to assess whether a mechanism of socialisation is operating. She draws a series of conclusions from the empirical data, stating, for example, that 'we can say with certainty that members who had only brief experiences of the socialization effects in voluntary associations are significantly less trusting than those who had longer experiences as association members' (Stolle, 1998: 521).

This is characteristic of much of the ‘mechanism-based’ research on social capital within the attitudinal approach. The studies discuss mechanisms, but they tend to directly ‘test’ the operation of these mechanisms through statistical analysis of survey data. Although there is often recognition of the limitations of the data used, there is no acknowledgement that mechanisms operate at a deeper level of social reality that is only contingently related to the empirical domain. Instead, the research approach is neo-positivist in that it appears to search for regular patterns of empirically observable events in order to determine causality. Some of these studies, where they outline plausible mechanisms of social capital development, are relevant to the current research. However, as discussed earlier, they often draw on flawed conceptions of social capital. Moreover, their general methodological approach does not permit a contextually sensitive empirical exploration of how social capital develops.

This brings us back to the pleas for alternative, qualitative approaches. And, looking again at these, we can see that some of them are critical realist in all but name. For example, Devine and Roberts (2003: 94, emphasis in original) argued for ‘a consideration of the processes by which social capital is formed and constantly reformed’. They explain that their preferred approach is ‘one that begins with external and contingent relationships between ‘variables’ but then ‘extracts’ from these variables various underlying mechanisms and tendencies which have a unique (i.e. qualitative) identity that, in turn, share a number of internal relationships with a wider set of social relations.’ (Devine and Roberts, 2003: 95). Such an approach is clearly critical realist in nature: it differentiates between external and internal relations; it notes the contingent nature of empirical events; and it seeks to extract underlying mechanisms. Indeed, the authors’ justification for this draws on critical realist arguments around ontology; they say, ‘This does not mean that we discount the significance of empirical relationships as being of secondary importance. Rather, it is to argue that the social world is complexly layered, and that each ‘layer’ obtains a qualitative existence as part of an interconnected ‘whole’.’ (Devine and Roberts, 2003: 95). Although they do not mention critical realism as the explicit foundation of their view, their reliance upon it is clear.

Moreover, they cite Sayer (1992), a well-known proponent of critical realism, as their key source.

Mechanisms in social capital research

So, what about empirical research that aligns more closely with these critical realist principles? In general, research in the network approach is often closer than that in the attitudinal approach, simply because sociologists and applied social scientists tend to draw on more structural, context-dependent conceptualisations of social capital. Although studies in the network approach can suffer from similar problems, i.e. lack of careful conceptualisation, reliance on a statistical mode of ‘explanation’ and inattention to social mechanisms, such research is often more attentive to underlying social structures and ascribes causal power to them, as critical realists do.

One recent study is particularly significant in this regard. Small’s (2009a) examination of how social capital develops in childcare centres in New York focuses on the embeddedness of social capital in organisational contexts. Following a network approach, he concentrates on the processes through which parents form ties through social interaction and how these processes are shaped by the organisational contexts within which they interact. He prefaces his empirical work with an explanation of why critical realist principles are important when seeking to understand network inequality. It is worth quoting this at length, as it applies equally to my research here:

Researchers increasingly acknowledge, to their credit, that to properly answer [questions around network inequality] they must take into account unobserved differences among people that determine who is well connected in the first place. As a result, researchers have examined ways of statistically controlling for these differences. This solution, however, addresses only half the problem: how people make ties is not merely a statistical nuisance to “control away”; it is a substantive process to understand. Knowledge comes about not only from demonstrating associations, but, more important...from explaining the mechanisms that give rise to them. (Small, 2009a: 9)

Through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation, Small (2009a) shows how organisations can act as ‘brokers’, acting both purposely and non-purposely to develop social capital. He argues that organisations are most effective as brokers when they provide opportunities for regular and long-lasting interaction in minimally competitive and maximally co-operative environments. These are important insights and I pick them up in subsequent chapters.

Interpretive research also has the potential to offer valuable insight into the mechanisms through which social capital is generated. For example, Glover (2004) undertook a narrative inquiry into a community garden, examining it as a social context in which social capital was produced, accessed, and used by a social network of community gardeners. The participants’ stories highlighted how the garden allowed them to develop social networks that extended beyond the garden project. The study also demonstrated the way in which these networks facilitated various outcomes, which differed between groups, ranging from deterring crime to increasing property values. Importantly, Glover (2004: 156) discusses how the community garden can be viewed as both a source and a consequence of social capital. This is how many authors (e.g. Doherty and Misener, 2008) have analysed voluntary sports clubs. Drawing on Coleman’s theory, Glover (2004) describes the community garden project as intentional organisation, benefiting both members and non-members. The interpretive approach of this research enabled a focus on the way participants understood the social ties they had formed and the influence of the interaction context on this process of tie formation.

In addition, some researchers have started to examine the mechanisms of social capital creation by incorporating insights from social psychology, specifically social identity and social categorisation theory. Hooghe’s (2003b) study of voluntary associations in Belgium, described above, is one such example. His empirical research suggests that social interaction within voluntary associations may lead to more democratic attitudes through the

social psychological process of self-categorisation. More recently, Kramer (2006; 2009) has sought to address the question of how social capital develops by focusing on the social psychological process of collective identification. Specifically, he argues that individuals have relatively distinct identities and that collective behaviour is underpinned by a form of collective identity that can be more or less salient according to various contextual factors. Such social psychological insights are highly relevant to the debate around mechanisms and I pick them up in subsequent chapters.

Perhaps the most important and influential contribution to the debate around mechanisms is the work by Portes (1998; Portes and Landolt, 2000; Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998). In his article, *Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology*, Portes (1998) describes four principal mechanisms through which social capital develops, namely: reciprocity exchanges; enforceable trust; value introduction and bounded solidarity. The mechanism of reciprocity exchanges refers to ‘an accumulation of “chits” earned through previous good deeds to others, backed by the norm of reciprocity’ (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998: 130). This has its roots in social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961; Simmel, 1902) and is the main mechanism proposed by social capital theorists in the rational action school, such as Lin (2001). Enforceable trust shares with reciprocity exchanges a strong instrumental orientation, but it refers specifically to the embeddedness of social exchanges within groups. This mechanism operates via group members subordinating their present desires to the wishes of the collective, in anticipation of good standing within that group. As Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998: 130) put it, ‘Social capital in this instance is generated by individual members’ disciplined compliance with group expectations’.

Value introduction refers to the way in which value imperatives are learned during processes of socialisation (Parsons, 1937). For example, value imperatives may encourage people to pay their debts on time or obey traffic regulations because they feel an obligation to do so. According to Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998: 129), this functions as ‘a source of social capital because it prompts individuals to behave in ways other than out of naked

greed; such behavior then becomes a resource appropriable by others or by the collectivity.' Bounded solidarity is similar to value introjection in that it involves an element of moral obligation. However, it relates to '*situational* circumstances leading to the emergence of principled group-oriented behavior quite apart from any early value introjection' (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998: 130, emphasis added).

To some extent, these four principal mechanisms encompass (or, rather, underpin) many of the other mechanisms posited within the literature. For example, the mechanism of value introjection refers to the basic process through which people learn value imperatives. This constitutes the core of the socialisation mechanism, discussed above, which is implicit in much of the attitudinal research on social capital. Likewise, the mechanism of bounded solidarity, as outlined by Portes, encompasses the key social psychological process of collective identification described above. These four principal mechanisms constitute the basis of my empirical analysis. As such, I discuss them in detail later in the thesis (see chapter six).

Before moving on, there is one other issue that demands attention, namely the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. As we saw earlier, this is increasingly being incorporated into theoretical discussions around voluntary associations and there are now a few studies that have sought to operationalise it. In one prominent example, Coffé and Geys (2007a) present a methodology for assessing the bridging/bonding nature of voluntary associations. In short, this requires a researcher to compare an association's members against relevant local population statistics on a number of socio-economic variables. The closer an association's membership corresponds to the local population, i.e. the less over-represented various groups are, the more bridging the association is deemed to be. In a subsequent study, the authors analyse the impact of bonding and bridging associations on civic and social attitudes in Flanders and find that effects do differ, with bridging associations having a stronger, positive effect on attitudes (Coffé and Geys, 2007b).

There are a number of criticisms one could raise against this methodology. For example, should simply mirroring a local population constitute bridging potential within an association? Let us take a hypothetical example. A voluntary association in an ethnically non-diverse area (where the local population was, say, five per cent ethnic minorities, 95 per cent white) might seek deliberately to promote diversity through attracting members from diverse backgrounds. This might lead to its membership being 50 per cent ethnic minorities, 50 per cent white. By Coffé and Geys's (2007a) methodology, this association would be deemed *less* bridging in nature than an association that mirrored the local population (i.e. five per cent ethnic minorities, 95 per cent white). This seems perverse and appears to contradict the potential for tie formation across diverse social cleavages that bridging is supposed to involve.

In fact, Coffé and Geys do note a number of difficulties in seeking to operationalise the bonding/bridging distinction. For example, they discuss the danger of ignoring differences within association categories, i.e. grouping unlike organisations under broad labels like 'hobby groups' or 'youth organisations'. This brings us back to Eastis's (1998) study, discussed above, in which she found different social capital processes and outcomes within two ostensibly similar choral groups. Moreover, this relates to the critical realist emphasis on careful conceptualisation. The authors also note that the researcher herself has to decide the (statistical) cut-off point when distinguishing between bonding and bridging, which again highlights that there is no simple distinction between the two. Indeed, other research suggests that if any distinction between bonding and bridging can be made, it may be linked more to people's subjective, identity-based perceptions than to specific demographic differences (Nichols et al., 2013; Vermeulen and Vermeel, 2009). I pick up this discussion of bonding and bridging in my empirical analysis.

To sum up so far then, empirical research has provided several insights on how social capital develops. Attitudinal research has explored, often through the use of large-scale survey data, the relationship between associational

membership and various attitudinal indicators of social capital. However, much of this research is open to methodological criticism and it has been argued that alternative, qualitative approaches may be better suited to understanding the mechanisms through which social capital develops. Researchers have posited a number of mechanisms of social capital development and some have started to explore them empirically. In the empirical analysis in subsequent chapters, I draw on such work to investigate how social capital develops in specific contexts. For the rest of this chapter, I narrow my focus to sport. In what follows, I conduct a theoretical and empirical critique of the literature on sport and social capital and I look particularly at mechanism-based explanations of how social capital develops within the context of voluntary sports clubs.

THEORETICAL CRITIQUE OF SPORT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

Academic literature on sport and social capital can be divided into two broad groups: research that employs the concept of social capital directly; and research that engages with aspects of social capital theory without explicitly employing the concept. The first broad group comprises relatively recent research and can itself be subdivided into two groups: extended theoretical tracts; and empirical studies. The second broad group is more miscellaneous. It includes: general research on the social impacts of sport; research on sports volunteering; management and governance research on the voluntary sector; and research on social psychology within sport. While this work can provide some useful insight on social capital development and the context surrounding voluntary sports clubs, I focus my theoretical critique mainly on the body of research that has dealt explicitly with sport and social capital.

Detailed theoretical studies of sport and social capital have tended to incorporate analysis of all three main social capital theorists. As in other fields, Putnam's work has received considerable attention, particularly in relation to sport and social policy. However, his version of social capital has

certainly not been privileged across all theoretical discussion (Adams, 2010; Coalter, 2007a; b; Doherty and Misener, 2008; Nicholson and Hoye, 2008a). Indeed, Blackshaw and Long (2005), in one of the most extensive theoretical treatments of social capital in the sport and leisure context, take particular issue with Putnam's work, exposing its communitarian foundations and its structural functionalist perspective. They promote instead a sociological understanding of social capital, arguing that Bourdieu's version permits a clearer analysis of the ways in which marginalised groups act.

Analysis of social capital within sport has frequently included recognition of the 'dark side' of social capital and the theoretical distinction between bonding and bridging (Blackshaw and Long, 2005; Coalter, 2007a; b; Auld, 2008). Indeed, it could be argued that these issues have been taken up more energetically here than in other disciplines. This is perhaps due to prevailing views of some sports clubs (e.g. tennis and golf clubs) as cliquey and therefore resonant with Putnam's description of bonding social capital and/or Bourdieu's class-based view of sport. It is worth noting, however, that not everyone has accepted such theoretical distinctions uncritically. For example, Blackshaw and Long (2005: 245) argue that 'the 'like us/unlike us' presumption that lies at the heart of the distinction between bonding and bridging is hard to appreciate given the multi-dimensionality of any individual (sex, age, class, occupation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political belief, abilities, interests)'.

Much of the theoretical literature on sport and social capital urges researchers to explore the role of voluntary sports clubs in helping to develop social capital (e.g. Auld, 2008; Coalter, 2007a; b; Collins, 2005). This follows the general interest in voluntary associations discussed above, stemming particularly from Putnam's work, but also from Coleman's discussion of social organisations. While a few commentators have argued that sports clubs should be seen as outcomes, rather than sources, of social capital, most have countered this view. For example, Doherty and Misener (2008) draw on Bourdieu's (1986: 249) argument that 'the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them

possible' and note that other social capital theorists, including Putnam, have argued that sports clubs and other voluntary associations can be analysed as both source and outcome.

Some authors have questioned whether the member-benefit nature of sports clubs renders them unlikely sites for the production of social capital, but again this view has been countered. For example, Doherty and Misener (2008) argue that social capital is usually conceptualised as doing *with*, rather than doing *for*. Indeed, a quick glance back at Coleman's conception would suggest that the member-benefit nature of sports clubs is no impediment to the development of social capital. In his discussion of appropriable social organisation, he uses a residents' association and a social club as exemplars of 'the general point, that organization, once brought into existence for one set of purposes, can also aid others, thus constituting social capital available for use' (Coleman, 1988: 108).

Before moving on, it is worth noting that theoretical work on sports clubs and social capital has sometimes failed to incorporate theoretical and empirical developments from other disciplines, including some of those discussed earlier in the chapter. For example, both Nicholson and Hoye (2008a) and Doherty and Misener (2008) echo uncritically Putnam's (2000) assertion that what matters for social capital is active and involved membership. However, empirical studies in mainstream political science have suggested that the disparity between active and passive membership may not be particularly pronounced and that the impact of the latter has been underemphasised (Wollebæk and Selle, 2003; Wollebæk and Strømsnes, 2008). Furthermore, only a very few sport researchers have incorporated the insights of critical realism into their discussions of social capital. Coalter's (2007a) work is one example: he draws on Pawson (2006) and Pawson and Tilley (1997) to stress the significance of mechanism-based research. Another is Seippel's (2006), which includes both theoretical discussion and empirical analysis. I discuss the latter below, as I turn now to empirical work on sport and social capital.

EMPIRICAL CRITIQUE OF SPORT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL RESEARCH

Empirical research on sport and social capital has been conducted in both the attitudinal and network approach and has employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs. Following the general pattern outlined earlier in the chapter, quantitative work has very often followed Putnam, drawing on his civic-oriented, attitudinal conception of social capital. For example, Delaney and Keaney (2005), using the 2002 European Social Survey, found that, after controlling for socio-demographic characteristics, membership of a sports club had a small, but statistically significant, effect on political engagement and trust in civil institutions, a substantial effect on meeting socially with friends, but no effect on social trust. In Canada, Perks (2007) analysed data from the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating and found statistically significant, though weak, relationships between youth sport participation and 11 measures of community involvement. In Japan, Okayasu et al. (2010) analysed data from a questionnaire survey and found that involvement in community sports clubs was related to measures of trust, social networks and reciprocity. These relationships were stronger for members of 'comprehensive' clubs, which are open to a wide range of community members and include cultural activities, than for members of 'traditional' clubs, which are smaller and often focused on one particular sporting activity.

Seippel (2006) examined data drawn from a random sample of the Norwegian population and found that membership of a sports organisation had a positive effect on generalised trust, but weaker than for membership of other types of organisation. He found similar significant (but weak) correlations for general political interest and voting. It is interesting to note, as Coalter (2007a) does, that Seippel seeks to move beyond 'black-box' correlations. He acknowledges that the indicators used in the survey do not measure social capital directly, but are instead 'social phenomena that might be influenced – increase or decrease – by variations in types and amount of social capital' (Seippel, 2006: 171). He also, as discussed above, emphasises the importance of specifying the social mechanisms through

which sports clubs may influence social capital. From the literature, he identifies three such mechanisms: provision and facilitation of information; influence of social ties; and reinforcement of identity and recognition. Although the data do not allow him to explore these mechanisms in detail, such studies represent an important step towards a critical realist analysis of social capital development within sports clubs.

Although most quantitative studies on sports clubs and social capital have followed the attitudinal approach, a few have followed the network approach. For example, Harvey et al. (2007) assessed the social capital effects of volunteering within sports clubs using two particular tools: the position generator, which measures individuals' access to people with different social statuses, and the resources generator, which identifies the resources available to people through their social networks. They found that social capital is unequally distributed among sports volunteers as a function of several social factors, including class, age, gender and ethnicity. As the authors point out, this 'speaks to the complexity of the distribution, formation, and reproduction of social capital not only within society in general, but also within smaller social worlds such as community sport organizations' (Harvey et al., 2007: 220). In another study, Seippel (2008) examined the position, centrality and influence of voluntary sport organisations, by considering networks between categories of organisations in Norway over a period of 20 years. He found that while sport consistently represented one of the largest categories of voluntary organisation (along with trade unions), sport organisations were quite weakly embedded, although, over time, they have become more embedded and centralised.

Overall, quantitative research on social capital development within sport has produced mixed results. For example, Seippel's (2006) study suggested that the effect of membership of a voluntary sport organisation on generalised trust and political commitment was weaker than for voluntary organisations in general. However, Brown (2008) found that members of sport and recreation organisations scored either significantly higher, or certainly not lower, than members of other types of community organisation on measures of social

and political trust, tolerance and connection to neighbours. And Hoye et al. (2012) found that while involvement in one or more community sport organisations was a significant but weak predictor of higher levels of social connectedness, involvement in non-sport community organisations was not. In addition, Seippel (2006; 2008) found that sport organisations were less likely to promote bridging social capital than other types of voluntary organisation (something that Paxton (2002) and Stolle and Rochon (1998) also found), whereas Coffé and Geys (2007a; b) found that sports clubs were among the most bridging organisations. The contradictory findings of these latter studies might also relate to the different operationalisations of bonding and bridging within quantitative research. As we saw above, Coffé and Geys's methodology was based on examining heterogeneity within associations and comparing it with local populations. Seippel's, on the other hand, was based on quantifying people's multiple affiliations.

In short, the same methodological issues that afflict quantitative research on social capital in other disciplines are present here too. Indeed, some researchers within sport have noted this. For example, as mentioned above, Seippel (2006: 171) discussed the limitations of 'identifying sets of black-box correlations'. In addition, Perks (2007) noted a number of technical issues in his analysis, including the crudeness of some of the measures. This re-emphasises the importance of paying attention to process and context. As mentioned earlier, Eastis's (1998) ethnographic study of two choral groups, in which she found different social capital processes and outcomes in each group, is instructive in this regard. It demonstrates that even in organisations of the same type in the same geographical location, the potential for developing social capital can differ, depending on a range of contextual factors and the various social processes involved. This suggests an important role for well-conducted, systematic case study research, a point made by Brown (2008) in his conclusion and made repeatedly elsewhere in the literature (e.g. Collins, 2005; Skille, 2008).

In fact, some exploratory qualitative research has been carried out, notably in rural Australia, where several researchers have examined the role of sports

clubs in the development of social capital. For example, Driscoll and Wood (1999) suggest that sports clubs have the potential to promote leadership and skill development at an individual level and health and community identity at a collective level. Tonts (2005) found that sports club members perceived social interaction as particularly important and referred to the capacity of clubs to create 'tight-knit communities', which they associated with community pride. Atherley (2006) stressed the centrality of volunteering to sports clubs' potential contribution, but noted that declining population in rural areas was creating difficulties in this regard. These studies are useful, as they explore some of the processes through which social capital might emerge within the sports club context. However, as Coalter (2007a) notes, there is often a lack of careful conceptualisation within such studies. For example, Driscoll and Wood's (1999: 68) definition of social capital – 'a collective term for the ties that bind us' – is vague and has limited analytical value.

Mechanisms in sport and social capital research

So, what about qualitative research that offers a more fine-grained analysis of social capital and a focus on social mechanisms? In one study, Burnett (2006) examined the Active Community Club Initiative in the rural village of Tshabo, South Africa, and identified the following processes: first, people that became coaches developed their skills, which had individual benefits, such as better employment prospects and higher status, and collective benefits, such as the facilitation of opportunities for the rest of the community; and second, reciprocal acts facilitated access to resources at an individual level through the lending of equipment, and at a collective level through community safety when people travelled and played together. Burnett (2006) also suggested that bonding within groups of the same age and gender was most common, although the broader operations of the club facilitated linkages within the community by providing an umbrella for members of grassroots organisations.

In another study, Walseth (2008) looked at how bonding and bridging social capital was formed at sports clubs through interviews with female athletes aged 16-25, belonging to the so-called second generation of immigrants in Norway. Based on Putnam's theoretical framework, the author found that clubs were often used as arenas to strengthen existing friendships, producing bonding social capital. Respondents tended to focus on similarities between players, in terms of ethnicity and gender, and placed strong emphasis on the social support received. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Walseth found team sport to be particularly effective at developing and maintaining social ties. This re-emphasises the importance of intensive studies which are able to take account of specific socio-contextual factors, such as the type of sporting activity being performed. In terms of bridging social capital, Walseth (2008) found that most new ties formed were weak. Whereas weak ties have previously been considered beneficial for finding employment (Granovetter, 1973), the age of the respondents in this study meant that this was rarely significant. Instead, respondents mentioned other network-mediated benefits that arose from their weak ties, in particular learning about different cultures.

This study also highlighted the embeddedness of social capital processes within specific socio-organisational contexts. For example, two respondents who joined an 'ethnic majority' club in a richer neighbourhood considered social class a major barrier, not in terms of participation itself, but in trying to build social capital. Walseth (2008) links this to particular structural features, such as the ethnically divided nature of Oslo and the fact that voluntary sports clubs tend to be locally embedded, with strong historical traditions of participation and volunteering. Indeed, another study by Krouwel et al. (2006) illustrated how this local anchoring of sports clubs might contribute to a degree of 'culture clash' within competitive team sport, thus inhibiting the formation of social ties across ethnic lines. These sorts of studies sensitise us to the fact that social networks and resource exchange present in voluntary associations are themselves embedded in wider networks, often characterised by inequality.

In Australia, Hoye and Nicholson (2012) drew on Bourdieu and Putnam to investigate how country horse racing clubs contributed to the development and maintenance of social capital. Through interviews with board members, staff and community members, they found that the provision of racing and related services and facilities encouraged the development of social networks and encouraged reciprocity among local organisations. Interestingly, they found that community members perceived clubs to be developing social capital through provision of facilities for community use, even if the clubs did so at commercial rates.

I close this empirical critique by focusing on one particularly significant study, which was carried out in the UK by Crossley (2008). He examined the mechanisms through which people formed social networks in the context of a private health club in Greater Manchester. In doing so, he drew directly on critical realist ideas to critique the ‘variable analysis’ common to most social capital research. He argues:

The inattention to mechanisms in much social capital research forms part of a wider problem of what a number of authors have criticized as ‘variable analysis’...Relationships between variables...do not translate into relationships between agents; do not necessarily inform us with respect to those relations; and may even obscure them...We know a lot about the statistical link between proxy variables for social capital and wellbeing variables but it is necessary to delve deeper; to look at the social connections, networks and mechanisms that constitute social capital. We need research which more precisely maps on to our theoretical apparatus. (Crossley, 2008: 479)

Following Coleman, Crossley (2008) analysed social capital in terms of its facilitative functions: maximising physical advantages (through group encouragement to exercise harder); identity and recognition; counselling; information; collective action; and exchange of services. He also examined the ‘dark side’ of social capital, identifying the negative outcomes for other gym-goers of the bonding social capital developed. In addition, Crossley (2008) described a brokerage and closure network figuration, in which the main group became connected to other groups through key ‘brokers’. As a

result of this balancing of social ties, these brokers experienced tension and other negative outcomes. This is of particular interest, because it contradicts Burt's (1992; 2005) well-known theoretical and empirical work, which demonstrates that individuals who bridge structural holes accrue significant benefits. This demonstrates once again (and the author himself points this out) how critical it is to examine context when seeking to understand the development of social capital.

SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a theoretical and empirical critique of research on social capital. It has explored two broad approaches to social capital research – network and attitudinal – and argued that the first of these displays greater theoretical coherence. While acknowledging that there remains a series of debates around its conceptualisation, I adopted a general definition of social capital as 'the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures' (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 532). In the empirical critique, I noted a number of methodological issues with quantitative research on social capital and I grounded this critique in critical realism. This highlighted the importance of empirical research which is sensitive to context and seeks to specify the mechanisms through which social capital develops. I explored a number of posited mechanisms and noted that all tended to cohere around one or other of Portes's (1998) four principal mechanisms, namely: reciprocity exchanges; enforceable trust; value introjection; and bounded solidarity.

The latter part of the chapter focused on sport and social capital. Here, quantitative research has largely followed the attitudinal approach, but suffers from a number of methodological issues, including the lack of suitable data. As Seippel (2006: 179) argues, 'we need data designed more explicitly for sports studies, which distinguish more clearly between various aspects of organizational structures and activity, for the many possible networks emerging from a voluntary organization and for the specific topic of sport'. Qualitative research has provided some important insights, but there remains

a need for well-conducted, in-depth studies that employ careful conceptualisations of social capital. Importantly, as in other fields, researchers are now calling for empirical studies that examine the mechanisms through which social capital develops. This is where the current research fits in. As discussed in chapter one, this thesis seeks to explore how social capital develops within voluntary sports clubs, paying particular attention to the mechanisms involved and how these are shaped by the organisational contexts within which they operate. In the next chapter, I explain in more detail how the empirical part of this thesis was conducted.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Trench warfare in the social sciences continues. In methodological battles, those on the quantitative side still fire shots at those on the qualitative side and vice-versa. Their hostile positions are linked, historically at least, to the opposing poles of positivism and interpretivism. However, there are now an increasing number of peacekeepers calling for a ceasefire. These methodological pragmatists, such as Bryman (1992) and Hammersley (1992), argue that such conflict is unnecessary. They suggest that there is no essential bond between methodological approach and philosophical stance. Others, including me, fall somewhere in between: neither battlers, nor pacifists. Like the methodological pragmatists, I believe that crude quantitative-qualitative divides that seek to champion one approach to the exclusion of the other are unhelpful. However, the methodology used must also be compatible with the philosophical commitments of the researcher.

In chapter one, I sketched out my basic philosophical commitments, broadly those of critical realism. In chapter two, I critiqued previous research on social capital and argued that empirical research on social capital could benefit from critical realist insights. All of which leads inexorably to a discussion of the research approach adopted in this thesis – the focus of this chapter. First, I discuss the basic methodological approach I adopted, namely (critical realist) case study research, and I explain why this was appropriate for understanding how social capital develops in voluntary sports clubs. Second, I discuss key elements of my research design, including the form the case studies took and case selection. Third, I discuss my main methods of data collection – interviews and observation – and I explain how these enabled me to gain insight into people's social ties and the resources they accessed through those ties. Fourth, I discuss data analysis and other key issues, including research ethics and research quality.

BASIC APPROACH

As discussed in chapter one, critical realists are primarily interested in careful conceptualisation, abstraction and specification of underlying social mechanisms. Sayer (1992; 2000) discusses these principles in reference to two basic methodological approaches, namely ‘intensive’ and ‘extensive’. Intensive approaches start with individuals (people or other social objects) and trace the main causal relationships into which they enter, looking at their qualitative nature as well as their number. Extensive approaches seek to specify how extensive certain phenomena or patterns are in a population. Obviously, these correspond closely to traditional understandings of qualitative and quantitative research. However, Sayer emphasises two points that are not always part of the qualitative-quantitative discussions. First, intensive and extensive approaches should not be considered incommensurable. From a critical realist perspective, they can simply be seen to study different aspects of social phenomena and to seek to answer different questions. Second, when considered within a critical realist framework, the two approaches have different strengths and weaknesses.¹⁰ Table 3.1 overleaf illustrates intensive and extensive approaches in greater detail.

¹⁰ In fact, it should be pointed out that the position of extensive research within critical realism is controversial. Some would argue that it should be rejected entirely, as its reliance on a constant conjunction model of causality renders it incompatible with critical realism. However, in addition to Sayer, several authors (e.g. Downward et al., 2002; Kemp and Holmwood, 2003) have pointed out that it can play an important, if somewhat circumscribed, role. For example, Kemp and Holmwood (2003) argue very persuasively that spontaneously occurring regularities in the social world may approximate the kind of closed systems that experimenters create in natural science. Furthermore, sophisticated statistical techniques may enable researchers to uncover patterns of regularity by controlling for the influence of certain structures. While it is essential to remember that such correlations do not indicate causal relationships, they may play a part in critical realist research either by suggesting that certain real structures might be operating or by allowing researchers to test, in some way, certain hypothesised mechanisms.

Table 3.1 Summary of intensive and extensive research

	Intensive	Extensive
Research question	How does a process work in a particular case or small number of cases? What produces a certain change? What did the agents actually do?	What are the regularities, common patterns, distinguishing features of a population? How widely are certain characteristics or processes distributed or represented?
Relations	Substantial relations of connection	Formal relations of similarity
Type of groups studied	Causal groups	Taxonomic groups
Type of account produced	Causal explanation of the production of certain objects or events, though not necessarily representative ones	Descriptive 'representative' generalisations, lacking in explanatory penetration
Typical methods	Study of individual agents in their causal contexts, interactive interviews, ethnography, qualitative analysis	Large-scale survey of population or representative sample, formal questionnaires, standardised interviews, statistical analysis
Limitations	Actual concrete patterns and contingent relations are unlikely to be 'representative', 'average' or generalisable Necessary relations discovered will exist wherever their relata are present, for example, causal powers of objects are generalisable to other contexts as they are necessary features of these objects	Although representative of a whole population, they are unlikely to be generalisable to other populations at different times and places Problem of ecological fallacy in making inferences about individuals Limited explanatory power

Adapted from Sayer (2000: 21)

If we relate this to the empirical critique in the last chapter, we can see that, to date, a large number of social capital studies, particularly in the attitudinal approach, have been extensive. As noted in that critique, for example in Manicas's (2006) analysis of *Bowling Alone*, this kind of extensive research,

from a critical realist perspective, can be seen to provide descriptive generalisations, but not causal explanations. In this thesis, I seek to answer the broad question, ‘how does social capital develop within voluntary sports clubs?’ From a critical realist perspective, this means that the empirical component of my research needed to examine the processes through which social capital developed, focusing on the individuals and groups involved and seeking to provide a causal explanation. As Table 3.1 sets out, this kind of question is best investigated through intensive research. Typical methods include studying people or other social objects in their contexts, carrying out interactive interviews or undertaking ethnographic work. As such, I decided to adopt an intensive, case study approach, seeking to understand the phenomenon of interest (social capital) in its real-life context.

Several methodologists have discussed the synergy between critical realism and case study research. For example, Easton (2010: 123), building on the insights of Sayer and others, states that ‘case research is...entirely consistent with a critical realist ontology’. Likewise, Bygstad and Munkvold (2011) argue that ‘a typical critical realist research design would be an intensive study, with a limited number of cases’. Furthermore, realist evaluation, the broad framework discussed in chapter one, is effectively case study research. As Pawson and Tilley (1997: 125) explain, ‘each evaluation...is seen as a case study, and the function of the case is to refine our understanding of [context-mechanism-outcome configurations] which seem to have application in that domain’.

The literature on case study research is vast and its strengths and weaknesses have been discussed at length elsewhere (see, e.g., George and Bennett, 2005; Gomm et al., 2000; Ragin and Becker, 1992; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). As such, I will not attempt any grand recapitulation here. My justification for using a case study approach rests on the arguments I have made so far in the thesis, concerning the value of a critical realist perspective and the need for intensive study of social capital development within specific contexts. In short, working within a broad realist evaluation framework, the case study approach allowed me to examine how specific

mechanisms operated in voluntary sports clubs to develop social capital. One particular strength of the case study approach in this regard was its iterative nature. As Sayer (2000) points out, it is likely that multiple mechanisms are operating in any given social situation and it is possible that different mechanisms may cause the same event. This means that it is easy to make causal misattributions; and an appropriate research design should seek to address this issue. As Easton (2010: 124) argues, ‘the case method with its “cut and come again” disposition is ideally suited to the task’.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research purpose and research question

It may stretch the reader’s patience if I restate the purpose and central question of this research, but it is important to be as clear as possible, as the purpose of any research shapes and informs its design. This research seeks to answer the general question: how does social capital develop? Following the theoretical discussion in chapter two, social capital is here understood as ‘the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures’ (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 532). Within the general scope of this question, I am concerned with how social capital develops at voluntary sports clubs. From a critical realist perspective, this entails a focus on the mechanisms through which social capital develops in particular contexts. Contexts, in this sense, refer to different types of sports clubs, different types of people, different types of involvement, and so on. (I describe context in more detail later.)

Unit of analysis

A key initial task for the researcher is to try to specify the unit(s) of analysis being investigated. This is a perennial problem in case study research (Ragin and Becker, 1992; Yin, 2009) and one that was exacerbated here by the phenomenon under investigation. Social capital, as discussed in chapter two, is multi-dimensional and multi-level: it has been viewed as an individual and

collective resource and has been studied at individual, group, neighbourhood, regional, national and international level. Yin (2009: 30) argues that selection of the appropriate unit of analysis occurs when accurately specifying research questions. As described above, the emphasis here was on how social capital developed in voluntary sports clubs and included a focus on the social mechanisms through which this occurs. Previous research, discussed in chapter two, suggested that such mechanisms involve elements of group interaction, formation of social ties, development of shared meanings, identity formation and so on, all within the context of particular organisations. This, in turn, suggested multiple units of analysis for a case study: the sports club as the principal unit of analysis, with individual members, groups of members and the relationships between them as ‘embedded’ (Yin, 2009) or ‘nested’ (Thomas, 2011) subunits.¹¹

A nested case study, as Thomas (2011: 153) says, ‘gains its integrity, its wholeness, from the wider case’: the process of contrasting and comparing subunits is important, but the impetus comes from contrasting these subunits as *parts of* the wider case. Thomas (2011) gives the example of three classrooms within one school: if the school had no significance beyond the fact that it physically housed the classrooms, then the cases would not be seen as nested. Likewise, here, if a sports club had no significance beyond being a physical setting for members then it might not be appropriate to consider this a nested case study design. However, as previous research has shown and as my empirical analysis re-emphasises, individual members and groups of members are integral parts of a sports club and various elements of the club context shape the interaction between these individuals and groups. As such, a nested case study design seemed most appropriate.

¹¹ I prefer Thomas’s term ‘nested’ to the more common ‘embedded’, because, as he says, “nested” gives more of a sense of a subunit *fitting in* with a larger unit, rather than being *implanted* there. It is that *fitting in* in which you are interested – how does the subunit connect with other subunits and the whole? (Thomas, 2011: 152, emphasis in original)

Choosing a single or multiple case study

Another key initial task was to decide whether to conduct a single or multiple case study. The case study literature devotes significant attention to this question and there are several rationales for single or multiple cases, based on different underlying assumptions (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gomm et al., 2000; Ragin and Becker, 1992; Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). In a basic sense, there is a trade-off between depth and coverage, in that multiple cases enable greater coverage, but less depth. However, there are other issues at play. For example, Stake (2005: 445) argues that, ‘when there is...less interest in one particular case, a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition’. Here, Stake is mainly concerned with the distinction between intrinsic case study (where the focus is on understanding the case itself) and instrumental case study (where the case is used as a tool, e.g. to provide insight into an issue). Thomas (2011: 141) makes Stake’s argument more explicit: ‘with the multiple case study, the focus is unequivocally on the phenomenon of which the case is an example’. This applies to the current research. The focus here is on the phenomenon of social capital, specifically on the broad process through which it develops. As such, while I had an interest in understanding the voluntary sports club context, it was predominantly that, i.e. a context for the study of social capital development. Consequently, I decided to adopt a multiple case study design, so I could examine how social capital developed in a small number of different sports clubs.¹²

Selecting cases

So, having decided upon a multiple, nested case study design, how did I go about selecting the precise number of cases and the cases themselves?

¹² My decision to adopt a multiple, nested case study design was also informed more specifically by critical realism. As discussed, a central tenet of critical realism is that empirical outcomes vary depending on how causal mechanisms operate in different contexts. A single case study, notwithstanding its nested design, would have limited my ability to make such cross-contextual comparison. A multiple case study, by contrast, facilitated exactly the kind of ‘cross-case analysis’ (Schwandt, 2001) that is common in critical realist research. I discuss analysis in more detail below.

Here, as is common, I was guided by both theoretical and practical considerations. Like many other researchers (e.g. Small, 2009b; Thomas, 2011), I am uncomfortable with discussion of ‘samples’ and ‘populations’ in small, intensive studies. As discussed, the goal of this research is not statistical generalisation to known populations, but specification of how social mechanisms operate in specific contexts. As such, case selection was driven not by statistical, but by theoretical, considerations.¹³

Previous research did not provide detailed information on which features of sports clubs might be most important when investigating social capital development. Nevertheless, it did offer some general guidance. For example, theoretical and empirical research suggested that voluntary sports clubs, in England at least, can be roughly divided into two broad categories, namely informal and formal. Cuskelly et al. (2006: 36) explain the difference as follows:

At one end of the spectrum are traditional/informal sport organisations, which have strong collective identities, operate as cooperatives and view professionalism and external assistance as threats. At the other end of the spectrum...are contemporary/formal sport organisations, which tend to be systematic, business like and receptive to external assistance.

Initial empirical support for this broad distinction was provided by Nichols and James (2008), whose analysis of netball clubs in England found two distinct clusters. As this informal/formal distinction encompassed a number of features relevant to the study of social capital, such as collective identity and co-operation, it constituted a general basis on which to select cases. Indeed, Nichols and James (2008: 112), at the conclusion of their study, argued for just such an approach within the realist tradition:

¹³ Having said that, it is still useful to sketch just a basic picture of the voluntary sports club ‘landscape’ in the UK. While the total number of sports clubs in the UK is not known, previous research has suggested there are around 151,000 (Nichols, 2003). In England, a separate survey of sports volunteering (Taylor et al., 2003) produced an estimate of 106,423 voluntary sports clubs in England, with an average of around 77 members. These remain the best estimates currently available.

[V]ery little is known about what exactly voluntary sports clubs achieve and what management systems this is contingent on. This could be researched by a set of case studies of clubs spread along the informal–formal spectrum of organisation, which would provide a theoretical justification for selection of cases. This could be aggregated in a realist approach to understanding the process by which different types of clubs contribute to different outcomes in different circumstances.

In addition to this informal/formal dimension, I considered a number of other potentially relevant features, drawn from research on sports clubs and on social capital in general (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Potentially relevant features of voluntary sports clubs

Feature	Potential relevance	Source(s)
Type of club (i.e. informal or formal)	Informal clubs often act as co-operatives, while formal clubs are more business-like. This might affect: the way members perceive the clubs; their relations with fellow members; their willingness to provide resources to one another; and so on.	Cuskelly et al. (2006); Nichols and James (2008); Taylor (2004)
Size of club	Large organisations might offer members the opportunity to meet and form ties with a greater number of people, whereas small organisations might create opportunities for more frequent interaction with the same people.	Passey and Lyons (2006); Small (2009a)
Type of sport	In general, the nature of a focal activity can affect the way people interact with each other and form ties. As one example, team sport might offer members more opportunities than individual sport to form close ties with other members.	Feld (1981); Fine (1987); Walseth (2008)
Organisation of activity (e.g. regular weekend matches, or more ad-hoc, self-arranged play)	The way activity is organised might affect several aspects of social interaction, including the frequency and length of contact opportunities, which in turn might affect tie formation and resource exchange.	Crossley (2008); Small (2009a)
Diversity in types of members	The presence of different types of people within organisations might affect the opportunities for bonding and bridging and the sense of group solidarity.	Coffé and Geys (2007a; b); Seippel (2006); Weisinger and Salipante (2005)

Some of these features were clearly inter-related. For example, as Nichols and James (2008) pointed out, larger clubs tended to be formal. In addition, the way sporting activity was organised within a club (i.e. weekend matches or more ad hoc play) was heavily dependent on the type of sport being played. Still, when selecting cases, I took account of each of these features.

In the end, I decided to select three case study clubs along the basic informal-formal spectrum, while also seeking to explore potential differences across size of club, type of sport, organisation of activity and diversity in types of members. I selected the precise number partly for theoretical reasons (as it would allow me to make cross-case comparisons around the aspects just discussed) and partly for practical reasons (as I felt that three was the maximum number of cases I could study in sufficient depth). Once I had made these selection decisions, I began (in earnest) to search for possible cases. (I add the parenthetical ‘(in earnest)’, because I had already been thinking about possible cases as my study, and especially my thinking around research design, had progressed.)

Again, there is plenty of discussion around case selection in the case study literature and there are several different classifications and rationales (see, for example, Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1988; Mitchell, 2006; Stake, 2005; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009). A significant issue here was access, something Van Maanen and Kolb (1985) consider ‘crucial’. Moreover, as I wanted to collect rich data on social mechanisms, I felt that ‘opportunity to learn’, as Stake (2005: 451) puts it, was key. Consequently, I felt that finding cases through friends and contacts, within the general theoretical parameters I had set, would enable me to negotiate access most easily and provide the greatest opportunity to learn. I therefore asked friends, acquaintances, work colleagues and other contacts, some of whom, in turn, put me in touch with their friends, acquaintances, work colleagues and so on. In the end, I selected the following cases:¹⁴

¹⁴ All names of clubs and club members are pseudonyms (see page 94).

- (i) Caggston: A small, informal cricket club, based in South London;
- (ii) Faxhill: A medium-sized, relatively formal football club, based in East London;
- (ii) Treeford: A large, formal tennis and squash club, based in North London.

As suggested in the literature, this case selection process was characterised by a combination of hard work, strategic planning and luck (Van Maanen and Kolb, 1985).

Case descriptions

Caggston was officially founded in 1976, although it had operated in a casual, ad hoc way for a few years before that. It started as a social side associated with a church in South London and then, as members brought in other friends, acquaintances and work colleagues to play, it moved away from its church origins. It has always been a one-team club, which does not own its own facilities (it plays its 'home' matches at the ground of another, larger cricket club) and it has around 12 to 15 playing members each season. The club used to play only 'friendly' matches, but entered a league in the early 2000s. The league season usually runs from May to September, with a match every Sunday (weather-dependent) and some training ('nets') and friendly matches in the run-up to the season. Every year, the club runs a 'tour' over the August bank holiday weekend, during which members (and members' families, girlfriends, friends, etc.) go away together and the club plays two or three matches against teams outside London. I negotiated access to Caggston through a close friend, who played for the club and whose father had co-founded and still played for it.

Faxhill was founded in 2006, initially as an adult football club. It was 'born out of the perceived lack of football coaching and playing facilities' in the local area (Faxhill website). During my research period (mostly the 2010/11 season), the club had three adult teams and two junior teams – roughly 90

members overall, although there was quite a high turnover in the adult teams. The adult teams (in which I conducted the bulk of my research) played league matches, usually once a week, from August to April, with training (not very well attended) on Tuesday evenings. The club does not own its own facilities; it leases a pitch at a local sports centre. I negotiated access to Faxhill through the co-founder and primary organiser of the club, who was an acquaintance of a work colleague.

Treeford was founded as a tennis club in the early 1900s and has expanded in several stages since. In the late 1930s, it became a tennis and squash club and began operating a bar (initially run by volunteers); in the 1980s, it built a new clubhouse; and later it also installed a ‘balloon’, allowing indoor tennis in winter. Currently, it has fourteen tennis courts, seven squash courts, a gym and fitness studio and a large clubhouse that is open seven days a week. The club has around 800 members (500 tennis and 300 squash). At the club, members can arrange matches among themselves; play in ‘club period’ (mixed ability ‘drop-in’ sessions run on Saturdays and Sundays); play the ‘ladder’ (a rolling, internal club competition); play in occasional club tournaments; do one-to-one or group coaching; or (ability permitting) play in the club teams. I negotiated access to Treeford through a slightly roundabout route: another PhD student, whom I met at a postgraduate forum, put me in touch with a tennis development officer, who, in turn, put me in touch with the tennis secretary at Treeford, who along with the club chair, agreed to support my research.

Together, these three clubs allowed me to study the development of social capital in socio-organisational contexts which differed in formality, size, type of sport and member diversity. Caggston was very small, with no facilities and was generally characterised by a co-operative way of working – in short, a good example of an informal club. Treeford was large, with business-like structures (it had several paid staff, a formalised and specialised committee, etc.) and was receptive to external assistance (it had recently received several hundred thousand pounds worth of funding) – in short, a good example of a formal club. Faxhill was somewhere in between, in terms of

both size and formality. In addition, Caggston and Faxhill were team sport clubs, while Treelford was an individual sport club, allowing exploration of different types of sport.

In terms of member diversity, Faxhill was based in a deprived part of East London, with a large proportion of its members local to the immediate area, young (18-23), black or minority ethnic, either unemployed or casually employed; Treelford was based in a prosperous part of North London, with a large proportion of its members wealthy, white, well-educated, middle or upper-middle class, middle-aged or retired; and Caggston was more of a mix, certainly in terms of age (16-60s) and background (some working class, some middle-class). So, the case study research allowed some exploration of member diversity both across and within clubs. Of course, each of these elements of socio-organisational context was much more nuanced than this brief outline suggests. Nevertheless, these initial obvious differences provided a *prima facie* basis for cross-case comparison.

DATA COLLECTION

To understand how social capital developed within the clubs, I needed to gain insight into how people interacted with one another, how they developed social ties and how they thought and felt about such ties and their club involvement more generally. This pointed to two main methods of data collection, namely observation and interviews. This accords with previous discussions of appropriate methods of data collection in social capital research, as outlined above (e.g. Devine and Roberts, 2003; Schuller et al., 2000; van Deth, 2003). Moreover, it follows the path of other critical realist case study research (e.g. Bygstad and Munkvold, 2011; Crossley, 2008; Small, 2009a).

Before discussing my data collection methods in detail, it is worth briefly considering whether my research should be seen as ethnography or not. Traditionally, ethnography has been seen as a long-term commitment, where researchers spend 12-18 months living in a particular community and seek to

describe holistically the socio-cultural life of that community (O'Reilly, 2009). This does not accurately capture my research. As I go on to discuss below, I spent intermittent periods at each of the clubs and I did not seek to provide holistic socio-cultural descriptions of group life. However, as Madden (2010: 17) points out, definitions of ethnography have changed: 'Nowadays, while long-term, single-site projects are still undertaken, many ethnographic projects are conducted over much shorter periods of time and may be multi-sited and/or focus on a particular aspect or element of a society or culture'. This quite accurately captures my research; so, on these terms, my research might well be considered ethnography. Ultimately, it may be less a matter of specific labels and more a matter of basic research orientation. As Madden (2010: 17) says, 'what both long-term and short-term ethnography share is that these studies seek to build theories of culture and society, theories of human behaviour and attitudes, and to appreciate what it means to be human in particular social and cultural contexts'. This is what I sought to do.

Observation

Observation, as a method of data collection, enables an understanding of what people do and how they interact in real life settings (Waddington, 2004). Furthermore, it provides insight into how people construct meanings: as Silverman (2010) points out, one can discern meanings not just from what people say, but from what they do. In this respect, observation reflects the interpretive epistemological element of critical realism. In addition, it is a method that is highly sensitive to context. Through observation, a researcher seeks to understand social interaction, which is the immediate context for the construction of meaning, and the way in which the broader context affects processes of social interaction. This appreciation of context, as discussed, is central to an understanding of how social capital develops (Johnston and Percy-Smith, 2003).

There are several different forms of observation, including structured, unstructured, covert, overt, non-participant and participant. Perhaps the most commonly discussed distinction is that between non-participant and

participant observation. At a basic level, the former is when the researcher watches people from the outside with little social interaction and the latter is when the researcher participates in the activity she is studying. Myers (2009: 150) argues that participant observation is beneficial because ‘it enables an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, values, norms, and practices of the social group or organization being studied’. On the other hand, several authors (e.g. Lee, 2000; Webb et al., 1966) have argued that more ‘unobtrusive’ forms of observation can be beneficial, as they can mitigate some of the possible problems caused by a researcher’s presence.

Research role

In practice, there is often no sharp distinction between participant and non-participant observation: researchers can occupy a range of roles within the field. Indeed, Gold’s (1958) classic typology ('complete participant'; 'participant-as-observer'; 'observer-as-participant'; and 'complete observer') sought to demarcate researcher roles according to involvement and detachment; familiarity and strangeness; and closeness and distance. Adler and Adler (1998: 84) discuss this typology, but argue that, over time, practitioners’ attitudes have shifted ‘toward greater involvement, even membership roles’. In this vein, they discuss their own typology of membership roles (Adler and Adler, 1987), namely: ‘complete-member-researcher’, ‘active-member-researcher’ and ‘peripheral-member-researcher’.

In my research, I sought to occupy (and for the most part did occupy) a ‘peripheral-member-researcher’ (PMR) role. Adler and Adler (1998: 85) describe this as follows:

Researchers in peripheral membership roles feel that an insider’s perspective is vital to forming an accurate appraisal of human group life, so they observe and interact closely enough with members to establish an insider’s identity without participating in those activities constituting the core of group membership.

For the most part, this captures how I behaved at the clubs. I observed the focal activity (cricket, tennis and football matches), I chatted with members, I sometimes drank and ate with them, I watched sport on television with them; and I observed them as they did all these things with each other. On a very few occasions, however, I participated more fully in the focal activity (more on this below).

There are always reasons for adopting a particular research role and so there were in my case. The three most common reasons for adopting a PMR role, according to Adler and Adler (1987: 36-7), are: epistemology (the researcher is unwilling to get too ‘drawn in’ for fear of being unable to interpret her findings in a sufficiently detached manner); the activities themselves (the researcher is unwilling to participate in whatever activity is central to the group she is observing); or demographic characteristics and/or assumed norms and values (the researcher is blocked from formal membership of certain groups, or is simply considered too ‘different’ to integrate fully). Each of these reasons combined to underpin my decision to adopt a PMR stance, although they varied in salience across the clubs.

At Caggston, as noted above, I gained access through an existing close friend. Moreover, another close friend and a couple of other people I knew also played for the club. While I came to feel, during the research, that this closeness was very beneficial (as it eased initial interaction, made participants more willing to be interviewed and permitted significant depth in some conversations around identity, roles, relationships and so on), I was initially concerned about my ability to remain sufficiently detached. More than that, I was concerned about potential ‘imbalance’ in my overall researcher role, given that I had no close knowledge of any of the research participants at the other clubs. As such, although I could easily have taken a more active role at Caggston (for example, by joining the club as a playing member for a whole season), I decided to adopt a PMR stance – mostly watching games and playing only twice when there were no alternatives (i.e. the team did not have sufficient players and I felt it would have damaged my position to refuse to play). At Treeford, I also could have taken a more active role and, in fact, I

did decide to join for three months as a student member. As it turned out, however, I only played one ‘club period’ (as I broke my leg the week after joining!), so, as at Caggston, I mostly watched games and chatted with other members either in the clubhouse, or on the tables outside near the courts.

At Faxhill, my PMR role was less an active choice and more a constraint imposed on me. This was due, in large part, to the third issue that Adler and Adler (1987) identify, namely that a researcher can be considered too ‘different’ to integrate fully into a group. This, in itself, was due to several factors. First, I was not able to join any of the adult teams (primarily because of time commitments, but also because of ability) and, unlike at Caggston and Treeford, there was no real culture of non-playing, or social, members. As such, my role as ‘outsider’ was always obvious and (I felt) there was a certain degree of suspicion that often inhibited close interaction. Second, as discussed above, Faxhill was based in a deprived part of East London and a large proportion of its members were local to the immediate area, black or minority ethnic, either unemployed or casually employed, and had not done any further or higher education. My position as a white, non-local, middle-class, university-educated PhD researcher created, initially at least, a natural ‘barrier’.¹⁵ Third (and this I came to see as more significant further through the research process), my primary contact at the club was Frank, the co-founder and main organiser. His relationship with the members was, in some respects, slightly uneasy and so, despite my repeated attempts to present myself as just a general, interested observer, I believe many of the members

¹⁵ Of course, many researchers have conducted participant observation in settings where the differences in background between researcher and research participants are far greater than those I faced. And, as I go on to discuss, I did my best to mitigate these issues and act appropriately in the club environment. Nevertheless, I feel that these differences shaped my research role to some extent and are therefore worth describing.

associated me with Frank and were therefore unwilling to engage too closely with me (e.g. by agreeing to be interviewed).¹⁶

I made various efforts to overcome these obstacles, i.e. to integrate more fully into the group. (These ‘strategies’ relate mostly to my experience at Faxhill, as it was here that I remained more peripheral than I would have liked; however, they apply in some measure to my research efforts at each of the clubs.) First, I sought to present myself appropriately: I dressed in a manner suitable to each research site (Bailey, 2007) and I ‘presented myself’ in what I considered to be an appropriate manner (Goffman, 1959). In some instances, I traded on the classic ‘naïve observer’ role, i.e. I expressed surprise at relatively mundane observations made by research participants in order to encourage further discussion (Randall et al., 2007). In other instances, I traded on my ‘insider knowledge’ of sport and my own sports club experiences. In addition, as discussed above, I sought to manage the perceptions of research participants regarding my independence from my primary contact. Fetterman (1989) notes this as a common challenge. As he says, gaining entry to a group through ‘an integral and powerful member of the community is useful, but establishing independence in the field is also important to avoid prematurely cutting off other lines of communication’ (1989: 44). In sum, in the words of Madden (2010: 7), I sought to ‘be

¹⁶ I could point to several strands of evidence for this, but the following example is illustrative. I had chatted with one of the members, Kyle, on several occasions and he had agreed to be interviewed (albeit with limited enthusiasm) and had given me his mobile number. I texted him, re-emphasising the general nature of the proposed chat – ‘just to tell me a bit about your time at the club, your experiences and so on’ – and, when he did not reply, I waited a week or so and contacted him again. Eventually, he sent me the following message:

Hi Rich, not a problem to meet, but it would be a good idea to hold out for a bit as there is a number of important meetings happening soon and after these take place I’d be in a better position to say which way the club wants to move forward, hope you understand my logic on this one, and look forward to speaking with you. Thanks.

In the end, despite my contacting him again and seeing him in person another couple of times (and making an effort to assure him that I was just interested in a general chat about his experience, not about the ‘management’ or ‘direction’ of the club, and that I was completely independent and would not reveal anything to Frank or anyone else), he never agreed to be interviewed. My feeling (which, of course, might be wrong) was that, first, he simply could not be bothered to sit down with a ‘stranger’ to discuss his time at the club, but also, second, he felt that the interview would involve detailed conversations about his and other members’ feelings about the club that I might then pass on to Frank.

ethnographic', that is, I sought to both 'do' and 'think about' my observation throughout the process.

Observation at the clubs

To return to the specific process, I conducted observation across the three sites for around 16 months (January 2010 to April 2011). I visited Caggston most Sundays from late April to August 2010, went on the annual tour and attended other events (e.g. the annual club dinner). I visited Faxhill for around two-thirds of home matches and some away matches during the 2010/11 season and attended around ten training sessions during the season (including post-training drinks in the local pub). I visited Treeford on multiple occasions throughout the observation period: at weekends for 'club period'; on weekdays and weekday evenings; and for specific events (the annual general meeting, first team club matches, etc.). In total, I spent around 80-100 hours at each of the clubs.

During my early observations, I experimented with different ways of taking field notes, but quickly settled into a routine whereby I would make notes after my site visits (very often on London buses). This accords with Lofland and Lofland's (1984) general rule that notes should be made either immediately, or at least as soon as possible afterwards. I followed general conventions in note-taking. That is, I sought to distinguish, where possible, between: verbal material that I recalled exactly; verbal material that I reasonably recalled; actual observations (of behaviour etc.); and my impressions or inferences (Flick, 2009; Strauss et al., 1964). I also followed the suggestions of Spradley (1980) in using four forms of field notes, namely: (i) condensed accounts in words, sentences, quotations from conversations, etc.; (ii) accounts of impressions from interviews and field contacts; (iii) a journal including experiences, ideas, fears, breakthroughs etc.; and (iv) some notes about analysis and interpretations. For the most part, I separated these four forms into two main documents: (i) and (ii) in my 'Field Notes'; and (iii) and (iv) in a regularly updated journal I titled 'General Reflections'. (I include

an extended extract from my ‘Field Notes’ as Appendix A and an extended extract from ‘General Reflections’ as Appendix B.)

Interviews

Interviews are perhaps the most commonly used data collection method in case study research. Again, as with observation, there are several different types of interview and the literature on interviewing is extensive (see, e.g., Alvesson, 2011; King, 2004; Kvale, 1996; Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Commonly, a distinction is made in the literature between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, although writers also refer to focused, semi-standardised, problem-centred, expert and ethnographic interviews (Flick, 2009). At root, most forms of interviewing, except highly structured interviewing, are designed to enable the researcher to ‘see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective’ (King, 2004: 11). This was important in the current research, as I sought to understand research participants’ perspectives on interaction at the clubs, social tie formation, collective identification and other social processes.

Within the case studies, I conducted a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed me to explore a set of topics in each interview, but with the flexibility to probe particular areas as and when appropriate (Kvale, 1996). As is common, I used an interview guide, which included ‘ice-breaker’ questions, such as ‘How long have you been a member of this club?’, and ‘deeper’ questions concerning the types of relationships people had formed with other club members, their experiences of ‘club life’ and so on. (A copy of the interview guide is included as Appendix C.) As is also common, the topics I discussed with interviewees changed over the course of the research. This was due to my increasing knowledge of

the issues I was researching and my increasing interest in particular elements.¹⁷

As this was a multiple, nested case study design, I was interested in the perspectives of individual members and groups of members, as well as in how the clubs themselves operated. As such, I sought to interview a range of individuals, in order to explore different perspectives, a process known as 'sampling for range' (Small, 2009b; Weiss, 1994). As with overall case selection, there was some guidance from previous research. In addition to the normal considerations of age, gender, social class, marital and family status and life-stage, Table 3.3 presents some other features discussed in previous studies of social capital and voluntary associations.

Table 3.3 Potentially relevant features of interviewees

Feature	Description	Source(s)
Length of involvement in club	Length of time at the club	Stolle (2001a; b)
Type of involvement in club	E.g. active or passive member, volunteer, committee member	Wollebæk And Selle (2002b; 2003)
Intensity of involvement	I.e. how much time a member usually spends in the club per week/month	Wollebæk and Selle (2002a)
Other voluntary association memberships	I.e. current and past involvement in other voluntary associations	Hooghe (2003a); Stolle and Hooghe (2004)

Through my interviews, I sought to select interviewees who might allow me to explore how these aspects influenced processes of social capital development. However, in case this implies a clear, structured selection process, it is important to note that I was strongly influenced by those who

¹⁷ Two examples of this are as follows. First, I became increasingly interested in how research participants characterised the social ties they had formed through their club involvement (i.e. whether they considered other club members to be close friends, or acquaintances, and how they themselves drew distinctions between these different types). This interest arose primarily from my reading of Small's (2009a) study of social capital development in childcare centres and further research on social networks. Second, I grew increasingly interested in the process of collective identification, following my reading of, among other things, Kramer's (2009) work on the social psychological underpinnings of social capital theory. This led me to focus more in interviews on how people felt about being part of a group, when such group feelings were strongest and so on.

would agree to be interviewed. In the end, my selection of interviewees was a mix of initial probing, selection based on the above ‘criteria’, opportunism (e.g. who was hanging around in the clubhouse at Treeford) and ‘snowball sampling’.

In total, I interviewed 31 people in 23 separate interviews, around ten in each club. (A full list of interviewees is included as Appendix D.) Interviews lasted anywhere between 50 minutes and two and a half hours, the average being around an hour and a half. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. The vast majority of interviews were one-to-one, with just three interviews involving multiple participants. After a time, I felt that I had begun to reach the point of data saturation, when each new interview ‘provide[d] very little new or surprising information’ (Small, 2009b: 25). Still, while I stopped conducting further interviews (with the exception of one later interview at Faxhill), the analysis of my data continued for some time.

In the interviews, I sought to adopt certain critical realist conventions in the way I conversed with the interviewees. Pawson and Tilley (1997: 153-182) actually devote an entire chapter to realist interview technique and discuss how to ‘construct’ realist data. In short, this involves framing questions around the key elements of critical realist explanations, namely context, mechanism and outcome. For example, they suggest asking participants to give examples or tell stories, as this can help identify salient aspects of context and provide rich detail about social processes. In the interviews, I often used this technique, encouraging participants to tell me ‘the story’ of how they first came to the club, or ‘the story’ of how they became part of a group at the club. Likewise, Pawson and Tilley (1997: 167) suggest that interviewers should present theories, so that participants can ‘confirm, refute or refine’ those theories. This involves reframing a participant’s initial explanations in the form of a ‘context-mechanism-outcome’ configuration and

asking for further comment. I also used this technique regularly in the interviews.¹⁸

I used two other key techniques in the interviews to ‘construct’ critical realist data. First, I found that the best way to gain insight into the mechanisms of social tie formation and social capital development was to approach it backwards. That is to say, interviewees seemed to find it easiest to identify the outcomes of their involvement first (e.g. the social ties they had formed, the groups they now felt part of, the resources they had received and provided) and *then* to discuss the processes that had led to these outcomes. Second, I regularly encouraged interviewees to make cross-contextual comparisons. That is to say, once they had identified certain mechanisms of social capital development that they felt operated within the club, I pushed them to think about whether such mechanisms operated in other areas of their life (e.g. at work, in other voluntary associations, with family, friends and so on). This technique achieved two things: first, it elicited rich information about context and what specific elements of context either enabled or constrained certain mechanisms; second, it often sharpened interviewees’ descriptions of the mechanisms themselves. Overall, the interviews provided a rich seam of data on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of social capital development.

¹⁸ I could provide many examples of this, but the following simple one should suffice. Henry, a member of Treeford, had discussed in our interview how he felt that he had developed, or entered into, a kind of ‘social net’ (his phrase) at the club; and he had discussed some aspects of interaction at the club that he felt made this process quite straightforward. One of these was that he did not consider his attendance at the club to be an obligation. I sought to reframe this more formally (albeit not very eloquently) and put it back to him.

RT: Yeah. So you think that that kind of neutral aspect of the club life, or the very sort of, the nature of it being *voluntary*, you know, you’re all there because you *want* to be there, you think that helps the kind of, the social net develop?

Henry: *Definitely*. And I, I think it’s, it’s an important aspect of...not joining a club, but it’s a very important aspect of *staying* in the club.

After this exchange, he went on to discuss this ‘context-mechanism interaction’ in more detail, providing further insight into how the ‘choice element’ of participation affected social interaction in the club. I discuss this further in subsequent chapters.

Documents

In addition to observation and interviews, I also collected a small number of documents. As Myers (2009: 153) points out, documents, such as emails, web pages and leaflets can allow a researcher to build a richer picture than could be obtained by interviews and fieldwork alone. Here, I gathered a small body of relevant material, including web pages from the three clubs' websites, newsletters and club emails. I used these to provide further contextual detail, particularly around issues like club 'culture'. For example, Caggston's website included a section entitled 'War Stories', which included a number of members' 'Top Ten Reminiscences'. This kind of material provided additional insight (along with observation and interviews) about processes of social interaction, social tie formation, collective identification and so on. These documents, like the field notes and interview transcripts, were entered into NVivo for analysis (more on this below).

DATA ANALYSIS AND OTHER RESEARCH ISSUES

Until recently, there was a relative lack of detailed guidance around data analysis within case study research, certainly when compared to the advice available on selecting cases, entering the field, collecting data and so on. Indeed, Yin (2009: 127) still comments that analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies. Likewise, there was, until recently, little direct guidance on how to analyse data within critical realist research. This is linked to the more general lack of critical realist methodology texts discussed earlier. Fortunately, this situation has changed somewhat and there is now a growing body of work related to these issues. In what follows, I discuss some of this recent guidance and I explain the approach I took in this thesis.

First, the nuts and bolts. I transcribed all interviews verbatim and, as discussed above, I recorded field notes and kept a research journal entitled 'General Reflections', which included analysis and interpretation of observations, notes and analysis concerning interviews and reflections on

the research I was reading (see Appendix B). I entered all my data (field notes, interview transcripts and other documents) into NVivo, fundamentally to facilitate data management (Kelle, 2004: 278), but also to make the coding process more straightforward. As is entirely common in qualitative research, the processes of data collection, analysis and writing overlapped and influenced one another.

My process of coding and data analysis was largely based on the constant comparative method, which is a key technique within grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Several authors (e.g. Layder, 1993; Yeung, 1997) have noted the complementarity between critical realist research and grounded theory and several critical realist studies have used such an approach (e.g. Clark et al., 2005; Tolson et al., 2007). As Myers (2009: 106) points out, this kind of grounded theory analysis is very useful in developing context-based, process-oriented descriptions and explanations – precisely the aim of this research. Indeed, Yeung (1997: 62) maintains that ‘the grounded theory method comes in handy for the practice of realist research by complementing the functioning of iterative abstraction and by grounding realist theories of causal mechanisms in concrete phenomena’.

The first stage of my analysis involved breaking down the data into specific ‘units’ and then coding these ‘units’ to categories. These categories were derived either directly from the participants’ language and particular perspectives, or from elements of the broad social capital framework, which formed the focus of the research. As Lincoln and Guba (1985: 339-344) discuss, drawing on Glaser and Strauss (1967), the process of constant comparison involves assigning ‘units’ of data to various categories (often multiple), changing the content and definition of different categories and seeking relationships between these categories. In charting this process, I created and maintained three documents:

- (i) ‘Coding Order’, in which I simply recorded the order in which I coded my data (e.g. individual interview transcripts, field notes, website material);
- (ii) ‘Coding Scheme’, in which I recorded the specific categories I created and when (i.e. during the coding of which document);
- (iii) ‘Coding Reflections’, in which I wrote extended descriptions of individual categories, reflections on any uncertainties about where specific material should be coded, explanations for coding material in the way that I had, my interpretations about relationships between categories and so on.¹⁹

At this point, it is worth discussing the critical realist elements of this process. These centred on the distinction of contexts, mechanisms and outcomes and, importantly, the identification of interactions between them. Westhorp (2008: 156) notes that ‘it is tempting to begin from the assumption that realist analysis can be straightforward’. One could simply code data to ‘context’, ‘mechanism’ and ‘outcome’. However, as she herself and many other critical realists (e.g. Reed, 2009; Sayer, 2000) point out, there is often no simple distinction between these elements. For example, in relation to social capital, we have already discussed how the outcomes of social capital can function as the basis for group solidarity. Consequently, it is possible to see how these social phenomena might be viewed (and coded) as both outcomes and mechanisms of social capital development. Likewise, Sayer (2000) explains that ‘context’ is really just the relation of a particular mechanism with other objects that have their own causal powers and liabilities (i.e. other mechanisms). Ultimately, one’s labelling of social phenomena as context, mechanism or outcome is often an analytical decision, rather than an ontological claim. My main analytical decision was to focus on the principal mechanisms of social capital development, as outlined by Portes (1998). This meant that I predominantly analysed (and coded) other processes as elements of context.

¹⁹ I include an extended extract from my ‘Coding Reflections’ as Appendix E.

Significantly, as discussed earlier, critical realist explanation rests on the *interactions* between contexts and mechanisms that produce outcomes. As such, one important aspect of my analysis was to identify such interactions. For reasons of space, I do not describe in detail the different ways I sought to do this (for a fuller explanation, see Westhorp's (2008: 155-181) excellent discussion of 'realist qualitative analysis', which I drew on regularly). Nevertheless, some description of my approach is useful. One obvious way of identifying an interaction, or at least participants' perceptions of an interaction, is when participants offer them explicitly in their explanations. This can be seen in the following basic example, where Michael at Trefford explained how level of sporting ability (considered here an element of 'personal context') could affect the process of social tie formation: 'If you're good at tennis...people want to play with you and you get to mix in a lot more'. As Westhorp (2008: 175) notes, 'the mere fact that participants have entered explanatory mode ('explaining how this change happened') rather than, for example, descriptive mode ('describing that this change happened') may serve as a clue to an interaction'. In addition, there are other linguistic clues, such as co-location of items in the text, or the use of linguistic joiners, such as 'and', 'because', 'but' and 'like'. Of course, I did not code these linguistic clues in their own right. Nevertheless, it was this process of identifying interactions, undertaken as part of the broader process of constant comparison, that characterised my data analysis.

Ethical issues

A number of ethical issues arose during the process of my research, specifically in my collection of data through observation and interviews. These centred on: informed consent; avoiding harm for participants in data collection; doing justice to participants in data analysis; and confidentiality. These all are common issues in qualitative research and they have been discussed at length in many methodological textbooks (see, for example, Creswell, 2003: 62-67; Flick, 2009: 35-44; Tolman and Brydon-Miller, 2001). Nevertheless, I will provide a concise summary of the steps I took to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical way.

Before I began observation in each of the clubs, I received informed consent from key individuals. Allmark (2002) defines this process as follows: the consent is given by someone competent to do so; the person giving the consent is adequately informed; and the consent is given voluntarily. In Caggston, this key individual was the president, Bob; in Faxhill, the primary organiser, Frank; and in Treeford, the chair, Mary, and the tennis secretary, George. In each case, these key individuals received consent from other members of the club, either through direct discussion (Caggston), or through committee meetings (Faxhill and Treeford). In Treeford, as it was the largest club, I also produced a poster with my name, photograph, contact details and a general description of the research I was conducting, which was placed on the club notice-board. This poster included a section informing members that if they had any concerns about the research, or wished to opt out, they could contact either me, or the chair of the club. Before each interview, I provided participants with a consent form that included the following elements, as recommended by Creswell (2003: 64-65): their right to participate voluntarily and right to withdraw at any time; the purpose of the study; the procedures of the study; the right to ask questions and obtain a copy of the results; and both their and my signatures.

During data collection, I sought to ensure that the research brought no harm to participants. The research was not focused on particularly sensitive topics; however, in observing and discussing social interaction, the formation of social relationships, processes of exclusion and so on, some more sensitive information was shared. On a very few occasions, interviewees asked for the voice recorder to be turned off, as they provided me with personal information either about themselves or other members, which they did not wish to be included. I respectfully agreed to all such requests. Both before and after every interview, I offered to provide interviewees with complete transcripts of the interviews, so that they could read and make any corrections, if they wished to (none took up this offer). In addition, I sought to deal with potential concerns through the steps I took to ensure confidentiality (see below). In analysing data, as Flick (2009: 41) notes, you come to certain

judgments (e.g. in comparing people in terms of ability, or behaviour), which participants, if they read the results, might find embarrassing, or which might alter participants' views of themselves. In order to 'do justice to the participants', I sought to ensure that my interpretations were really grounded in the data (e.g. interview statements) and were not unfair judgments made on a personal level.

Finally, I have sought to protect participants through ensuring confidentiality. As regards the data itself, I have taken the obvious step of storing it in a safe place (e.g. physical data in a locked cabinet; electronic data on password protected devices). As regards the write-up, there was more to consider. During the research, none of the research participants were particularly concerned about me using their real names, nor were key individuals at the clubs concerned about me revealing the names of the clubs themselves. However, I tend to agree with Bearman (2005: 15) that

human subjects' concerns are not only about what is; they are also about what could be...and thus one must be especially sensitive to the possibility of deductive disclosure of respondent identity, because we can never know what specific kinds of comments, analyses, descriptions, or accounts are or will in some future turn out to be potentially harmful.

As such, I have provided pseudonyms for both clubs and individual members and, where necessary to ensure anonymity, I have changed biographical details.

Trustworthiness

The final issue that I wish to address in this chapter is a thorny one, namely validity, or trustworthiness. Opinions on this issue vary widely. Some consider concepts like reliability and validity to be just as important in qualitative, as in quantitative research, albeit that they take different forms. Thus, Yin (2009) provides an extended discussion of how to ensure construct validity, internal and external validity and reliability in case studies.

Others reject such an approach, arguing that the concepts of reliability and validity are fundamentally related to measurement, probability samples, statistics and so on. For example, Thomas (2011: 62) argues that attempts to reformulate validity by proposing new criteria (e.g. credibility, relevance, confirmability etc.) are really just attempts to bash a ‘square peg, validity, into the round hole of case study research’.²⁰ For Thomas (2011) and other researchers in this vein, the key issue is not reliability or validity (or some reformulated version of either), but a more general issue of quality (more on this below).

I agree with elements of this latter position. Like Janesik (2000), I think there is a tendency towards ‘methodolatry’, or ‘criteriology’, as Schwandt (1996) dubs it. This is no doubt related to the methodological battles discussed at the start of the chapter, whereby many qualitative researchers have felt pressured to demonstrate that their work is somehow ‘scientific’. Nevertheless, there are some useful lessons to be drawn from the discussions on validity in the qualitative methodological literature, specifically around the concepts of triangulation and reflexivity, and these influenced the way in which I conducted my research. Thus, I discuss each of these in turn before returning to the more general issue of quality.

Triangulation is a key element of case study research and critical realist research more broadly. Denzin (1970) originally referred to four types of triangulation: data triangulation; investigator triangulation; theoretical triangulation; and methodological triangulation. Yeung (1997: 64-5) discusses the last of these, methodological triangulation, in the context of critical realist research and suggests that it can do much to improve the quality and trustworthiness of the data collected. This was the approach I adopted, primarily by combining interviews and observation. To take a very obvious example, one of the interviewees at Faxhill discussed how all members of the first team would always stay after matches to eat and drink

²⁰ Indeed, he demonstrates this in a not entirely tongue-in-cheek fashion by showing that Einstein’s work leading up to the theory of relativity would have met virtually none of the ‘validity criteria’ proposed in the methodological literature, whereas Burt’s work in educational psychology (now shown to have been fabricated) would have met all of them.

together for at least a couple of hours and often the whole night. However, my observations over the season suggested this happened very rarely, if at all (most players would actually stay for half an hour or so and then leave). Although the concept of methodological triangulation has been criticised as resting on positivist assumptions (see, e.g. Massey, 1999), it has been strongly argued that viewing phenomena from different angles can aid critical awareness.²¹

Another notion increasingly discussed in this area is reflexivity, which has been defined as ‘the interpretation of interpretation’ (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000). Again, there has been a great deal written about reflexivity and I cannot hope to contribute meaningfully to that debate. Still, it is worth pointing out that, in my research, I sought to adhere to certain key principles of reflexivity. First, I sought to look at my own perspectives on the data and the research process from other perspectives. In particular, I discussed my interpretations (as appropriate) with some members of the clubs as I went along. These key informants helped refine my understanding of ‘club life’. Second and related to the first, I sought critically to explore my own position in the field, my possible influence on the research participants and my own assumptions that underlay my interpretations of the data. In practical terms, I tended to record these reflections in my research journal, entitled ‘General Reflections’ (see Appendix B).²²

At root, as noted above, social science researchers should seek to ensure the quality of their research. However, this is just as difficult to pin down as many of the other issues discussed in the last few paragraphs. Thomas

²¹ Indeed, Richardson (2000) makes this argument from a postmodernist perspective, although she puts forward the concept of ‘crystallization’ instead of triangulation. In later work, she explains this as follows: ‘I propose that the central imaginary for “validity” for postmodernist texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallization.’ (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005: 963)

²² For a while at the beginning of the research, I considered digitally recording my reflections (a bit like Agent Cooper in *Twin Peaks*), but I quickly abandoned this plan for a number of reasons, including the very real danger of total self-absorption.

(2011: 66-67) draws on Hammersley (2005: 3-4) to offer some useful indicators of quality, including: (i) clarity of writing; (ii) a clearly outlined and justified research question; (iii) appropriate methods of data collection; (iv) sufficient information about the research process and the researcher; (v) clear formulation of main claims; and (vi) clear relations between these claims and the evidence. I have sought to attend to each of these in my research. I have, I hope, written clearly throughout the thesis, while I specifically outlined and justified my research question in chapters one and two, restating it formally in this chapter. I have also, in this chapter, explained my methods of data collection and my rationale for using them; and I have provided as much information about the research process as space would allow. I formulate my main claims in chapters four to eight and I summarise these and examine their implications in chapter nine. In relation to the last of these ‘quality indicators’, i.e. clear relations between claims and evidence, some authors criticise analysis based on interviews and observation for being selective and leaving out evidence that does not fit with a chosen narrative. I have sought to address this, in my write-up, by indicating clearly where I felt the evidence for my claims was strong and where it was more tentative. In certain places, I have also used individuals as ‘critical cases’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 229) to demonstrate key issues.

Having said all this, Hammersley (2005: 6, quoted in Thomas, 2011: 67) offers an important caveat, which applies to these ‘quality criteria’ (and, in fact, to all such criteria around validity or trustworthiness):

These are lists of what we might call issues for threshold judgment: they remind the reader what to take account of, what they need to make a judgment about. However, they are not operationalised in such a way that anyone who did not already know how to make the judgments concerned would be able to apply them, nor do they tell the reader what would be sufficient in each case. And they do not tell us whether all of the thresholds have to be met for a positive conclusion to be reached, whether high scoring on one can counterbalance a lower ‘score’ on another, and so on. Moreover, I do not believe that they can be operationalised in this way, or that attempting to do so would be desirable.

It is worth keeping this in mind as we turn, in the following chapters, to the main findings of the thesis. I have sought to ensure quality in the research, but, in some ways, this quality is something that will ultimately be judged by the reader.

SUMMARY

This chapter has presented an extended insight into my methodological approach. I explained how and why I conducted intensive research, using a multiple, nested case study design, and how and why I selected the particular cases I did. I then discussed my specific methods of data collection and illustrated some of the techniques I used and some of the challenges I faced. Finally, I discussed how I analysed the data and I touched on other key issues, including reflexivity and research quality. In the next five chapters, I present my empirical analysis. I focus on how and why people formed ties at the clubs, the mechanisms through which social capital developed and the way various elements of context shaped those mechanisms. First, however, in the next chapter, I discuss the outcomes arising from people's involvement in the clubs.

CHAPTER 4: OUTCOMES OF INVOLVEMENT

Involvement in a voluntary sports club can lead to a range of possible outcomes. Most obviously, it enables participation in one or more sporting activities. This sporting participation may lead to its own set of outcomes – personal satisfaction, improved sporting skills, and so on. But a voluntary sports club is also a site of social interaction. It provides opportunities for people to meet other people and to enlarge their social networks. It acts as a broker. Social capital theorists argue that through social ties, people are able to access a range of resources, such as information about jobs, social support and so on. But can involvement in a voluntary sports club actually lead to these kinds of outcomes? This chapter addresses this question.

It might seem strange to look first at outcomes. However, in order to say something about the mechanisms through which social capital is developed and the contexts within which these mechanisms operate – the aim of this thesis – it is first necessary to look at the outcomes of social capital and at social capital itself. Furthermore, the research suggested that the positive outcomes that people derived from their involvement tended to enter their ‘vocabularies of motive’ (Mills, 1967) and so direct their behaviour. Any analysis of social capital development ought to pay attention to people’s motivations; and so an understanding of the outcomes of involvement is an important part of this analysis.

This chapter has three main sections. In the first section, I look at ‘sporting’ outcomes: the benefits and occasional detriments that people identified as resulting directly from their participation in different sporting activities. These outcomes do not constitute social capital, nor are they analysed as such. However, the evidence suggests that what appear, at first glance, to be purely ‘sporting’ outcomes are often inextricably linked to outcomes and processes related to social capital. In the second section, I look at network-mediated benefits, such as social support, job opportunities and expert advice, and certain costs, such as restrictions on individual freedoms, that

together can be seen as outcomes of social capital. In the third section, I attempt to isolate social capital itself. That is to say, I examine evidence of people's ability to secure resources, rather than the resources themselves.

'SPORTING' OUTCOMES

Every member who played sport in one of the clubs discussed outcomes deriving from the sporting activity itself. Patrick, a member at Trefford for 13 years and now employed as club manager, referred simply to enjoyment: 'I enjoy it. 'Cos tennis is fun. It's the best game in the world, but that's my own, my own personal opinion.' Bob, the founder of Caggston, said: 'When it comes down to it, you said to me, what's the attraction? The huge attraction is being involved in the game of *cricket*. Now, that is the tremendous attraction. I just think cricket is such a *great* game.'

More specifically, almost every member explained how relaxing the sporting activity was; how it functioned as a diversion; and how it positively affected their mental well-being. For example, Ben at Caggston, said:

[It] stops you thinking about death for about eight hours every Sunday. Which isn't bad [laughs]. Um, just takes your, just takes your mind off things. It does, you can relax...when you're running about in the field, waiting to bat, or even batting, you don't think about anything else. It's just an, it's just that ability you have to switch off from everything else. So, it's a good stress relief.

These experiences were widespread. Indeed, several interviewees, such as Michael at Trefford, discussed how other members, as well as themselves, had experienced similar outcomes: 'There's quite a lot of people who would say that they only survive their work, or their divorce, or whatever's going on, through tennis. It's like a refuge for them.'

Members linked these outcomes to particular aspects of their participation. For example, Leslie at Trefford talked about the importance of achieving: 'Well, I think it kind of, it pumps me up, really. If you play a good game, you

feel quite happy.' And Roland at Treeford discussed how enjoyment was linked to a feeling of improvement: 'The actual enjoyment, which is slowly increasing, of actual tennis, you know, the actual stroke of a ball, getting accuracy right, things like that...Um, all of that sort of feeling improvement, um, in terms of a bit more consistency of playing, experiencing that is a source of *great* enjoyment, actually.' Those involved in organising activity at the clubs also derived enjoyment from others' participation in sporting activity. Again, this related both to the 'pure' enjoyment and to the enjoyment through achieving that others experienced. Frank at Faxhill said: 'Why do I get involved in it? I don't know actually [laughs]. I love football and I love seeing people enjoying themselves.' Patrick at Treeford said something similar: 'What I get out of the club is pleasure from people playing tennis...To watch people playing tennis, old, young, from the age of three onwards. It's fantastic.'

At first glance, these outcomes appear to relate exclusively to participation in sporting activities; they seem somewhat removed from social capital. So, why examine them here? There are at least three answers to this question. First, the case studies showed that 'sporting' outcomes and the mechanisms through which they developed were bound up tightly – perhaps inextricably – with broader processes of social interaction. This is important, because, as later chapters will show, these broader processes are themselves tightly bound up with mechanisms of social capital development. Second, as mentioned briefly above, 'sporting' outcomes played a key role in people's motivations for joining and for maintaining membership of the clubs. Any analysis of the development of social capital should take account of such motivations. Third, and perhaps encompassing the other two, research has shown that the 'focal activity' in an organisation, or in a specific locale, shapes how people act towards each other and how they establish relationships (Feld, 1981; Feld and Carter, 1998). Consequently, understanding the particular sporting activities that club members pursue and the outcomes they derive from them informs our understanding of the wider social processes that take place within the various clubs.

The links between ‘sporting’ outcomes and social interaction

Almost every member who discussed ‘sporting’ outcomes linked them to other outcomes, or other mechanisms. For example, Bob, who, as we saw above, talked about the enjoyment he derived from cricket, also mentioned other social outcomes.

It doesn’t just work on one level, like, ooh, I’ve had loads of fresh air and exercise and I feel really good about myself, possibly because we won and I did well, sort of thing. Um, I think it can also, you know, it helps your personal relationships and that sort of thing – it must do, it *must* do, because of the nature of team sport, and organising and running a – pretty small – venture, but it does take some organising and running, people have got to do certain things, you know.

Likewise, Michael at Treeford swiftly followed his comments about the tennis club being a ‘refuge’ with a discussion of the social elements of club life.

And then there’s, um, meeting people who are not at *work*, so you haven’t got, and maybe they’ve got different, um, um – what’s the word – they can put a different mirror on your situation, ‘cos they’re not in your particular profession, so they can, you know, put things in context in a way, if you talk to them about your work problems or whatever it is. And then, and then there’s drinking afterwards, of course, there’s alcohol, which is like going to a pub, I suppose. So, it’s, I think, overall, it’s, um, for me anyway, but I’m sure you’d find that for other players, it’s a, it’s a kind of, fantastic, really.

Roland, too, who talked quite specifically about the enjoyment he derived from improving his tennis skills, did so only *after* he discussed the opportunities the club offered for social interaction.

Um, I’ve enjoyed the incidental social side of just meeting people I otherwise wouldn’t meet, but haven’t got to know them better than that. You know, haven’t built up those kind of friendships where I spend time meeting them socially, apart from tennis. But, I’ve enjoyed the, the kind of casual acquaintance, if you like, of lots of people.

This is interesting, because Roland had not, by his own admission, got involved in the social side of the club. On his own account, his primary purpose was to improve his tennis, rather than to engage socially with other members. Nevertheless, the social interaction that occurred simply as part of his group coaching – ‘the incidental social side of just meeting people I otherwise wouldn’t meet’ – had become, for Roland, a source of genuine enjoyment. (It is also interesting, because, in his comments, Roland distinguished between different types of social ties, namely ‘casual acquaintances’ and friendships where people meet ‘socially, apart from tennis’. I discuss different types of ties in chapter five.)

The link between ‘sporting’ outcomes and social interaction is perhaps best illustrated by those who discussed playing the sport in different contexts. Duncan, at Caggston, put it as follows:

I've played cricket in lots of different kinds of, types of sort of scenarios. So, I've played like school cricket, county schools cricket, and I've played club – different – club cricket, cricket at university and stuff like that. I guess Caggston is probably the *form* of cricket that I've most enjoyed. Um, and I think that's probably, that's always been due to...to me just liking the people that I play with more, probably.

This exemplifies a general pattern: members’ initial comments suggested their enjoyment derived directly from the sporting activity, while their more extended comments revealed the significant role played by other factors, such as social relationships.

At Treeford, George’s comments followed this pattern. Initially, like many members, he identified the positive aspects of playing tennis: ‘Coming down here, when you’re just hitting a ball, all you need to think about is that ball and hitting it, so everything else is out of your mind, so it’s actually quite a nice relief. It’s all, it’s all, it’s very therapeutic.’ I asked him whether he thought that was an outcome of the activity itself (‘is that just a *tennis* thing?’), or whether it derived from other aspects of the club environment. He replied:

Yeah, I think my response to that is that...I think there is something nice about the availability, the club makes it available, because often you can just come down and get a game, whereas if you weren't in a club, (a) you don't mix with people who necessarily want to play tennis and (b) the people who want to play tennis may not be available...It's really important, that, so you've not got that added pressure of trying to organise to go and find someone to play, you've just got loads of similar people [laughs] who want to play, or you just come down and fit in somewhere. So, that's a really important aspect of it, I think...What tends to happen is that people get a, a circle of friends or of tennis players that they play with and it means that your options of playing are increased enormously. And you've always got the facilities. I mean, you could turn up to a park court and they could all be used, for example, whereas down here you just book a court, you know.

These comments are instructive for two reasons. First, they show how the organisation of the focal activity (here, tennis) affected the outcomes people derived from their membership. In this case, the ready availability of other players meant that members did not, in George's words, have 'that added pressure of trying to organise to go and find someone to play.' Recall that his initial view was that the activity of tennis *itself* was therapeutic. However, his extended discussion made clear that part of this 'therapy' derived from the way in which the club made the game available. Second, they begin to illustrate the way in which members formed social ties at Trefford. As George said, 'What tends to happen is that people get a, a circle of friends or of tennis players that they play with'. I discuss the formation and maintenance of social ties in the next chapter.

Very often, members made the jokey observation that sport, at the clubs, was almost superfluous. Henry provided an indicative example. Like a number of other members, he had played tennis until his mid-teens and had then given up, only starting to play again in early middle-age. He had been a regular at the club since then, playing, until very recently, with a group that had met weekly for the last 20 years. In our interview, he also discussed his involvement at a local sports centre, where he swam every morning with a rarely-changing set of retired 'gents'. The benefits he derived from that and from Trefford, he said, were very similar: 'It's the social side of humanity,

isn't it, at the end of the day? It isn't just the, the hitting the ball with the tennis racquet, or the swimming and the diving into the pool, that was almost an excuse – not quite [laughs], because that was an important aspect of it – but, um, the social side of it was very, very important. It was key.'

These findings, i.e. the close links between 'sporting' and 'social' outcomes, are in line with much previous research. For example, Fox (2000) reviewed research on the relationship between exercise and self-esteem and found that it was almost wholly dependent on social context. The study showed that 'attractiveness' factors, such as positive physical self-perceptions, that led people to continue to participate, could not be separated from factors that promoted self-esteem, such as the qualities of the leader, the sport or exercise setting and relationships with other participants. Drawing a broad conclusion from this and other research, Biddle et al. (2004, quoted in Coalter, 2007a: 101) argue that 'while physical activity may enhance psychological well-being, it is likely that the prevailing psychological climate and social interactions will be more crucial than actual physical activity'. The evidence from the case studies suggested a very similar conclusion.

For the vast majority of members, then, the social interaction *within* and *around* the sporting activity was crucial to their involvement. And the structure and nature of this social interaction was heavily dependent on the way the sporting activity was organised. These key findings emerged again and again in each of the case study clubs and I consider them at much greater length in the following chapters. Here, though, I am primarily concerned with outcomes and with social capital specifically. This first section has pointed up one broad conclusion, namely that what appear, at first glance, to be pure 'sporting' outcomes are often very closely bound up with 'social' outcomes that derive from processes of social interaction. The second and third sections indicate that many of these 'social' outcomes can be regarded as consequences of social capital, or as social capital itself.

SOCIAL CAPITAL OUTCOMES

Discussion of social capital very often incorporates anecdotes, examples and vignettes. Some of these, like the New York diamond sellers (Coleman, 1988), discussed in chapter two, are now well known. Many authors use them to exemplify social capital: they describe discernible social networks, shared norms, obligations of reciprocity, the facilitation of some type of collective action and so on. However, in keeping with the careful conceptualisation of social capital that I am using within this thesis, such vignettes should be seen as more often focusing on the outcomes of social capital than on social capital itself. Of course, they imply that social capital is present (people secure resources, so they must have the *ability* to secure resources), but identification of social capital and its sources is often subsumed in the details of its outcomes. The case studies provided many such vignettes and, in what follows, I describe a few of them in detail. Accordingly, this section should be seen as focusing primarily on the outcomes of social capital, both positive and negative, that emerged at the clubs. In the final section, I seek to move beyond these vignettes to try to analyse social capital as distinct from its outcomes.

Network-mediated benefits

The case studies were replete with examples of what Portes (1998: 12) terms ‘network-mediated benefits’. These ranged from simple, everyday favours – one club member drove a van, so helped other club members move house – to career advice, joint investment and ‘relationship counselling’. I start this section with two stories ‘straight from the horses’ mouths’. These stories emerged from two very different people at two very different clubs. Yet, they reveal several commonalities about the presence of social capital in voluntary sports clubs and the way it can provide benefits.

Michael and the property business

I first met Michael at Treeford around lunch-time on a showery Wednesday. We sat next to one another, watching tennis on the television, and he struck up a conversation with me almost immediately. He spoke with a mixture of urbanity and crudeness as only the well-heeled can, telling me within two minutes about the sexual exploits of professional tennis players, Ana Ivanovic and Fernando Verdasco. After I briefly discussed my research interests, he told me that Treeford was a great place for networking. In a manner either jokey or serious (I was unsure at the time), he told me: 'I've made all my money through here'. I asked him if, at some point, he would mind chatting about the club in more detail and he readily agreed. So, a couple of weeks later, we sat down for an extended interview.

White, in his late 40s, bespectacled and evidently fit, Michael had been a member of Treeford for more than 20 years, playing regularly in one of the club teams. He chose the club, he told me, based on its reputation, the quality of its players and its facilities. Quite quickly, we got on to discussing what Michael referred to as the 'business benefits' he had had from the club.

Through the people I used to play here, the friends I met through the, through the social afternoons, got to know them quite well, and they were a similar standard, so, er, used to play with them and then discuss, you know, how they made their money. Quite a few of them were in property and so they sort of helped me in that direction, 'cos obviously I was very dissatisfied with what I was doing.

I thought, remembering our previous discussion, that he was referring to his work as an organisational psychology lecturer! However, as it turned out, he was referring to something else.

At the time, I wasn't doing that, actually. I was working, when I first started here, I was working for a big multi-national as a market analyst and then I moved into academe. Then I set up my own business, but, um, within property, started more than 15 years ago. Only through encouragement, really, from somebody here. One of the members here encouraged me, showed me the ropes, took me to auctions,

you know, told me I shouldn't be working in the job I was, such low money, that, so it was fantastic, really.

He told me in more detail how his career shift had occurred.

I met this particular person and we used to play in the team here, for the third team, together. And, um, I think at the time, he was, he was younger than me, he'd just graduated, but his father was quite wealthy. And I think he took one job and only lasted a few months, he just couldn't bear being told what to do. And his father gave him money, you know, to buy properties on his behalf and do them up...And what happened was, we used to – say, about six times a week – we used to come down here. Think, for some reason, I was only part-time employed, then, I can't remember, or even between major jobs, something like that. But, there was a long period of maybe a year when I used to come here about, about 11 o'clock in the morning, about three times a week, play three sets of tennis, go to a pub for lunch, and then go and visit a couple of properties to look at, which were in the auction catalogue. But, I didn't have money, he had money, so we just went through them together, just for fun, and he told me the ins and outs of the whole business. So, as a result of that – I did have a little bit of money – I did buy one, a very cheap one at the time, which cost me about £6,000, one bedroom flat. So, that's what got me started, really, on the, the whole process. And also we bought, we did joint ventures together, we bought, I would say we bought, over the years, we've bought about ten properties together...And what used to happen – sometimes, he used to go to the auction, I was working, so I couldn't go anyway, he used to buy properties on my behalf, but jointly. And neither of us had seen the properties. We just bought them unseen, because we thought the picture looked nice or whatever. And then we used to either develop or sell them back into the auction, or back into an estate agent. So, over the years, we've done a lot of things together, bought a chalet in France together. So, there's a lot of synergy, put it that way.

For Michael, this was not an isolated example. Although the closeness of the relationship and the scale of the outcomes were greatest in this case, he had, he said, done similar things with other members of the club.

Yeah, I've done a lot of similar things here, but on a smaller scale. When I, um, when I was thinking about leaving employment altogether, setting up my own business, I had a friend here I used to play tennis with – he's actually a country member here now, he's moved to France – but he was a very successful lawyer. In fact, there's two lawyers here, one I used to use for my transactions – he's now

retired, but I used to use him – and the other lawyer, I told him how unhappy I was working, and he said, well, he encouraged me and said I should leave work and set up my own business and, er, he was very good for that. And *another* person here, who I played in the same team with, actually, same, same as the guy who was doing the property, another person, he's in, he runs his own public relations company, he wrote the brochure for me, for my company, for my start-up company, he did it *all*. All for me, everything, completely free of charge. It's funny, he did the whole thing and, off the back of that brochure, I captured my first big client, through, through the brochure, so that was fantastic. And so there's a lot of, um, that going around all the time. And I've employed people from here as well, for my building work and so on [laughs].

For Michael, then, Treeford had been a valuable source of network-mediated benefits.

Olly and the everyday favours

Olly had started at Caggston almost 30 years ago, coming along with his father and younger brother. His initial sporting participation, and that of his brother, was piecemeal and tentative: 'Yeah, if they were short, we'd field. Just standing on the boundary, watching the ball go by [laughs], or trying to field it.' Now 40, Olly was able to cast his mind back over a long span of involvement: 'I enjoyed it. You know, it was something to do. But, it's virtually taken up every Sunday in the summer since [laughs]. Which, in a way, when you think about it, is a bloody long time.' White, quite slim, his dark brown hair flecked with the odd white one, Olly was friendly and occasionally slightly nervous. He was, in some ways, quite disillusioned with Caggston, feeling that it had become a less sociable environment and one in which people were less willing to pitch in.

Well, years ago it was all sort of enjoyment, I suppose the activity of running around, whatever, but now it's – I wouldn't say a chore, I still enjoy *doing* it, but it gives me the 'ump when you're – not saying, maybe I don't do myself any favours by saying, 'Come on guys, you need to relieve the umpire, you need to relieve the scorer. Um, drinks need taking out.' Things like that. And they look at you and go, 'Do it then,'

you know. But, you're doing something else, because no-one else will do what you're doing.

During the interview, we discussed the ethos of the club in more detail. I mentioned the tradition I had observed at the annual club dinner of presenting a mini cricket bat to those club members who had recently had a child. I asked Olly whether this really meant something to him and to others at the club. He replied: 'Yeah. Yeah, it's just so – in a way, it shows you the club is sort of a family club. Everyone is...I say there for you, if you know what I mean. You know...I can't really describe it.' After pausing and reflecting, however, he did describe it. He said:

Yeah, 'cos obviously there are times when, you know, I've needed passports signed. Years ago, it had to be a profession sign it. So, it was, 'Bob, you're a solicitor, can you sign it?' 'Yeah, no problem.' You know, driving licence. 'Can you sign this?' 'Yeah, no problem.' That sort of thing. Er, so, in a way, yeah. Everyone – if anyone needed something doing and someone knew how to do it, I suppose, you could ask them and all they could say is 'No,' I guess [laughs].

I asked him whether this sort of thing happened much and he said,

I wouldn't say it happens *much*. Er, occasionally, you know. I mean, I've asked Bob for a couple of things. My Dad's asked him. Er, my Nan asked Bob for a few things when she was in the process of moving, er, well, *years* and years ago. So, yeah, if you had something that someone could do, you know. I've helped Duncan and Matt move bits and pieces when I had a van. That sort of thing, so, yeah, in a way, but it didn't happen that often.

However, a moment or two later, he went on to discuss how Tom, another member of Caggston had told him about a job opportunity at his place of work.

Yeah. Like Tom at the moment, he – 'cos I'm out of work – and, um, Tom said to me, 'There's a vacancy that's possibly going at our place. Would you be interested?' And he's forwarded me the job description and, um, I sent him my CV. He looked at my CV, he altered it a little bit. And said, 'Would you be interested?' And I said, 'Yeah, ok.' So, he's put my name forward for *that*. So...

RT: Oh, right. Ok. So, that sort of thing...

Yeah. Yeah. So, and I think Geoff worked with Bob for a bit. Um...

RT: Oh, yeah, 'cos he and Karl are now setting up their business, aren't they...

Yeah, so, if someone could do something, no-one would say no, really [laughs].

Later, Olly reiterated his point with a hypothetical example: 'If someone was an electrician in Caggston, I'm sure they wouldn't turn round and say, "No, I can't be arsed to help you out," if one of us asked them. You know, I don't think there'd be anything like that. It would be, "Yeah, I'll come round." So, Olly, despite his dissatisfaction with some elements of club life, described a series of network-mediated benefits that he and others had accessed through their involvement.

These examples of network-mediated benefits emerged from different clubs: the first, a large, well-funded, tennis and squash club with around 800 members, a rapidly progressing £2.5 million redevelopment and a bright future; the second, a small, one-team, cricket club with 12-15 regular playing members, no facilities and a somewhat uncertain future. They also emerged from different people: Michael and Olly had dissimilar personal histories, dissimilar social backgrounds and dissimilar attitudes towards their respective clubs. Furthermore, they differed in scale: joint property investment on the one hand and counter-signed passports on the other. Yet there were clear commonalities. Both Michael and Olly identified a range of network-mediated benefits that became available to them and to other members through their involvement in voluntary sports clubs. These actual and potential benefits became available because people interacted, spent time together and formed social ties – important processes that I examine in subsequent chapters. Here, the focus remains on outcomes; and the next important question – one I turn to now – is whether Michael and Olly were isolated cases, or whether other members had similar experiences.

The type and extent of network-mediated benefits

It is not the intention in this thesis, nor is it possible with the data I have collected, to make claims about regularities or common patterns within broader populations. My analysis is focused on how processes work in a small number of cases and what produces change. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look at whether the sorts of network-mediated benefits described above extended across others in the case study clubs and to look briefly at the types of benefits that club members experienced. This is because such stories, taken together, sketch a basic picture of club life and the networks of social ties that exist within it. They allow us to gain an understanding of what outcomes people experienced and, importantly, they reveal elements of the processes that led to them.

As we have seen, Olly, in Caggston, identified how club members had provided small services for him, such as signing documents, and how he had done favours for others, such as helping them move house. He told me that this type of activity was present across the club and that other members had the ability to access such resources. And indeed, other interviewees from Caggston, such as Duncan, pointed to similar resources:

When Ben started playing for us, he like, he offered me a job in, he offered me to come and work with him and stuff like that...Which was, you know, I guess, there are those kind of benefits, but it's not something that I've ever looked to get out of that scenario at all, not something...

RT: Yeah. But, what, that kind of stuff sort of exists, or *could* exist?

Well, it *does* exist. 'Cos I remember Darren, a while ago – this guy that used to play for us called Brian, who – a dubious character – but, um, he...Darren for a while struggled to find a job, he was out of work for quite a long time and, um, Brian's wife worked for a clothing company and she helped him to get a job with them and he's been working there ever since. So, it does kind of, it does happen.

Indeed, a few weeks later, this cropped up again in the natural course of conversation. I was chatting with Glen and Ben about some of the younger

members in the club.²³ In particular, Ben was discussing Ryan's educational achievements (he had taken three GCSEs a year early) and said, quite seriously, 'I'll sort him out with an internship if he wants it.' So, some members of Caggston had access to employment, or internship, opportunities, although this was not widespread.

More common in Caggston was the social support that members had gained or provided through their involvement. Duncan discussed this at length, suggesting that it had happened even more regularly in the past.

I think there was almost like a sense in which people talked about, you know, might talk about issues, or might talk about their life. And I remember like Sarah, Pete's wife, Sarah, she [laughs] almost used to do this like mentoring thing with Darren, where she'd like, you know, um, she'd kind of like help him through like scenarios, like he'd had some difficult scenarios with like girlfriends, stuff like that, and she would like kind of help him *through* those kind of things, as like a sounding board for him almost.

This view was echoed by some of the members' wives. Although not playing members of the club, their regular (and in some cases very lengthy) involvement gave them valuable insight into what went on in the club.

Kate: On one level there is a certain amount of mutual support as well...

Daisy: Yeah.

Kate: I mean, I don't, it's not sort of, you know, obvious, but I, people sit and they talk about things on the boundary, they probably do out there as well, I don't know, but, er, and I know various people have gone through difficult times in their life and talked to people, often it's something that people sit and chat through on the boundary...²⁴

²³ This was on the final day of the annual tour. We were messily consuming hot roast chicken, baguette and peri-peri mayonnaise (*sic*), washed down with tropical fruit juice.

²⁴ I observed this on a number of occasions. During my time at the club, I spent long periods on the boundary, listening (and occasionally contributing to) discussions on people's jobs, personal lives and so on. There was, it felt to me, a palpable atmosphere of sharing, almost like a group counselling session.

So, Caggston members appeared to have access to everyday favours, to varying degrees of emotional support and, in some cases, to information about jobs and even to internships and employment.

At Treeford, as we have seen, Michael realised certain ‘business benefits’ from his involvement. Several other members pointed to the sorts of services and expert advice that membership of the club made available. Leslie, for example, brought this up in her interview.

And sometimes people *want* things. Lots of people in the club are, you know, lots of architects, lots of surveyors, lots of, um, if you *need* somebody, you can usually find someone in the club who can relate you with someone. So, it’s quite a, it’s quite a full reference system, you know, knowing this large body of people, who are, um, quite dynamic.

I asked her whether she herself had made use of this ‘reference system’ and she said,

Yeah. Sometimes. If I’d had a particular, I’ve phoned people, I’ve made a couple of calls sometimes, if I’ve needed a bit of steering on something, and people will give you that information that you need. Whereas, you know, it can take ages if you try and go somewhere else.

A few days earlier, I had spoken to Claire, who had been a member of Treeford for four years. I asked her whether she had witnessed the kind of reciprocal information sharing and service provision that others had discussed. She said:

Um, yeah, I mean, there are some people who come from different backgrounds. If you want help, they do help you, yeah. I think once I did, did, some people knowing those technical things about building. You know, boiler or something. Yeah, then someone introduced me to one member, who’s doing that, so I contact him. He’s very happy to help, yeah [laughs].

RT: Yeah. And that sort of thing, would you say that sort of thing is quite widespread? That sort of thing of, like, oh, so-and-so knows so-and-so and...

I think people *will* help you if they can in the club. Yeah, they would. Normally they would. Yeah.

This exchange of services and expert information seemed to benefit not just members, but also the organisation of the club itself. For example, in response to a very general question about what the club was like, Mary, the chair, told me that she would often ask people to do things on behalf of the club.

One of the things that I like doing is asking people to do things for nothing [laughs]. And, um, very often they *do*. Jamie, who's in the white shirt at the next table, he – we've just got a new website – but Jamie did our old website and runs all our email. Um, but another squash member, who's a graphic designer, has just done us a new, a fabulous new website actually.

At Treeford's AGM, which I attended a few months later, this kind of resource provision was mentioned explicitly. George, in his annual tennis report, took the opportunity to thank specific people by name for all the good and important work they had done for the club. He reeled off a very long list of people that had provided an almost bewildering array of services free of charge. I also observed this behaviour during my time at Treeford, as the following excerpt from my field notes illustrates.

20 March 2011

Participated in 'club period' ('social tennis'). I noticed the easy, straightforward, casual exchange of information. For example, Gareth (male, late 30s, close-cropped, brown hair, tall, confident, not quite swaggering, but not far off) continues a conversation with another member (male, late 40s) after their match: 'A____ is the name of the company she works for.' Other member: 'Right, well, she must know B____.' They continue to discuss people in common and possible opportunities in the industry (apparently Gareth's wife/girlfriend is looking to move on from A____). This is a small example, but it illustrates how easy it is to start sharing information like this about jobs, acquaintances, people in common. These two members don't appear to know each other well at all (I think this is the first time they've even played together), but club period – convivial atmosphere, bit of playing, bit of sitting, snatches of conversation – seems conducive to the flow of information, etc.

A few people also discussed social support at Treeford. For example, Leslie said she felt ‘the club [was] kind of like a big, giant family of people’. I asked her whether she felt this family feeling was widespread within the club and she said,

Well, it's something *I* have, you know, will, people that I talk to, if I go away a long time, haven't been seen, someone might put a phone-call into me to find out if I'm alright. Whereas, you know, I don't think that would happen with new members, because you wouldn't know, they wouldn't know enough people.

I go on to discuss this in the next chapter, where I examine the *types* of social ties that people formed. However, it is worth noting here that Leslie's characterisation of the ‘club-as-family’ was not common among the members I spoke to. On the whole, members of Treeford talked more about the services, information and other tangible resources they had received than they did about social and emotional support. I explore the reasons for this in subsequent chapters.

Network-mediated benefits also arose as outcomes of interaction *between* clubs. For example, Mark, at Faxhill, explained how club organisers themselves built up a network through which they shared information and helped one another.

So, again, it's that meeting is, again, is being nice, having a chat, seeing what other teams are up to, tell 'em what you're up to. See if you can get help off them, see if they can help you. It's, it's helping each other, you know, even though you may see yourselves as rival to these other clubs, you still all want the same thing. To get a bunch of lads out playing football. And that's the ambition of most people, I believe, in football. Hope so [laughs].

These sorts of cross-club ties are not the direct focus here, so I do not dwell on them. However, this demonstrates that these processes of information sharing and resource exchange operated within and across organisational contexts.

So far, we have looked at relatively ‘tangible’ resources that members accessed: advice, information, direct support and so on. But members also accessed some more ‘intangible’ resources; and these were often just as, if not more, significant. Ben at Caggston provides a good case in point. He said:

It's a relaxation thing, so I can be more of myself at Caggston with these people that I know really well...I am more myself at Caggston than I am at work, 'cos I can relax more and doss about more and that's part of, maybe that's part of what I get out of Caggston is the ability to relax and behave as I am myself without worrying. That's part of the trusting other people – you can behave yourself and know that people aren't gonna have a strop.

This was a sentiment expressed by many members across the case study clubs. Indeed, many used exactly the same formulation as Ben, i.e. that they could be ‘more themselves’ at the club. This finding supports several previous empirical studies of social capital. For example, Crossley (2008: 486), in his ethnographic study of social capital in a private health club, described it as follows:

[The group] created a space wherein its members could enjoy an identity which was both valued by others and distinct from whatever other identities they enjoyed elsewhere in their life. It is relevant in this sense that a number of group members, on different occasions, expressed the view that their time spent at the gym was a time where the individual could ‘be him/herself’, dropping what by implication were portrayed as the pretences and controls required by interaction in other contexts.

As Crossley pointed out, many authors (e.g. Goffman, 1959; 1961; Honneth, 1995; Simmel, 1955) have argued that spaces in which individuals can develop distinct identities and recognition are central to self-esteem, agency and psychological well-being. From the evidence here, voluntary sports clubs, like the health club in Crossley’s study, ‘played an important facilitative role in this respect’ (2008: 486).

In sum, then, everyone I spoke to described one or more concrete examples of the following types of benefits: social support; identity and recognition; ‘expert’ advice; ‘expert’ services; information on job opportunities; everyday favours. And everyone considered such benefits relatively common. Taken together, members’ accounts provided a basic picture of people interacting within specific socio-organisational contexts and accessing (or *having access to*) a range of social and material resources. In addition, although I have not focused on them, these accounts provided clues about the processes involved and certain elements of context. For example, Michael at Trefford talked about the social ties he had formed and the way sporting activity was organised; and Olly at Caggston discussed the family ethos of the club and his particular role and length of involvement. I analyse these and other elements in subsequent chapters. Here, the salient point is that through membership of social networks within the clubs, people had access to a range of network-mediated benefits. While these benefits should not be considered social capital *per se*, they imply the presence of social capital. And, as I go on to demonstrate, they provide the backdrop against which the mechanisms of social capital development can be analysed.

Negative outcomes of social capital

Before moving on, it is important to re-emphasise that social capital can have negative as well as positive consequences. As Portes and Landolt (2000: 532) state, ‘the same mechanisms appropriate by individuals as social capital can lead to a set of negative outcomes for others’. They summarised four such negative consequences that had emerged from previous research: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms and downward levelling norms. Some evidence of these emerged from the case studies. Here, I focus on the two negative consequences for which there was most evidence: exclusion of outsiders and restrictions on individual freedoms. I do not dwell on them, again because outcomes are not the primary focus of this thesis. Nevertheless, they are important because, like the network-mediated benefits described above, they imply the presence of social capital.

Strong social ties that bind members of a group or community together can also serve to exclude others (Portes, 1998; Waldinger, 1995). As we saw above, Michael had developed close personal relationships with other members of Treeford and through this social network he had gained access to significant resources: information and guidance on property development, joint purchases and so on. But, as he pointed out, the development and maintenance of a given social network could lead, intentionally or not, to restrictions on outsiders.

You've developed a network already, which you find difficult to service anyway, with time constraints, so you're not particularly keen to develop new relationships at clubs. That's why clubs...they're quite cliquey. So, although it might seem friendly on the outside, within this club, there's a lot of cliques. And my clique is one I developed 20 years ago. Still in touch with. And, er, probably don't make an effort, really to, you know, meet, to make new associations as much. Something I probably could do or should do, maybe, but I don't.

Indeed, other members of Treeford had experienced this form of exclusion. For example, Claire, a member for four years, told me she found it difficult to 'break into' groups at the club, both to play with and to socialise with.

On the surface, seems everything is, er, ok, everybody very joined. Or, I don't know, should I say that? [Laughs] After you joined for a while and you found, er, there's some, er, divi-, dividents, yeah? Er, people tend to play with certain people together. And, er, some people, um, like, er, it's just a lot of the people are a bit busy with work and they probably just organise to play themselves.

This exclusion of outsiders, Michael argued, was quite common across all clubs, although he thought it was much less evident at Treeford.

Yeah, it's less true here, for sure. Some, some clubs are extremely cliquey. And they're quite obnoxious, actually, some of them, you know, they're very, they exclude other people, they don't make an effort to get them to join in. Yeah, so I think this club does make an effort to make people welcome and join in and so on and so forth.

He linked the more open, welcoming nature of Treeford to various aspects of socio-organisational context – its facilities, its management, the way sporting activity was organised and so on. I discuss these in more detail in chapters seven and eight.

At Caggston, Duncan discussed the way in which an emphasis on loyalty and commitment could lead to restrictions on individuals' freedoms.

[I] don't know if it's a central value, but I think a quite interesting, um, and that some people are more obsessed with than others, is the idea of commitment. Loyalty. Like, um, like, for example, I know that when I went away for a year and when Matt went away for a year and stuff like that, you get some, there's negative commentary.

His account suggested that membership of the club placed certain restrictions on individual members' freedoms. Dense, multiplex networks, such as those that existed in Caggston, created the 'ground for an intense community life and strong enforcement of local norms' (Portes, 1998: 17) – an example of what Portes refers to as 'the age-old dilemma between community solidarity and individual freedom'. It is important to stress that this was a matter of perspective: some members did not see regular participation as a restriction of individual freedom. Still, some did, and while Caggston was obviously a *voluntary* sports club, there were differences in *how* voluntary some members found it (see chapter eight for a fuller discussion of this issue).

These brief examples illustrate that the social capital developed within voluntary sports clubs can have negative, as well as positive, outcomes. The first example showed how the formation and maintenance of social ties that provided access to network-mediated benefits for those within the social networks also led to the exclusion of outsiders. To reiterate Portes and Landolt's (2000: 532) point, 'the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals as social capital can lead to a set of negative outcomes for others'. Yet, the second example suggests a qualification should be added to

that statement, namely that the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals as social capital can lead to a set of negative outcomes for others *and for the individuals themselves*. For as it showed, the dense social networks and the norms of commitment that provided network-mediated benefits for members also, in some cases, restricted the very same members' freedom to choose how and when they participated. This re-emphasises the basic critical realist argument that the same mechanisms can produce different outcomes for different people in different circumstances (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

One further point to note before moving on: the type and extent of network-mediated benefits discussed above were obviously influenced by the wider material resources available to members and by the size of the club. So, the discrepancy in 'scale' of some of the resources exchanged (joint property purchases at Treeford; counter-signed passports at Caggston) should not imply that mechanisms of social capital development were not operating, or were operating less often, at Caggston. As Portes and Landolt (2000: 532) argue, 'given the unequal distribution of wealth and resources in society, actors may have trustworthy and solidary social ties and still have access to limited or poor quality resources'. Coalter (2007a: 58) picks up this point when he argues that voluntary sports clubs vary in terms of the material resources available to members. This may seem like an obvious point, but it is one that is sometimes obscured by studies, particularly large-scale, attitudinal studies, that seek to measure 'stocks' of social capital and ignore the unequal distribution of resources (Foley and Edwards, 1999; Portes, 1998). I return to this issue in subsequent chapters.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital, as defined here, stands for 'the ability of actors to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures' (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 532). The previous section provided evidence that members of voluntary sports clubs secured a range of network-mediated benefits, as well as experiencing certain negative

outcomes. This implies the presence of social capital. However, as discussed earlier, one should seek, where possible, to maintain an analytical distinction between social capital's outcomes and social capital itself. A close analysis of the case study material allows us, in certain places, to make such a distinction.

As we have seen, members identified a range of resources that they had accessed through their involvement. But they also identified their *ability* to access resources, even when they had not actually accessed them. Take Olly, for example. He had received concrete benefits through his social ties at Caggston: he had had his passport and driving licence counter-signed; he had been told about a job and he had had help in applying for that job. But he also identified a more generalised ability to secure resources that he and other members of the club had: 'If someone was an electrician in Caggston, I'm sure they wouldn't turn round and say, "No, I can't be arsed to help you out," if one of us asked them. You know, I don't think there'd be anything like that. It would be, "Yeah, I'll come round." This is not a concrete example of a benefit received; it is a description of the ability that (some) members had to obtain resources through their social ties within the club. A similar picture emerged from the other clubs. As we saw above, Claire had received help and advice on plumbing and building from someone at Treeford. But she also identified a more general willingness to help among the members: 'I think people *will* help you if they can in the club. Yeah, they would. Normally they would.' This highlights the importance, when seeking to understand social capital, of looking beyond the actual resources that people obtained through social networks to consider people's *potential* to secure resources.

A number of interviewees provided vivid accounts that focused quite directly on social capital itself. For example, Henry drew a comparison between Treeford and his immediate neighbourhood:

Ok, just to digress a bit, um, if I think of, for example, my neighbourhood...now, we've got a very friendly neighbourhood, 40 houses in our street, at least, there are 40 numbers, so [laughs] I assume, so, it's a relatively small street. Now, we have, I

have a nodding acquaintance, er, with pretty well all of, everybody, *nodding*. Talking acquaintance with relatively few groups, but I'll give you an illustration. Last week, our freezer packed up and, so, we talked to the manufacturer and they said, 'Well, don't worry, just take everything out and, and wait for three or four days,' and you said, 'What the hell am I going to do with all this?' And it was so easy. I just knocked on the door of two neighbours, I said, 'I've got a bit of a disaster, have you got room in your freezer?' Now, that I couldn't do with a *stranger*, or I couldn't do with somebody who was just a *nodding* acquaintance. So, this is, this is what I call the social net, if you like, I don't know, you've, you would have a better expression, but that is the human social side of life, which is so important. And, er, I can understand, I've come across some people who are – inverted commas – loners. And, and they seem to miss out that side of it, of life. And I'm very lucky. But, I don't have to work at it, I just find it.

RT: Yeah...

It happens.

RT: ...but do you feel that that same thing is something that you've got through the club?

Yes. Oh, yes. No, I got that through life. Um, so, er, and, and, so, I, I think the club is an easy way, in a sense, er, because it's very receptive to that.

Henry's account is instructive for at least two reasons. First, because it was as close to a direct identification of social capital as the case studies provided. Henry's description of the 'social net' – a loose social network to which he belonged and through which he either accessed, or felt he could access, certain resources – corresponded closely to the conceptualisation of social capital outlined in chapter two. Second, because he claimed that the club was 'very receptive' to it. He later linked this to various factors, including: the way the club was organised around a shared passion; the way it provided a focus of activity; and the way it structured opportunities for repeated social interactions. I discuss these elements of socio-organisational context in subsequent chapters.

I close this chapter with Henry's identification of the 'social net', because it sets the scene for the ensuing analysis. Henry, like all interviewees, discussed the outcomes he had experienced through his involvement in the club. He also, like others, pinpointed the social ties and obligations of reciprocity that constituted his ability to secure resources. He then went on to explain the processes through which he had developed this ability to secure resources and the various personal and club-related factors that he felt had affected these processes. It is these processes and the way they operate in different contexts that are the focus of subsequent chapters.

SUMMARY

This chapter has demonstrated that people experienced a wide range of outcomes through their involvement in voluntary sports clubs. The vast majority of members participated in the clubs' sporting activity, which gave rise to a number of physical and mental outcomes. But members' accounts suggested that these 'sporting' outcomes were heavily dependent on processes of social interaction and social tie formation. In addition, the chapter showed that members accessed a series of network-mediated benefits through their club involvement, while some also experienced negative consequences, such as exclusion and restriction of individual freedom. Overall, the chapter demonstrated that social capital was present, to varying degrees, at the case study clubs. That is to say, members reported that they had the ability to secure resources through their membership. Closer analysis suggested that this emerged from the social ties they had formed and the obligations of reciprocity they had built up. The next chapter explores these latter processes in more detail. It examines the broad mechanism of social interaction and identifies the types of social ties that members formed.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL TIES

Members of associations are able to access a range of resources through their social ties. But how do members actually form these ties? And what types of ties do they form? This chapter seeks to examine these questions by drawing on the case study findings. It sets out the basic mechanism through which people formed ties – social interaction – and shows how this took place in all areas of club life. It then explores the different types of ties that members formed. It shows, in line with standard theoretical models, that members formed both ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ ties. But it also shows that members formed other types of ties, ones that did not fall easily into either category. These ties were strong, but domain-specific, and thus violated several of the expectations of standard network theory. In addition, many members also developed a sense of belonging, or collective identity within the clubs, which, in some senses, functioned as a ‘quasi-tie’.

These discussions naturally beg the question, why did members form ties? That is, what were the fundamental processes that underpinned tie formation? And, given that we know members accessed a range of benefits through their social ties, did they form ties deliberately in order to access such benefits? The latter part of this chapter explores such questions. It shows that two fundamental, inter-related processes – propinquity and homophily – operated within the clubs. It also shows that members, in general, did not consider that they had joined the clubs in order to form social ties. This suggests an important non-purposive element to tie formation and social capital development.

HOW MEMBERS FORMED TIES

Treeford: Finding a ‘four’

It was impossible to spend long at Treeford – talking to people or observing club activity – without the issue of ‘fours’ cropping up. A ‘four’ was shorthand

for a group of four people coming together to play a doubles match. Throughout the club, members arranged themselves into ‘fours’; for many, perhaps the majority, this was their most common form of club participation. Members’ accounts highlighted several key features of this type of group activity. First, the ‘fours’ tended to meet regularly, typically once a week. Second, they had often played together over a very long period – 15 or 20 years was not uncommon among well-established members. Third, social interaction – before, during and after the tennis itself – was an integral component of group meetings. Leslie illustrated this latter point when she described her and other members’ involvement at the club.

Yeah. I play on Monday with a group and then we might play Thursday. Yeah, and I’ve been asked to fill in on another group. ‘Cos there’s lots of fours. If you go there today, you’ll see there are lots of regular fours going on all day. So, like, Monday morning, there’s about five sets of women’s regular fours going on. And they all play Monday morning, start the week, you know, they all have a good coffee, a good chit-chat, and they go home.

In my time at the club, I had indeed observed just what Leslie talked about. Regular groups, usually same sex, seemingly very easy in one another’s company and at home in the club’s surroundings, met and chatted, played and chatted, then drank and chatted.²⁵ During my time at the club, on week days especially, I began to recognise several of these groups. They seemed to provide the natural rhythm of the club.

But how did these groups actually emerge? What was the process whereby people moved from being relative strangers, simply members of the same club, to being part of small, regularly interacting groups? George described it as follows:

Often people start by coming down, they join in this club period, which is this period we have at weekends, between 2 and 5 on Saturday and Sunday, where everyone just joins in, as a club organiser and so on. So, it’s a really good way of people who

²⁵ My not so subtle implication here being that social interaction was a fundamental part of this group activity.

haven't, who don't know anyone, maybe new even to London, they join a tennis club, you can come down and they start playing with different people and they're then mixed in. And then they, then they develop, you know, they find people, maybe, of their similar standard and they say to them, you know, 'You want to knock sometime?' So that's the way it works, I think, and then gradually you develop a group of people, you know, who you play with. Also, if you're at a certain level, people start playing in the teams and so you get to know people there and there's group coaching sessions that people run and so people go along to that and you start to get to know people, so they sort of mix in there and you develop your own circle of people that you play with.

This broad sketch highlights two key elements of the process. First, it was a general process of social interaction and tie formation: 'everyone just joins in', 'you get to know people' and 'gradually you develop a group of people who you play with'. Second, these opportunities for social interaction were structured, in large part, by the club: 'club period', 'the teams', 'group coaching' and so on. Members' comments repeatedly emphasised these elements.

Caggston: Becoming part of 'the family'

At Caggston, a similar basic process operated: people formed ties through social interaction that was, in large part, structured by the club. However, there were some important differences – in recruitment, in the way activity was organised and so on – and I discuss these below. Let us turn first to the members' accounts. Ben, like the vast majority of members at Caggston, past and present, had joined the club through an existing member (in this case, Tom). In the interview, we discussed, in some detail, the process through which he had formed ties at the club.

How did the process go? So, the process went – went along to the first few sessions, following Tom basically, going to Tom's house and saying, 'Right, let's go to the nets together.' Um, 'cos you still don't really know people, 'cos the odd people do or don't turn up and so it's all a bit, it's still a bit nerve-racking. You chat to people a bit about what they do and, um, and then I played the first few games in the first season.

The process of forming ties, Ben said, was rooted in participation and social interaction.

Yeah, so it's just playing and getting to know the people and then meeting the people and the family and then Jill [Ben's wife] would come along and that helped as well, 'cos you were meeting the families, so you met Kate and Debbie and Keith's wife, 'cos Keith was the captain at the time...But you started to meet those people and it's just a relaxing Sunday afternoon and you bring your kids along and they talk to other people and it's just a slow process.

The 'tipping point,' Ben reckoned, was the second annual tour that he had attended with his wife and their children.

We stayed with the kids on the outfield with everyone else and...we basically got absolutely wasted every night and somehow the kids survived and, er, we had a great time. And we won tourist of the year award [laughs], which is normally a cricketing award, um, for being the best cricketer on tour. It wasn't, it was basically for Jill and I being the best tourists, for getting absolutely hammered. I think that was when, when we, or I, thought I was part and parcel of the team.

In contrast to Ben, Pete had no initial connection. Indeed, he had the 'honour' of being the only member in Caggston's history that had joined without a personal introduction. I interviewed Pete and his wife, Sarah, in their camper van during the annual 'tour' and together they recounted his more unusual entry into the world of Caggston. At one point, he said: 'I don't know if you've seen my top ten on the website, but one really is – the time I joined the club is one of my top ten reminiscences.' Here, then, is Pete's website reminiscence, which tells a more condensed version of the story he told me in our interview.

I turned up for net practice at the ground in March 1995, to be greeted by a small, obviously close-knit bunch of blokes, who looked quite bemused, disconcerted, not to say mystified by the arrival of this uninvited stranger in the midst of their private gathering. Transpires that the club details I'd picked up at the library had been left there by accident, and should have been wiped off. Membership was exclusive and

conferred by word of mouth only, i.e. by shadowy people ‘who know’. Few non-initiates had penetrated the inner sanctum and survived. Over half the side seemed to share the same surname, and they constantly bickered in that familiar way that only boys who’ve grown up together too long can. What was this, some kind of weird, inbred cricketing version of the ‘masons’? I’d performed OK during the session in the nets, but it was clear that pure cricketing ability wasn’t going to determine anything in my favour. Then I dug out a £20 note and offered to buy a round as a goodwill gesture, or perhaps more accurately swing the membership vote my way. It seemed a more straightforward ploy than the various long-winded constitutional options the lawyerly club president seemed to be suggesting. Smiles all round...It was to be an expensive mistake.

Despite Pete’s rather curious initiation, he and Sarah told me that they had formed social ties very quickly within the club. They pointed to a general process of social interaction and, like Ben, they highlighted how the family ethos of the club had shaped that interaction.

Pete: Er, yeah, started the season and it was my kind of club and I think what *really* sparked it off for me was the sort of, the family aspect of it...

Sarah: Yep.

Pete: Yeah. You had Keith and his daughter who was three years old. You had others who were bringing their kids. You had Dennis who had a couple of kids, who were very young. Um, we at the time were trying to start a family and were very interested in that kind of side of things. And it was great because Sarah was able to go along, meet some of the women that were involved with the club. It wasn’t a traditional set-up, it wasn’t that the women, you know...

Sarah: Well, there’s no home ground, so there’s no making tea, ‘cos I would have objected to that [laughs]...

Pete: There wasn’t all that doting and being admiring on the boundary. In fact, the women were taking the piss from the boundary and the guys were having a social game and coming away and everyone, you know, there was a lot of banter.

Faxhill: Joining the circle, or getting your round in

At Faxhill, social interaction was patterned around teams and there was a *de facto* divide between the junior and adult sections. Within each section, as at Caggston, the process of forming social ties was largely conceptualised as ‘becoming part of a group’. One of the members from the junior section, Jerome, explained the basic process:

With us, it’s like, all of us are close together. Even if we get new people, we’ll make, like, a nickname out of them, or something. And then we’ll just start talking to them and give them a couple of weeks and they’ll be, they’ll fit in. Straight. Yeah. No-one feels odd out. Odd out here, so...

Observation and other interviews, however, suggested the process was not quite so simple. For example, Frank pointed to existing divisions and barriers – school and race prominent among them – that made integration difficult.

There’s actually so much trouble between schools, often, and you get two 16 year olds or 15 years olds who live in Faxhill – one goes to one school and the other goes to another – and, you know, there is a huge rivalry very often there out in the streets...It also happens between races. I mean, you get, in an area you get black lads, 15 year olds, 14 year olds coming in – happened to us this year at the beginning of the season. Second year, at the beginning of the season, we found in a couple of games the black lads were all beginning to pass to the black lads, the white lads beginning to pass to the white lads and the Asian lads beginning to pass to the Asian lads.

The club, as Frank told me, sought to ‘overcome’ those divisions. Indeed, Mark, coach of the youth teams, explained how he made specific efforts to encourage tie formation among members within his training sessions.

When my lads do a warm-up, warm-up in twos, so you’ve got one row of five on the right, one row of five on the left. As you go, you call out number one. Number one would go to the back of the group, so they all push up one. While this is taking place, in the early stages, you ask whoever’s there, this lap I wanna know his shoe-size, you know, I wanna know his – even in the youth section – aftershaves. You wanna know his favourite football team, his favourite colour. And by the time you’ve

finished the warm-up, it's six, seven laps, each player has to know two facts about him.

This, Mark said, helped to overcome the initial barriers, at least in the youth teams. In the adult section, Mark explained that he had a different 'system', but one that was no less effective:

The best way to socialise is to go out and get hammered. And that's what the lads do. And it's the best way to do it...We train on a Tuesday night, right, and then we have these social aspects straight afterwards, where you can have anything from 12 to 17, possibly more on some occasions, go out for a little social over the road, or a pub closer to home.

Like at Treeford and Caggston, then, members formed social ties at Faxhill through a basic mechanism of social interaction, which operated during the focal activity and in the times and spaces around it.

Key similarities and differences

These various accounts emerged from different people with distinct individual backgrounds, varying lengths of involvement and different levels of participation. Moreover, they took place in different club environments. Yet, together, they indicated certain key similarities in the ways that people formed ties at voluntary sports clubs. First, underlying and suffusing all club activity was a general mechanism of social interaction: people interacted while they participated in the sporting activity and they interacted in the times and spaces around it. Social interaction appeared to be both ubiquitous and significant. Second, the clubs played a major role in structuring the social interaction through which people formed ties: club period, the ladder, weekly matches, training, nets, annual tours and other events and activities set the patterns of social interaction within the clubs.

The accounts also indicated certain differences. First, people joined the clubs in different ways: through existing members, or through 'cold calling'. In Caggston, it was almost exclusively the former; in Treeford, it was mostly the

latter; in Faxhill, it was mixed, although one or other ‘route’ was often prevalent in particular teams. Second, participation in the focal activity was more or less highly structured. For example, at Caggston and Faxhill, there were official league seasons, so members often had to play matches at a regular time once a week. At Treeford, participation was slightly more ad hoc, although, as we saw above, those playing in ‘fours’ often played in a regular weekly slot. Third, members conceptualised tie formation in slightly different ways. Members of Treeford tended to discuss individualised social ties and small groups ('fours') that they had formed. Members of Caggston and Faxhill tended to discuss becoming part of a group and referred to processes of group ‘initiation’. Fourth, and related to the third, the accounts gave hints about different *types* of ties. For example, some members mentioned strong friendships, while others mentioned more general acceptance within a group. I look at all these various issues below and in subsequent chapters. First, however, I take a closer look at the basic mechanism of social interaction and explore how it operated at the clubs.

The basic mechanism of social interaction

Social interaction went on in all areas of club life: during the sporting activity itself, immediately before and after the sporting activity, at specific club social events, among those organising the club (e.g. serving on a club committee) and sometimes simply *at* the club, when no sporting activity was taking place. In examining this, it is worth placing social interaction in its wider theoretical context. As Nee and Ingram (1998) discuss, social interaction is the foundation of several key theoretical traditions. One prominent example is social exchange theory, in which Homans (1950), among others, illustrated how individuals establish, monitor and enforce norms within social groups. The greatest significance of this theoretical contribution, according to Nee and Ingram (1998: 24), ‘lay in locating the emergence of informal norms and their monitoring and enforcement by reference to mechanisms built into ongoing relationships’. I examine such mechanisms in the next chapter and demonstrate how they operated at the clubs. But for now, the objective is

simply to understand social interaction at voluntary sports clubs in a bit more detail.

As discussed in chapter four, social interaction was closely bound up with processes of sporting participation. However, some members did distinguish between them. For example, Roland at Treeford said:

If I was a different sort of person, I could easily go and sit in there – and this is how it would actually happen – and just sit in that area, talk to a few people, you know, and *actually* start, you know, spending more time, suggesting having a *drink*, maybe sharing a meal together and things and could quite quickly, um, develop all sorts of *deeper* social relationships. Um, so I suppose a club, um, has – this club – has all the opportunities for that, um, which I, personally, haven't capitalised on by choice, but, quite apart from that, there is this other social side, just to do with the tennis, and directly to do with playing tennis. Which is much more shallow, but equally enjoyable in a different way.

This is a crucial insight. First, as mentioned, Roland distinguished social interaction inherent in the activity itself (the 'social side, just to do with the tennis') from more general social interaction within the club. Second, he suggested that the latter might lead on to 'all sorts of *deeper* social relationships'. This raises the issue, once again, of the different types of ties that members formed, something I focus on in the second part of this chapter. Third, and perhaps most fundamentally, Roland's discussion illustrates the essential interplay between structure and agency. As he said, the club 'has all the opportunities' for people to form social ties, but these need to be 'capitalised on by choice'. I discuss this interplay in more detail below and in the following chapters.

Social interaction at the clubs also occurred at specific social events, although the frequency and significance of these events varied from club to club. Caggston was extreme in this regard: here, the annual tour, which was really a large social event, played a key role in the process of members forming social ties. I asked Duncan directly whether he thought it was

possible for members to integrate fully into the group without coming ‘on tour’. He said:

I don't think so, I...no, I don't think...I think if you continually, if you imagine a scenario where you continually came and played cricket for Caggston and never went on tour, you'd become something like, you'd become seen as something of like a ‘meggs king’,²⁶ like, you know, um, because I think it's, you know, for all our talk about playing like league cricket and blah-de-blah-de-blah, I think the most important thing in the whole year is that weekend [i.e. the tour]. Because that's the thing that I guess the club kind of perceives itself as, you know, it's like this kind of family scenario where everyone's kind of involved, everyone's pitching in and stuff like that and I think that's the one opportunity, the one time in the year when it actually becomes like a real thing. Um, and, yeah, I think again, and for that reason, like you're kind of, the real acceptance comes through participating in that and everything that goes with that, rather than the kind of week-to-week...

This again raised several important issues. First, it re-emphasised the idea that forming social ties at Caggston was about becoming part of a group (Faxhill was similar in this regard). Second, it linked this to the tour ('the real acceptance comes through participating in that and everything that goes with that'). Third, it revealed the basic 'club-as-family' culture of Caggston: 'that's the thing that I guess the club kind of perceives itself as, you know, it's like this kind of family scenario'. I discuss club culture in detail in chapter seven, but here it is interesting to note that Duncan considered the tour to be significant precisely because it represented an opportunity for members of the club to interact as a (quasi) family. This illustrates how contextual elements like club culture can influence processes like tie formation that are fundamental to the development of social capital.

At Treeford, as well as in and around tennis and at specific events, social interaction took place simply at the club. For example, Leslie explained how she would often visit the club just for the social interaction.

²⁶ This is shared vernacular between Duncan and me. Roughly translated, ‘meggs king’ means someone who does not show commitment and does not contribute fully in a given situation.

If you've had a bad day, or you're in, you've got half an hour to kill, or you want to read the paper, um, or there's something on the TV that you really want to watch, there's a game. Sometimes, I go to the club, and there's always someone you talk to, which is great, you know. It's not like a café, 'cos you can talk to Patrick behind the bar, or you can chit-chat with someone in the club for, it's great, you know, which is, you know, a plus.

Among the case study clubs, this was true only at Treelford, because it had permanent club-owned facilities. Nevertheless, it is one example of a more general phenomenon, namely that, in certain respects, the clubs functioned like 'third places' (Oldenburg, 1989). According to Oldenburg (1989: 16), 'the third place is a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home [i.e. the 'first place'] and work [i.e. the 'second place']]. As we shall see in subsequent discussions, voluntary sports clubs share many of the characteristics of 'third places', while also exhibiting certain differences.

These brief sketches were intended to demonstrate the ubiquity and significance of social interaction at the clubs. They showed that social interaction led to tie formation among members of the clubs. But what types of ties did members form? The next section addresses this question.

THE TYPES OF TIES MEMBERS FORMED

In general, people can form different types of social ties.²⁷ The classic distinction, at least since Granovetter (1973), is the one drawn between 'strong' and 'weak' ties. Strong ties are usually conceived of as tight bonds, characterised by the sharing of intimate feelings and strong emotional support, among people that cluster together and interact in multiple social

²⁷ I use the term 'social ties' here in a general sense to refer to social relations, i.e. kinship, friendship, acquaintanceship and so on. I mention this because researchers, even in the same social network tradition, can mean different things when they talk about social ties. For example, Borgatti et al. (2009: 894) show in their typology that 'social ties' can also be used to mean: similarities, such as spatial location or gender; interactions, such as talking to, or helping; and flows, such as information or beliefs. Although these elements are all closely related, when I refer to 'social ties', I refer principally to the social relations themselves.

contexts. Weak ties, on the other hand, are conceived of as loose bonds that offer less emotional support, but may offer more information, because they act as bridges to other networks of unknown people. This distinction is still drawn regularly. However, it is worth pointing to Granovetter's (1973: 1361) original caveat that any such distinctions around social ties may lead to 'ambiguity caused by substitution, for convenience of exposition, of discrete values for an underlying continuous variable'.²⁸

Strong ties

Some members across each of the case study clubs discussed close friendships they had formed through their involvement. One example was Neville, who had been a member of Treeford for more than 30 years. He told me: 'It's quite easy to make, to make both acquaintances and friends in a tennis club'.²⁹ Neville described the 'close friendships' he had formed. He said,

I mean, some of the, some of the people, say like Marion, she joined round about the same time as me and I know her really well. I, I've been on holiday with her on numerous occasions. So, there are a few people like that who I know really well and, you know, would expect to see in my house from time to time.

At Caggston, Pete and Sarah told me that they had also formed close friendships through the club.

Pete: For us, there was a real compatibility with, with the Taylors in particular.

Sarah: Yeah, we hit it off with them straight away, to be honest...

²⁸ In making this caveat, Granovetter was referring specifically to the inclusion of 'nodding acquaintances' in the category of 'absent ties'. However, I argue (and go on to show below) that such ambiguity can extend more broadly – for example in seeking to make a clear distinction between strong and weak ties.

²⁹ The initial reason he gave for this was 'because you've got something immediately you enjoy doing together...and that's playing, that's hitting a ball over a net'. This emphasises how social interaction takes place around 'social foci', an issue discussed regularly in the literature (e.g. Feld, 1981) and one I return to below and in chapter eight. For the moment, however, my focus is on the different types of ties people formed.

Pete: And that's about values and it's about shared kind of perspectives on, on broader things than just cricket. Obviously, it's about life and politics and things like that. You know, where we come from, we're lefties, quite sort of politically engaged and all the rest of it, and Bob's very interested in that sort of stuff and so we'd have those sorts of conversations.

Sarah: And since we've moved, they're the only ones from the club that we've actually kept in touch with and they've come down to see us.

Pete: And genuinely remained friends, as opposed to incidental...

Sarah: Whereas the others, I'm always happy to see them, most of them [laughs], but we don't keep in touch between tours or anything.

Pete: Yeah, different kind of relationship, different kind of affection that you feel. But Matt and Duncan, Bob and Kate, they're genuinely long-term friends for us and people that we see outside of the whole set-up.

These accounts raise two obvious points. First, most simply, they indicate that some people formed close friendships through their involvement in voluntary sports clubs. Across all the people I interviewed, perhaps two-thirds told me that they had formed close friendships of the type described by Neville, Pete and Sarah. These close friendships corresponded to the classic conception of 'strong' ties: they were tight bonds, involving emotional closeness, conversation on any and all topics and interaction in multiple contexts. That some members formed strong ties at the clubs might be considered an interesting finding in itself, given the prevailing anxiety about the decline of social capital and the growth of social isolation. Indeed, this same point was made by Small (2009a: 86) in his study of childcare centres, where he found that 'many center mothers developed nothing less than a small, family-like community, an all-around source of support with deep obligations, mutual confidence, and emotional intensity'. Second, the accounts illustrated some of the ways in which members drew distinctions between different types of ties. For example, Neville distinguished between 'friends' and 'acquaintances' and Pete between those who had 'genuinely

remained friends' and those who were more 'incidental'. It is to these other types of social ties we now turn.

Weak ties

Neville's distinction between 'friends' and 'acquaintances' was typical of many comments. For example, Leslie at Treelford also said she had made 'a few very, *very* good friends. And an awful lot of people I'm on nodding acquaintance with.' She said of the latter: 'I know lots of little bits about their lives'. As we saw in the last chapter, Leslie described Treelford as 'quite a full reference system'. In detailing this, she explained how 'you might say something to someone and they say, 'Well, you really need to speak to *this* guy''. Such social relations might be seen as classic 'weak ties': loose acquaintanceships, characterised by a lack of emotional intensity, based solely in one social context (in this case, the club), that often serve as sources of information.

Members at each of the clubs had formed these types of ties; indeed, they were the most common types of social ties formed within the sports club environment. I do not describe them in detail here for two reasons. First, the literature on social networks includes a number of studies that describe weak ties and how people access information and other resources through them (see, e.g., Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973; 1983). Members' accounts of weak ties were largely in line with existing studies and so an extended treatment of them here would add little to existing understanding. Second, the following sub-section also deals with weak ties, or at least with ties that can in some senses be considered weak. As such, it makes sense to save further discussion of weak ties until after I have introduced these finer distinctions.

'Compartmentally intimate' ties

Thus far, the case study findings appear to align closely with the classic distinction between strong and weak ties, i.e. members formed both close friendships and loose acquaintanceships. However, the vast majority of

members also formed ties that did not fit easily into either category, ties that were simultaneously strong *and* weak. They were strong in that they were intimate and often family-like, involved the sharing of personal details and were characterised by mutual support. But they were weak in that interaction was limited to the club and they involved a narrowly circumscribed range of activities, based around sport. Such ties are unusual, because they violate certain expectations of social network theory.³⁰

In itself, the idea that people form social ties around specific interests and in specific domains is nothing new: Feld (1981), Homans (1950), Laumann (1973), Simmel (1950; 1955) and others all put forward this general argument. However, the expectation is that such ties will be *weak*. Laumann (1973: 114), for example, declared that a ‘common interest in chess, work activities, [or] sports’ might characterise the relationship among acquaintances, but not that among close friends. The standard expectation of social network theory, as Small (2009a: 86) points out, is that ‘a golf buddy seen only on the course will not be the source of an intimate relationship; he will be the source of conversations on golf’.

Yet the case studies revealed that many members formed ties that were domain-specific *and* intimate. Recall Pete and Sarah. They were quite clear that they had formed only a very small number of strong ties at Caggston – people who had ‘genuinely remained friends, as opposed to incidental...’. But, as Duncan told me (noted in chapter four), Sarah had formed a close friendship with Darren within the club, which was characterised by the sharing of quite intimate details. Indeed, entirely unprompted by me, Sarah discussed this herself in our interview. She said:

I've always got a soft spot for Darren, for example. And Darren and I, certainly on tour...we used to have a lot of heart-to-hearts out on the boundary, you know, at midnight, be sat on the bench and I'd be doing my social worker counselling thing, older sister, whatever troubles he was going through with – ‘Oh, Sar,’ this and – so, I've always got a soft spot for Darren.

³⁰ The ensuing discussion draws extensively on Small (2009a: 84-100), who also found that mothers in childcare centres in New York had formed these sorts of ‘strong-weak’ ties.

Sarah said, quite clearly, that she did not see Darren outside the cricket club. For her, Darren fell into the category of Caggston members she was ‘always happy to see’ but ones she did not ‘keep in touch between tours or anything’. Yet their interaction within the club environment had attained a depth characteristic of strong ties.

Many members said similar things. For example, Glen described his ties with the majority of Caggston members as follows: ‘You’re not, you wouldn’t say you’re friends with them and they’re not close family or anything, but there’s some sort of connection that’s fairly permanent and, you know, nice, it’s nice.’ These were not strong ties; Glen was clear on this. However, in describing the nature of his interactions, he said, ‘you become so familiar with everyone, like *deeply* familiar’. He thought hard about how to characterise these sorts of social ties and eventually suggested they were ‘like your wife’s cousins’ who had ‘sort of become your cousins’.³¹ At Treeford, as we saw, Leslie said that she had made ‘a few very, very good friends’. However, when she described these ‘very good friends’, she said that, in many cases, their conversation, activity and interactions were based almost entirely around tennis and in the club itself. ‘Yeah,’ she said, ‘I’m not very good at this. Some people spend an awful lot of time in the company of people they met through the club. I tend not to.’ Again, these were not classic strong ties, but nor were they weak ties – they were something like ‘strong-weak’, or ‘weak-strong’ ties.

In fact, Small (2009a) provides a more useful mini-typology of social ties. He relabels strong ties ‘standard intimates’ and weak ties ‘non-intimates’ and labels this other ‘weak-strong’ category ‘compartmental intimates’. These latter ties he describes as relations ‘characterized by openness, trust and the revelation of privacy, but only within confined domains’ (Small, 2009a: 92). As discussed, he found that many mothers at childcare centres formed such ties: ‘Center-based interactions,’ he concluded, ‘could remain compartmental

³¹ Glen was (and remains) unmarried.

for long time periods, resulting in increasingly deep and truly intimate relations, even if the parties remained unfamiliar with entire categories of each other's lives'. This description captures much of the process apparent at the case study clubs; and, as we will see in later chapters, the very fact that these compartmentally intimate ties were domain-specific was key to many members' ongoing involvement.

But, why, to return to standard network accounts, are such compartmentally intimate ties not as regularly documented as strong and weak ties? That is, why are domain-specific ties usually expected to be weak? There are two main reasons. First, they are expected to lack the multiple reinforcement of norms that comes from a dense, interlocking network. As Small (2009a: 245) points out, this is part of Granovetter's weak ties argument: if the ties were strong, they probably would not be compartmental, because they would be closely involved with each other in overlapping, domain-transcendent networks. Second, people with compartmental relationships are expected to see each other less frequently than those with non-compartmental relationships. As Small says, this is implicit in Laumann's (1973: 114) argument that people in radial networks (i.e. people with compartmental ties) display 'lower affective involvement'. However, the organisational embeddedness perspective shows how voluntary sports clubs (and other types of organisations) to a certain extent confound these expectations. First, as we will see in subsequent chapters, group interaction within the clubs, particularly within team sport activity, often engendered norms that were multiply reinforced. And second, club members often saw their fellow members *more* frequently than they saw their close friends. As Glen at Caggston said, 'it's once a week, almost all year, 'cos there's nets as well. If you're seeing everyone once a week, [its] more than you see your mates'.

Classification of social ties

So, members formed different types of social ties: standard intimates; non-intimates; and compartmental intimates. Table 5.1, adapted from Small

(2009a: 97), outlines these different types of social ties and their characteristics.

Table 5.1 Characteristics of social ties among voluntary sports club members

	Standard intimates	Compartmental intimates	Non-intimates
Type of tie	Strong, domain-transcendent	Strong, domain-specific	Weak
Conversation	Topics transcend sport (family, work, politics, relationships)	Topics often domain-specific (sporting ability, injuries), but can also transcend sport (personal relationships, work)	Topics domain-specific (sport)
	Intimate quality (relationship problems, deeply held values)	Intimate quality (personal health problems)	Superficial quality (greetings, brief chit-chat)
Activity	Planned activities	Planned activities	No planned activities
	Activities transcend domain (sport, dinners, barbeques, cinema trips, holidays)	Activities domain-specific (sport, drinks/food within sport club environment)	-
Interaction	Beyond club (restaurants, homes, holidays)	Within club, or within narrow domain around club (pubs/restaurants close to club)	Within club

Adapted from Small (2009a: 97)

It must be stated – to return to Granovetter's aforementioned caveat – that any such classification risks ambiguity. Nevertheless, these ideal types provide a more useful set of reference points than the classic strong/weak distinction; and they broadly reflect the accounts of the interviewees across the case study clubs.

These findings are important for at least three reasons. First, as discussed, the fact that many members formed classic strong ties might be considered noteworthy in itself in an era of supposedly increasing social isolation. Second, the fact that most, if not all, members formed compartmentally intimate ties contradicts social network accounts that focus solely on strong and weak ties. Third, the evidence so far suggests that, in order to understand how ties are formed and what types of ties are formed, we need to pay close attention to the socio-organisational context within which they are formed. Small (2009a: 87) argues that the formation of compartmentally intimate ties at childcare centres was ‘made possible by something rarely considered in conventional models, that organizations can institutionally perform much of the “work” required to sustain strong friendships’. I return to this argument in subsequent chapters.

Sense of belonging

To this point, we have focused predominantly on the interpersonal ties that club members formed. However, a number of members drew quite clear distinctions between the specific social relationships they had established and the broader groups or networks they felt part of. For example, while Leslie discussed the ‘very, very good friends’ she had established at Treeford, she also told me she felt part of a wider network. I asked her about this directly and she said:

Whereas the club, you might talk to someone, and someone say, ‘Well, I haven’t seen so-and-so for a while.’ ‘Well, find out how he is,’ and then you talk to that person and then you know that that person’s alright. And there’s a lot of, um, people care for other people within the club, if they haven’t seen them for a while. There’s a, you know, asking, asking after people.

Many members at each of the clubs talked about their involvement in terms of group membership. For example, Glen at Caggston (with his traditional, multiple ‘yahs’), told me: ‘Yeah. Yeah. And it’s great like that. Yeah, you feel...part of a group, yeah.’ In discussing this, members regularly referred to

a sense of belonging. For example, Frank at Faxhill said: 'Faxhill, it could be any club really, but the longer they're with a club or with a society, the more they are going to feel like that, an affinity to that club or society'. Ben at Caggston said: 'It's just part and parcel. I'd say that, whilst probably only six people of the team are still the same as when I started, it feels the same'. This demonstrates a clear difference between specific relationships with individuals and a more general sense of belonging.

This distinction can be important when we consider outcomes. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, many members talked about the 'identity' and 'recognition' that characterised their involvement. Such articulations of identity, as Crossley (2008) points out, derive their meaning primarily from *group* membership, rather than from individual social ties. In addition, we discussed the self-esteem benefits that some members felt they had gained from their involvement. George at Treeford suggested that such benefits may derive primarily from group membership, rather than from the sporting activity itself. He said: 'It may be a sub-conscious thing where there is an element of actually belonging, you know, to a club, which is an important thing from the point of view of self-esteem'. Several other members made similar points.

While this distinction is salient and worth keeping in mind, it does not mean that we should consider sense of belonging as completely different to the sorts of social ties we have already discussed. Indeed, it is entirely possible to analyse sense of belonging, or collective identification, as a *tie*. As Frank (2009: 1618) argues, 'identification with the collective can guide resource allocations to a collective the same way social relationships (e.g., friendship, kin, close colleagues) can guide resource allocations in social exchange'. In this sense, as he puts it, identification with the collective functions as a 'quasi-tie'. The key issue here, then, is not one of labelling; it is one of focus. Whether or not we discuss collective identification as a tie (or quasi-tie), analysis of tie formation and social capital development needs to take account of *group* processes and the outcomes that derive from them.

Network structure at the clubs

In examining the types of ties members formed, my interviews and observations also revealed certain aspects of network structure. This thesis is not a formal network analysis, so I do not purport to map 'nodes' and ties precisely. However, a few brief sketches will be useful in setting the scene for a more detailed analysis, in subsequent chapters, of how aspects of network structure affected social capital development.

Caggston, the smallest club, with 12-15 regular playing members, can be characterised as a dense network of inter-related ties. There were some distinct sub-groups, which tended to cluster around the two main families, yet the group, as a whole, was relatively close. Daisy and Kate described it like this:

Daisy: It's two *families* at the heart of it. So everyone who comes is connected in some way to the families. So even if you're not *really* involved, then you will know someone...if you come, you're part of one of the families, whoever you met them through, and it's one of those groups, you're part of one of those two groups, they're smaller groups within the group, if you know what I mean...

Kate: Yeah, but at the same time as well, it's not cliquey, is it?

Daisy: No, not at all. Quite amazing, yeah.

Kate: I mean, we all mix in together quite well.

Glen said something similar: 'Yeah, the blokes I hang out with on the, at Caggston, are the blokes my age...I don't have any great heart-to-hearts with any of the others. But, you're really friendly with them and get on really well with them.'

At Faxhill, which was slightly larger (three adult teams and two junior teams), there were some dense clusters and a spread of more loosely connected

people. For example, Frank discussed the difference between the first team and the second team as follows:

I mean, the first team, for instance, the adult team, come from all over the shop and I suspect that they probably don't get together outside the football environment. Whereas the second team are all from Faxhill, they all know each other. They all know somebody who knows somebody, who knows somebody...Um, the guy who put it together probably knows just about every damn person in Faxhill, by the looks of it...

This is interesting, because it demonstrates the slight differences in network structure within the same club, but also because it highlights the importance of 'leaders' in creating and maintaining groups. I discuss this latter aspect in the next chapter.

Treeford was much larger than the other two, with around 800 members (500 tennis; 300 squash). As described, there were many small, dense clusters – people that played together in 'fours', or in regular group coaching, or in the club teams – within a much more disparate overall network. Roland, for example, who had group coaching on Tuesdays and Fridays, said, 'I think what I feel now is I feel part of a Tuesday and Friday network, which is part of the club. But I feel that separately to being part of the club a bit.' Likewise, Henry said, 'The one thing – and perhaps, when I say it's cliquey, perhaps not the right word – what is quite nice is there are lots of little groups'. At Treeford, then, because of its large size, members often thought in terms of their own little groups, as well as, or instead of, the club as a whole.

Implications

Before moving on, it is worth highlighting some key implications from the foregoing discussion. First, members themselves made various distinctions about the types of ties they had formed and the types of network structure that existed at the clubs. This is important because, as discussed in chapter two, people's perceptions of their own and others' social ties directly affect their behaviour. Moreover, several studies (e.g. Kumbasar et al., 1994)

suggest that these perceptions are often subject to considerable bias. Although this research does not directly compare members' perceptions of network position with 'objective' measures of network position, it does indicate the relevance of seeking to understand network perceptions, as they can shape the provision of resources within clubs.

Second, the focus on different types of ties and the role of sub-groups within clubs raises questions around 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Gittell and Vidal, 1998; Putnam, 2000). In many discussions on this topic, bonding has been associated with strong ties and bridging with weak ties, although such categorical analysis has been criticised (e.g. by Blackshaw and Long, 2005). I deal with aspects of the bonding/bridging debate below and I pick up this issue again in chapter eight, where I discuss how 'member diversity' affects the mechanisms of social capital development. However, the initial evidence here around 'compartmentally intimate' ties suggests that a simple bonding/bridging distinction might not capture the various processes involved in tie formation.

A third, related, implication concerns the way that social ties are often implicitly or explicitly 'ranked'. While it is commonly accepted that different types of ties have different advantages and disadvantages, strong ties are usually considered more *emotionally* significant. This is incorporated into the bonding/bridging distinction, in that bonding (through strong ties) has been seen as 'getting by' and bridging (through weak ties) as 'getting ahead' (Putnam, 2000). However, the case studies suggest that people can derive significant *emotional* benefits from weak ties, or, more precisely, from weak ties accompanied by, or encompassed within, an organisational tie. Indeed, the evidence suggests that it was often precisely the fact that such ties were weak that gave rise to such benefits. As Henry at Treelford said, 'I didn't take my home here and I didn't take any of these guys to my home...in fact, that was, was really the greatest *thing*, is actually to get away from the house...it is just a breath of fresh air that you need now and then'. This brings us back to the idea of a voluntary sports club as a 'third place'. As Oldenburg (1997: 64) explains, 'Friends met collectively have effects upon one another that do

not result when the company is not gathered and its members meet one another individually'.³²

The point is that any analysis which assumes that 'strong' ties are necessarily more emotionally significant than 'weak' ties is flawed. Such an analysis fails to take into account the constraints that traditional 'close' friendship can impose. This has been referred to as the 'paradox of sociability'. Indeed, some of the members mentioned this very issue. For example, Daisy at Caggston said:

I think that sense of belonging to something that isn't stressful, but also has a purpose is quite unique. Like you can have like a social group of *friends*, which is great and you spend lots of time and you organise to go and see them and that's relaxing time 'cos it's not work, but it's something different about a group that meets for a reason that's not about you socially, 'cos it almost takes away, 'cos even in your social setting there's hierarchies, there's obligations, things that you have to do, 'Ooh, have I not called someone? Have I not seen someone enough this week?' Or something like that. But there's no obligation here...

I examine the issue of obligations in more detail in chapter eight, but this re-emphasises the contradictions that emerge from strict categorical analysis of social ties.

It also brings us on to the final implication, namely the way that social ties themselves are conceptualised. As should be clear from the foregoing discussion, the traditional distinction between strong and weak ties did not adequately capture the different types of ties that members at the clubs formed. A closer analysis suggests that this is due to the way that definitions of social ties, or, more precisely, of tie *strength*, tend to collapse several dimensions into one. Granovetter's (1973: 1361) original formulation, which many subsequent analyses have drawn on, stated:

³² Oldenburg supports this conclusion by referring to a large body of evidence from mental health research which suggests that interaction within larger groups involves more 'socialising', leads to less disharmony and is often less emotionally demanding.

The strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie. Each of these is somewhat independent of the other, though the set is obviously highly intracorrelated.

This illustrates how several dimensions – length and regularity of involvement, emotional intensity, resource flows (i.e. ‘reciprocal services’) and so on – are collapsed into one. Although the formulation recognises that each dimension ‘is somewhat independent of the other’, this is often ignored when general distinctions are made between strong and weak ties. The analysis above suggests it is important to consider the various dimensions of tie strength (e.g. intimacy, amount of time and so on) separately. It should be recognised that social relations are really ongoing processes of interaction and resource exchange. Too great an attachment to static labels, such as strong and weak ties (even with further distinctions, such as compartmentally intimate ties), can obscure the dynamic character of social relations.³³

WHY MEMBERS FORMED TIES

Having examined how people formed ties and what types of ties people formed, the next question is, why did people form ties? In fact, this question is two questions. Or, at least, I analyse it as such here. The first question is: what are the underlying ‘social situations’ and ‘forces’ that brought people together and made the formation of ties likely? This necessitates a focus on the fundamental social and psychological processes that underpin the broader process of tie formation. The second question, more specific to the current study, is: did people deliberately seek to form social ties at the clubs? This requires an analysis of people’s stated (and unstated) motivations around: joining and maintaining membership of clubs; establishing relationships with others; developing affiliations to the clubs and so on. In

³³ This is part of a more general debate in the social sciences between variable- and process-oriented analysis. As Langley et al. (2013: 1) discuss in a recent article, ‘process studies address questions about how and why things emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time, as distinct from variance questions dealing with covariation among dependent and independent variables’. The eagerness to assign categorical labels, such as ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ ties, can be seen as a manifestation of this variable-oriented approach to research, which process researchers criticise.

what follows, I explore these two questions in turn.

Fundamental processes

Research on the formation and maintenance of social ties suggests that there are two fundamental processes involved: ‘propinquity’ and ‘homophily’ (Kadushin, 2012). Propinquity can broadly be understood as ‘being in the same place at the same time’, although, as we will see below, there are various important distinctions within this understanding. Homophily refers to the process through which people tend to connect with others like themselves, or tend to become like others with whom they are connected. Both of these fundamental processes operated at the clubs and, as the analysis shows, they were closely intertwined.

Propinquity

‘One aspect of being a member of the club is that often people just sit down and *talk* after matches and things like that...there’s a whole process of social interaction which wouldn’t take place if you weren’t a member.’ So said George at Trefford; and in a trice he had described one of the most basic functions of the club. As a host of researchers have shown (e.g. Blau and Schwartz, 1997; Feld and Carter, 1998; Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954), forming social ties requires, at the very least, that people have opportunities to interact with others. The clubs, just by existing, provided such opportunities. This is not a point to dwell on – as Blau and Schwartz (1997) point out, the fact that people need contact opportunities in order to form social ties is ‘virtually self-evident’ – but it is one to recognise. Most members did not comment on it directly; more often, they discussed particular ways in which they had formed ties or particular ways in which the club had structured opportunities for contact. Still, a few, like George above, did discuss it directly.

In examining propinquity, it is possible to discuss at least two separate processes. For example, Zhao and Elesh (2008) argue that there is a

difference between *co-location*, which simply implies that people are near one another, and *co-presence*, which implies a social relationship within a social institution. The clubs fostered the latter, co-presence, through the basic fact that people were members of the same club. Henry at Trefford provided an example of this. During our interview, I went off to get a second round of teas and when I came back, he said:

There's a lady there, who came up to me just now and, and she said, 'Were you at,' – there's another place I'm a member of – 'were you at the [local lecture group]? Because my daughter was there and, and she thought she recognised you because she said, you were a member of Trefford.' And this is interesting, you see, because people are connecting...And, ok, this young lady, whoever she was, wasn't quite sure, she described to her mother what I looked like. And she just got up and just talked to me, just like *that*. And I don't really know her, except that she once gave a talk up there. And I mean, this is the – and there's a chap down there, so, more or less the same, who said to me, 'What are you doing here? I haven't seen you in some time.' So, this is all part of the social side of it that a club offers you, which is *nice*. People, even people that you don't know on a regular basis, you can talk.

Co-presence itself requires further specification, as research has shown that it is affected by particular features of interaction, such as how frequently people interact, how intensely, while performing what kind of activity, within what sort of organisational culture and so on. The case study accounts have already highlighted the relevance of several of these features and I examine them in detail in chapters seven and eight. For now, though, it suffices to say that people formed ties at the clubs because, at a very basic level, the clubs provided opportunities to interact.

Homophily

Homophily is often expressed as the folk proposition: 'birds of a feather flock together.' As Kadushin (2012: 18-19) puts it, more formally:

If two people have characteristics that match in a proportion greater than expected in the population from which they are drawn or the network of which they are a part, then they are more likely to be connected...The converse is also true: if two people

are connected, then they are more likely to have common characteristics or attributes. There is also an implied feedback: over time, relationships tend to sort out so that they become more homophilous.

The homophily principle was introduced into social theory by Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) and, since then, a huge number of studies have substantiated it in a wide variety of social settings (see McPherson et al. (2001) for an extensive review). In their discussion, Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954) drew a distinction between *status-homophily*, which is based on ascribed characteristics (e.g. age, race, sex) and acquired characteristics (e.g. education, occupation, marital status), and *value-homophily*, which is based on values, attitudes and beliefs. Later research has suggested that the latter is often derivative of the former (McPherson et al., 2001).

At the clubs, the homophily principle was clearly evident and many members discussed it. George at Treelford said:

I think one thing you do get, perhaps it happens in all clubs, is you do get *different* groups of people, maybe based on their interests or their friendliness, or their, or their level of play, you know, so inevitably, that's a sort of inevitable thing you get everywhere...I do get a sense, obviously, of people gravitating towards people of similar standards, or interests, or, or social likeability, so, in terms of each other.

There was evidence of both status-homophily and value-homophily. Indeed, we have seen this already in our analysis. As Pete said of the ties that he and Sarah had formed with the Taylors at Caggston, 'That's about values and it's about shared kind of perspectives on, on broader things than just cricket' – a basic example of value-homophily. It could be argued that when discussing homophily, people are more likely to focus on value-homophily, as that is seen as more acceptable than some forms of status-homophily, e.g. ties based on race or social class. Nevertheless, people at the clubs did talk about those forms of status-homophily too. For example, in discussing the ties he had formed at Caggston, Ben said: 'I think the reality is what's brought us together is the cricket. What would bring us together outside cricket is sort of common background and common interests. So, I'm more likely –

and I have – to spend time with Charlie [another member], than I would with Darren or Olly.' This is interesting not only because it illustrates the operation of status- and value-homophily, but also for two other reasons: first, that interaction and tie formation differ within and outside the club environment; and second, that voluntary sports clubs can foster ties, at least within the club environment, between people from dissimilar backgrounds. I explore both of these issues in subsequent chapters.

The interaction between propinquity and homophily

Quite clearly, propinquity and homophily influence one another. If people are 'co-present', they tend to spend time with one another and, in the process, become more alike. In addition, if people are alike (e.g. they share an interest in the same sport), then they will tend to spend time together (e.g. in a voluntary sports club). This interaction raises an important debate around self-selection into voluntary associations, something Stolle (2003: 25) sums up as follows:

The problem with the research to date is that even though individuals who join groups and who interact with others regularly show attitudinal and behavioral differences compared to nonjoiners, the possibility exists that people self-select into association groups, depending on their original levels of generalized trust and reciprocity. This is a classic problem of endogeneity. People who trust more might be more easily drawn to membership in associations, whereas people who trust less might not join in the first place.

I discuss self-selection in more detail in subsequent chapters, but here it is just worth noting that empirical research has not reached any consensus on this issue (see Stolle, 2003; Hooghe, 2003b).

One final issue to mention here is that different characteristics, attributes, or activities – all of which may form the basis of homophily – can be salient in different times and places. Indeed, Kadushin (2012: 19) argues that this question of saliency is the 'critical research and theoretical question'. This again emphasises the context-dependent nature of tie formation and hence

social capital development. I examine this directly in chapters seven and eight, where I analyse how various elements of context influenced social interaction at the clubs. But first, I turn to another important question, namely did members form ties at the clubs deliberately in order to access material (and other) resources?

Tie formation at the clubs

People form ties for different reasons.³⁴ First, they may form ties purposely. That is to say, they may seek deliberately to make a social connection with another person, perhaps to gain access to information or other resources. This is the common usage of the verb ‘to network’. Second, they may form ties when they are seeking purposely to do something else. For example, someone may volunteer on a Parent-Teacher Association in order to improve the running of a school, but may make social ties as a result. Third, they may form ties through expressive acts, e.g. acts such as laughing or crying that are conducted for their own sake, rather than in pursuit of an objective. Indeed, Simmel (1971: 137) argues that social interaction itself can be considered expressive – people associate with others simply for the sake of association. Fourth, they may form ties through habitual acts that are neither purposive nor expressive, for example by saying ‘Bless you’ to someone who sneezed and then striking up a conversation. In sum, as Small (2009a: 13) sets out, ‘people can make ties when it was their purpose, when they had a purpose other than making ties, when their purpose was nothing but the act itself, and when they had no purpose at all at the time of social interaction’.

When considering purposive and non-purposive action, it is also important to distinguish, where possible, between global and local acts. As an example, a purposive global act might be to attend university in order to get a degree; a purposive local act might be to sign the registration sheet in a lecture. In effect, as Small (2009a: 11) points out, this kind of distinction depends on

³⁴ The following discussion draws on Small (2009a:11-13), who in turn drew on Merton’s (1936) seminal paper, *The unanticipated consequences of purposive social action*, and Elster’s (2007) work on rational actor models.

how narrowly we draw the boundaries around an act. In what follows, I discuss the formation of social ties at the clubs by reference to individuals' purposive and non-purposive global and local action.

Relational or interest recruitment?

Research indicates that people are motivated to join voluntary leisure organisations primarily through 'relational' or 'interest' recruitment. Fine (2003: 167) describes these as follows:

People generally become interested in a subject either through a personal relation, who serves as an activity role model (relational recruitment), or through exposure to an object or event that catches their attention (interest recruitment). Although the line is often hazy between these two categories...the distinction is between a focus on the objects of interest and a focus on social rewards.

These overlap with, or are perhaps underpinned by, propinquity and homophily. As Kadushin (2012: 18) identified, drawing on Feld (1981), 'common interests' are a means for drawing people together, instituting propinquity; and the influence of personal relations on involvement indicates homophily. Ultimately, as discussed above, they are mutually reinforcing: Fine says 'the line is often hazy'; Kadushin (2012: 19) calls it a 'chicken-and-egg situation'.

There was evidence of both relational and interest recruitment at the clubs, but the majority of members emphasised the latter. To put it another way, members felt that their global purpose in joining the clubs, at least initially, was to play sport. For example, Ben at Caggston said, 'Why did I start playing? [Long pause] Well, it sounds very, um – something to do. I've always loved cricket, always loved watching it. I was a reasonable cricketer when I was younger. And it was just a good laugh. Something to do.' As we saw above, he had joined through an existing member (in fact, he was 'recruited' by the wife of this existing member, who worked in the same organisation). But on his own account, he had performed a purposive, global

act: he had joined Caggston to play cricket; and he had subsequently formed ties non-purposely. Indeed, he addressed this directly in our interview. He said: ‘Yeah, there’s no ulterior motive. I never, oh, if I do this, it’ll enable me to expand my network and do x, y and z. It’s not the motive. It’s not the way my mind works.’

Other members across the clubs provided very similar basic accounts. At Treeford, for example, Roland described his motivation for joining as follows:

It’s interesting. I need to kind of delve into a bit more and try and understand what that was all about. It was very convenient. I live five minutes’ cycle ride or drive, or ten minutes’ walk here...Er [pauses], what else was there? I wanted to improve my standard, I think, a bit and actually do *better* at tennis. And I thought by joining a club, I’d have access to more players and stuff, rather than just these occasional weekend games with my mate. I think that was probably the prime motivation. It was never actually a social thing for me. I’ve sort of incidentally found the social side to be nice and enjoyable and good. Um, but it’s – I’m not really taking part that much in it even now – but it wasn’t for that reason that I joined anyway. It was really just to help develop my tennis a bit more and to have a source of enjoyment and improvement.

This is not to say that relational recruitment did not play a part. For example, at Faxhill, Frank suggested that ‘the majority of people when they join a club just do it for no other reason than, I don’t know, my mates are doing it, I’ve got to know them now.’ Likewise, as we saw above, everyone at Caggston (with the famous exception of Pete) had joined the club through an existing member. However, while the relational element of recruitment might have acted as a trigger, virtually every member felt that they had joined the club primarily through interest recruitment. This implies that tie formation at the clubs can be considered as at least partially non-purposive.

However, it might be useful to examine a ‘critical case’ here. Bob was widely considered to be the ‘father’ of the Caggston ‘family’. Other members discussed how he held Caggston together, nurturing the sociability that characterised the club. Bob himself was well aware of the way the club

functioned as a source of social support for some of its members and he regularly talked about Caggston as 'a social side'. However, even he clearly privileged sporting activity in his account of his own motivation:

I think the main thing is that I love playing cricket. When it comes down to it, you put all the other things in, I mean, I know why you're doing this, you see a social group, and, you know, you're interested in investigating it, but when it comes down to it, you said to me, what's the attraction, the huge attraction is being involved in the game of *cricket*. Now, that is the tremendous attraction. Now, I just think cricket is such a *great* game.

Overall, then, members' accounts suggested that they had joined the clubs to play sport and had subsequently formed ties non-purposely.

Possible objections and refinements

One could, however, raise several objections against this conclusion. First, if people were interested only, or primarily, in playing sport, why did they join a club? Why did they not just participate in sporting activity in more casual, informal surroundings? One answer is that, in some sports, club participation was the only practical way to play the sport. For example, cricket requires a well maintained pitch, 22 participants and proper equipment. Rob said this quite clearly at the start of our interview. 'With cricket,' he said, 'you can't go and have a kick-about with your mates, sort of thing. So, yeah, you have to [join a club].' Football and tennis are slightly different: it is much easier to participate in both of these sports outside a formal, club environment. However, members that directly addressed this issue invariably gave 'sporting' reasons for their decision to join a club. For example, Leslie at Trefford said:

I was a park player and I wanted to play in a club. And I started a new job, which was right out of town and whereas before I could make arrangements to play in parks, that became impossible, because I was doing an hour and a half commute and I was doing quite a lot of other travel. So, I wanted somewhere where I could always go and play without much effort of actually arranging...

We saw something similar from George in chapter four, where he described the availability of players and facilities within the club. On members' own accounts, then, playing in a club, rather than informally, was due to specific sporting requirements and ease of organising, rather than a specific desire to form social ties.

A second objection is that while members' global purpose in joining a club may have been to participate in sport, their local purpose in interacting within the club may have been to form social ties in order to access specific resources. This objection is more compelling and indeed there was some evidence that people engaged in local, purposive tie formation for instrumental benefit. For example, as Mary at Treeford said (quoted earlier):

One of the things that I like doing is asking people to do things for nothing [laughs]. And, um, very often they *do*. Jamie, who's in the white shirt at the next table...Jamie did our old website and runs all our email. Um, but another squash member, who's a graphic designer, has just done us a new, a fabulous new website actually.

Really, however, this was specific to her role as chair. Besides this, purposive 'networking' did not seem particularly widespread. Even those like Michael, who, as we saw in chapter four, had derived significant instrumental benefits from his social ties at Treeford, did not seem to actively pursue social connections for direct gain (more on this below).

What members did suggest – and again, on this point, they were remarkably similar across the clubs – was that social ties provided much of their motivation for *maintaining* membership. Henry's comments at Treeford were typical. He said,

It's a very interesting question, because, um [pauses], with hindsight, I don't think I've joined something *for* the social side of it. Er, I've joined it *for* a specific reason. You know, I want some exercise, or I want to get back to something that I haven't done for a long time. The, the social side is, um...is the bonus...[So] I think it's, it's

an important aspect of...not joining a club, but it's a very important aspect of *staying* in the club. You know, of continuing activity.

Leslie discussed a group of established members at Trefford where, for an observer at least, it had become impossible to disentangle the 'social rewards' from the 'objects of interest':

[T]hey have, like, a four and it's quite funny. And then they all got injured at various times, they're all approaching 60 and then they, they used to appear at the club anyway, they used to go, you know, do their four, have a drink and then go to a restaurant for a meal. And then when they were injured, they used to just meet at the club [laughs], have a drink and go [laughs] – the tennis was superficial to the meeting [laughs].

In this sense, it can be argued that social interaction and the maintenance of social ties entered the 'vocabulary of motive' (Mills, 1967) for many members.

A third objection to the claim that members formed ties non-purposely comes from a slightly different angle. So far, I have taken members' accounts largely at face value. However, it is possible that social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985) might have influenced members to deliberately under-emphasise (or even conceal) their desire to form social ties, because the practice of deliberately investing in social relationships in order to secure personal benefit is viewed negatively. I cannot entirely discount this possibility; however, the evidence, to me, did not suggest it. Again, a 'critical case' might help. Michael at Trefford was very open about his own instrumental motivations and he imputed these motives to others as well. Indeed, Michael's language, when discussing almost any aspect of club involvement was that of a rational choice decision-maker. For example, when talking about people who had left Trefford because they had found it too difficult to find people to play with, he said, 'that process is too tough for them. Probably when they look at the effort-reward calculation in their brain, they calculate it's not worth the effort to get the reward.' It might be expected, then, that he would conceptualise his own process of tie formation as a

conscious investment in social capital. However, he argued that any such considerations were secondary; his main objective in joining was to play, and improve at, tennis.

Yeah, when I first joined, the main purpose for me was to, er, just play tennis. And, erm, obviously the side, the side, the side benefits, like making friends and so on, making contacts and so on and so forth, but the *main* purpose was to play games...So, that's it, really, that's how it worked.

It is possible to argue that his formation of social ties at the club was a local, purposive act. However, even this is questionable. Indeed, when discussing how he had formed the ties that had led to his career shift and his joint property purchases, he said again, quite clearly, that this had emerged as a by-product. 'No,' he said, 'I didn't pursue that.'

A fourth, related, objection is that members' *post facto* explanations of their behaviour were rationalisations. That is, they did not really know why they acted as they did. This objection too I cannot entirely discount. However, if valid, such an objection is probably most consistent with the idea, noted earlier, that members formed ties through expressive social interaction. As discussed, Simmel (1971) argued that humans are characterised by 'sociability'. On his account, people often engage in social interaction with no purpose other than the social interaction itself; this social interaction may then, in turn, lead to the formation of social ties. If we follow Simmel's argument, it is likely that such expressive social interaction is so in-built that people do not account for it when explaining their own behaviour. Having said that, Henry did actually discuss something that might be seen as expressive social interaction at Treeford. He said: 'It's the social side of humanity, isn't it, at the end of the day?...The human social side of life, which is so important...But, I don't have to work at it, I just find it...It happens.' It is indeed likely that expressive social interaction occurs in voluntary sports clubs, just as it does elsewhere. However, this does not negate the central argument. As discussed at the beginning of this section, people who form social ties through expressive action do not, by definition, do so purposely.

Implications

Ultimately, it is often not possible to distinguish clearly between purposive and non-purposive and global and local action. So, given that this is the case, why have I striven to demonstrate that there was a non-purposive element to tie formation at the clubs? There are two main reasons. First, such a finding provides a corrective to theoretical accounts of social capital that argue – implicitly or explicitly – that social capital emerges from deliberate investments on the part of rational actors. Second, it sensitises us to the importance of socio-organisational context.

The first point returns us to questions of agency and structure and to theoretical propositions about how people form social ties. Lin (2001), who rooted his analysis in rational choice theory, argued that people make connections because of the gains they anticipate. As Small (2009a: 231) points out, Lin did distinguish between instrumental and expressive actions, but he devoted almost all of his theoretical exposition to the former – a clear privileging of agency. Bourdieu (1986: 249) maintained that social networks resulted from ‘investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships.’ Although Small (2009a: 9) notes that some have assumed Bourdieu was referring to habitual, rather than purposive, action, many have taken him to mean that social ties are formed through purposive investment. Of course, much of the writing on social capital recognises that it emerges as a by-product of other action. However, there is still a significant body of social capital research that relies on rational actor models and thus implicitly incorporates the idea of purposive tie formation. The case study findings reported here re-emphasise the importance of acknowledging *non-purposive* tie formation.

The second point indicates how important it is to analyse the context within which people interact. I have already discussed this and indeed I have highlighted certain aspects of socio-organisational context that appeared to play a role in tie formation. However, the non-purposive nature of much tie

formation re-emphasises this point. If people always formed ties purposely, we would naturally focus on individual choices, personal characteristics and so on. But if people form ties non-purposely, as a by-product of organisational involvement, it is likely that the socio-organisational context has a significant impact on those processes. I examine this, i.e. the interaction between context and processes of tie formation, in subsequent chapters.

SUMMARY

This chapter has shown that people formed a range of ties at the clubs. They did this through a basic mechanism of social interaction that was structured in large part by the clubs. Some members formed close, long-lasting friendships through their involvement – classic ‘strong ties’. Some formed acquaintanceships that often yielded useful information – classic ‘weak ties’. More interestingly, perhaps, a large number of members formed ties that were simultaneously strong and weak – ‘compartmentally intimate ties’. These were an important source of support and identity and their prevalence suggests that basic models of tie formation need to allow for the fact that ties can be both intimate and domain-specific.

The chapter also explored the fundamental processes underpinning tie formation: propinquity and homophily. The evidence showed that these operated at the clubs, just as they do everywhere else, and that they influenced each other in important ways. Finally, the chapter sought to determine whether members formed social ties purposely in order to access material resources. The evidence suggests they did not. It appears members joined clubs with a primary focus on sport and formed ties as a by-product. This in turn suggests we need to pay close attention to the context in which people formed these ties. That is the subject of chapters seven and eight, but before that, in the next chapter, I wish to examine the mechanisms of social capital development in more detail.

CHAPTER 6: MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Social capital stands for the ability of people to secure resources through membership of social networks or other social structures. This implies that people need to be connected to one another. But it implies more than that. It implies that people are willing to provide resources to one another. As Portes (1998: 5) says, 'resources obtained through social capital have, from the point of view of the recipient, the character of a gift'. But who does the giving; and why? Such questions are paramount. Indeed, Portes (1998: 6) argues that 'such motivations...are the core processes that the concept of social capital seeks to capture.' This chapter seeks to explore such motivations, with reference to the case study clubs. The chapter is arranged in four sections. First, I reintroduce the principal mechanisms of social capital development, as outlined by Portes (1998), and I explain how they are rooted in different theoretical accounts of social behaviour. Second, I draw on members' accounts and my observations to analyse how these mechanisms operated within the clubs. Third, I look at other important mechanisms that also played a role. Fourth, I discuss several key issues that arise from the preceding analysis.

THE PRINCIPAL MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

In his seminal article on social capital, Portes (1998) argued that there were four principal mechanisms of social capital development, namely: 'reciprocity exchanges'; 'enforceable trust'; 'value introduction'; and 'bounded solidarity'. As discussed in chapter two, a number of other mechanisms have been proposed in the literature, but they all tend to cohere around one or other of these principal mechanisms. Therefore, to avoid undue proliferation, I start from Portes's descriptions and, where other proposed mechanisms either overlap or diverge, I explain how and why. Portes (1998) classified these four principal mechanisms according to their accounts of social behaviour, invoking the broad distinction between 'instrumental' and 'consummatory'

motivations. Instrumental behaviours, as Millar and Tesser (1990: 86) put it, are ‘intended to accomplish a goal which is independent of the attitude object [and] are likely to be cognitively driven’; consummatory behaviours, by contrast, are ‘engaged in for their own sake [and] are likely to be affectively driven’. Portes identified reciprocity exchanges and enforceable trust as deriving from instrumental motivations and value introduction and bounded solidarity as deriving from consummatory motivations.

While this classification provides a useful point of departure, it obscures certain debates. For example, as we will see below, several authors have argued that reciprocity exchanges do not derive solely from instrumental motivations: indeed, Lawler (2001), among others, has claimed that such exchanges have an affective (or consummatory) dimension. More fundamentally, as Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998: 129) themselves point out, the very notion of value introduction has been criticised as an ‘oversocialised’ conception of human action and is the subject of ongoing criticism by many economists. Quite clearly, this thesis cannot hope to settle such debates. However, the case studies do provide an opportunity to explore how people *themselves* explained their motivations and how these motivations affected the development of social capital.

HOW THE MECHANISMS OPERATED AT THE CLUBS

Reciprocity exchanges

This mechanism of social capital development, rooted in social exchange theory, suggests that ‘social life consists of a vast series of primary transactions where favors, information, approval, and other valued items are given and received’ (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998: 129-30). Herreros (2004: 8-16) has offered a detailed account of reciprocity exchanges, including the intermediary role of trust, from the perspective of bounded rationality: he argues that through involvement in social networks, people acquire information about people’s ‘type’ – their values, attitudes, behaviour and so on – which leads to them forming expectations about others’ likely

behaviour (i.e. trust, in his conception). Trusting relations can then generate obligations of reciprocity among members of these social networks. Why this latter process happens is not completely clear, but Herreros suggests it may occur through a desire on the part of the trustee to either maintain a particular reputation, or maintain self-esteem.

The case studies provided evidence of this mechanism. First, they demonstrated how people acquired information about each other's 'type'. This occurred even within the sporting activity itself. Roland at Treelford provided a good example of this. As we saw in chapter four, Roland had recently (post-retirement) started group coaching. Through this, he told me, he now felt part of 'a Tuesday and Friday network' at the club. But how had this process of him becoming part of a network actually worked? He said:

Well, I think it's, um [pauses], yeah, interesting [pauses]. What is it? It's, er, I'm just trying to think of the process, particularly with this Tuesday and Friday group. Um [pauses], it's a mixture, it's partly spending time with individuals and learning about their expectations, their sort of values and their beliefs, but around tennis, you know, 'cos that's what you're doing, you're not talking, you're not there, I'm not there, um, talking about politics, or life in general, really. So, it's, at a minutiae, it's working out a relationship, if you've got a partner in tennis, doubles, working out how you're going to play, the two of you against your opponents, talking to each other about strategy, either being reprimanded by your partner 'cos you got something wrong and then learning from that and then realising that they've got that expectation, so get to know them a bit better. And then the way the drill things work, you're changing all the time who is your partner, so in the course of each hour and a half you're probably playing with half of the 14 people, um, roughly, um, you know, different sort of formats...But, over time, it's getting to know the individuals, their names, a bit about their family lives outside, um, it's a peripheral thing, but also, um, how they play tennis, what they want from you, what I want from them, um, mixed in with the actual enjoyment of succeeding or failing, or laughing at failing. Yeah, again, the human bit, which I quite like. But, but, also I enjoy the variation in people, 'cos there are some people who are deadly serious, you know, who just, you know, to my astonishment, will, you know, swear and rant and rave 'cos a ball went slightly in the wrong direction or something and I think, I didn't realise it was that important [laughs]. But for them it is. So, er, it's, er, it's all of those things, I think, over *time*.

Roland's account, like others at Treeford, suggested that during the sporting activity itself, members acquired information about one another. Through subtle processes of negotiation 'over time', as Roland emphasised, members learned about others' 'expectations', 'values' and 'beliefs'. Roland's account also pointed up other interesting issues. First, while social interaction within the coaching sessions was centred on the focal activity (i.e. tennis), it extended, even during the activity itself, to other areas (e.g. 'getting to know...a bit about their family lives outside'). This relates to our earlier discussions concerning the close intertwinement of 'sporting' and 'social' outcomes. Second, the way in which the activity was organised (i.e. group coaching sessions in which members regularly changed partners) facilitated the process of tie formation. This is one instance of the general phenomenon discussed in the last chapter, namely that the clubs structured members' social interaction. Third, acquiring information was 'mixed in with' another process, namely achieving. This highlights how other social processes can influence the principal mechanisms of social capital development. I discuss each of these issues later in the chapter.

At Faxhill, I observed a similar process of information acquisition. Repeated, intense social interaction during sporting activity enabled members to pick up clues about other members' expectations, values, beliefs and behaviours.

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People's knowledge of the players on the pitch is clear and, in some ways, intimate. People know each other's temperaments well. For example, Kevin clearly has a short temper, he's irascible, he doesn't like being fouled and he often reacts badly on the pitch (one of the substitutes says to Ash, 'He's *always* like that, but it's a *contact* sport.') This knowledge translates into particular ways of acting towards players, e.g. most players treat Kevin very carefully and encourage him, rather than criticising him. Another player, Harvey, is talented, but quiet – Ash calls to him very often, telling him to be louder.

The mechanism of reciprocity exchanges suggests that this acquisition of information about people's 'type' can lead to trusting relations and, further, to

obligations of reciprocity. Glen at Caggston (again with his ‘yeahs’) referred to just such a process:

Yeah, and people talk about...yeah, and like some...yeah, especially on tour, you do talk about things with people...yeah, you know, fairly like intimate things, um...So you do...it does go, it does go pretty deep, really, and trusting and everything. Yeah, you do trust them. Yeah. Yeah, definitely.

Ben also discussed the issue of trust. He said of his fellow Caggston members:

Oh, *yeah*. Oh, yeah. Everybody I would trust. I’d give them a hundred quid and say, ‘Look after that for me’. Or however you define trust, that’s very monetary. But I would trust them to do the right thing, to look after my kids, to drive my car. I’d just trust them, even though you could argue that some of them you wouldn’t trust if you came across them in the street, ‘cos of their backgrounds, or what, or their behaviours. But, yeah, I do. ‘Cos you get to know people.

In many ways, Ben’s general account of social capital development followed the mechanism of reciprocity exchanges as posited in traditional (rational action) exchange theory. He said that through repeated social interaction ('it's just playing and getting to know the people'), he acquired abundant information about other members' preferences and likely behaviour ('you know each other very well'). This led to the development of trusting relations ('Oh, *yeah*. Oh, yeah. Everybody I would trust.'), which, in turn, underpinned his willingness to provide resources (as we saw in chapter four, he had offered an internship to Duncan and said he would do the same for another member). This indicates an information-based conception of trust and a mechanism of social capital development underpinned by instrumental behaviour.

Yet Ben’s account might also be read another way. As mentioned above, Lawler and his colleagues (Lawler, 2001; Lawler and Thye, 1999; Lawler and Yoon, 1996; 1998) have suggested that there might be an important emotional element to social exchange. In particular, they have shown how

exchange is linked to identity; for example, Lawler and Thye (1999: 229) explain how affect control theory, which is based on the idea that emotions signal the self, suggests that ‘emotions experienced in exchange are contingent on the actors’ identities’. While certain identities, such as corporate executive, usually involve norms that require a person to control his or her emotional displays, other identities, such as friend, husband, or team-mate, ‘normatively allow or generate richer emotional experiences’ (Lawler and Thye, 1999: 229). Ben’s account suggested just such a link between identity and social exchange. As we saw in chapter four, Ben felt that the club allowed him to be ‘more himself’. And elsewhere in his interview, he explained how this shift in identity (or, as he saw it, this expression of his ‘true’ identity) led him to form intimate social ties, develop trust and engage in social exchange.

Many members across the clubs described similar experiences. In line with affect control theory, this suggests an emotional content to reciprocity exchanges. As Lawler and Thye (1999: 229) explain, ‘One implication [of affect control theory] is that as the exchange context changes from purely instrumental to partially expressive, the salience of certain identities will shift, resulting in a wider range and greater depth of emotions’. I go on to examine identity in more detail below, but this brief discussion illustrates a more general issue in seeking to analyse the mechanisms of social capital development, namely that there are often several possible ‘readings’ of a particular mechanism.

Indeed, some analyses of reciprocity exchanges do not align themselves with either rational-choice or emotional readings of the mechanism. Torche and Valenzuela (2011), for example, argue that reciprocity should be understood more simply (or more fundamentally) as the social dimension of ongoing personal relations. This is an argument that requires fuller exposition, so I quote it here in extended form:

Personal relations have a defining ontological foundation: It just happens that nobody can initiate their own existence. Our existence is the product of an act that

entirely escapes our decision, it is always received, and it therefore has an origin that precedes consciousness and will, and which appears as essentially unavailable. The original act that gives rise to personal relations has a constitutive social dimension: it is the case that our existence and all that comes with it have been given by others. Reciprocity is therefore an original experience. Our existence is immediately and from its origin a bonded experience. (Torche and Valenzuela, 2011: 188)

Such a ‘reading’ of reciprocity exchanges has certain implications. First, it implies that trust is not always a conscious choice. The authors put it as follows: ‘Building personal relations requires, by necessity, time, but once they are established, trust ceases to be a conscious choice, becomes embedded in reciprocity, and usually acquires the taken-for-granted character of familiarity’. This seemed to reflect the experiences of many members. As we saw in the last chapter, many members had formed strong or compartmentally intimate ties through their involvement; and the way they discussed their fellow members (and the way I observed members interacting) strongly suggested this ‘taken-for-granted character of familiarity’. Although a few, like Ben and Glen at Caggston and Leslie at Treelford, explicitly discussed trust, most did not.

Second, it implies that reciprocity should be understood as an exchange of gifts, not just of things. ‘It is in this sense,’ Torche and Valenzuela (2011: 188) argue, ‘that reciprocity transcends, without cancelling, economic exchange, because what is exchanged is inalienable from those who exchange and the unique relation established among them.’ Portes (1998: 7) also identified that reciprocity exchanges differed from economic exchange. However, he linked this to the fact that obligations might be repaid in a different ‘currency’ from that in which they were incurred and to the fact that the timing of the repayment is unspecified. Torche and Valenzuela’s point is more fundamental. They argue that reciprocity is simply a natural extension of personal relations. Interestingly, as the authors note, this ‘deep link between the factual and the social dimensions of personal relations is kept in natural language: the words ‘gift’ and ‘present’ are synonymous in many languages’ (Torche and Valenzuela, 2011: 188).

To sum up so far, analysis of the case studies suggested that reciprocity exchanges functioned as a mechanism of social capital development at each of the clubs. This occurred through repeated interactions among club members, formation of social ties, development of trust and the building up of reciprocal obligations. Beyond this, the analysis raised two key issues. First, there are several ‘readings’ of this mechanism. For example, reciprocity exchanges might be seen as: ongoing interactions of self-interested rational actors; emotionally prompted interactions; or an ‘original’ experience inherent in ongoing personal relations. Second, this mechanism of social capital development is tightly bound up with processes of tie formation. Both of these issues recurred throughout the analysis of mechanisms, so I discuss them in more detail at the end of the chapter.

Enforceable trust

While a focus on reciprocity exchanges directs attention to interpersonal interaction, enforceable trust focuses more on social exchange within group settings. According to Portes (1998: 8), ‘the motivation of donors of socially mediated gifts is instrumental, but in [enforceable trust], the expectation of repayment is not based on knowledge of the recipient, but on the insertion of both actors in a common social structure’. As a mechanism of social capital development, enforceable trust highlights the embeddedness of exchange, something emphasised in the new institutional perspective (Granovetter, 1985; Nee and Ingram, 1998). This embeddedness has two consequences. First, the donor’s returns may come not from the recipient, but from the collectivity, in the form of group ‘status’. Second, the collectivity acts as guarantor that any debt will be repaid. In practice, as Portes notes, these two effects are often mixed.

There was evidence of this mechanism at each of the clubs, but it was clearest at Caggston. As discussed in the literature, enforceable trust works through the ‘internal sanctioning capacity of the community’ (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998: 135); and this was most evident at Caggston,

particularly when members discussed how either they, or other members, had become part of the group. As a long-standing member of the club, Duncan was very familiar with this process and described it in some detail. At one point, he said:

It's almost like an initiation, in a weird way, a sort of informal initiation, um, and there's always that kind of like, you know, you'll have conversations with people where they're, when there's new players, like, 'So-and-so's a good bloke, isn't he?' Like a lot of that kind of chat, you know, kind of leading up to that period of kind of acceptance. I think there's a lot of that inward negotiation about whether or not people are like good blokes and stuff like that.

This, in itself, is not enforceable trust. But it is evidence of the internal sanctioning capacity of the community, which, according to Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998: 135), 'plays the central role' in enforceable trust. The operation of the mechanism itself was perhaps more evident at Caggston in relation to the issue of commitment. As Duncan said (part-quoted earlier),

[I] don't know if it's a central value, but I think a quite interesting, um – and that some people are more obsessed with than others – is the idea of commitment. Loyalty. Like, um, like, for example, I know that when I went away for a year and when Matt went away for a year and stuff like that, you get some, there's negative commentary and, um, you know, someone else who gets a lot of negative commentary about something like that is Ben, who will go for long periods of time without playing.

In part, as Duncan made clear, a member's standing within the group was affected by his adherence to the norm of commitment (to turning up and playing for the team on a Sunday). At first glance, this might appear tautological – a commitment to commitment – but it relates to the way in which Caggston and all members' associations, to an extent, are examples of *productive exchange*. Emerson (1976: 357) defined productive exchange as follows:

Unlike the direct transfer of valued items in simple exchange, here items of value are produced through a value-adding social process. In general, the separate

resources of two or more persons, A, B, C, ... N, are combined through a social process involving a division of labor.

As discussed in the literature, it could be argued that the principal outcome of the social capital developed at voluntary sports clubs is the ongoing functioning of the clubs themselves (Auld, 2008; Coalter, 2007a). In this sense, at Caggston, enforceable trust operated as a mechanism of social capital development by helping to ensure that members who provided resources (in this case, simply their regular participation in the sporting activity of the club) were repaid by other members providing (the same) resources. The perpetual operation of this 'value-adding social process', facilitated by a mechanism of enforceable trust, sustained the operation of Caggston. The same was true of Faxhill. Both Frank and Bob, key organisers of Faxhill and Caggston respectively, strongly emphasised the importance of 'getting a team out' each week.

Enforceable trust also operated as a mechanism of social capital development at the other clubs, though in a less pronounced fashion. At Faxhill, as at Caggston, the internal sanctioning capacity of the community appeared to be most salient during the 'initiation' phase, i.e. when people had joined and were becoming established within the club. Mark offered a straightforward example:

If you take ten people to a pub, one of them's brand new and he says, 'Right, lads, what do you want to drink?', he buys the first pint, he's in. If it comes to the tenth round and it's the new guy and he says, 'Right, lads, I'm off now,' you know he's out, straight away. It's a horrible thing to say in the adult section, but it's true.

Such a scene is commonplace, of course, not just in Faxhill, but in other voluntary sports clubs and in pubs and bars everywhere. Nevertheless, it captures the essence of exchange embedded in group settings. Indeed, in many respects, buying rounds in the pub is similar to a rotating credit association, which is one of the classic exemplars of social capital given in the literature (see, e.g., Coleman, 1988; Light, 1984; Portes, 1998).

In our interview, Mark said that this type of generalised exchange – i.e. members building up and discharging obligations to one another, monitored to a greater or lesser extent by the group – characterised activity at Faxhill. However, a closer examination of activity at the club revealed that enforceable trust did not always operate, or, perhaps more accurately, did not always lead to positive outcomes. The following field notes record the conversation I had with Frank at a club training session:

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I said to Frank I felt the second team appeared more together, more bonded than the first team. Did he agree?

Frank: 'Yes. They're definitely more of a group.'

RT: 'Yeah. There were a few along [at the match I attended on 19 March] and it was one of the guy's birthdays and they made a big thing of it.'

Frank: 'Yes, but did you hear what happened later?'

RT: 'No.'

Frank: 'He had 140 quid nicked from his wallet, which was in the changing room. It was locked. I had the key. But there's always a few need to go back in – forgot a shin-pad, or whatever. Anyway, he had 300 quid in his wallet, or so he said, and he said 140 was nicked. You don't expect it from your own team. But someone must have known he had that money.'

It is important not to extrapolate too far from a single incident, but this does point up several issues. First, and most simply, it shows that it is necessary to remain healthily sceptical about some of the accounts of club activity given by interviewees (in this case, Mark). Second, it highlights how mechanisms of social capital development might actually create the conditions for betrayals – as many authors have discussed, trust in groups can create the conditions for opportunistic behaviour (Herreros, 2004).

So, to return to the issue above, why was there more evidence of enforceable trust at Caggston than at the other clubs? For the major part of the answer, we need to return to Olly's description of Caggston: 'It is a closed club, if you know what I mean. Everyone knows everyone.' Enforceable trust, as discussed, works through the internal sanctioning capacity of the community. Coleman (1988) relates this sanctioning capacity

to closed social structure, i.e. dense, interlocking networks of social ties. Caggston was a prime example of network closure; and this closure enabled information sharing between members, which meant that reputation, or standing within the group, was rapidly communicated. Of course, there are other facets to this argument and I examine them in the next two chapters. Here, though, it suffices to note that the small size of Caggston and the lengthy and regular interaction of its members had created this dense network of inter-related ties that underpinned enforceable trust.

There are a couple of further things to note about enforceable trust. First, this mechanism operated most clearly in the clubs as part of the broad process through which members became (or did not become) part of a discernible group. This illustrates once again the close intertwinement between tie formation and social capital development. Second, the case study accounts suggested that enforceable trust, or, more specifically, closed social structure, could lead to negative outcomes for certain people. This was most obvious for people who struggled to form social ties within the various clubs. For example, Duncan spoke about one new player at Caggston.

I remember we had a few like quite good players come and play for us, guy who used to teach Matt clarinet [laughs] bizarrely, this guy Adam, who, um, was a really good player, really good batsman, and he came and played for us, but he was quite like, he was quite a soft, kind of sensitive kind of guy, and he got like basically bullied out of the scenario from what I understand of it.

Here, the same closed social structure that facilitated enforceable trust and helped to ensure commitment to certain norms (i.e. regular participation) also led to exclusion of ‘outsiders’.

Moreover, as also discussed, the same mechanisms that lead to the development of social capital and to positive outcomes for some people can, at times, be experienced negatively by the very same people. For example, at Caggston and Faxhill, enforceable trust helped ensure the continuation of the clubs through group monitoring of norms of commitment. Yet, some

members experienced these obligations negatively. For example, Rob at Caggston discussed the pressure he felt to attend regularly.

You do get this pressure, like you may want to play three weeks out of four, but on the fourth, you feel bad if you don't go. It's very similar to pulling a sickie...When I had to go back to Devon the weekend before last, I did feel like I was pulling a sickie. 'Cos I really had to go, but it did feel like pulling a sickie in much the same way as the Monday before last felt – [laughs] when I pulled a sickie.

It is important to point out that not all members saw it this way: others appeared to view their regular participation as a wholly conscious and positive choice. However, the fact that some members did bears out the point that mechanisms of social capital development can, in certain circumstances, lead to both positive and negative outcomes for the same people. This re-emphasises the importance of a critical realist perspective that seeks to understand what works for whom in what circumstances and why.

Value introjection

Value introjection refers, very broadly, to the way in which certain norms and values become internalised and then act as categorical imperatives that guide behaviour. Internalised norms, such as helping others, paying debts in time, or trusting unknown others, enable other people to access resources and hence constitute social capital. As discussed earlier, Portes (1998) and others suggest that while reciprocity exchanges and enforceable trust extend from people's instrumental motivations, value introjection and bounded solidarity (discussed below) extend from consummatory motivations. It is obviously very difficult to examine a drawn-out process like value introjection through analysis of interviews and observations in a few specific organisational contexts. However, what we can do is examine how members themselves accounted for their behaviour. That is to say, we can see whether they considered their actions, in particular their willingness to make

resources available to others, to be a result of relatively stable personal values; and, if so, where they considered these values derived from.

At the most basic level, nearly every respondent explicitly said that they felt they had relatively stable personal values that informed their behaviour. For example, Tom, at Caggston, said:

I'm a big team person, if you like. I'm not afraid to take on roles, be it captain, or treasurer, or whatever, to help the club. And, I guess to an extent, I'm prepared to muck in and do whatever's necessary, again, to make sure as many people as possible are involved, enjoy it, et cetera. I don't know what sort of person that makes me, but a good *team* player, I suppose.

In contrast, Michael, at Treeford, said (with an accompanying chuckle), 'I'm not a co-operative person. I'm not a team-working person, really.' These were divergent comments, yet they were typical in the sense that both Tom and Michael identified personal values and attitudes that they felt directed their behaviour.

As to whether members felt that the *clubs* had fundamentally affected their values, the evidence was more equivocal. Some were adamant that club involvement had not changed them at all. Michael, for example, said, 'In actual fact, in my own case, it hasn't made me more co-operative at all...I don't get involved in organising things here very much, 'cos that's not the sort of person I am.' Likewise, Pete and Sarah felt that Caggston had not influenced their values and attitudes. 'We've not been changed by the club,' said Pete. 'I don't think so,' Sarah agreed, 'I don't think it's changed my personality, my outlook, really.' Others felt that it had. Although he treated the notion with characteristic dry humour, Duncan said that he felt club involvement had instilled in him an attitude of tolerance and developed his ability and willingness to co-operate.

Yeah, I think so, yeah. I reckon. I, I would say so. Um, because I'm not sure that in any other, in any of the other scenarios that I've moved in in my *life*, I would necessarily have encountered people of the type that I've encountered at Caggston.

Um, I think it's, like someone like Roger, for example [laughs], like, you know, where else am I going to meet a kind of like slightly cantankerous, 50 year-old traffic warden [laughs]? You know, and there's a certain way of dealing with someone like Roger, and of – and more than dealing, you know – of *henchmanising*³⁵ someone like Roger that, that I'm not sure I would have learnt anywhere else, really, um...and I guess, and I certainly wouldn't have learnt to do it at a young age, I think. I think, as you move into – I think that's another thing, I think, about being a child in an adults' environment, from my point of view – is that maybe learning to deal with different people, like when adults [laughs] can be difficult and that kind of thing and to understand it from an earlier age than I would have done in, you know, I would have had no other setting in which to do that with. So, I think, um, I think it definitely has an impact, yeah, on your kind of like, on your interactions with adults as you kind of get, as you move into like the world of work and stuff like that, definitely. 'Cos everyone's got like a Roger at work and stuff like that, so it's, you know...definitely helps. There's definitely something.

This is a revealing insight for several reasons. First and most simply, Duncan considered that through his involvement at Caggston, he had experienced the mechanism of value introduction. Second, Duncan linked the operation of this mechanism to the fact that he had been involved in the club from a young age. This tallies with recent research that stresses the significance of youth socialisation experiences in the development of social capital (Stolle and Hooghe, 2004). Third, Duncan explicitly linked the introduction of tolerance to the way in which the club enabled (or, really, necessitated) social interaction with people from dissimilar backgrounds. This relates to the distinction made in the literature between bonding and bridging social capital. As discussed, certain social capital theorists, following Putnam, have argued that 'group experiences might be even more pronounced in their impact when the members of the group are diverse and from different backgrounds' (Stolle, 2003: 26). Duncan's comments suggest such an impact.

Fourth, and related to the third, Duncan pointed to the fact that he 'had no other setting' (certainly at an early age) in which to understand the importance of tolerance and how to deal with people from different

³⁵ This is again (with apologies to the reader) shared vernacular between me and Duncan: 'henchmanising', in this context, means something like 'befriending', or 'getting along with'.

backgrounds. Such comments lend some weight to arguments that privilege the role of voluntary associations in the creation of social capital (e.g. Putnam, 1993; Verba et al., 1995). I deal with each of these issues – youth socialisation, member ‘diversity’ and the specificity of the voluntary association context – in the following chapters. Overall, across the case studies, most members felt that value introduction *did* operate at the clubs, if not in their case, then in others’. Yet most expressed this with an understandable degree of uncertainty. The response of Neville from Treeford was typical in this regard. He said, ‘Yeah, the answer is probably yes, although it’s very difficult to pinpoint exactly what, ‘cos I have spent, you know, I do spend quite a few hours here every week. I’m sure it’s changed, er, er,...but it’s very difficult to [laughs] to, to pinpoint it.’

One key debate, discussed in chapter five, is whether co-operation within voluntary associations is the result of value introduction or self-selection. There was evidence of both at the clubs. For example, at Treeford, Michael felt that (unlike him) a large majority of members were relatively co-operative and willing to volunteer for various organiser roles. Yet he questioned whether this was a result of the club’s influence, or self-selection:

You’ve got to always question which came first. ‘Cos maybe the people who join clubs tend to be more co-operative in the first place...If you look at it on a standard deviation model or something, that’s probably, you’d probably find that to be correct, but whether they join clubs in the first place because they’re that nature, I don’t know.

Taking members’ accounts together, the picture that emerged was of both processes operating together. Indeed, several members, such as George at Treeford, expressed just such a view.

My own view on that is that it’s probably a totally expected two-way process. I think there’s a selection, a self-selection aspect to it, that people, you know, might want to belong to a club...But also like in the process of being here, there’s got to be some form of gradual integration going on, you know, in terms of, of, you know, being a member of the club. So, on the one hand, it’s probably a self-selecting process. On

the other hand, it's some form of evolutionary process once here, you know. Which means...it's probably Darwinian [laughs], you know.

RT: Self-selection and adaptation [laughs]?

That's right, yeah [laughs]. Yeah.

In fact, there is support in the literature for just such a 'selection and adaptation dynamic'. This dynamic, which Hooghe (2003b) theorised and empirically examined, refers to the process through which members, interacting within voluntary associations, converge on a pattern of attitudes at a more extreme level than the average of people's pre-existing attitudes. This does not presuppose that such attitudes are those commonly associated with social capital (trust, willingness to co-operate, and so on). However, it does provide empirical support for the operation of a value introjection mechanism within voluntary associations.³⁶

There are a few further points to note about value introjection. First, taking a closer look at some of the comments allows us to see what members considered some of the key elements of the mechanism to be. For example, George at Treeford said:

I think that inevitably, if you're involved in some form of process, that does change you...I mean, one aspect of being a member of the club is that often people just sit down and *talk* after matches and things like that and that's *invaluable*, actually. And that inevitably influences people, it must inevitably influence the way people think.

Many other members also discussed the importance of talk and engaging with others' perspectives. As noted above, this relates to the issue of 'bridging' social interactions and member 'diversity', something I examine in more detail in chapter eight. Second, a focus on the way members

³⁶ Having said this, several authors have made the argument that socialisation within voluntary associations *will* tend to have generally positive, rather than negative, effects (if trust, willingness to co-operate and so on are considered to be positive). Hooghe (2003b: 107) explains this argument as follows: 'Because of the fact that more civic-minded people are more easily organized than misanthropes, at the aggregate level, their norms will be spread more successfully within civil society than the values of misanthropes.'

internalised certain prevalent norms within the clubs naturally leads to questions around what these were. I do not discuss them in detail here, as I am focusing primarily on mechanisms. However, I discuss them in subsequent chapters, because the normative environment (what some might label the culture) of a club is a key element of the socio-organisational context that shapes interaction. Third, as mentioned above, it is clear that value introjection, as a mechanism, might lead to the internalisation of ‘negative’ values, just as it might ‘positive’ ones. This once again illustrates the importance of an embeddedness perspective. As Hooghe (2003b: 106) puts it, the ‘socialization effects of interaction within voluntary associations are not uniform but are context dependent’.

Bounded solidarity

Bounded solidarity refers to group-oriented feelings that emerge from people interacting within a common situation. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998: 133) describe it as ‘an emergent sentiment of “we-ness” which leads to ‘forms of altruistic conduct...that can be tapped by other group members to obtain privileged access to various resources’. Recent research on social capital has sought to detail the social psychological foundations of this mechanism. For example, Kramer (2006; 2009) has drawn on social identity theory and self-categorisation theory to explain the ways in which individuals psychologically identify with a collective and how this enhances their willingness to engage in collective behaviours. Specifically, he argues that individuals have three relatively distinct psychological identities – individual, sub-group and collective – and that ‘one’s behavior is driven by the interactions between the type of identity that is most important at the moment, and the specific situational factors’ (Kramer, 2009: 242). Bounded solidarity, in this sense, can be equated with collective identification, whereby individuals are likely to ‘see themselves and their behavior in terms of impact on the collective to which they belong’ (Kramer, 2009: 243).

Bounded solidarity was apparent at each of the case study clubs, but to varying degrees. It appeared strongest at Caggston. As Bob said: ‘We’re not

just a bunch of blokes playing cricket. We're more than that.' Most often, as we have already seen, members expressed this collective identity by referring to Caggston as a family. At Faxhill, Frank also discussed the emergent sense of togetherness that many of the players felt:

There's always [a feeling of togetherness]. As I said earlier, the more you play together, in anything, but football particularly so, because you are, you know, you're physically together, you, you, you do look after each other on the pitch, there's no two ways about it...Our second team, they've got a bloody Facebook site for the club now and everything, you know, they're into it in a very big way, Faxhill, Faxhill, Faxhill.

A very large body of research, from small group laboratory experiments to in-depth field studies, has suggested that even very minimal social contextual cues which make individuals' collective identities salient can foster collective behaviour (see, e.g., Caporael et al., 1989; Kramer, 2009). For example, studies have shown that even the frequent use of collectivising language, i.e. the use of 'we' instead of 'I', may have this effect (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Kramer et al., 1993; Ottesen et al., 2010). At Caggston, collectivising language and repeated references to a distinctive club identity were prevalent. This was obvious to any newcomer, as my field notes from my very first visit testify.

23 May 2010

As we are all sitting around on the boundary, a squabble breaks out between Roger, Olly and Kieran (three generations of the Haddon family), concerning Keiran's Caggston cap. Rob (playing his first game for the club) is amused and comments, 'You go from one cricket club to another and get similar stuff'. Duncan replies, 'Stick around long enough and you'll realise that *this* one is a bit different'. Bob chuckles and agrees, knowingly.

One of the principal means through which bounded solidarity is created and maintained is talk. As Fine (2003: 135) puts it, 'All groups develop narratives, accounts, and memories that are based upon and contribute to a shared understanding of their identity'. This was extremely common at Caggston.

25 July 2010

Several people in the group – Glen, Chris, Ryan, Roger, Duncan – talk about teams against which Caggston has had arguments, or ‘scuffles’. This provides opportunities to discuss particular anecdotes relating to specific members, but always in reference to the *group*. I say, ‘I didn’t think cricket would be as prone to that sort of thing, ‘cos it doesn’t really have the opportunity for physical confrontation, like football.’ Chris replies, ‘Well, Darren squared up to this bloke, properly.’ Others chip in with similar stories. Also, when talking about an incident on Tuesday night at a friendly game, someone describes the incident and Chris talks (jokingly) about ‘good Caggston aggression’.

This latter example also shows how the group defined itself *in opposition* to other groups (in this case, other teams in the league). In social psychological terms, this relates to the intertwined processes of self- and social-categorisation, in which individuals think of themselves in relation to their sub-group or collective identity and make contrasts between ‘us’ and ‘them’ when evaluating outcomes (Turner et al., 1987). Such ‘contrasts’ were evident in countless conversations at Caggston.

In the interviews, members of Caggston elaborated on this mechanism of bounded solidarity. For example, Glen said:

There’s a lot of talk about how shit you are, both as a team and as a player, you talk about yourself being shit. Half, at least half the – no, everyone does it in fact [laughs]. So, there’s a partly kind of like...everyone. And somehow that’s something to do with being in a group, you know, you’re in the group and...everyone takes the piss out of themselves a bit, like, I don’t know, somehow, that’s what being in the group is sort of about.

Indeed, I observed first-hand the way in which self-conscious self-deprecation fostered a collective identity at Caggston.

30 August 2010

I spend time with the team in the dressing room (behind the scenes!) before the final game of the tour. People are talking about the opposition club’s up-market facilities – their immaculate pitch, their well-appointed dressing rooms, their neat white kit, etc. Someone says, ‘These will be good.’ Bob replies: ‘But we’re a *team*. Not

talented individuals, but a *team*.' 'That don't play as a team,' Duncan replies sardonically. 'A load of prima donnas,' Glen chips in. 'Untalented individuals that don't know how to play as a team,' Duncan jokingly concludes.

So, there was strong evidence of bounded solidarity at Caggston. But did this constitute social capital? That is to say, did this emergent 'we-ness' enhance people's willingness to make resources available to others within the group? Analysis suggests that it did. Recall Olly, for example. In chapter four, we saw how he characterised the club as a family and told me, 'There is...an identity'. He then directly linked this family-like, collective identity to the sorts of everyday favours that people did for one another within the club: 'Everyone – if anyone needed something doing and someone knew how to do it, I suppose, you could ask them and all they could say is no, I guess [laughs]'. Other members made similar connections between an emergent group sentiment and willingness to make resources available to others in the group.

At the other clubs, there was less evidence of bounded solidarity at *club* level. Instead, there was more evidence of identification at the sub-group level. For example, the following extract from my field notes at Faxhill demonstrates the salience of team (i.e. sub-group) identity:

1 March 2011

One of the regular, post-training group discussions in the pub with several of the second team players and one first team player. Andy [second team player] says, 'The first team haven't won anything for two seasons now, right? Which is why they're whinging.' Ash [another second team player] says to me, 'The first team don't come to training, except him [indicates Wayne, the first team player]. They're too good to train.' This is gentle ribbing, but with an edge. The issue of first team vs. second team seems particularly salient. Ash talks about Lewis, the ex-manager of the first team. He says that Lewis put his mates in the team and would only ask for second team players when he was short, but would then not want them when the good first team players came back – 'So, the second team players were like, "can't be fucked with this, they can fuck off. And now they won't play for the first team.'" Later, Andy tells me about the second team's performances over the season. He says they are doing well – 'We're just about reaching our sexual peak.' Everybody

laughs. It's a joke, obviously, but I get the feeling that there is genuine solidarity among second team players and that the comment relates to the team having matured together as a group over time.

At Treeford, there also did not seem to be a readily-communicated, strong, *club*-level collective identity. Some of the members did appear to identify with elements of Treeford's history and tradition (for example, Patrick, the club manager, said, 'Even if I wasn't working here, I'd prefer a club...with heart, with character and *tradition*. This club's got, what, 105 years of tradition.') However, the most visible symbols of the club's history and tradition were the boards in the club-house that held the names of previous winners of tournaments; and, judging by my observations and informal discussions with members, they seemed most prominent as a public record of *personal* achievement, rather than as a representation of *collective* identity.³⁷ It could be argued that these winners' boards conferred *more* status among members because recent winners joined a long list of previous winners (i.e. collective identity enhanced status claims). However, in relation to Kramer's (2009) distinctions, discussed above, personal identity seemed much more salient than collective identity in these types of interactions.

Where bounded solidarity did appear to operate at Treeford, this was mostly at the sub-group level. For example, Henry, as we have seen, had played with the same 'four' for more than 20 years and had recently dropped out through injury. The group was clearly significant to him (as he said, 'I *miss* that. And, er, I want to revive it.); and the collective identity they had developed was manifested in his repeated references to 'the guys' and his invariable use of 'we' to describe their activities. Yet when I asked him whether he felt a sense of identity with the club as a whole, he paused and said, 'Not really'. He explained that he had never been involved in the running of the club and had never really been moved by any collective sense of responsibility.

³⁷ As one example, within just a few minutes of our very first meeting, Leslie told me that she had won the most recent veterans' mixed-doubles tournament year – 'my name's on the board', she said. And later that evening, she said the same thing to Claire and waited for (or, rather, demanded) acknowledgement. The winners' boards seemed mostly a means of conferring status on individuals.

I don't think, well, I mean, I'm not here to start telling people how to run a place, if it's, if they're running it. I know that some people do, but I don't like doing that [laughs]. I'd just walk out. It's like going to a restaurant, if you get a bad meal, you don't start telling them how to run a business, you don't go back again [laughs]. It's as simple as that.

This idea of 'club-as-restaurant' provides an interesting contrast to the idea of 'club-as-family', which was prevalent at Caggston. I discuss these different club cultures in the next chapter and I explore how they affected the mechanisms of social capital development. Here, it is just worth noting that Henry's comments, like those of other members, provide more evidence of the way that 'social contextual cues' can affect the salience of personal, sub-group, or collective identities (Kramer, 2009); and thus more evidence of the context-dependent nature of social capital mechanisms.

ADDITIONAL MECHANISMS

The analysis so far has demonstrated that each of the principal mechanisms of social capital development operated at the clubs, but to varying degrees and in slightly different ways. It has also highlighted several recurring issues, namely that: there are different possible 'readings' of the various mechanisms; there is close interplay between mechanisms; and there is close intertwinement between tie formation and wider mechanisms of social capital development. I examine each of these issues in the final section of this chapter. Before that, I discuss two additional mechanisms that operated at the clubs, both of which had important effects on the development of social capital.

Achieving

Achieving, here, refers to individuals or groups performing well in the particular sporting activity they are pursuing, either in competitive situations, or, more generally, through improving their sporting skills. The case studies

showed that achieving could lead directly to outcomes not necessarily related to social capital, such as a sense of personal and/or group satisfaction; but also that achieving could develop, maintain, or erode social capital by influencing other key processes, such as social interaction, tie formation and bounded solidarity.

At a basic level, achieving affected the quantity and quality of ongoing social interaction. Many members at each of the clubs discussed how performing the sporting activity well improved the quality of social interaction at the club and, conversely, how performing poorly could worsen it. Olly from Caggston illustrated both sides of this equation well. First, he told me about a match at the end of the previous season, which exemplified the negative effects of poor performance:

We batted and we were all out for something ridiculous. I think I got out first ball. I got one that just buried itself somewhere and just skidded along the floor. So, I was really annoyed and I just packed my bag and went straight home, couldn't entertain anyone, 'cos I was just so pissed off with the attitude of the team, and my attitude in a way, that I just didn't want to be around anyone.

Then, later, he explained what happened when the team performed well: 'Yeah, it's really good. Everyone's really chatty and...generally, you do well and everyone's chatty and pint afterwards in the bar.' Ben said something very similar.

Most Sundays I won't stay [to have a drink and chat after the match], but that's generally 'cos we've been murdered. And I'm in a – 'cos I do get pissed off about it. So, it'd be, what would be perfect for me, what would make me enjoy it more, is if we won most of our games, 'cos I'd stay and have a beer after most of the games. And if we won most of our games, it'd mean we're doing well as a team and I'm doing relatively well.

These insights show two things: first, that achieving (or not achieving) operated at both individual and group level; and, second, as discussed in the

last chapter, that people's ongoing motivation for involvement was closely bound up with wider processes of social interaction.

Achieving also interacted directly with bounded solidarity. For example, Frank at Faxhill said, 'You know, Faxhill can actually give Larry and John and Fred and Paul and all the rest of them, whoever they are, give them a sense of achievement. You know, they win the title, fantastic. Togetherness, it's bonding, it's bonding.' Somewhat conversely, Tom at Caggston suggested that *under*-achieving might, in certain circumstances, have an even stronger effect on bounded solidarity:

You'll get people who are getting beaten all the time, who won't enjoy and will just drop out, where the people who are prepared to stick at it, you know, whether we're getting beaten or whether we're doing well, or whatever it happens to be, it's much easier to form a bond, I think, when they do that, you almost feel like they're doing it for you.

This relates to the way a sense of adversity can heighten collective identification, through making members' sacrifices for the group more salient (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1998). It is important not to carry this too far, because, as discussed above, repeated poor performances over time tended to diminish the quantity and quality of social interaction. However, it does demonstrate again the critical realist argument that key social processes can interact to produce different outcomes for different people in different circumstances (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Achieving also developed, or, perhaps more accurately, transcended, obligations of reciprocity. Earlier, we saw how certain members of Caggston experienced the group monitoring of regular participation negatively. However, as some of the members pointed out, they only tended to experience the obligation of regular participation as an obligation (and thus negatively) when they were performing poorly. Rob at Caggston provided a clear example of this.

It [regular participation] would be dependent on me actually getting some runs. 'Cos that's directly linked to my – my sense of obligation to play cricket, when it feels like an obligation goes up when I'm not doing well. If I'm getting runs every week, it's not an obligation and I'm far more likely to become involved. If I'm not doing very well, then my interest wanes.

I discuss this issue in more detail in chapter eight. There I show how the 'choice' element of participation shaped social interaction and social capital development.

The case studies also showed how achieving, as a mechanism, could influence the development of social capital through the creation of status hierarchies. Michael at Treeford was characteristically open about this. He said,

There's a kind of status to [my involvement] as well, social status. It kind of gives me – because I'm self-employed, I work from home now – it gives me a kind of reference point. So, I can come here and people know me, you know, even not for tennis I sometimes come here, just to drop in for a drink and everyone at the bar knows me, and have a chat and a laugh, yeah, people recognise me and, um, they know I'm quite a good player. You know, so there's those kind of benefits.

This shows how status, based on achieving, facilitated the formation of social ties at Treeford. As Michael explained, other members had often sought him out to play in their 'fours' and this had led, in turn, to his wider development of social capital. Quite obviously, though, this can cut both ways. As not everyone can achieve at the same level, achieving constrained tie formation for some, while enabling it for others. I analyse this issue in the next two chapters, where I discuss how elements of personal context, including people's level of sporting ability, shaped social capital development.

Leaders providing impetus

A number of researchers have discussed the importance of 'leaders' in the development of social capital. For example, Oliver (1984) explained how

certain individuals can, in effect, absorb the set-up costs associated with building social capital; and Ostrom (1990: 187) discussed how leaders could initiate an ‘incremental, sequential and self-transforming’ process of organisational development. Krishna (2007: 954) investigated this empirically in his study of social capital development in villages in India and showed that ‘leaders help[ed] other villagers overcome the collective action dilemma’. A similar mechanism operated at the case study clubs.

In Caggston, the influence of key individuals was immediately apparent and uniformly recognised. Every member discussed this, but Pete was perhaps clearest in his identification of the process. In talking about the ongoing productive exchange that made the club function, he said: ‘My take on it, for me, it is about a very, very strong moral *leader*, frankly, in someone like Bob, who’s able to, who’s got the respect of people, um, and brings, reciprocally, brings a commitment, you know.’ This process was clear at Faxhill too, where Frank had helped to set up the club and had made enormous efforts to ensure it continued. It was also apparent, though perhaps in a more diffuse way, at Treeford.

At the latter, I was able to examine the process from the perspective of regular members and of the ‘leaders’ themselves. For example, Roland, who had not organised activity in the club himself, described what he imagined the process to be:

Things are often due to individuals, aren’t they, in the end, it seems to me...so in a club like this, if, if I chose to analyse it enough, I could probably identify four or five individuals who could be anything from coaches to committee members to informal members who just have a lot of clout in terms of people listening to them, that *create* the culture, I think, probably...And I’m just a sort of [laughs] beneficiary of it, in the sense that that permeates through and then affects then the things that I get involved with. Um, so I think it’s like that. And, and *probably*, they might even have those discussions around, how are we going to make this work in a way that’s going to be friendly, um, informal, but, er, still maintain high standards and be *challenging*. Those are the words, I suspect, if I was to be a sort of fly on the wall around the discussions that go on. If I could first of all identify those people and then listen to

their language, I would have confirmation that these are the people who are actually driving what's going on here. Would be my guess.

My observations and other interviews found these speculations to be remarkably accurate: Mary, the chair, Patrick, the club manager, George, the tennis secretary, and other key organisers regularly discussed how they could create a friendly, welcoming, co-operative culture. I examine this issue of club 'culture' and how it shaped social capital development in the next chapter; for now, it suffices to say that key individuals appeared to play a significant role in this process of culture creation.

KEY ISSUES EMERGING FROM THE ANALYSIS

The foregoing sections have provided a close analysis of how the mechanisms of social capital development operated within the clubs. Throughout this analysis, several key issues recurred; and these demand further exposition. In what follows, I discuss each of these key issues in turn.

Multiple 'readings' of the various mechanisms

The first issue is that the principal mechanisms of social capital development are open to multiple 'readings'. We examined this above in relation to reciprocity exchanges. To recap, the traditional, rational-choice reading sees it as repeated rational transactions by self-interested people, driven by instrumental motivations. An emotional/affective reading suggests that reciprocity exchanges emerge from our emotions, a view that can be seen as either contradictory or complimentary to the rational-choice view.³⁸ The

³⁸ A 'strong' emotional reading would suggest that affective processes operate *instead of* the internal cost-benefit processes associated with the rational-choice perspective. For example, Heise (2002: 17) explicates affect control theory as follows: 'humans are viewed as meaning-maintainers, who continually reconstruct the world to fit intuitive knowledge generated from sentiments, within cognitive and logical constraints. In this perspective, rational analysis is rare rather than routine. When successful problem solving does occur, it quickly is assimilated into the affective meaning system and replayed thereafter as intuitive knowledge.' A 'weak' emotional reading would suggest that affective processes and cost-benefit processes operate alongside one another and may influence one another. For example, Lawler's (2001: 349) affect theory of social exchange 'identifies some fundamental ways in which the rational and nonrational are intertwined in exchange processes'.

anthropologically informed reading of reciprocity implies that, as an original experience, it is a natural, emergent product of ongoing social interaction. The analysis of the case studies, as we saw, offered evidence that fitted with each of these readings.

To take another example, let us look at Leslie's description of Treeford as 'quite a full reference system', through which one could access expert advice on a range of issues. I asked her whether she would feel comfortable asking just any member, even one she did not know personally, and she replied: 'Oh, yeah, because, well, exactly, there's an element of *trust* with the members, yeah.' But what type of trust was this? And, related of course, what mechanism of social capital development? The rational-choice view of trust is that it is 'a more or less well-grounded expectation about the preferences of other people' (Herreros, 2004: 8). But Leslie readily admitted that she would be perfectly happy to depend on members that she did not know well at all. Moreover, these other members were seemingly willing to provide resources (advice, services, etc.) to someone *they* did not know well at all. Was it, then, their insertion into a common social structure, i.e. the mechanism of enforceable trust, that created this social capital? Did the 'donor' gain honour or approval from the group for her/his offer of services? The evidence indicates not, since the absence of dense, interlocking ties and the concomitant lack of clear information flows among members suggest that the relevant reputational processes may not have been operating in this case. Overall, then, it appears that this might not have been the information-based conception of trust that is posited in rational-choice accounts of reciprocity exchanges and enforceable trust.

Instead, it may have been identification-based trust, a form of trust which derives from a member's identification with a particular group or organisation, rather than from detailed information about specific others (Kramer, 2009). This suggests that the sort of resource exchange Leslie and others mentioned at Treeford may have been a result of bounded solidarity: the emergent sense of collective identification, or 'we-ness', that comes from membership of the same group or organisation. In this vein, as discussed in

the last chapter, Frank (2009) argues that collective identification can act as a ‘quasi-tie’, encouraging trust between members that do not themselves share strong personal relations, and directing allocation of resources to a group. Although, as we saw above, there was not a strong sense of club-level bounded solidarity at Treelford, there may have been sufficient identification among members to direct this type of resource exchange.

This is a tentative and debatable conclusion. Indeed, it is likely that rational-choice theorists would still argue that such behaviour is in line with their models of trust and exchange. As discussed in chapter two, Coleman's (1990) model proposed that people make the decision to trust when the ratio of the probability of being right about someone else's trustworthiness over being wrong was greater than the ratio of the potential losses from being wrong over the potential gains of being right. In the case of Leslie, it could be argued that, although her information on the other members' likely behaviour was very slight, the potential losses (of relying on advice about plumbers, or something similar) were even slighter. However, there are examples from other contexts where people have taken much riskier trust decisions with the same, or even less, information than Leslie. For example, in the study of childcare centres discussed earlier, Small (2009a) found that mothers were willing to entrust their children to other mothers from the centres without even knowing these mothers' names, occupations, or other basic information. As he argues there, such examples point to models of trust that are not solely based on information gathering and rational calculations. Ultimately, whichever way one takes this particular example, we should be aware that there will often be multiple ‘readings’ of the mechanisms of social capital development.

Interplay between mechanisms

The second major issue is that there is overlap and interplay between the various mechanisms. For example, above we examined both value introduction and bounded solidarity. While value introduction refers to the internalisation of value imperatives during socialisation, bounded solidarity,

according to Portes and Sensenbrenner (1998: 130), refers to the ‘emergence of principled group-oriented behavior quite apart from any early value introjection’. However, there are strong arguments to suggest that these two mechanisms operate together to produce social capital. As we have seen, many social capital theorists, following Putnam, have argued that voluntary associations function as significant sites of value introjection. Indeed, Putnam’s major thesis, at least in his early study, was that voluntary associations had important socialisation effects on democratic and co-operative norms and values. In this, he followed de Tocqueville’s well-known pronouncement that associations functioned as ‘learning schools for democracy’. This suggests that the ‘emergent sense of we-ness’ (i.e. bounded solidarity) not only encourages the development of co-operative norms and values among members that share a collective identity, but also functions to instil these co-operative norms and values in members more generally (i.e. value introjection).

As noted above and in previous chapters, there is fierce debate over this perspective. However, there is some evidence from social psychology for the interplay of these mechanisms. For example, Tyler (2001: 159) summarised evidence from a number of studies on collective identification and co-operation and found that ‘social identity processes are especially important because they create an identity-based psychological dynamic that changes people’s internal sense of themselves, i.e. changes their values and attitudes’. The evidence from the case studies also offers some support for this interplay of bounded solidarity and value introjection. As we saw above, George at Treeford was of the opinion that some members developed more generalised co-operative attitudes and behaviours through their club involvement. Specifically, he linked this to the feelings of solidarity and sense of belonging that club membership created and the positive impact these feelings had on individuals’ self-esteem. Other people, such as Frank at Faxhill, suggested a similar intertwining of bounded solidarity and value introjection.

The analysis above also suggested that the additional mechanisms interacted with the principal mechanisms of social capital development. For example, as we saw, individual and group achievement (or, in certain circumstances, under-achievement) contributed to bounded solidarity and thus to the development and maintenance of social capital. These are just a couple of examples, but they are intended to illustrate a more general point, namely that mechanisms of social capital development can interact with each other to produce outcomes. In fact, this is a point well recognised in critical realism. As Reed (2009: 436) states, 'mechanisms...interact with a complex configuration of additional mechanisms that are contextually embedded within socially and temporally dynamic situations'.

Tie formation and social capital development

Following on from the above, the third key issue is that mechanisms of social capital development are very closely, perhaps inextricably, bound up with processes of tie formation. I made this point in chapter five, but the close analysis of the principal mechanisms in this chapter has reinforced it. In fact, some argue that there is no distance at all between ongoing personal relations and social capital. For example, Torche and Valenzuela (2011: 189) state, 'In a context of personal relations, social capital is to a large extent an involuntary by-product of the relationship, and trust is often indistinguishable from familiarity, virtually always an unconscious bet, which becomes conscious and problematic only if betrayed'. Viewed this way, the processes through which social capital develops are none other than the processes through which people form and sustain social ties.

Yet even when tie formation and social capital development are analysed separately, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that they overlap significantly and reinforce each other. One example is the close intertwinement between social and organisational tie formation and the mechanism of bounded solidarity. In the case studies, Rob illustrated this well. He was a new member of Caggston, but he had previously been a member of his home-town cricket club for around ten years. He explained in

detail the process through which he had become integrated into the group at his previous club.

I think there's a tipping point when you felt like, oh, I'm one of the people who doesn't know everyone, and then one day you've sort of tipped over the edge and you're one of the group as opposed to the new people who don't know everyone. But, as to when and where that is...it's quite hard to recall it in perfect detail...I guess it's when people are talking afterwards in the bar about stories and events and you actually remember those things as opposed to just having heard about them, that's probably a tipping point. When you feel more part of the group, than just someone who's playing. So, I think there's that shared history. To a certain extent. Also, then you know, half the time, when someone tells a story about something that's happened and you actually know full well that it was, that it's a completely exaggerated story. That's one aspect. When, I think, you're fully integrated into the group is when you cease to remember that it's exaggerated. Yeah, and when you've bought into it to the extent that the exaggerated story becomes your truth, as opposed to something that you know someone's bullshitting about.

As Rob's account shows, 'stories and events' and 'shared history' served a key function in the formation and maintenance of social ties. Fine (1987: 128) discusses this when analysing the culture of small groups; he says, 'As the culture develops, it increasingly serves as a focus for group reference and action, and a member who attempts to enter a group that has been functioning for a considerable period of time must remain in the background until a substantial portion of the group's culture has been mastered'. Yet, as discussed above, the use of collectivising language and the creation and maintenance of shared history is also fundamental to the mechanism of bounded solidarity. This suggests that 'mastering' a group's culture facilitates *both* the formation of social ties (specifically integration into the group) *and* the development of a collective identity that encourages co-operative, group-oriented behaviour (Kramer, 2009).

So, mechanisms of social capital development are very closely intertwined, if not entirely commensurate with, processes of tie formation. As Small (2009a: 10) found in his study, 'how a person forms and sustains a tie can affect the social capital to which she has access. That is, many of the obligations

people feel and the resources they feel willing to provide others derive from the contexts that gave rise to and sustain their relationships.' This may seem obvious, but acknowledging it can help us avoid treating social ties as fixed features of the social world. As discussed in chapter five, it is important to keep in mind the dynamic character of social capital and its embeddedness within ongoing personal relations.

The 'type' or 'level' of social capital developed

The final key issue, or question, emerging from the analysis is, what 'type' or 'level' of social capital might be developed through involvement in the clubs? As Torche and Valenzuela (2011) point out, the mechanism of reciprocity exchanges is predicated on the likelihood of ongoing interactions and the mechanisms of enforceable trust and bounded solidarity are predicated on the existence of bounded groups or communities. This leaves value introduction as the only mechanism with 'universalistic potential', that is to say, the only mechanism 'which establishes obligations with those who do not share common membership and loyalty' (Torche and Valenzuela, 2011: 185). This takes us back to the debate in chapter two and the basic division between network and attitudinal approaches to social capital: arguably, the key fault line is how far social capital, operational within a particular group or social context, extends.

The usual response of attitudinal researchers to this debate is to invoke a metaphor of 'extremes on a continuum', the idea being that 'the attributes of social relations can be extended from the closest ones to larger social settings' (Torche and Valenzuela, 2011 185). This has resulted in discussions of 'thick' and 'thin' trust, 'particularised' and 'generalised' interaction, 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital and so on. However, serious problems exist with such a continuum metaphor. For example, several authors (e.g. Kadushin, 2012; Burt, 2005) discuss the radically different nature of brokerage and closure network structures that supposedly underlie these different 'forms' of social capital. Others, as we saw in chapter

two, fundamentally reject the idea of 'thin' or 'generalised' trust (Jackman and Miller, 1998).

Nevertheless, there are mechanism-based suggestions of how such 'collective level' social capital might be created. As noted at the outset and at several points since, this thesis is primarily concerned with individuals and small groups in specific organisational settings. As such, it is limited in what it can say about the development of 'collective level' social capital. Nonetheless, the case studies did allow for some exploration of these possible mechanism-based explanations. First, as noted earlier in the chapter, there was some evidence to suggest that value introjection operated at the clubs. For example, Duncan at Caggston, like some other members, felt that club involvement had instilled in him values of tolerance and co-operation. However, others, like Michael at Treeford, were extremely dubious about such a prospect: 'I think clubs are like religious sects, I don't think it does transfer very well outside. So you trust your own members, but [laughs] you don't necessarily trust people outside the organisation.' Overall, as noted there, most people thought that value introjection probably did operate, but were unable to point to clear evidence. In this vein, Glen at Caggston offered an unusual, but hyper-self-analytical account, in which he argued that his positive interactions within the club 'spilled over' in a limited way outside the club environment.

Yeah, I'd say you sort of take a sort of – I'd say you are, on the Sunday night and the Monday morning, anyway, definitely better disposed to people, bloke in the shop, the bloke selling tickets...

RT: [Laughs] What do you mean?

Just sort of blokes that you come across, strangers...

RT: [Laughs] You're nicer to strangers?

Yeah, I'd say you – well, as you do, coming... Yeah, you've been out all day and it's partly that, you've had a nice time out, you're better... you sort of talk to – there

seems to be more in it when you talk to people for you, so you look them in the eye a bit more and so on and so on.

RT: But that extends to like what, Monday morning?

Yeah, that's the time when you know yourself that it feels a bit different. The rest of the week, the long term stuff, it's hard to know, but probably.

Second, as also noted above, there was evidence that bounded solidarity functioned not only as a source of social capital for group members within a group context, but also as a means of value introduction itself. Third and more tentatively, the case studies provided some evidence that macro-level mechanisms might be operating through the clubs. As mentioned briefly in chapter two, one mechanism posited in the literature is that voluntary associations might institutionalise social capital by 'continually demonstrat[ing] the rationality and utility of collective action' (Wollebæk and Strømsnes, 2008: 260). The case study research was unable to explore this in any detail, as it focused on members' experiences, rather than generalised attitudes towards voluntary associations in a wider population. However, at one point in our interview, Roland at Treeford said,

Well...I think it probably has made me realise, having been here, makes me realise the *value* of a club more. Um, and the potential for good social experiences. And, er, so, um [pauses], if, if I was thinking of myself in a different position, it's nice to know this is *here*. In other words, if I divorced, became lonely, lost lots of friends or family or something, um, I wouldn't have previously thought much of *clubs* or anything featuring in my life at all. In fact, I was, I thought of myself as very much a non-club person before I joined the club. Um, but now I see it as actually a, an important part of *community*, as a, as one of a number of different ways in which people can come together and develop relationships that they otherwise wouldn't, so my kind of, my *picture* of clubs was probably a hostile one before and has become a much more positive one from this. So, so, that's changed.

A few other members made similar comments about how their views of voluntary associations had changed. Of course, the first thing to point out is that Roland's changed perception of clubs came about *through* his involvement. As such, it was not an example of what Wollebæk and

Strømsnes (2008) were discussing, i.e. that non-members within a society might be more willing to co-operate and make resources available to one another through positive popular perceptions of voluntary organisations. Nevertheless, it is at least plausible to suggest that Roland's changed perception may have influenced, albeit to a very small degree, the perceptions of those close to him. Or, if that is a step too far, Roland's experience at least suggests that some type of attitude change concerning the potential of voluntary organisations to develop social capital is possible.

Overall, the analysis so far, including the close analysis of mechanisms in this chapter, has re-emphasised the network view of social capital. That is to say, it has shown how the principal mechanisms operate to develop social capital primarily for those within a specific social network (here, the clubs and/or the sub-groups within those clubs). However, the brief analysis above suggests, or certainly does not exclude, the possibility that mechanisms might also operate to develop social capital outside the boundaries of a specific network or organisation, as certain attitudinal researchers following Putnam would predict.

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the principal mechanisms through which social capital develops. It has shown how these mechanisms operated at the case study clubs and it has indicated certain differences among clubs, groups and individuals. The analysis of the case study evidence indicated various possible 'readings' of these principal mechanisms; which, in turn, highlighted fundamental, ongoing debates in social science concerning social behaviour. In addition, the analysis demonstrated how closely the various mechanisms are bound up with one another and with processes of social tie formation. The analysis also revealed, without focusing on it directly, how various aspects of context influenced the principal mechanisms of social capital development. In the next two chapters, I seek to analyse the influence of context. Specifically, I seek to examine how various elements of 'personal'

and ‘socio-organisational’ context shape social interaction and the wider development of social capital.

CHAPTER 7: THE INFLUENCE OF CONTEXT

'Context counts...and counts crucially.' Such was the verdict of a wide-ranging, pre-millennial review of social capital research (Foley and Edwards, 1999); and the point still stands. Although I have so far focused on mechanisms, the analysis has nevertheless revealed the influence of context. That is, it has shown that people's backgrounds and the socio-organisational settings within which they interact influence: how they form ties; the types of ties they form; the way in which they exchange resources; and the types of resources they exchange. In this and the following chapter, I examine these 'context-mechanism interactions' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997) in more detail.

This chapter has four main sections. In the first section, I discuss what, for the purposes of this analysis, constitutes context. In addition, I explain the distinction I have made between 'personal' and 'socio-organisational' context. In the second section, I look at the first of these two broad categories: 'personal context'. In particular, I look at how people's life-stage and personal circumstances, level of sporting ability, level of club involvement and general 'clubbiness' influenced tie formation and social capital development. In the third section, I move on to 'socio-organisational context'. Specifically, I look at how two fundamental (and related) elements of context – the way activity was organised and club culture – shaped social interaction and social capital development. In the final section, I address a question that is implicit in the foregoing analysis, namely *why* the clubs acted as they did.

PUTTING 'CONTEXT' INTO CONTEXT

The critical realist perspective on social science suggests that mechanisms operate (or do not operate) in different contexts to produce different outcomes. Sayer (2000: 15) explains this as follows: 'The same mechanism can produce different outcomes according to context, or more precisely,

according to its socio-temporal relations with other objects, having their own causal powers and liabilities, which may trigger, block or modify its action'. The key part to focus on here is Sayer's specification of context as 'socio-temporal relations with other objects, having their own causal powers and liabilities'. This takes us back to our discussion in chapter three concerning how we distinguish between context, mechanism and outcome. As explained there, any distinctions are more a matter of analytical standpoint than of clear, unambiguous divisions.

In this thesis, I have focused on the core processes through which people become willing to provide resources to others without any immediate return; and I have designated these the principal mechanisms of social capital development. This analytical decision has meant that other features of the social world, such as the 'culture' of a club, or the life-stage or level of sporting ability of a member, appear as relatively stable elements of context. Viewed from a different analytical standpoint, however, such elements could *themselves* be seen as mechanisms. For example, level of sporting ability could be seen as a point-in-time 'measurement' of the ongoing mechanism of 'achieving' discussed in the last chapter. In sum, then, context should be understood as a broad label that is applied to many features of the social world, including ongoing processes.

So, having said this, how can we distinguish between different aspects of context? Again, any such distinctions will tend to be analytical decisions, rather than unambiguous ontological differences. Nevertheless, I have drawn a broad distinction between 'personal context' and 'socio-organisational context'. I use the former label to refer to key aspects of individuals, such as their marital or occupational status, or their level of involvement at the clubs, and the latter to refer to key aspects of the clubs, such as their size, structure or culture. Of course, such a distinction is not clear-cut. An interpretivist perspective would draw attention to the role of individuals' perceptions and the meanings they attach to social phenomena. So, for example, one could argue that individuals' perceptions of club culture might vary quite widely; and thus, on those grounds, an individual's *perception* of club culture should

be considered as an element of personal context that might affect her development of social capital.

However, the constitutive nature of meaning need not negate the usefulness of a distinction between ‘personal’ and ‘socio-organisational’ context. Critical realist analysis always involves an interpretive element: as Sayer (2000: 17) puts it, ‘critical realism acknowledges that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful, and hence that meaning is not only externally descriptive of them but constitutive of them (though of course there are usually material constituents too)’. Therefore, grouping certain social phenomena under the broad heading of ‘socio-organisational context’ does not deny their intrinsically meaningful nature. Instead, it is an analytic convenience that recognises that some aspects of context might be best considered on an organisational, rather than an individual, level. With that extended caveat, let us turn our attention to the first of these two broad categories, namely ‘personal context’.

PERSONAL CONTEXT

Life-stage/personal circumstances

The case studies provided a wealth of evidence showing how people’s ‘life-stage’ and ‘personal circumstances’ (marital status, occupational status, whether they had children and so on) affected their willingness, or capacity, to form social ties and develop social capital. For example, Michael explained how his involvement at Treeford and his desire to interact with new people had changed according to his personal circumstances.

When I first joined and up to maybe the, the first ten years, I was single, so I used to use [the club] also as a social mechanism, so I used to spend, I used to come here, say, about 12 o'clock on Saturday and leave about 11 o'clock at night. And the same on Sunday...Now, now it's reversed, so I play – also 'cos my job's changed and I've got a regular partner – I don't usually come down here at weekends. I don't want to play social tennis. And I haven't got a strong desire to meet new people,

because I've already got an established network of people, so I don't, I just tend to arrange my matches during the week with people I already know.

Other members at Treeford made similar comments. For example, Claire explained how her work commitments had constrained her involvement. She told me that she had been asked to play for the ladies' team at Treeford, but that she had had to decline, because 'with my work now, the tennis cannot be priority'. As we saw in chapter five, Claire had struggled to develop social ties at Treeford: on her own account, she had not met many people of a similar age and with similar interests. Had she been able to join one of the ladies' teams, the regular interaction which that would have entailed may have enabled her to form stronger social ties with similar others. As it was, her work commitments had limited her opportunities for interaction.

At Faxhill and Caggston, members' life-stage and personal circumstances also influenced social capital development. For example, at Caggston, Pete and Sarah explained how their social interaction on the annual tour had changed now that they had a child. They were less likely, they said, to make ties with newer, younger members, largely because they were no longer so involved in 'the drinking and the sorts of dialogue that they might have'. Having said this, the general organisation of the focal activity at Faxhill and Caggston somewhat circumscribed the influence of life-stage and personal circumstances. As both were team sports played in weekly matches in organised league competitions, this meant that at least a certain level of regular participation was expected, or, in a stronger sense, required. So, while life-stage and personal circumstances might affect people's more general decisions to join, or maintain membership, of Faxhill and Caggston, once *in* membership, their basic pattern of participation was more rigid than at Treeford. I examine this issue, i.e. the way in which activity was organised at the clubs, below.

The case studies also revealed how changes in life-stage and personal circumstances could directly affect people's willingness to provide resources.

For example, Roland explained how life-stage might affect his willingness to serve on the committee at Treeford:

I suppose there's a bit of me, um, 'cos I'm at an early stage of retirement, I'm enjoying the liberty and freedom that comes with it and I don't then want to start committing myself [by volunteering for the committee]...I think, you know, if I chose to, I could do a fairly reasonably good job of doing all that sort of stuff, but it's just nice not doing it. So, it's purely selfish [laughs]. So, whether that will continue, I don't know, whether, in ten years' time, or whatever, I shall be thinking...

RT: Missing the kind of committee stuff [laughs]?

Well, I don't think, I, I don't think I would ever *miss* committee stuff, 'cos they always seem to me to be an evil that has to be done, rather than something to enjoy. Um, but, um, I think there might come a stage where I think, you know, I've enjoyed a lot out of the club and therefore I must return in some way, apart from paying my fees, there are other ways in which I can contribute. So, that may creep in.

RT: What, social conscience paying back...

Yeah.

RT: But within the context of the club?

Yeah. Yep. That's what would drive me to it. Because I would still think of it as something which is a bit of a pain to do, but was necessary, 'cos if people didn't do it, it wouldn't *run*. Yeah. It's just that.

As well as illustrating the way life-stage can shape social capital development, Roland's insight also illustrates the complex interplay of mechanisms. On the one hand, he characterised his likely future volunteering as pay-back for the benefits he would have enjoyed. This might be seen as an example of enforceable trust: social exchange embedded in a group, wherein people make resources available to the group in the knowledge that others are likely to do the same at an unspecified point in the future. On the other hand, Roland also attributed his likely 'resource offering' to a kind of 'social conscience'. Here and elsewhere in the interview, he discussed his general belief that people ought to contribute to voluntary

organisations and social movements. This suggests a mechanism of value introjection: the internalisation of a value imperative that people ought to engage in collective action to benefit each other and society more broadly. As discussed in the last chapter and in the critical realist literature more broadly, mechanisms often work in tandem to produce outcomes (Reed, 2009).

Level of ability

Another aspect of personal context that affected social capital development at the clubs was 'level of ability'. This was most evident at Trefford. Every member mentioned it and I observed it repeatedly during my time at the club. As Neville put it,

It's quite important in *tennis*, 'cos if you get somebody of a different standard, er, either the ball whizzes past you [laughs], and you don't get a game, or when you hit the ball to somebody else it doesn't come back. Er, other sports – squash, for example, you can get some sort of game, game going. In tennis it's hopeless if you've got somebody of a wildly, wildly different standard.

In one sense, then, it was a necessary part of the activity itself. However, it could have quite far-reaching effects on social interaction and tie formation. For example, as Michael explained (with characteristic bluntness), it could lead to rejection and exclusion.

If you spoke to some people, I think, who weren't as good at tennis, they'd find it very difficult to break through into established relationships. Because people don't want to play with them. So, it's always a Catch-22 situation in tennis clubs and probably other types of clubs as well, I don't know. If you're good at tennis – I mean, I wasn't particularly good, but I was good enough – people want to play with you and you get to mix in a lot more, people invite you to mix, because they can see they can have a good game with you and so, you go a lot further. But if you're, if you come in as a beginner, the, the work you have to do is much, much more. You have to take a lot of blows, a lot of rejections. You know, the process is tougher because you have, you know, you have to go through a lot of rejections, because you'll get rejected by,

because people won't invite you to join their four, because they can see you're not good enough.

This demonstrates quite clearly how level of ability influenced social tie formation. Yet it also demonstrates how this context-mechanism interaction could itself be influenced by other aspects of personal context, such as personal resilience. That is to say, those who were prepared to 'take a lot of blows, a lot of rejections' might manage to form social ties in spite of their initially low level of ability.

At Faxhill and Caggston, level of ability also affected social tie formation, but in a less pronounced way. At Faxhill, there were three adult teams, organised (for the most part) by ability. As we saw in chapter five, members tended to have stronger ties and, importantly, develop stronger collective identities within their particular teams. So, in this very basic way, level of ability structured interaction and tie formation at Faxhill. At Caggston, there was only one team, so level of ability did not affect members' basic pattern of interaction. Nevertheless, it can be argued that it did affect the process through which people became 'part of the group' at Caggston. As several members of Caggston discussed, in order to integrate successfully, it was important for members to 'have a role' in the team. While most members explained that this was not just about sporting ability, it seemed from my observations and from some members' broader comments that, if people did have a high level of ability, then this, to a large extent, could *be* their role. That is to say, for those with a high level of ability, the pressure to find and define one's role in the team was lessened (more on this below).

Level of involvement

Theoretical accounts of social capital have often suggested that voluntary associations are more likely to instil tolerant and co-operative values among those members who are most intensely involved in organising the associations (Putnam, 2000). Empirical research has both supported and contradicted this view (see, e.g., Wollebæk and Strømsnes, 2008). Again, we

cannot draw extensive conclusions from the case studies. However, we can explore how such personal contextual factors influenced the mechanisms of social capital development in certain cases. George at Treeford spoke about this most clearly (although other ‘leaders’ at Treeford and elsewhere made similar comments):

Now I’m a bit more involved about what goes on behind the scenes, clearly it changes your perspective. And probably it helps you be more, more sort of club-focused, rather than individual-focused, because you, you come to realise that there’s so many competing interests that it’s quite important to have an understanding of these competing interests and to make a judgment or a decision that does its best in terms of some form of compromise, whereas if you’re not part of, say, the administration of the club, you wouldn’t see that. You’d only see it in terms of your own vested interests. So, it’s quite important to see it from both sides, so from that point of view, I found it quite good to be tennis secretary. It’s opened my eyes to some of the different perspectives in the club and some of the different things that happen here that I wouldn’t have known otherwise, you know.

This shows how the process of deliberation and democratic decision-making, often central to organising activity in a voluntary association, had had an impact on George’s attitudes and behaviour. That is to say, it had facilitated social capital development through enhancing value introjection. It also shows, in a more general way, how a higher level of involvement might affect the mechanism of bounded solidarity. As George said, ‘probably it helps you be more, more sort of club-focused, rather than individual-focused’. This suggests a shift from ‘personal’ to ‘collective’ identity (Kramer, 2009), which, as we saw in the last chapter, can underpin a willingness among group members to make resources available to others within the group.

Level of ‘clubbiness’

One important question to ask is: do voluntary sports clubs largely attract ‘clubby’ people? This is just a colloquial way of asking the basic self-selection question discussed in previous chapters. As noted there, it is not possible in this thesis to draw strong conclusions about self-selection.

Nevertheless, it is an important issue within research on social capital and voluntary associations; and so it is worth exploring in a little more detail how members viewed their own ‘clubbiness’ and how this might have influenced the broad process of social capital development.

Members seemed roughly split as to whether or not they considered themselves ‘clubby’ people. Some very clearly did. Neville at Trefford, for example, said, ‘Yeah, I’ve always been in, er, I’ve always quite liked being in social organisations of one sort, of one sort or another. And when I was younger, I was in various political organisations. I spent a lot of time in that.’ Likewise Patrick said, ‘Well, I’ve been around clubs all my life.’ This, he told me, directly affected his tie formation and sense of belonging: ‘as soon as I joined, I didn’t, yeah, I just belonged to Trefford and that’s it.’ Others did not consider themselves ‘clubby’. For example, Leslie at Trefford said, ‘No, I’m not. Not at all.’ She said she knew people who were ‘clubby types’: ‘Yeah. And if it wasn’t *that* club, it would be another club, because actually they amend themselves to be on committees, they love committees.’ But again she said that that was not her: ‘No, I’m not a committee person’. It is of course possible that people did not self-identify as ‘clubby’ types, even when they were, either because they considered it a pejorative description, or simply because they did not see themselves as such. Nevertheless, as a very basic point, it appeared from members’ accounts and my observations that there were both ‘clubby’ and ‘non-clubby’ types in each of the clubs.

Of perhaps more interest is the way that broader contextual factors, such as different ‘sport cultures’, can affect self-selection. For example, Rob at Caggston discussed this in some detail. He said:

I think most people in cricket [are the ones] who I think it was Edward Heath described as completely unclubbable...Like where I grew up, it's quite a hippy town and you get quite a lot of kids who've got hippy parents and don't do really sporty things – sport's not encouraged, shall we say. You don't find them joining the football club, but you *do* find the odd ones turning up at cricket club.

He went on to say,

The weird thing is, cricket is a sport where you actually spend more time in a club situation than football. So, you expect it to attract people who are more club types. But I don't think that's the case. I mean, you spend all day at a cricket game, you spend two hours at a football game, then you go home. But I don't think it's the case that that relationship necessarily is direct. I think you get people who are less *club* types at cricket.

Rob's comments are interesting for at least two reasons. First, and most simply, they indicate that different sports have different cultures. As discussed, several studies (e.g. Stolle and Rochon, 1998) have demonstrated that different 'associational sectors' are related to different sets of values and attitudes. And certain studies (e.g. Eastis, 1998) have shown that even within the same broad associational sector, different organisational contexts can affect social capital development. These case study findings are in line with such studies. Second, they direct attention to length and frequency of interaction. Although Rob argued that the lengthier interaction within cricket clubs did not necessarily mean that more 'clubby' people joined them, his general point was that length and frequency of interaction are significant in the club context. As we go on to see in the next section, this was indeed the case.

SOCIO-ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Voluntary sports clubs, just by existing, function as sites of social interaction. We saw this in chapter five, where we examined the fundamental processes of propinquity and homophily. However, it is not just the basic opportunity to interact that is important in forming social ties and developing social capital. Indeed, there are myriad elements of socio-organisational context that can influence tie formation and social capital development. In this section, I examine two of the most significant, namely length and frequency of member interaction and club culture.

Length and frequency of interaction

Research has shown that frequency of interaction is particularly important in forming social ties. In discussing this, Small (2009a: 14) points to both Emerson's (1976) exchange theory and Homans's (1950) theory of the group. In short, Emerson argued that repeated exchange reduced mutual uncertainty, while Homans argued that repeated interaction heightened mutual affection. More recent social psychological studies (e.g. Lawler, 2001) have reached similar conclusions. The case study clubs, just like many other organisations, offered opportunities for frequent social interaction. For example, Caggston played one match per week for five months over the summer, with 'nets' once a week in the preceding couple of months. Faxhill also played one (or sometimes two) matches a week, with a training session on a Tuesday evening, for nearly ten months between August and May. Treeford was slightly different. People participated in various ways – in club period, in the ladder, for one of the teams, in coaching sessions, in a regular 'four', or on a more casual, ad hoc basis. But evidence from my observations and from members' accounts suggested that the majority of people at Treeford also played at least once a week. Furthermore, Treeford had a 'balloon' – an inflatable structure that covered two courts in winter – which meant that members could participate all year round. In sum, each of the clubs provided the opportunity for members to participate at least once a week for a significant proportion of the year.

This is important because, just by pursuing their basic global purpose (i.e. organising sporting activity), the clubs played a crucial role in initiating and maintaining social ties. As discussed earlier, Bourdieu (1986: 250) argued that 'the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability'. Many social capital theorists have thus focused on people's agency, i.e. the 'unceasing effort' made by individuals. But here we can see that, in many respects, the clubs themselves 'made' this unceasing effort of sociability. This takes us back to the argument set out in chapter five, namely that the way the clubs structured activity significantly influenced tie formation. As George said, club period at Treeford was 'very important' for integration

and the ladder served an ‘important social function’. Likewise, he explained how important the ‘balloon’ was, because it enabled members to continue to interact frequently throughout the year: ‘Yeah, it’s quite important, actually...it means, I suppose, it’s more part of your life, it’s not just something you do...just three months in the summer, it’s available all year round. We were playing constantly all through the winter, so, um, and it keeps the connections that you have with people.’

As well as frequency of interaction, the case studies showed that length of interaction had an important influence on tie formation. At Caggston, every single playing and non-playing member mentioned the duration of each ‘encounter’. Ben said: ‘Yeah, yeah, it’s seven hours. Seven or eight hours, when you’re playing cricket.’ This extended interaction fostered (or forced) social interaction. As Rob said, ‘Basically, you’re in the day for 40 overs, aren’t you? If you don’t take the piss out of people constantly, it’s not really that much fun [laughs].’ Such lengthy encounters thus tended to lead to the development of social ties. As Glen said (quoted earlier), ‘When you’re on the field you’ve got the shared thing to talk about, when you’re off it, you become so familiar with everyone, like *deeply* familiar, because you’ve got seven, eight hour games.’

People also discussed how the total period of interactions had contributed to tie formation. For example, Ben at Caggston said: ‘I think it’s because everybody’s played cricket – the average tenure is 48 years and we’ve only been going [laughs] 30. It is, like basically, people – when you fit, you stay.’ These long periods of membership were important at the other clubs too. At Faxhill, for example, Frank discussed the way in which social interaction over a long period could facilitate the formation of social ties and a process of collective identification: ‘Faxhill, it could be any club really, but the longer they’re with a club or with a society, the more they are going to feel like that, an affinity to that club or society...It’s a drip, drip thing.’ At Treeford, as we have seen, people formed close ties with others through playing in regular ‘fours’, often over long periods. As Henry said of his four, which had been going for more than 20 years, ‘Yes, you’re not talking about a month or two!’

Quite obviously, the duration of each encounter varies according to the type of activity (sporting or otherwise) that people are undertaking. For example, Tom discussed the differences between Caggston and a football club he also played for:

I mean, the amount of time you spend with people and the nature of the time you spend with people does actually affect the kind of things that you, the way that you actually interact with them. I mean, we spend certainly more time with people in the cricket team – not only by virtue of the fact that the games are longer – than we do in my football team, for example. So, I'd say I've got more developed relationships with people in the cricket team than I do in the football one. Purely because of the fact we spend more time together. Um, and I think the footballers would say – while some of them do, um, fraternise, if you like, off the pitch, it's more by virtue of the fact that they've known each other for donkeys' years. Um, and we all just get together and enjoy the time that we have together, but we recognise that's a relatively short period of time. And some of that is focused around the game, analysing the game afterwards, and we don't have that much time for just pure social time. Whereas with the cricket club, the tours particularly help, because for three days you're just sort of thrown together and experience everything together. Um, and that's a real *bonding* thing you can then carry over into the other times that you meet, et cetera. Um, it kinds of sets you up I suppose for that kind of relationship.

This demonstrates, first, how ostensibly similar activities (team sports like cricket and football) can vary in terms of interaction patterns and, second, how this variation can affect tie formation. In fact, Tom's description of social interaction at the football club resonates with my observations of Faxhill: that is, members tended to interact for shorter periods of time. As I did at each of the clubs, I sought to identify patterns of interaction at Faxhill – the 'rhythm' of the club. This excerpt from my field notes describes a typical post-match scene: 'After the match, about six or seven of the first team come into the clubhouse, sit, drink, have food, chat and then drift off. Most stay for about half an hour.' This is just a vignette, of course, but my general impression – from observations and from members' accounts – was that the shorter periods of interaction at Faxhill made the formation of strong or

compartmentally intimate social ties less likely than at Caggston. This is not to imply that members did not form social ties and develop social capital at Faxhill. It is just to say that, *ceteris paribus*, the lengthier periods of interaction at Caggston, due in part to the nature of the sporting activity, made the formation of ties between members more likely.

So, how much interaction is needed to develop social capital? Such a question has no single answer. Indeed, as a critical realist perspective would suggest, a multi-dimensional process like social capital development will operate differently for different people in different circumstances. However, some members at the case study clubs did address this question directly and their answers bear scrutiny. At Caggston, members tended to focus on total length of involvement at the club, rather than frequency of interaction, or length of encounter, largely because the league season dictated the latter two elements. Olly suggested the process of developing social capital could be relatively quick – around one full season:

It's, maybe, I don't think it's that long, really. I think it's mostly, I would say, a season. Then you, you'll know what, I say, the ethics of the club are and that, that, who does what, and this, that and the other. You'll, you'll get to know what *happens*. Um, maybe not even as long as that. So, you're talking, like, what, 20 weeks, a season?

Pete and Sarah also felt that the process – for them, at least – had been rapid. Sarah said, ‘Not long at all, I would say. You know, bearing in mind it's 15 years ago, but it felt very comfortable, you know, as you said really, it felt very comfortable very early on.’ Glen, for his part, thought the process might take a few years (to get to ‘deep, trusting’ relationships), but he also thought the fundamental elements of the process were apparent right from the beginning: ‘[It] takes a few years. Not all *that* long, though. Even a season, you spend a lot of time with them. And even the first time, you could sort of see how it would happen, even the first time you go.’

At Treeford, members focused on both frequency *and* length of interaction. Michael felt it took a couple of years of regular participation:

Well, it evolves not over – not instantly – it evolves over a time period of say, couple of years, I'd say, in the sense that you play tennis together, you play, for example, you play in the team together, you spend quite a lot of time together, actually, in a doubles partnership, you go to other clubs.

Leslie, too, felt it had taken her a while to develop social capital: 'Yeah. It probably took about five years, actually, to be honest.' She linked this to the way in which a clique of established members used to inhibit the development of social capital among new members. She felt that the situation had changed significantly – 'it's not like that now' – so new members were able to form social ties and develop social capital more quickly. Like Michael, she felt that the process might take a new member a year or two of regular participation.

So, the case studies suggested, with some variation, that around a year of regular interaction (perhaps once a week) was probably necessary to form strong or compartmentally intimate ties. This accords with much of the research on social capital, which has long recognised the importance of time. As Putnam and Feldstein (2003: 286) put it, 'building social capital is neither all-or-nothing nor once-and-for-all. It is incremental and cumulative.' It must be repeated, however, that this is just a rough, temporal outline of a broad, multifaceted process. What the accounts really showed was that several elements of socio-organisational context, including the way activity was organised, affected the process. I turn now to another major element of socio-organisational context, or, depending on one's definition, an alternative holistic term *for* socio-organisational context, namely club 'culture'

Club culture

'Culture' is notoriously difficult to define. Indeed, Fine (1987: 124) describes the anthropological literature on culture as 'a rough and thorny patch.' It is

important, therefore, that we try to tread carefully. Schein (1992: 3-15) identifies a wide range of phenomena that are associated with culture, including behavioural regularities in interaction; shared language; customs; traditions; rituals; group norms; espoused values; embedded skills; and shared meanings. Importantly, he also argues that culture and leadership are ‘two sides of the same coin’, a point I return to below. Fine (1979; 1987; 2003), in his work on small groups and culture, emphasises that cultural elements must be situated in their social context. He uses a specific term ‘idioculture’, which he defines as ‘a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and that serve as the basis of further interaction’ (Fine, 1987: 125). In the following discussion, I adopt Fine’s general definition, as it incorporates a strong focus on interaction within specific social contexts.

Members of the case study clubs repeatedly referred to club culture, although, as might be expected for such a ‘fuzzy’ concept, they used a variety of terms, such as ‘nature’, ‘ethos’, ‘atmosphere’, ‘feel’, as well as ‘culture’ itself. I cannot hope to provide an holistic account of each club’s culture. As discussed in chapter three, this research was not ethnography in the traditional sense (O'Reilly, 2009). Instead, what I can do is provide some initial, basic descriptions of club culture, drawing on members' accounts and my observations. Then, in the next chapter, I examine some more specific elements in greater detail.

Caggston was a ‘family’. This was how members described it. Every playing and non-playing member referred to Caggston as a family. Ben told me, ‘It’s a *family*. That’s the best way to describe it.’ Likewise, Roger said, ‘I do believe it’s an extended family, in a way.’ Geoff agreed: ‘Family club, isn’t it? It’s a big family club.’ This ‘club-as-family’ culture was clearly evident during my lengthy observations at the club. Any number of incidents, conversations, or interactions would attest to it: from Roger and Kieran – grandfather and grandson – walking out to bat together and several members asking me, ‘Are you noting this?’ to the club’s Annual General Meeting, which, in fact, resembled nothing more than a big family Christmas dinner, with members,

wives, girlfriends and children (including a one-month old baby) in attendance.

The other key element of Caggston's culture was the emphasis placed on sociality and cohesion over competitiveness and sporting success. Again, everyone mentioned this. For example, Duncan said, 'The social side has always been slightly *more* important than the cricket side and that's what, I guess, is attractive to me'. Tom said the same: 'You know, we can play a decent standard of cricket. Um, but we tend not to get too upset if we're not delivering on that all the time. And it's probably more important to us, as a whole, to, um, to be there together, you know, as a group. It's very much a group sort of activity.' Kate told me, quite directly, 'If it was all about winning, I think the club would operate slightly differently, but it's all about giving everybody a game.' This, she went on to say, was 'a very spoken culture. It's discussed quite a lot.'

At Faxhill, the culture was different. There was a much stronger emphasis on sporting achievement, discipline and organisation. This was evident in the attitude and behaviour of Frank, the founder and central figure, but also in the discussions and interactions of many of the club members.³⁹ As discussed in chapter six, there was some culture of togetherness; however, this was mainly apparent within pre-existing friendship groups and there was no real sense among the members that the club itself was a 'family'. In fact, it is difficult to talk of a stable culture at Faxhill. This is due to two main factors: first, it was a young organisation, founded only five years previously, with relatively high player turnover; and, second, there was a lack of shared

³⁹ My very first reflection after my initial meeting with Frank was as follows:

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Frank very committed to the club; very knowledgeable about football, particularly in the local area; strategic (e.g. has vision of them winning the top division, turning semi-professional, bringing more junior teams in under the first team); quite single-minded (e.g. prepared to bring in people above existing members of the club where he can see weaknesses in existing volunteers); more interested and eager to talk about the specifics of running the club than about the socio-psychological outcomes of membership.

This initial reflection changed little during my period of observation.

vision. Research suggests that strong cultures tend to develop within groups that ‘interact intensively over a long period of time’; and have ‘a sense of shared direction’ (Fine, 1987: 190). At Faxill, such shared direction was lacking.

Indeed, the culture at Faxhill might be most accurately described as conflictual. There were two related fault-lines: first, whether the club should be ‘about’ sporting success or sociality; and second, whether members ought to be primarily organised in, and committed to, the club, or to individual teams within the club. For example, early on in our discussions, Frank told me, ‘It’s all about the first team, going as far as you can go’. There were, he said, ‘too many small groups, friendships, cliques – we need to cut that out’. This suggests a focus on sporting success. Yet at other times, he told me how much he appreciated the social ties that club members had formed: ‘I love that, the togetherness.’ In essence, there was an unresolved tension between these two elements of club culture. Frank himself recognised this. He said, ‘It’s always a fine line between the bonding and the club functioning.’

At Treeford, the culture was different again. It was, for many, a form of ‘sanctuary’. Members typically described it as ‘friendly’ and ‘well-run’. For example, Henry said, ‘it’s a *friendly* club, um, it’s well organised,’ and Leslie said, ‘it’s one of the friendliest clubs in London.’ But, more than this, people referred to it as a kind of ‘refuge’. For example, Mary called it ‘a sort of oasis’ and George said, ‘It is a kind of asylum, really. Asylum in its true sense. A place of sort of safety, if that’s the translation from the Greek.’ As mentioned previously, a very few, like Leslie, likened it to ‘a big, giant family of people’, but this was not the prevailing image (indeed, even Leslie said, ‘Well, it’s something *I* have’). Instead, the culture was one of easy familiarity in very comfortable surroundings.

In rough terms, Treeford’s culture was somewhere between a commercial leisure enterprise and a traditional members’ club. On the one hand, the committee and wider membership was stocked with business people and

'talk' about the club often reflected this. For example, Mary, the chair, likened members to shareholders, she discussed with me the club's 'Future Planning Group' and she mentioned the various 'capital projects' that the club was undertaking. On the other hand, there was a traditional, 'membership' ethos. As Neville said, while acknowledging some of the more business-like elements of the club, 'It still is very much a *members*' club.' As he went on to say, this was reflected in the club's rules and the way in which people accepted them: 'There are all these rules, which people do, do abide by, out of duty to the club...which sort of *cements* the club, I think...it's a sort of social contract, rather than a business contract.' Overall, the 'membership' element was predominant. The club was 'professionally' run, with excellent facilities, and this contributed strongly to the 'club-as-sanctuary' culture. However, Treeford remained, *de facto* as well as *de jure*, a members' club.

These are, it must be repeated, very cursory sketches of complex club cultures. But even these basic descriptions highlight differences in socio-organisational context across the clubs; and these differences affected the mechanisms of social capital. To take just one example, the 'club-as-family' culture at Caggston encouraged new members to bring wives, girlfriends, friends or children to matches, to the annual tour or to other club social events; and this facilitated the formation of strong, or compartmentally intimate, ties. As Fran, Geoff's wife, said,

Um, my first experience was last year and it was really, really great. I would never think it would be so great. I mean, new people. They welcomed new people and got them together as a family. So, that's a good thing for the club, I think. It's not just a club and playing games and drinking, but it's a, they are attached with each other as well. It's not just the members of the club, it's being like a family now.

It also provided a supportive social context for the development of bounded solidarity. As discussed in the previous chapter, bounded solidarity is partially developed through narratives and accounts that contribute to a shared understanding of identity (Fine, 2003: 135). This was evident at Caggston, as Duncan's comments illustrate.

Because there's this certain rhetoric around Caggston, around, you know, you're almost already told, you almost already know what you're getting out of it, because people *talk* about how it's like a, um, you know, because it's a family club, because it's very accepting of like weirdness and stuff like that, um, you kind of like, in a sense, your meaning, the kind of the meaning you derive from it is like [laughs] already laid out for you... you're encountered by a very strong rhetoric, I think, as soon as you enter the club, that tells you what it's about.

This strong, spoken culture at Caggston helped to create and maintain bounded solidarity, which, in turn, enabled people to access resources. For some, this meant ongoing emotional support, relationship advice, and so on. For others, as we saw in chapter four, it meant more specific, tangible resources. This process can be understood through the social psychological perspective on exchange examined in the last chapter. As Lawler and Thye (1999: 222) argue, 'exchange contexts should have norms for displaying emotions in addition to an emotional tone tied to the particular exchange contexts'. At Caggston, as Duncan said, 'That's the thing that I guess the club kind of perceives itself as, you know, it's like this kind of family scenario where everyone's kind of involved, everyone's pitching in and stuff like that.' This demonstrates the direct connection between the emotional tone of the exchange context and the ability of members to access resources: the 'family scenario' and 'pitching in' were tightly bound up with one another.

At Trefford, the 'club-as-sanctuary' culture also facilitated the formation of social ties and the development of social capital, but in a slightly different way. As discussed, the organisation of activity within the club enabled members to participate in a number of different ways. Those who played in club teams and/or regular 'fours' tended to form strong, or compartmentally intimate, ties, as they interacted frequently and often over long periods. However, the relaxed club culture also created a space for members to form a large number of weak ties. This was illustrated in chapter five, when Henry explained to me how a fellow member had just come up and started talking to him, because her daughter had thought she had seen him at a local

lecture group meeting. Henry attributed this sort of interaction to the friendly, relaxed culture of the club:

As I said, when you went out to pick up our drinks – thank you very much – conversation started here, straight away...And so, there is no shyness about saying hello. Um, and that is, that is what is pleasant. It's easy going. Um, you are not committed, they're not committed, you just, I don't know [laughs], behave like human beings.

Notions around lack of commitment – ‘you are not committed, they’re not committed’ – were prevalent among members of Trefford. In fact, for many members, this was a key element of the ‘club-as-sanctuary’ culture; and they directly contrasted their voluntary participation at Trefford with work. I discuss this issue, i.e. the voluntariness of sports club involvement, in the next chapter. Here, it suffices to say that this relaxed, very voluntary engagement made conversation and weak tie formation easy for many members.

At Faxhill, the ‘club-as-achievement-vehicle’ culture did not always encourage the formation of new social ties and the wider development of social capital. As outlined above, Frank, while appreciating social cohesion within individual teams within the club, ultimately saw it as an obstacle to the central goal of the club achieving sporting success. I had many discussions with Frank on this issue. The following is one such example.

22 March 2011

Frank: ‘I only want people with commitment here.’

RT: ‘Do you think you’ve got a lot of people with commitment?’

Frank: ‘We’ll see at the end of the season. At the end of the season, we’re going to get everyone over there [the sports centre where Faxhill’s home pitch is located] – firsts, seconds, thirds. Put it to them what we’re going to do. Tell them, actually, not put it to them. It’s a members’ club, but they don’t get a vote, so...It’s going to be one club, with movement between teams and if they don’t like it, they can leave. And we’ll work with what’s left.’

This indicates Frank's strength of feeling and it also illustrates how the 'club-as-achievement-vehicle' culture tended to inhibit the development of social capital, at least in the short term. As discussed, social capital tends to build up over time, via repeated patterns of (lengthy) social interaction. Frank's strong desire to develop a successful club led, along with other factors, to a rapid turnover of players, which in turn impeded this kind of lengthy, regular social interaction.⁴⁰ Yet it can be argued (and Frank did argue) that these various actions were, in fact, intended to develop a strong, socially cohesive *club* culture for the future. In one regard, this can be seen as an 'identity battle'. As discussed in previous chapters, the social identity perspective on social capital distinguishes between personal, sub-group and collective identity (Kramer, 2009). Faxhill's conflicted culture can be seen, from this perspective, as a quite direct conflict between members' sub-group and collective identities, with Frank determined to strengthen the latter, often at the expense of the former.

In sum, culture differed across the clubs and, importantly, influenced social interaction and the principal mechanisms of social capital development. However, it is important not to take these basic descriptions of club culture as straightforward and unambiguous. For example, although the rhetoric of 'club-as-family' was very strong at Caggston – certainly much stronger than at the other clubs – this should not be taken to imply that club members exchanged resources exactly as family members would. Indeed, Duncan, in characteristically reflective mode, discussed precisely this issue. He said:

It slightly concerns me, because I just, I've given a lot of chat about how like when we go on tour, there's, it's important for people to be accepted, that they're seen as part of the family, part of the community and stuff like that, then I guess it slightly concerns me that that might just be a little, like, we *do* all that and that *does* appear to be important and all that kind of stuff, but *does* it then translate into actual like

⁴⁰ As I recorded in my field notes (19 March, 2011), 'Frank tells me, now that the first team's season has finished: "I'll send you the stats. You know, we used 60 players this season! That's what happens when you get rid of your manager and half your players." That is 60 players used over one full season for a team of 11 players. Compare that with Caggston, which used 16 players over one full season also for a team of 11 players.'

kind of practical, kind of, wider support for people, stuff like that, and whether it should even?

He then proceeded to answer his own question. He suggested that, over time, there had been a shift away from people interacting in a ‘family-like’ way, but that, in spite of this shift, the ‘club-as-family’ rhetoric had persisted.

I don't know. I...I think like on that, really, on that kind of really supportive, practical, emotional level...I'm not sure that anyone would necessarily get that out of Caggston. Um...but then, I don't know, I don't know...Because when I went to see Pete and Sarah this weekend, they were both talking about how this kind of like, how they really felt for them it was like a really good, strong community, sort of family feel, um, but I kind of see that as being, I kind of see it as, what I was saying, as being that one weekend in a year [i.e. the annual tour]. That kind of like, it provides that for everyone, it *literally* provides, like it's literally like being away with a, you know, a big community, with a family, you know, that kind of thing, but I struggle to see how it does that throughout the rest of the year. How it provides any of those things throughout the rest of the year. ‘Cos to me, it *more* feels like, *now*, just a group of guys who turn up and play cricket. And you get like Karen comes down occasionally and my Mum comes down and, but I certainly remember a time where literally, you know, you'd go and play cricket and everyone would come and Keith would come with his family and all our family would come and Pete would come and Sarah would come and Mitch would bring his girlfriend and Shane would bring his family and Tom would bring his family and everyone would, like, it was week-to-week, it...And whether or not we've just kind of, because a perception has grown up now that that's what Caggston's all about, like we kind of just *assume* that's what it's about and actually maybe it kind of really *isn't* that much anymore. And maybe that's not such a bad thing, maybe it's just a change, or what-have-you, but...maybe that kind of perception of what it means to be part of Caggston is, is kind of something that used to be true, rather than, than is true. But is still kind of like a rhetoric that surrounds it, you know.

These comments point up several key issues. First, they suggest a gap between rhetoric and reality: the ‘very spoken culture’ of Caggston-as-family might obscure the ‘reality’ of club life. Second, they indicate that people’s impressions of club culture can change, or, conversely, can be resistant to change over time. As Duncan said, perhaps a ‘perception has grown up now’, which has remained stubborn. Third, they show that individuals can

have different perceptions of the same organisational culture. As Duncan said, he, in some ways, felt that Caggston was not as ‘family-like’ as the prevailing spoken culture suggested. However, he acknowledged that other members he visited (e.g. Pete and Sarah) felt differently. Each of these issues demands much closer analysis than I can provide here. For now, we must simply conclude that we cannot assume an unambiguous, unidirectional relationship between an organisation’s culture (however defined) and the type of resource exchange that takes place within that organisation.

As noted above, the sketches of club culture I have provided here are relatively basic. In the next chapter, I go into more depth. There, I examine a number of more specific elements of socio-organisational context, such as the size and structure of the clubs, the nature of their focal activities, the diversity of their membership profile and so on. Before that, however, while keeping a broad focus on club culture and how clubs structured interaction, I explore another important question: namely, *why* the clubs acted in the way they did.

WHY THE CLUBS ACTED AS THEY DID

Just as individuals can act purposely and non-purposely (and globally and locally), so too can organisations. But what does it mean when we say that organisations act? And how exactly do organisations structure social interaction so as to facilitate the formation of social ties and the wider development of social capital? An organisation is here defined as ‘a loosely coupled set of people and institutional practices, organized around a global purpose’ (Small, 2009a: 15; see also Scott, 1995). This implies that organisational analysis should focus on both people and institutional practices. People within an organisation can directly influence social tie formation, for example by determining whether and how members interact, and institutional practices can do the same.

Institutional practices can be both normative and cognitive. Normative institutions have been defined as ‘web[s] of inter-related norms – formal and informal – governing social relationships’ (Nee and Ingram, 1998: 19); and cognitive institutions have been defined as ‘classifications built into society as reciprocated typifications and interpretations’ (Meyer and Rowan, 1977: 341). These are clearly related, but they are subtly different. Small (2009a: 16) draws a useful distinction; he says: ‘whereas normative institutions tell actors how they ought to behave, cognitive institutions shape their perception of their circumstances’. At Caggston, for example, a normative institution was that members should come on the annual tour and mix in with other members’ families and friends. A cognitive institution was the idea that the club itself *was* a family.

Discussing clubs’ actions in terms of institutional practices is, in a sense, just another way of talking about ‘culture’. Fine’s (1987: 125) definition of culture, which, as we saw above, focused on ‘knowledge, beliefs, behaviors and customs shared by members of an interacting group’, overlaps heavily with the definitions of normative and cognitive institutions. Small (2009a: 235) makes precisely this point in his study: he opts to discuss normative and cognitive institutions, rather than culture, but notes openly that he is ‘effectively discussing cultural practices’. He argues that discussing normative and cognitive institutions permits a little more clarity in considering organisational actions. As this is what we are concerned with here, I follow Small in seeking to specify the most salient normative and cognitive institutional practices at the clubs; and, importantly, I seek to examine how and why they emerged.

In general, the case studies showed that the global purpose of each club was to organise and make available sporting activity for its members. This is unsurprising and simply reflects the nature of sports clubs and other voluntary associations, i.e. that they are expressions of shared values – ‘organising around enthusiasms’ (Hoggett and Bishop, 1985). Having said this, organisers at all the clubs were keenly aware of the social side of membership and often acted purposely to encourage social interaction.

Moreover, as we saw in chapter five, members often acted purposely to maintain the social ties they had made within the clubs. Although this did not supplant the global purpose of providing sporting activity for members, it did influence certain aspects of club life.

Trying to untangle purposive from non-purposive action is very difficult, perhaps, at times, impossible; as Small (2009a: 233) says, the purposive/non-purposive distinction is probably ‘most useful at the extremes’. When applying this to the clubs’ actions, we can see that, at one extreme, the clubs structured frequent opportunities for social interaction non-purposely, simply because of the requirements of organising sporting activity. For example, as discussed, Faxhill and Caggston played in league competitions, which meant that members tended to interact at least weekly; they also organised training sessions, ‘nets’ and pre-season matches, all of which offered opportunities for regular and sometimes lengthy interaction. At the other extreme, the clubs sometimes structured social interaction purposely through organising specific social events. Between these extremes, the clubs often acted both purposely and non-purposely to encourage social interaction, tie formation and resource exchange. And it is in examining these actions that the ‘organisational embeddedness perspective’ (Small, 2009a: 177) is perhaps most useful.

Treeford provides an interesting example, so I begin my analysis there. As we saw in chapter five, members tended to form ties, at least initially, through structured club activities – club period, the ladder, group coaching, and so on. Such structured club activities might be seen as nothing more than the club pursuing its global purpose of providing sporting activity to its members. Indeed, many of the members saw it that way. For example, when I asked Leslie whether she thought the club had set up the ladder deliberately to encourage social integration, she said, ‘No. No, no, no...The committee didn’t, you know, wouldn’t have any say. It was just, um, one of the members decided it would be a good idea.’ However, my discussions with key club organisers (George, Mary and Patrick) revealed that, even if the ladder had not been set up originally to encourage social integration, the club organisers

were now well aware of its role in helping members to form social ties and were keen to promote it partly on those grounds.

This was true of most, if not all, the structured activities at Treelford. For example, George said, 'I think the club does all it can to try and help by creating strategies for people to join in and also strategies for people to learn and join in when they feel they can, you know.' In discussing how members formed social ties at Treelford, he said:

I think there's two sides to that. There's the personal characteristics of the person, whether it's someone who does mix in easily or is reticent or shy or outgoing or whatever...The other side is the, um, is the, the structural processes within the club, you know, that's what I'm saying, we have club period where people mix in, we have, um, we have the ladder that people can play in, we have coaching, group coaching and so on and so forth, so unless someone doesn't feel comfortable with those sorts of things, I would have thought it was pretty easy to mix in and become part of the club. Yeah, but there is this issue, though, of, of the club can only provide the means and the individual character and that person's character traits means they either make use of those means or it doesn't, you know.

This raises, or re-raises, several key issues. First, George clearly saw structured club activities as opportunities for members to 'mix in and become part of the club'. On these grounds, it is possible to argue that the club acted purposely to structure activities to encourage tie formation. Yet George also recognised the key role of agency: 'the personal characteristics of the person' and whether they 'make use of those means'. This recognition of the agency-structure relationship chimes with Roland's comments, which we examined in chapter five: 'this club...has all the opportunities [to develop deeper social relationships], um, which I, personally, haven't capitalised on by choice'. These sorts of comments exemplify a general critical realist perspective, which focuses on how people act on the opportunities and inducements that their social environment provides (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Having said this, it is important to recognise that structured activities at Treeford, regardless of the purposive/non-purposive nature of the club's actions, did not always facilitate tie formation. For example, although the general principle of club period was that all members should have the opportunity to mix in with others, some members used it as a chance to organise their own games within pre-existing groups. I observed this practice first-hand and Claire referred to it several times in her interview; she said: 'Some people, even in the social time...still organise themselves, even if they got organiser, but they, um, ignore, you know, ignore the organiser, they organise themselves with four players.' This again highlights the often complex interactions between individual motivations and organisational actions; and how these can affect members' capacity to develop social capital. Here, Treeford organised club period partly in order to provide a supportive context for the formation of social ties among members who did not know one another. However, this purposive organisational action was affected by individual preferences for playing tennis against people of similar ability, or for playing within existing friendship groups. As such, the capacity of some members to form new social ties was reduced.

Analysis of organisational actions also highlighted the important role that 'leaders' can play within club culture. For example, we saw above that the vast majority of members described Treeford's culture as 'friendly', 'relaxing', 'welcoming' and 'open'. I asked George whether he thought that the club acted 'deliberately to develop that culture of sort of openness'. He replied, 'I think we do. I think we do.' He then went on to discuss how he himself sought to help new members to integrate socially: 'I mean, I take part in club period and I often join in with those who are totally new, just as, as a means of seeing how they get on and, and also a bit of encouragement. And it's quite important, that, I think, to try and make people welcome.' Some authors, like Schein (1992), go so far as to argue that culture and leadership are 'two sides of the same coin'; they suggest that leaders act to create organisational culture. While this view has been criticised as functionalist (see, e.g. Alvesson, 2002; Schultz, 1995), even those writing from a socially constructivist perspective argue that leaders can change people's meanings

and ideas. However, as Alvesson (2002) notes, this is largely through processes of negotiation *within* a cultural context, rather than through straightforward culture ‘creation’.

During my time at Treeford, I quickly got to recognise several key individuals who encouraged social interaction among members and sought to shape a comfortable, sociable atmosphere. I noted this several times in my field notes, but the following excerpt is typical:

7 March 2011

Saw Mary ‘doing the rounds’ before the AGM. For example, she knew one member had moved into a new flat in the area, and said she’d seen his wife/girlfriend and had had a brief chat with her. She then came to ask me how things were going with my research. Ruth and Patrick also both asked about my leg [which I had broken a few months before] and how things were going.

One can argue, then, that Treeford, in the persons of George, Patrick, Mary and others, acted purposely to encourage the formation of social ties and to maintain a culture of friendliness.⁴¹

Individuals at Faxhill and Caggston were perhaps even more instrumental in affecting club culture than those at Treeford. This was partly because Faxhill and Caggston were smaller than Treeford; partly because they had not been in operation for as long (Faxhill, in particular, had only been running for five years); and partly because Faxhill and Caggston (again, particularly the former) had been founded with more or less explicit social ‘missions’. At Faxhill, we have already seen how Frank’s strong desire for the club to

⁴¹ It should be noted that such actions did not always proceed smoothly. For example, very soon after Mary had first introduced me to Leslie, the latter criticised her, to me, quite openly. The following excerpt from my field notes records the incident:

21 March 2011

Almost as soon as Mary leaves, Leslie says to me, quite loudly: ‘She’s very pompous, isn’t she, Mary? She thinks she’s done more for the club than anyone else.’ This makes me feel very uncomfortable, as there are other people around: I don’t want to disagree with a stranger and make a fuss, but I don’t want to agree either. I subtly demur. (Or try to subtly demur.) Later, when Mary goes inside, Leslie starts up again and says: ‘Yes, she never really listens, does she? She asks you questions, then she’ll ask them again next time. She doesn’t store the information anywhere. It’s all very surface, you know, social chit-chat.’

achieve sporting success and offer healthy, structured activity to young people in an area of high deprivation had led to a focus on discipline. This was bolstered by, or manifested in, specific normative institutions. For example, Frank discussed how participation at Faxhill involved signing up to a code of conduct:

By joining a club like Faxhill, they are signing themselves off to a code of conduct, some of the things in which – I mean, they read it, they sign it and they're expected to abide by it and that's going to, it's going to give them a little bit of a...tramlines to work within, you know, I mean, they've then got a little bit of discipline, a discipline code, you know.

Yet both Frank and Mark recognised the importance of social interaction for junior and senior players and sought to promote it through specific social events. For example, Mark said, 'In terms for the kids, we mix in other ways that's not just football. We put on some certain nights. We have a PlayStation night...I know it's not very physically active. I know that. But, it's, it's just a team morale, team bonding, everybody laughs.' Yet the club's ability to run such events, as Mark explained, was limited by lack of resources:

We can't afford as a, a small community club, we can't afford to take the kids off bowling or anything like this. We did take them on a trip [to Ipswich Football Club] in our first year, but it cost so much money...We took them on a luxury coach, which all the kids' parents paid for, they all chipped in. Um, I got left with a fair lump myself, again.

This highlights, once again, that it is important to consider the material resources of an organisation and its members when examining processes of social capital formation.⁴²

⁴² As discussed in chapter two, I follow Portes (1998) and others in conceptualising social capital primarily as access to resources in networks. This is to avoid potential tautology wherein social capital is equated with the resources acquired through it. As such, when considering clubs such as Faxhill, where members' levels of material resources were often low, it is important not to imply that members were not motivated to provide resources to one another; they may simply have lacked the means to do so. Likewise, in this case, it appeared that the club was motivated to promote social tie formation among members through specific social events, but often lacked the resources to do so.

Faxhill also provided evidence of normative institutions that helped to develop social capital non-purposely. For example, Mark told me how he set out to parents his expectation that they should attend matches.

What I've learnt is, when the kids are young, the parents are very enthusiastic, going crazy on the touchline. As we're now into our third year, we're not getting that many. And after a recent parents' evening, I did have to set some rules down and the attendance record's now up...All I simply said was, 'Look, with all due respect, I'm not a glorified baby-sitter and you're treating me like one.' So, I ended up treating them [i.e. the parents] like a bunch of kids, gave them a bollocking and now they're coming down. So, again, it's just putting rules into place, rules into practice.

Mark instituted this normative practice purposely in order to maintain the interest of the parents and, ultimately, to sustain the club. However, as a by-product, it led to more frequent social interaction between club members and parents and thus slightly denser inter-generational networks around the club (Coleman, 1988). Overall, my observations suggested that such networks were not particularly dense, even after Mark's intervention. However, the point itself is still valid: Mark instituted a specific normative practice for a purpose other than social tie formation, yet it still had a positive (if small) effect on social interaction and tie formation. This basic example demonstrates the potential significance of 'leaders' and the general importance of considering the unintended consequences of purposive social action (Merton, 1936).

At Caggston, as we have seen, 'leaders' were also very important; however, the culture that emerged was quite different. As discussed above, there was a basic cognitive institution that Caggston was a family and there were associated normative institutions that people should bring family members on tour, pitch in, help supervise other members' children and so on. As also discussed, there was a normative institution that 'everyone should contribute to the team'. Kate, an acute observer of Caggston life, described it as follows: 'I think it's important that every-, well, it's important to the club, that everybody has a role, particularly on the field. That, you know, nobody's left out, nobody's just *there*, um, to make up the numbers'. Many of the playing

members of Caggston described the same thing and, importantly, many linked it directly to the ‘club-as-family’ cognitive institution.

But how did these normative and cognitive institutional practices emerge at Caggston? As discussed in the last chapter, most members pointed straight to Bob, the founder and ‘father elect’, as a key figure. Pete’s comments were typical in this regard: ‘I have to say that Bob is a huge influence on this. He sets such a, an ethos, you know...he’s always been there to make sure people play fair and respect the opposition and all the rest of it.’ Immediately after he said this, I told him that Bob had used some quite loud and colourful language to describe the opposition at the previous week’s match. Pete laughed and said,

Yeah, but he can do that. Because in a way he’s like the Dad who’s kind of lost it, isn’t he? ‘Cos he’s always had the moral authority, I think. And, you know, people tease him and whatever. But, socially, people would sit up and listen. And you’d know if you’d crossed the line. And he is, he is genuinely upset and there must be a transgression.

When I spoke to Bob himself about his role in developing the ‘club-as-family’ culture at Caggston, he was typically self-effacing. He pointed to other factors, such as the annual tour and the role in this of the former captain, Keith:

It’s not something that we’ve gone out of our way to do, but it’s just something that – I think it grew a lot out of the tours, I think it grew out of the fact that, um, some of us weren’t awfully happy about just going off on our own for the Bank Holiday weekend...We felt that it would be better if – and we would get more people to go – if we were more inclusive and that’s what we started doing. And, of course, that inclusiveness then spins off into everything else, you know...I think tour is the reason, yeah, yeah...and that had a lot to do with Keith. Keith’s attitude was very much to involve his family and he was into camping, camping was their thing, so he sort of, he latched on to the idea of camping, said that he reckoned that’s what he would do, and, um, that was something that was seized on immediately.

Other members also attributed the normative institution that ‘everybody should have a role’ to Keith’s captaincy; and, like Bob, discussed the importance of the annual tour in creating the broader ‘club-as-family’ culture. For example, Pete mentioned both of these factors:

Keith...very much set the tone on the playing side for how things would run. It was very participative. The ethos was very much about everyone having a go...I mean there was an element of merit, obviously, there was an element of playing the cricket, you know, to, to achieve, to play well and to perform, but it wasn't the be all and end all, in a way. If somebody slipped on a banana, that was more amusing and more something to enjoy and recollect than a fantastic performance...And I think Keith very much set that tone with the man-management that he had. He knew everybody very well and *personally*. So, again, I think that was a good thing, because it kept, it kept people together, that sense of togetherness in the game and the sense that one belonged and it wasn't about individuals and worrying about whether you'd be selected next week and, with a small number of players, you didn't have that hot breath of competition on your neck, or whether you'd get a game the following week. And, yeah, it grew from there, basically. The tour, obviously, is a big factor as well. Holding the club together and building those sort of ties that make it feel a bit like a family. Certainly for us it felt like a family, something you look forward to every Sunday and the tour was our sort of getting away with the family.

So, ‘leaders’ were crucial within the culture of Caggston. But even here, there was a mix of purposive and non-purposive action. As Bob said, individuals within the club had a definite desire to make the annual tour more inclusive. However, the idea of camping, which ultimately underpinned this ‘family holiday’ atmosphere, derived largely from the personal preference of the then captain, Keith. Moreover, the desire to be more inclusive, while partly an end in itself, was also due to the necessity of ensuring regular participation. As discussed, the club was small and required a sufficient number of regular playing members just to ensure that a full team could be fielded every week; the inclusive ethos, as Bob and Pete both noted, helped to bind players to the club and bolstered the normative institution of playing every week. In this sense, the ‘club-as-family’ culture fostered the development of social capital non-purposely.

SUMMARY

This chapter has demonstrated how various elements of context influenced social capital development at the clubs. A broad distinction was drawn between ‘personal’ and ‘socio-organisational’ context; and both were shown to affect tie formation and the principal mechanisms of social capital development. Key elements of personal context included: life-stage and personal circumstances; level of sporting ability; level of club involvement; and pre-existing values around club membership. Key elements of socio-organisational context included: the length and frequency of member interaction; and club culture.

The chapter also addressed, in a basic way, the question of why clubs acted in the way they did. This involved examination of individuals’ actions and specific normative and cognitive institutional practices at the clubs. The analysis showed that clubs acted both purposely and non-purposely to promote social capital development. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into the socio-organisational contexts at the various clubs. I look at key, specific elements of context and examine how they influenced social capital development. In particular, I compare the interaction contexts at the clubs with other interaction contexts, including work, family and friends.

CHAPTER 8: KEY ELEMENTS OF SOCIO-ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Social capital scholars have highlighted an apparent conundrum. Why should voluntary associations be afforded such a privileged role in accounts of social capital development when people participate in them for only a limited amount of time, especially compared to the time they spend with family, with friends, in work, or in other organisations? Stolle and Hooghe (2004: 425) make just such an argument and conclude by remarking, ‘it seems unlikely indeed that strong socialization effects of non-vital events (like membership in an association) would be found among adults’. In this chapter, I explore this apparent conundrum. Building on the last chapter, I examine in detail the socio-organisational contexts of the case study clubs and compare them with other interaction contexts, namely other voluntary associations, work organisations, family and friends.

This comparative analysis illustrates how the principal mechanisms of social capital development operate differently in different interaction settings. It also highlights certain salient elements of socio-organisational context that particularly influence these mechanisms. Specifically, it highlights two relatively ‘tangible’ elements of socio-organisational context, namely size and structure, and five relatively ‘intangible’ elements, namely the ‘choice element’ of associational life; the importance and nature of a focal activity; the co-operativeness (or competitiveness) of engagement; the hierarchical (or non-hierarchical) nature of the association; and membership diversity. The chapter itself is arranged in two main sections. In the first, I consider the more ‘tangible’ elements of socio-organisational context and, in the second, the more ‘intangible’ elements. Throughout the chapter, as befits a critical realist analysis, there is a focus on how context and mechanisms interact to produce different social capital outcomes for different groups and individuals.

'TANGIBLE' ELEMENTS OF SOCIO-ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Organisational size

The size of a voluntary organisation shapes patterns of interaction and hence the development of social capital. However, there is no straightforward, linear relationship between size and social capital. In fact, the case studies suggested that both large and small clubs could facilitate social capital development, albeit through different mechanisms. At Caggston, several members explained how the small size of the club shaped the mechanism of bounded solidarity. Recall, for example, Olly, who said of Caggston, 'There is...an identity. You know. It is a closed club, if you know what I mean. Everyone knows everyone.' This, he said, meant that Caggston was quite a cohesive group, where everyone did (or would do) favours for one another. This did not happen at the large football club he had volunteered at for the last four years. I asked him, 'Why do you reckon that is?' and he said,

Maybe 'cos there's so, it's such a big club. I mean, there's people, I could come down here any week and I'll look around and go, don't recognise that manager. You know, even though I've been down here four years, or whatever. But, I'll go, what's, who's he? What team's he? And they'll probably do that to me. Who's he? Where's he from?

RT: Whereas you're saying, like, with Caggston...

Yeah, because it's so small...Yeah, the bigger you are, I think the harder it is for a *bond*, if you know what I mean.

Members of Treelford, who had previously been members of small tennis clubs, also described how small size helped to create strong, or compartmentally intimate, ties. For example, Neville said:

Yeah. Um...I've been at quite a small London club with three courts...And they had a very good system. People turned up and they were put on a board with moveable pegs. So, the, the fours rotated on a very fair basis. So, if, er – what it meant was that everybody played with everybody and there were never any grumbles about

standard, ‘cos, er, the way they had it, somebody chose a four they liked, but next time, somebody else chose a four they liked. It all, it worked very well...Um, here [at Treeford] that *sort* of happens in club period, but not so well actually. People, people, even in club period want to play with people of their own standard...Um, so the small clubs are very much more everybody mixing in.

At first glance, then, it seems that smaller clubs provide a more facilitative socio-organisational context for the formation of strong ties. However, several members of Treeford pointed specifically to the *large* size of the club as a crucial factor in the development of social capital. They explained that the large size of the club (around 500 tennis members) meant that people of any ability were usually able to find others of a similar ability, form ‘fours’ and play together regularly. As Neville himself said, ‘It’s a large club, so you can get, you can get to *find* a group, a group of people who you like and who you get on well with on the, on the tennis court.’ It seems, then, that both small and large clubs can facilitate tie formation and social capital development, although in the former there is often more opportunity to develop *club*-level bounded solidarity.

Club size also affected social capital development in a slightly more indirect way, through its impact on the sense of ‘ownership’ members felt. As Duncan explained, comparing Caggston with a larger cricket club that he had played in, ‘I think when you play in, in a big club, everything feels quite impersonal and you don’t, you almost don’t feel any kind of responsibility to it.’ Many other members from across the clubs made similar observations about ‘ownership’ and responsibility towards the club. However, closer analysis indicated that the main issue here was one of structure, rather than of size. Although there was a close relationship between the two, such that members of smaller clubs were more likely to feel a sense of ‘ownership’, this relationship was not direct.

Organisational structure

In small clubs, there tends to be a lack of formal structure. For example, even though members of Caggston took on roles like secretary or president, these were largely nominal. As the following comments from Ben illustrate, there was an important difference between members' formal involvement in Caggston's 'structure' and members' informal, but much more significant, acceptance into Caggston as a social group.

I think [the second annual tour] was when we, or I, thought I was part and parcel of the team and then a couple of years after that I'm now honorary president or chairman or something – Bob's president and I'm chairman, I think [laughs], not that it makes any difference – but, it was probably after that tour that we felt a bit more comfortable with it.

So, formal, structural roles were not significant in themselves at Caggston. Nevertheless, members felt close to the decision-making 'centre'. And this had an important effect on their experiences of the club: the ways in which they interacted, the ways in which they formed ties; and the social capital they developed. Nearly every member discussed these issues; however, Duncan provided perhaps the clearest explanation of the processes involved.

Well I used to play for [another club] on a Saturday. Um, and that was, that was very different. I kind of found that different, I guess, because, because it's a *big* club, it's so structured, and you have kind of like, you have, they have selection meetings and all of that kind of stuff and it's, I guess it's a kind of – maybe the thing about Caggston that's different is the informality of everything, yeah, that there is a structure in the sense that there's a committee and there's an annual general meeting and that we have awards, an awards night, and all these kind of things, but actually, you know, when you compare us to a lot of cricket clubs, the ones I've experience of, you know, there's no, there's none of that kind of like structure in place around the cricket, around, you know, kind of selecting players, players moving between teams, you know, and all the politics that kind of goes with that, as well, so...And doesn't have a ground as well. Doesn't have any kind of [laughs] real infrastructure at all, um...

I asked Duncan how the lack of structure at Caggston influenced his experience of membership. He said:

Um, I think at Caggston everyone feels at the centre of things, you know, everyone, um, kind of feels that they have a like a role to play in building the club to some extent. You know, I think there's, probably everyone in the team at some point thinks about whether or not they could get their friends in to play and things like that. I think when you play in, in a big club like [the other club] everything feels quite impersonal and you don't, you almost don't feel any kind of responsibility to it. Like, like, I think that's probably a big thing that Caggston is, because it's a small thing and because at *times* it's looked like, I guess, that it might fold, that we don't, haven't got enough players and blah-de-blah, everyone kind of feels, at least feels – I don't know whether it necessarily goes as far as people taking on – but people kind of feel responsibility towards it, whereas I think when you play with a big club, which already has loads of structures in place, it's already got a kind of feeder system of kids coming up through the school and things like that, I don't think as a player you feel like you have to *do* anything other than just turn up and play every weekend, pay your subs...

In social psychological terms, this sense of ‘ownership’ appeared to make members’ collective identities more salient (Kramer, 2009). Moreover, members attributed the favours they did, or would do, for one another to this sense of collective identification. In this sense, we can say that the informal ‘structure’ of Caggston, which led to members feeling ‘at the centre of things’, promoted social capital development through the mechanism of bounded solidarity (Portes, 1998).

In contrast to small clubs like Caggston, large clubs tend to have more formalised structures. At Treeford, for example, Mary explained to me:

We have a general committee, which at the moment consists of, I think, 13 or 14 people from very varied backgrounds. We have me, the chair, we have William, who's the vice-chair, we have a secretary, a squash secretary, a tennis secretary, um, we have somebody who specialises in HR, so he helps us deal with any sort of staffing issues. Um, and we've got somebody else who's good at IT. And then we've got two people who are the leading lights in our development – it's called the Future

Planning Group – and they have a little sub-group – oh, and we have a treasurer, I missed out the treasurer.

Unlike at Caggston, these committee members often performed very specialised and quite time-consuming activities. Also, unlike at Caggston, taking on these structural roles had a real effect on some of the members themselves. As we saw in chapter seven, George said of becoming tennis secretary, ‘Yeah, it does alter things...clearly it changes your perspective. And probably it helps you be more, more sort of club-focused, rather than individual-focused’. As noted there, this suggests a shift from personal identity to collective identity (Kramer, 2009).

Interviews suggested that regular members at Treeford, i.e. those who had not taken on formal roles, experienced the structure of the club in quite different ways. A few saw the committee as a somewhat distant clique. For example, Claire felt that she did not strongly identify with the club because it was ‘too big’. She said, ‘A lot of people not bother anything. And I can never influence either, because I think so many people don’t bother, so why should I [laughs]? They have the meeting to discuss about the building things, and I didn’t attend...’ Although Claire was not an isolated case (Leslie and a couple of others said similar things), the majority of members at Treeford viewed the committee benevolently, or, at the very least, neutrally. They felt that, if they chose to, they could involve themselves with the committee and have a say in the running of the club; yet they often deliberately avoided doing so. In fact, for many, it was precisely this distance from the decision-making structures of the club that helped create the ‘club-as-sanctuary’ culture discussed in the last chapter.

So far, the analysis has suggested a close relationship between size and structure: small clubs tend to lack formal structure, but members feel close to the decision-making ‘centre’; large clubs are more formalised, but many members feel at a distance from the decision-making structures. However, this relationship is not uniform; indeed, the case studies showed that other factors played a part. For example, Faxhill was a medium-sized voluntary

sports club, so it might be expected that its members felt less close to the decision-making centre than members of Caggston, but closer than those of Treeford. However, this was not the case. In many ways, Faxhill was a one-man club: it was managed, driven and shaped by Frank. As mentioned in the last chapter, he told me: ‘At the end of the season, we’re going to...put it to [the members] what we’re going to do. Tell them, actually, not put it to them. It’s a members’ club, but they don’t get a vote, so...’ On another occasion, he said: ‘Had a meeting last night. Just four of us. In London...Mark doesn’t know about it. Nor does Ash. But sometimes you have to go behind people’s backs.’ Again, as discussed earlier, Frank was very committed to the club and saw these actions as necessary for ensuring the club’s ongoing functioning and, ultimately, the benefit of the members. Still, these examples re-emphasise the importance of examining the actions and motivations of key individuals within organisations, as well as more basic elements, such as organisational size (Nee and Ingram, 1998).

‘INTANGIBLE’ ELEMENTS OF SOCIO-ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Voluntariness of associations

Voluntary associations are voluntary. This statement may be the most obvious of the thesis so far, but it is important to make it, because the voluntary nature of associational life has fundamental effects on social capital development, especially when associations are compared to other interaction contexts. It is also important to make it in order to question it. That is, it is important to explore just *how* voluntary people’s participation in associations is. In the following paragraphs, I use the case studies to examine these issues.

Fundamentally, people participated in the clubs through choice; and, for the vast majority, this ‘choice element’ underpinned all their club activity. As Henry from Treeford said, ‘When I come here, I want to come. I don’t come here ‘cos I just say, oh, I’ve been a member here for so long, let’s just keep it

up.' This 'choice element' shaped social interaction in important ways. For example, Roland at Treeford said,

The organisations I've been involved with in a voluntary way, outside of tennis, outside this, have been very specific objectives, things to pursue, um, structures, er, agendas. So, I think of them predominantly as being the world of committee meetings and, um, tasks to be performed. A bit like work, in a sense. Whereas the tennis club, um, I see as completely me deciding what I like doing, what I don't like doing. And I suppose the voluntary thing, the voluntary work in organisations is still me choosing to do things. Um, but it was with a social conscience more, I suppose, where this seems like pure and utter, er, indulgence [laughs]. And just pursuit of happiness [laughs].

For Roland, the 'choice element' ('me deciding what I like doing, what I don't like doing') underpinned the cognitive institution that Treeford was an 'indulgence' or a sanctuary. This, as we saw in the last chapter, was a common experience for the majority of Treeford members. Moreover, this 'choice element', as we will see below, facilitated the formation of social ties, the exchange of resources and the expression of a relaxed, leisurely, social identity.

Before we look at that, however, it is necessary to examine this notion of voluntariness in a bit more detail. Specifically, it is important not to assume that this 'choice element' characterised all club involvement. For example, as we have seen, several members of Caggston openly discussed occasions when participation felt like a burden. As Rob said (quoted earlier), 'you do get this pressure, like you may want to play three weeks out of four, but on the fourth, you feel bad if you don't go. It's very similar to pulling a sickie'. In this sense, the difference between club involvement and work, which appeared sharp at Treeford, was much less clear. This is a crucial issue. In fact, as Fine (1987: 187) argued, in his very careful examination of Little League baseball teams in the U.S., 'The relationship between work and play poses one of the most significant dilemmas in understanding sport.' I discuss this in more detail below. In general, though, with this paragraph serving as an extended caveat, people participated in the clubs because they enjoyed it.

A close analysis of members' comments allows us to see how a general sense of enjoyment and relaxation shaped the development of social capital. This is perhaps best illustrated by comparing how people formed and sustained social ties at the clubs with how they formed (or did not form) ties elsewhere. Michael, at Trefford, put it like this:

Well, it's different here, it's obviously different from work, because you come here to relax. So, the, the, the initiation and the development of relationships is much easier in many ways, than, say, if I'm looking for work, you know, at a psychology conference or meeting. There, it's much more difficult, because there's always the elements that you're trying to sell something to the other person and they're trying to sell, they're trying to get work from you and you're trying to get work from them. So, it's less, it's much less relaxed. And a little bit more, I guess, a little bit more difficult, to have that easy intro into a, into a social network. A little bit more tense, say. Whereas here it's obviously very – once you've played tennis, that sort of gets your, it gets the chemicals, the chemical change in the brain. People feel quite euphoric. And then they have a glass of beer and everything and it's very – and then the social relationships become very easy.

This relaxation that the clubs offered can be thought of, in part, as 'identity work'. As we have seen, some members' motivation to participate revolved around the social identity they were able to express in their interactions at the clubs. In their words, they could be 'more themselves'. Ben at Caggston said this; and he explicitly contrasted it with work:

That's part of the reason you go to Caggston, 'cos you can have a laugh and behave in an idiotic, childish way, 'cos I'm generally idiotic and childish. And no-one takes offence. And the way that if I behaved in an idiotic and childish way at work [laughs], people would weirdly get offended and I'd be like, 'No, I'm only messing about,' and it's like, you can't really say that, can you?

Some members, in discussing how the clubs enabled them to assume a more relaxed, 'authentic' identity, also drew contrast with family and friends. For example, Henry at Trefford said,

The social side in family is slightly different, because you've got, you start having personal interests or something like that, there may be conflicts and, um, and I feel very guilty with, er, some cousins, some of them, perhaps, er, second cousins, twice-removed type of thing, type of people, that I don't keep in contact with. And one or two of them make an effort to contact me. I always respond, of course, but I, I don't take the initiative and I regret that because somehow feel, hey, wait a minute, we might not have many, but we may have one or two genes in common [laughs]. So, the club is – coming back to the club aspect – is a *neutral* area. You can walk out, you can stay in, you know. There's no commitment, in the sense of, of say, I've got to do this and I've got to do that and I've got to remember people's birthdays and whatever. You don't have that sort of constraint, you know. It's not a big constraint, but it is a constraint.

This is a prime example of a voluntary sports club acting as a 'broker'. As discussed in chapter five, much social capital theory, either explicitly or implicitly, assumes that individuals act rationally to form and maintain social capital. Indeed, Bourdieu (1986: 250) argued that 'the reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability'. However, as Small (2009a: 87) pointed out in his study of childcare centres (quoted in chapter five), the ties that mothers formed 'were made possible by something rarely considered in conventional models, that organizations can institutionally perform much of the "work" required to sustain strong friendships'. We can see this here with Henry. He had not maintained particularly strong ties with his distant relations, largely because he had not 'taken the initiative'. At Treeford, however, the nature of club activity meant that he got to see fellow members regularly without having to take much initiative. In short, the club had institutionally performed much of the 'work' in sustaining Henry's ties.

Daisy, Duncan's wife, provided another example. Talking about social interaction at Caggston, she said: 'I don't know why, I just find it really relaxing, coming down, I find it really relaxing.' Reflecting further, she compared it with how she interacted within her friendship group:

I think that sense of belonging to something that isn't stressful, but also has a purpose is quite unique. Like you can have like a social group of *friends*, which is great and you spend lots of time and you organise to go and see them and that's

relaxing time ‘cos it’s not work, but it’s something different about a group that meets for a reason that’s not about you socially, ‘cos it almost takes away, ‘cos even in your social setting there’s hierarchies, there’s obligations, things that you have to do – ‘Ooh, have I not called someone, have I not seen someone enough this week?’ – or something like that. But there’s no obligation here...

Daisy’s assertion that there was ‘no obligation here’ did not accord with some of the accounts from playing members at Caggston (e.g. Rob above) and doubtless reflects the different experiences of playing and non-playing members. However, her general identification of obligations and hierarchies as key elements that shaped social interaction did accord with the accounts of members, not only at Caggston, but also at the other clubs. Indeed, a great many members discussed the significance of hierarchy and I examine this in more detail below. Before that, I turn to another important dimension of associational life, one that Daisy also highlighted, namely the fact that a voluntary association is ‘a group that meets for a reason that’s not about you socially’.

Importance and nature of a focal activity

As discussed in the last chapter, voluntary associations are often conceptualised as ‘organising around enthusiasms’ (Hoggett and Bishop, 1985). Thus the focal activity of a voluntary association is key – it is its *raison d'être*. Feld (1981), among others, has stressed that *all* social activity is arranged around ‘social foci’ and that these focal activities shape social interaction and the formation of social ties in important ways. The case studies provided strong support for this argument; and, in what follows, I discuss how the nature of the focal activity influenced social capital development at the clubs.

A focal activity is, at a basic level, a shared interest that facilitates social interaction. Recall Henry, at Treeford, who identified how social capital (or ‘the social net’, as he called it) had developed within his neighbourhood. I asked him, ‘Do you feel that that same thing is something that you’ve got

through the club?' He replied, 'Yes. Oh, yes...I think the club is an easy way, in a sense, er, because it's very receptive to that.' 'Why?' I asked him. 'Why do you think particularly? Why a club more than...?' He said,

Because, first of all, you've got something in common. You, you, you enjoy whatever it is, swimming, or playing tennis, or whatever it is. So, you've got a point of contact and, er, and, um, you probably start talking about that. Um, and you know, the next minute, you start saying, what *do* you do, or what *did* you do, in life, and this and that and the other. And you find something interesting, and, and, you know, you have a conversation. Conversation is a, a, a key aspect of it.

This was a typical response. As Neville said (quoted in chapter five), 'It's quite easy to make, to make both acquaintances and friends in a tennis club...because you've got, you've got something immediately you enjoy doing together...and that's playing, that's hitting a ball over a net'.

However, while there was general agreement across members of all the clubs that a focal activity facilitated social interaction and promoted the formation of social ties, there was less agreement on whether *sport*, as a focal activity, was more or less likely than other types of activity to do this. Some, like Leslie at Treeford, felt that sport in a voluntary sports club was just like any other voluntary activity:

I could almost liken it to visiting, like, a church, for instance. My father's quite involved with the church and he had lots of different relationships with lots of different people in the church. It could be any other sort of organisation where you integrate with people 'cos you've got common interests, um, or, you know, you want to talk about a particular subject.

Others, like Roland, felt that different focal activities, specifically those which required people to expose their values, would be more likely than sport to facilitate social tie formation. He exemplified this by directly comparing his involvement at Treeford with the time he had spent working as a psychologist, during which he had developed a strong tie with one of his colleagues:

The nature of the work meant that we had to expose our values much more, I think, um, to do with, in our case, children, parents, officialdom, things like that, which we don't discuss at *all* when I'm playing tennis. So, um, if tennis was a different game and was a game where you had to link your values and beliefs and your approach to life much more directly into the tennis, then the depths of relationships would probably be greater than it is. It's enjoyable, but it's, it's, it's peripheral in one sense, but it works nicely. Whereas for some people in work you kind of get much more involved with them, um, so, I think it's, it's quite different...

Still others felt that sport was *more* likely to facilitate close ties than other types of activity. For example, Patrick said: 'I think clubs, especially sports clubs, produce closer knit people. Um, you meet better friends in clubs, sports clubs, than you do out in the wide world.' I asked him why and he said:

It's difficult, it is. It's a question I can't answer 'cos I've always wondered that. But again, I'm always comfortable around people who play sport. Maybe because I can talk about – well, I can talk about a lot of topics – but sport is what interests me. You know, athletics...I can talk about most sports, any sports, 'cos I've tried them all. But that's because I just love sport.

In sum, while the case studies demonstrated that social tie formation was facilitated by sport, they were equivocal about whether sport, as a focal activity, was better able than other activities to promote social tie formation and social capital development.

What the case studies did provide was some quite detailed accounts of how different focal activities could have quite different effects on the formation of social ties. For example, Henry made an interesting comparison between his involvement at Treelford and his and his wife's involvement at a local lecture group:

Yes, well, that's an *interesting* one, that's an interesting one, because that is totally different. The answer is we know *nobody* there. I mean, you know, we have a nodding acquaintance, but it's not a *club*, in the way we are talking about it like this

place. It's just simply, it's a place where you go and listen to a lecture and walk out. Ok, er, as I was just saying, there's going to be a trip to one of the big houses in England...Now, I suppose in the bus, we will socialise and never socialise again. We might actually say hello to each other next time we go to a talk, but it's not the same thing. Um, and, because, because you're going basically going to listen to lectures, very interesting lectures, you're focusing on *that*. And, er, and there is a restaurant attached...and, and some of us, by no means all, but quite a few of us, after the lecture, go there and, and, and have something to eat. Um, we'll be sitting at the next table and not say hello to each other. That part of it is not so good.

I asked him why he thought that was and he paused and said,

It's a little bit like going to school, you know. You, you, you may, the only reason you might socialise is, you go out and kick a football. And if you don't, you don't socialise. I really – that's a very good question. I don't have the answer, but I, I, I can *understand* why it isn't, because, um, you know, you all sort of go in, you sit down, you know, you have an interesting talk, otherwise you wouldn't go there and, er, usually, mainly, about art, or something like that, or, or, in fact, very often science topics, or things like that. And you go there not because you know and you want to contribute, just because you want to, it's almost as banal as watching a football game on TV [laughs], you know, you are a *spectator* and that's it, end of story. Once you are a spectator, you're not going to socialise. Spectating and socialising are two things that don't, that don't...If you are a spectator, you're negative, you're not taking part in anything, you're, you're, you're just looking at people doing something.

Henry, then, felt that his markedly different experiences at the two voluntary associations were due to the nature of the respective focal activities, specifically the level of 'active' participation inherent in each. I put it to him that much of the most significant interaction might take place *around* the focal activity and so it might be expected that *any* focal activity within a voluntary association setting would promote the formation of social ties. He agreed, in principle, but said again that tie formation did not operate at the lecture group in the same way that it did at Treeford. In explaining this, he turned again to the nature of tennis and its 'active' component: 'You've got to *participate*, you've got to contribute. If you don't contribute, you, you can't socialise. You can't sit back.'

Comments such as Henry's might lead us to think that sport is more likely to foster social capital development than many other activities, simply because it involves more 'active' participation. However, it is crucial to remember that sport itself is an umbrella term that covers a range of different activities. As Coalter (2007a: 34) notes, 'There are individual, partner and team sports; contact and non-contact sports; motor-driven or perceptually dominated sports; sports which place differing emphases on strategy and physical skills and sports can be both competitive and non-competitive'. This should caution us against making easy generalisations about the capacity of sport to develop social capital.

Indeed, the case studies provided some fine-grained evidence concerning the different characters, and differential effects, of various sports. For example, Ben compared his involvement at Caggston with his involvement at a golf club where he was also a member:

I tell you what's different about it...I play with my father-in-law [at the golf club] and it's quite an individual sport. I think I'm quite introverted when I'm not at work, 'cos I don't have, 'cos I spend a fucking lot of energy at work, and I'm quite happy just to not make any effort. I imagine if I made the effort, I'd get to know lots of people.

RT: At the golf club?

Yeah. But I don't make the effort. And I didn't really make the effort at Caggston, but it just happened. 'Cos you go along and it's a group of eleven people. And it's the *same* eleven people and you spend eight hours with – and you're all relying on each other. In golf, you can not talk to your playing partner an entire round, he'd think you're a bit rude, or you can say ten words to him and he'll think you're a bit rude, but not hugely rude. But at Caggston you're forced together and you have to throw the ball to each other, you have to help each other just by playing.

Mark at Faxhill said something similar. In comparing tennis and football, he argued that the close engagement of football – the more 'active' elements of physical contact and frequent talking *within* the sport itself – quickened the development of social ties:

Tennis is quite a – to break the barriers really quickly is quite hard, ‘cos obviously you’re, you’re playing at such a distance, whereas we’re playing at a close quarter. So, you’re gonna have more physical contact straight away. So, you’re going to get to know the person a lot sooner, whether you like it or not. Whereas in tennis, maybe when you get your, you know, your first set’s done, you get to sit down, you may have a little, quick chat, but it’s a quick chat and you’re back again. Whereas in football you’re constantly talking, constantly barging into each other, getting to know each other very, very quickly [laughs].

These comments point to a basic distinction between team sports, e.g. football and cricket, and more individual sports, e.g. golf and tennis. Such a distinction has been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Fine, 1987; Nichols et al., 2013; Walseth, 2008) and indeed it has been argued that participation in team sport is more likely to develop social capital through bounded solidarity. As Fine (1987: 190) put it, ‘Sports teams, with their emphasis on the socioemotional side of shared activity and with their clear and explicit task goals, seem particularly likely candidates to develop collective traditions and shared meanings.’

Having said this, it is important not to accept such a distinction uncritically. Indeed, comparing and contrasting various members’ comments paints a more nuanced picture. For example, Glen spoke evocatively about the nature of participation at Caggston, noting in particular the space cricket offered to be on your own. He said,

Fielding is excellent because...you can say something when you want to, you don’t have to, you never have to say anything. It’s funny, people can be quite funny when it’s just like, you’re always saying the same thing, and it can be quite funny when people pipe up with something. So, it’s like...something about the rhythm. And then afterwards, when you’re batting, and you’re all just sitting around...And so you never, yeah...you’re never...no-one’s company’s ever imposed on you particularly...Yeah, and the beauty is that you don’t, you’re not...in the field, you’re sort of with them and on your own. The whole day in fact, you’re with them and on your own. Equally. You’re not oppressed by people’s company and you’re not lonely.

This suggests that the notion of cricket as an activity that compels constant interaction, as might be presumed from Ben's account, does not tell the whole story. Indeed, Glen's account suggests a greater degree of individual choice. In a similar way, Michael's account of golf contrasts with Ben's. Whereas the latter suggested that golf was not particularly conducive to the formation of social ties, Michael argued that:

Golf is even better [than tennis] to facilitate relationships...[because]...you've got, you've got about three or four hours with them, to walk round, between hitting each shot. Whereas in tennis you don't talk so much during the match. You try to murder each other. It's only afterwards you talk. In golf, you've got the opportunity to chat as you're going round, which I think, probably, might be even better to develop close relationships.

These various accounts illustrate, once again, the complex interplay between structure and agency and the important influence of the focal activity. For example, Michael said, 'In golf, you've got the opportunity to chat as you're going round'. The key word here is 'opportunity'. Ben said that he had not formed ties through the golf club, but he freely acknowledged that he had had the *opportunity* to do so – 'I imagine if I made the effort, I'd get to know lots of people'. On his account, he had not made an effort at Caggston either, but, as we have seen, he had formed a number of compartmentally intimate ties at the club. Ben said that this had 'just happened'; and indeed he may have experienced it like that. Yet even in discussing how it had 'just happened', he pointed to certain aspects of the focal activity – its duration ('eight hours') and its co-operative nature ('you have to help each other just by playing') – that had contributed to him forming ties. I examined the former, i.e. length and frequency of interaction, in the last chapter. I now move on to examine the latter, i.e. the co-operative nature of engagement.

Co-operation vs. competition

In general, research has indicated that social capital is more likely to develop in co-operative, rather than competitive, contexts, as competition can inhibit

tie formation (Small, 2009a).⁴³ However, research has also shown that co-operation and competition often combine. For example, Sennett (2012) discusses the balance between the two in what he terms ‘differentiating exchange’. Differentiating exchange defines ‘borders’: for example, when strangers meet and talk, they may come away from the encounter with a clearer understanding of their own interests. Such exchange can involve the personalised competition of ‘invidious comparison’, although, as Sennett (2012) discusses, certain ‘rituals’ and institutional practices can mitigate this and promote co-operation instead (more on this below).

The case studies clearly illustrated how co-operation and competition could facilitate or inhibit social capital development. First, following on from the discussion above, several members pointed to how the co-operative, or competitive, nature of the focal activity itself shaped interaction. As Ben said of cricket, ‘you’re forced together and you have to throw the ball to each other, you have to help each other just by playing’. I asked him, ‘Do you think that actually, really means something? Like, that actually makes a difference?’ and he replied,

Yeah. Yeah. The physical interaction of team sport and the reliance of you on everybody else in your team makes a huge difference to the way you then interact with people in a way that – for me, it does. So, if we were playing cricket together and I – sorry – you bowled a ball that I took a catch off, we’d celebrate that together, and I’d be like, fucking hell, brilliant, well done you. If you got a hole-in-one [in golf] and I didn’t, we’d be celebrating your success, not our success...[and] you wouldn’t get the same camaraderie going, because, it’s a team sport, you don’t celebrate success in the same way. And that brings you closer together. And so you remember the times when you won a very difficult game. And that brings you together. Whereas me holing a long putt, or you holing a long putt, I’m like, well, well done you, but I don’t like you now, because you’re too successful. Whereas shared success, or shared failure, or shared success, brings you together, I think, because you remember the good times.

⁴³ It is important to note here that competition is not the same as antagonism. As Simmel (1955) pointed out, competition is not so much *against* an opponent, as it is *for* a particular prize. Indeed, picking up on this distinction, Small (2009a: 235) argues that the ‘most important element of competition to friendship formation...lies in the size of the stakes. As the stakes increase, the conflict inherent in competition becomes increasingly direct.’

This closer analysis of co-operation vs. competition re-emphasises the potential difference between team and individual sport. As Small (2009a) noted, social psychological studies have found that when people in groups successfully accomplish joint tasks, the cohesion of the group increases, a process Lawler (2001) labelled ‘relational cohesion’. In the mechanistic language of social capital, this suggests that, *ceteris paribus*, team sport is more likely than individual sport to develop social capital through bounded solidarity.

However, the case studies also showed that any inherent differences in the co-operative or competitive nature of a focal activity might be subsumed by more significant differences in socio-organisational context. This was revealed most clearly when members compared their associational involvement with work. Michael’s comments here were typical:

With tennis, or with ski-ing, or all these enjoyable activities [laughs], just people, just basically come to unwind, relax, have fun, whereas in a professional environment, it's not necessarily that much fun. Because you've got a lot of competitors, rivals, and there's money involved. Often, and as soon as money becomes involved in anything, including tennis, actually, it becomes less friendly...I mean, when there's no money involved, I mean, it might hurt your ego [laughs], but in that sense...I think that's the major reason why there's, I mean, it's easy to facilitate, you know, form friendships.

This suggests that voluntary associations, even those organised around sports that involve strong elements of competition, tend to be experienced as co-operative, precisely because of their dissimilarity to work. It also supports Small’s (2009a: 235) argument, stated above, that the ‘most important element of competition to friendship formation...lies in the size of the stakes’. As Michael said, losing a tennis match at Treeford might ‘hurt your ego’, but this is lower stakes than losing money.

So far, the analysis has implied a neat opposition between co-operative voluntary associations that facilitate tie formation and competitive work

organisations that inhibit tie formation. However, that does not really tell the whole story. Indeed, as discussed above, research has shown that voluntary sport is experienced by participants as both play *and* work (Fine, 1987). Glen spoke quite revealingly about this, when he described his experience at a voluntary football club where he was also a member. He told me there was a strong spoken culture that emphasised ‘paying attention’ and ‘doing your job’; and this made the competitive elements of interaction more salient. This competitiveness, Glen said, had negatively affected his experience of social interaction at the club:

Yeah, it’s the lesser for it. It means much less. I see them out, I play with them more intensely, it’s a more intense thing [than the cricket at Caggston], but...the actual football isn’t that bonding...really. Only to the ends of the football, if you see what I mean. So, it’s bonding to the extent that you all fight for each other and blah, blah, blah. I’d sort of do all that, perhaps for them slightly more, perhaps slightly less. But there’s not the sense of like, um, this is a great place to be and this is different from life and this is...It’s like being at a more fun job, but still those sort of stresses, um, than just being somewhere totally different.

So, Glen argued that competitiveness and work-like rhetoric were more evident at the football club than at Caggston. But how might we explain such differences? Glen pointed to two factors that reinforce some of our earlier findings and illustrate the inter-relatedness of various elements of socio-organisational context. First, and most importantly, he said the differences were due to the ethos, or culture, of Caggston, which, as we saw in chapter seven, privileged sociality and equitable participation over competitive results. Indeed, if we look again at the culture of Caggston, we can see certain practices that are reminiscent of the kinds of ‘rituals’ that Sennett (2012) argues can mitigate the negative effects of ‘invidious comparison’. For example, Sennett (2012: 82) points to the Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes (training centres which used to operate for ex-slaves in North America), where at the end of each day, ‘every individual was named as having achieved something, even if what they had accomplished would seem trivial to the sophisticated outsider’. At Caggston, Duncan said,

It's quite important for everyone in the team to feel that they, to feel like they have a role and that they are somehow of value and importance to the actual cricket team...a massive part of acceptance comes from not necessarily being that *great* at cricket, but by people being able to see that you have some kind of role within the actual team.

This was institutionalised, as Kate explained, in the selection practices at Caggston: 'if someone's a really good player, they don't get to do everything, you know. So, everybody has either a bat or a bowl or keeps wicket or whatever.' As Pete said, this 'kept people together, that sense of togetherness in the game and the sense that one belonged and it wasn't about individuals'. It can be argued, then, that Caggston was an example of differentiating exchange, one in which specific institutional practices were able to 'affirm the distinctive value of each person [and so] diminish the acid of invidious comparison and promote cooperation' (Sennett, 2012: 83).

The second factor Glen pointed to was the fact that Caggston members came from relatively diverse backgrounds. He said, 'With Caggston, because everyone's so different, like, you wouldn't even know how to – there's no sense of competition because you're not, it's just so different, you're not at the same level on things.' This possible link between membership diversity and co-operation (or lack of competition) is interesting and I examine it below. First, however, I turn to another key element of socio-organisational context that influenced social capital development, namely the relative absence of hierarchy.

Hierarchy

In his discussion of 'third places' – cafes, bookstores, hair salons and other hang-outs – Oldenburg (1997) refers to them as 'levelers': places characterised by a relative absence of hierarchy. Voluntary sports clubs, as we saw in chapter five, share many of the characteristics of 'third places' and indeed many members in the case study clubs discussed the relative absence of hierarchy as one of the most significant aspects of their

involvement. In general, their discussions focused on two related aspects: first, the relatively non-hierarchical nature of the organisation itself, i.e. the way the clubs were run; and second, the way in which social interaction within the clubs tended to transcend status distinctions within broader society.

At Treeford, George's comments on the issue of hierarchy were paradigmatic. He said:

Most occupations you do have some form of hierarchical status, with all its complexities and problems and so on and so forth. Whereas down here, in a club like this, while there might be organising committees and things like that, there's not a sense of some form of hierarchical status issue. So, I'd have thought that would be a profound influence on the way in which you'd perceive the difference between working...and coming down here to play tennis.

George's acknowledgement of 'organising committees and things like that' takes us back to our earlier discussion of club structure. As we saw there, differences in levels of hierarchy between the clubs influenced social capital development by affecting members' sense of 'ownership'. Here, a closer analysis suggests that such differences between clubs, while they may still be important, are likely to be experienced as minor when compared to the much more significant differences between any voluntary sports club and someone's work organisation. That is to say, the overall contrast between the work context and the associational context was much more salient than specific differences between clubs: members of *all* the clubs felt that there was much less of a 'hierarchical status issue' at the clubs than at work.

This difference between the clubs and work shaped social interaction in important ways. As Rob said: 'The difference is, at [his former cricket club], once I'd got to know [the other members], then I'd go out without any barrier. Whereas at work there is *always* a barrier.' This kind of 'no barrier' interaction, which many members discussed, is similar to what Simmel (1971) labels 'pure sociability', namely the 'joy, vivacity and relief' of engaging personalities beyond the contexts of purpose, duty or role.

Oldenburg (1997: 56) picks up on this and argues that third places offer the opportunity for this kind of ‘pure sociability’. However, he also argues that this does not entirely capture ‘the quieter moments of social relaxation that also characterize third place association’. He suggests adding the German adjective ‘Gemütlich’, which implies friendliness, neighbourliness and a vague obligation of helping others to feel at home. This applies to the sports club context too, as attested by comments like Glen’s above about the relaxed rhythm of Caggston life, or those of many Treelford members about its ‘sanctuary-esque’ environment.

Some members described quite precisely how hierarchy affected their interactions. For example, Ben said of Caggston:

You don’t have the structure and the hierarchy and the expectation – if I fuck up at Caggston, I’ll get picked next week...If I fuck up at work, I’ll be in the shit and there’ll be financial implications. And not fuck up and make a mistake, but if you fuck up and do something stupidly wrong, like you’re offensive, or you’re rude, or you do something plain stupid, you can get away with that at Caggston, ‘cos you, they know it’s just a joke, but I couldn’t make the same jokes at work that I can at Caggston, ‘cos everyone’s...up their own arses [laughs], no, everyone’s...you’re on a pedestal. But I’m just one of eleven blokes at cricket. Whereas I’m top of the tree – not top of the tree, ‘cos that’s an arrogant, twatty thing to say – but I am quite senior at work, so you have to monitor, you have to modify your behaviour as a result of it.

As we saw earlier, Ben said that part of the reason he went to Caggston was because ‘you can have a laugh and behave in an idiotic, childish way’. This was one of a great many comments from members of all the clubs about how they often felt more able to ‘be themselves’ at the clubs. Here, we can see that this ability to ‘be oneself’ at a voluntary association is linked to the relatively non-hierarchical nature of engagement. As Oldenburg (1997: 25) put it, drawing once more on Simmel, people ‘shed their social uniforms and insignia and reveal more of what lies beneath or beyond them’. This, albeit in different terms, was how the vast majority of members described their involvement at the clubs.

The case studies showed that issues of hierarchy and structure were closely related to issues of power and social influence. Ben discussed this quite openly. He said:

It's like you've got two levels of power. You've got positional power, which is what I've got at work, 'cos I'm quite senior at work, and so I can tell people what to do and they will respond to me, because I'm their boss. And you've got personal power, which is your influence on other people by your own behaviour and I'll get you to do something, because I'll get you to believe it's in your own best interests, rather than I tell you to do it. And I think I – Caggston's more about personal power, it's about your influencing skills and ability to get on well with other people and talk to them about stuff. Whereas work is still personal power, because ultimately people wanna work, it's better if they want to work for you, but you've still got that positional power. I can't tell – if I'm fielding, I can't say, 'Oi, fuck-stick, move over there,' where at work I could. I could say, 'Right, you're going to have to go work over there today'. So, it's a different dynamic in terms of the way you influence people.

This is interesting. Ben's opinion that interaction at Caggston was influenced by 'personal power', rather than 'positional power', reflects Oldenburg's (1997: 24) observation that within third places, 'the charm and flavour of one's personality, irrespective of his or her station in life, is what counts'. But then, just a little later in our discussion, Ben revised his club/work comparison and said, 'Actually, one of the good things about Caggston [is that] you don't *have* to influence people'. This suggests that while 'personal power' might count for *more* than 'positional power' at a voluntary association, one of the key characteristics of the latter is that members do not need to think and act so much in terms of power and influence. Ben

summed this up quite simply when he said, ‘it’s not about getting people to do what you want...it’s about playing cricket’.⁴⁴

So far, we have effectively been examining hierarchy from an ‘elevated’ perspective. For example, Ben was a partner at a large, multinational firm and so, in comparison with many members of Caggston, he might be regarded as of high social/occupational status. For him, Caggston acted as a leveller: ‘I’m just one of eleven blokes at cricket’. But was this simply the perspective of someone who was, in his own words, ‘quite senior at work’? Analysis of other members’ accounts at Caggston suggested not. For example, Olly, who, as we saw earlier, was from a working-class background and had been unemployed for a while, made similar comments: he described the club as ‘a family’ in which everyone was ‘there for you’. At one point in our interview, he did refer to ‘the hierarchy of the club’. But when I asked him about it, he said, ‘Well. I wouldn’t call it a hierarchy. Well, I did say hierarchy [laughs]. But, in terms of service, yeah.’ That is, the only hierarchy he experienced at Caggston was related to length of membership, rather than to social status within society. Moreover, as he went on to say, length of ‘service’ did not lead to people ‘lording it’ over others.

This chimed with other members’ observations at Caggston. For example, Glen was one of the keenest observers of social dynamics within organisations and, in our interview, he reflected closely on the influence of hierarchy within the various sports clubs he had played in. He said:

⁴⁴ Nearly every member who discussed this issue said something similar. I have focused on Ben for two reasons: first, because he described the processes in more detail than most; and second, because he represented something of a ‘critical case’. That is to say, more than any other interviewee, he seemed to see the social world in terms of ‘power relations’: throughout the interview, he openly discussed how he influenced people, how he wielded power at work, and so on. Consequently, his statement that, at Caggston, ‘you don’t have to influence people’ was telling. Whether this was actually the case, i.e. whether there was a general absence of power dynamics and ‘hierarchical status issues’ at the clubs, is open to question. Indeed, several commentators, especially Fine (2001; 2010), have argued that many social capital accounts are inattentive to issues of power; and one could argue that this criticism applies equally to the current research. Nevertheless, the issue here is slightly different; it is about comparison. What members’ accounts suggested strongly is that they experienced interaction at the clubs as much /less affected by issues of hierarchy and power than interaction at work. Indeed, some, as we will see below, experienced it as less hierarchical than interaction among family and friends too.

At school, in the cricket club, there were always people that wanted to hang out with other cricket blokes and, you know, the sense of importance from being in the cricket team and they like invite a bloke, someone in the cricket team who's maybe two years below them or a year below them, wouldn't, they wouldn't otherwise have invited, just 'cos he's like in the cricket team, make a big deal out of it.

RT: Yeah. And you would never do that?

No. And I couldn't even be around it happening.

RT: Why?

'Cos it's kind of a, it's, it brings out like the fucking worst in people. Your whole like...um...you...there's a sense of hierarchy, you know, it's like all the worst things about being at school. It's a lot worse in school in clubs. And *universities* ten times worse as well. At university, it's fucking regressive. I was in a football club at university and that was like really tedious, like quite nasty bantering, so there's a real pecking order, you know...

RT: Like proper social hierarchy stuff?

Proper, yeah. And based on the crappiest things. You wouldn't – there'd be loads of really nice blokes that'd be at the bottom, you know.

RT: But that didn't actually stop you being a member...

Yeah, in the end it did stop me being a member. I stopped going in my fourth year. Because socially, you know, it's always – it's like you've just got to a party, you know, and it's that first bit of just being in a big group and, you know, you don't feel comfortable saying stuff, you're not yourself. It's like that, but all the time.

RT: But would you say Caggston's like that?

No, no. It's not like that. It's not like that, partly because I don't think anyone – I don't think anyone gets that much like feeling of self-importance from being at Caggston...you know, there's no selection criteria...to play. You can be as shit as you want, basically. There have been literal beginners that have started...

Glen then expanded on the non-hierarchical nature of interaction at Caggston and compared it to other contexts:

No-one has any like, um, no-one wants that particular position, no-one wants like to achieve anything within it, like be, be any particular part, you know, no-one wants to bat high, no-one wants to be captain, to be friends with this bloke, not with that bloke, that's absolutely no – so it's a big group, without anyone being a bad bloke about... There's no sense of competition in the team, not even, not even like in the subtlest ways really. I suppose I'm a slight, I'm not right at the heart of it, but there's no sense that anyone, there's no arguing, there's no argument, no tetchiness or whatever, which is quite unusual...

RT: What, the non-hierarchical aspect of it?

Yeah, non-hierarchical and it's really *completely* non-hierarchical. Entirely, you know, which is really – you just don't get at work, or even with your mates you don't get it actually, 'cos even with your mates there's always a thing, you know...

Glen's latter point highlights another interesting comparison, i.e. between a voluntary association and a close friendship group. Several other members made similar comments. For example, as we saw earlier, Daisy said of Caggston: 'it's something different about a group that meets for a reason that's not about you socially, 'cos it almost takes away, 'cos even in your social setting there's hierarchies, there's obligations, things that you have to do.' This takes us back to our discussion, in chapter five, of the differences between close friendship ties and domain-specific ties. As noted there, many authors, either implicitly or explicitly, consider the former to be superior to the latter, as they are presumed to be more emotionally significant. However, such ranking often fails to take into account the 'costs' associated with close friendship groups – precisely the 'hierarchies' and 'obligations' to which Daisy referred. This is not to suggest that we should reverse the ranking and privilege domain-specific ties over strong ties. Instead, it is to note, as Oldenburg (1997: 63) does, that research suggests we need *both* intimacy and affiliation. Voluntary association membership tends to cater for the latter and, as the case studies showed, one of the key elements of socio-organisational context that fostered this sense of affiliation was the relative absence of hierarchy. In the following sub-section, I move on to discuss

another key element of socio-organisational context, raised at various points in the foregoing discussion, namely member diversity.

Member diversity

'It's like being part of a village, really, you get that sort of cross-section of people.' This is how Mary first described Treeford; and, in doing so, she highlighted what nearly all members regarded as a key element of the voluntary sports club context, namely that it brought together people from different backgrounds. In the social capital literature, this has generally been considered in terms of the 'bonding' or 'bridging' nature of voluntary associations and it has spawned a sizeable literature of its own.⁴⁵ My analysis cannot hope to cover all the relevant aspects of this debate. However, the case studies did point up several key issues and it is worth considering them in as much detail as space allows.

First and most simply, every single member I spoke to mentioned the fact that they had met 'different types of people' through their club involvement. George's comments were typical. He said, 'What's good here is that we have an enormous mixture of people, actually, with all sorts of backgrounds'. Second, people tended to experience this 'diversity' primarily through conversation. For example, Leslie referred to a 'diverse set of members' at Treeford whom she considered 'very interesting people to talk to'. Third, it appeared that, for many members, such conversations functioned as a form of social support. We noted in chapter four how members derived social support from their membership, but closer analysis here suggests that the 'diversity' of the socio-organisational context played an important role. As some of the wives of Caggston members discussed,

Karen: It's different as well because if you do go visit someone, talk to someone, they give you advice as well, and it's someone totally different

⁴⁵ See, for example, Gittell and Vidal (1998); Putnam (2000); Leonard (2004); Coffé and Geys (2007a); Glanville and Bienenstock (2009); Johnston and Percy-Smith (2003).

Daisy: Yeah, that's true.

Karen: And it's *really* good, because you do realise how different everyone is...

Kate: And without the advice even, it's just the sharing.

These quite basic findings – that members encountered ‘different types of people’ through the clubs and that this manifested itself most obviously in conversation – emerged from each of the case study clubs.

Before we examine these issues in more detail, though, it is necessary to interrogate the notion of ‘diversity’ itself, particularly as it was perceived by the members of the different clubs. Here, a comparison between Treelford and Caggston is instructive. Treelford had a membership profile that was almost exclusively white, predominantly drawn from the professional classes and disproportionately (more than three-quarters) male. Caggston, by contrast, had a much more diverse membership profile, at least in terms of socio-economic background. As Pete said:

What I think's intriguing about Caggston is it's, um, in terms of social class, you know and where, people's backgrounds...it's got the gamut...People from quite professional classes who send their kids to private schools and you've got other people who are proper working class and are sort of South London born and bred and all the rest of it. And some who are disadvantaged and have not had a great education, find jobs, all the rest of it.

So, given these basic differences in membership profile, how do we explain the fact that members of *both* clubs talked about how ‘diverse’ the clubs were and members of *both* clubs appeared to experience this ‘diversity’ in a similar way, i.e. through interesting conversation with dissimilar others? One basic answer is that members of Treelford meant something other than socio-economic background when they talked about ‘diversity’. For example, George qualified his initial observation that Treelford had ‘an enormous mixture of people’ by saying:

...all kinds of professions, and some people who've achieved at enormous high levels...I mean, down here, we have people who are very, very well-known in terms of the legal profession, or, um, in healthcare professions of various kinds, um, you know, and people who are, um, very well regarded in things like marketing, business and so on...So, it's really...you know, meeting different people from different backgrounds and different, different professions or different work experiences or whatever.

George, then, used 'diversity' primarily to refer to differences in people's professions; and a review of other members' comments from Trefford suggested a similar usage (for example, Mary described Trefford's diversity by saying 'we've got airline pilots, judges, teachers, musicians, actors, psycho-therapists – a complete range'). In contrast, when members of Caggston discussed diversity, as we saw from Pete's comments, they were often referring to quite wide socio-economic differences between members, rather than just occupational variation. A second answer to the question of why members of both Trefford and Caggston appeared to discuss diversity, despite their different membership profiles, is that members were making implicit comparisons between the diversity of people they met in the clubs and the diversity of people they met in other interaction settings. I return to this point below.

Before that, the case studies illustrated two further basic points about diversity that ought to be mentioned. First, the focal activity itself can affect how diverse a club's membership profile is. For example, cricket, more than some other sports, allows for diversity in age. As Rob said, 'In cricket, you can play a competitive game with people of different age-groups, whereas football, if you have an old guy playing with a bunch of 25 year olds, you can't do it. You know, the fitness levels are too disparate.' Likewise, tennis allows for diversity in age and, more than many other sports, in gender too. Of course, it does not follow that all cricket clubs have diverse age profiles, nor that all tennis clubs have 50-50 gender splits. However, the basic point is that, *ceteris paribus*, the nature of the focal activity can influence how 'diverse' the club is, particularly in terms of age and gender.

Second, while all members discussed interacting with people from ‘diverse’ backgrounds, they still suggested that tie formation, at least where strong ties were concerned, tended to operate on the ‘homophily principle’ (McPherson et al., 2001). As George at Treeford said (quoted in chapter five), ‘I do get a sense, obviously, of people gravitating towards people of similar standards, or interests, or, or social likeability, so, in terms of each other.’ However, when it came to weak or compartmentally intimate ties, members’ comments reveal that many of these were formed with people from dissimilar backgrounds. Sarah from Caggston illustrated this comparison well. She said: ‘There are people who you would just naturally gravitate to, just because you would have an affinity to, which you would have *wherever* you met them, I mean, whatever context you met them...And then others who you might not have come into contact with who you still get along with.’ These ‘others’, as we saw in chapter five, she characterised as weak, or compartmentally intimate, ties. Sarah’s comments, like those of many other members, illustrate the power of ‘homophily’ and how it tends to operate in any context. But they also illustrate how the ‘diverse’ socio-organisational context at Caggston had facilitated the formation of compartmentally intimate ties with others from dissimilar backgrounds.

So, how did diversity affect the principal mechanisms of social capital development and the outcomes people derived from their involvement? First, as discussed, the basic process of conversing with people from ‘diverse’ backgrounds functioned as a source of ‘interest’ and ‘enlightenment’ for some and more profound social support for others. Through this basic process, people also acquired information, which led to other outcomes. For example, as we saw in chapter four, Michael started working in property development through information he acquired from social contacts at Treeford. In this case, occupational diversity strongly influenced the way in which reciprocity exchanges led to social capital outcomes. This takes us back to Granovetter’s classic argument about the ‘strength of weak ties’. As he put it, there is a ‘structural tendency for those to whom one is only *weakly* tied to have better access to job information one does not already have.

Acquaintances, as compared to close friends, are more prone to move in different circles than oneself.' (Granovetter, 1974: 52, emphasis in original)

Diversity also influenced the mechanism of value introjection. As we saw in chapter six, several members felt that interaction within the clubs had changed their attitudes and affected their behaviour outside the club environment. In discussing this, most pointed specifically to the diversity of the club environment as a key factor. For example, George at Treeford said:

The whole thing about discussing things with different people from different backgrounds and, and doing that regularly and, and, er, thinking about what people say and do just, just widens your perspective, so it must actually change you as, as an individual. And probably, you know, in, in, in a rich and fruitful way...I just think the whole process of interacting with people you wouldn't necessarily meet is so, so valuable. Just to see things from different perspectives and, and get an understanding of what other people do and how they live and so on and so forth, you know.

A great many other members made similar comments; and again their comments demonstrated the salience of comparison (with work and other interaction contexts). As Duncan said (quoted in chapter six), 'I'm not sure that in any of the other scenarios that I've moved in in my *life*, I would necessarily have encountered people of the type that I've encountered at Caggston...[And] maybe learning to deal with different people...I would have had no other setting in which to do that.'

In examining the influence of diversity on value introjection, it appeared that *perceptions* of diversity often played the key role. So, members of Caggston, which had a more (socio-economically) diverse membership profile than Treeford, were not correspondingly more likely to consider that they had developed social capital through value introjection. This might be explained by the specific nature of the cognitive process involved. For example, Herreros (2004: 52) argues that people may 'generalize from the expectations...developed within their associations, because they consider that their comembers are representative of society at large'. As he notes,

such beliefs are hardly rational, in the sense implied by Elster (1983) and others, i.e. in accordance with the laws of probability. However, cognitive psychology has repeatedly shown that ‘people have strong intuitions (wrong most of the time) about random samples’ (Herreros, 2004: 52). This re-emphasises the point made in chapter two that any distinctions between the bonding and bridging nature of associations may be linked more to identity-based perceptions than to measurable demographic differences (c.f. Nichols et al., 2013; Vermeulen and Vermeel, 2009). In fact, this can be seen as another instance of the general phenomenon discussed earlier, namely that people’s perceptions of key elements of club life (such as their and others’ social network positions) can differ from more ‘objective’ measures.

The case studies also suggested that, in certain circumstances, diversity might inhibit social capital development by constraining the mechanism of bounded solidarity. For example, when discussing the influence of diversity on bounded solidarity at Caggston, Duncan said:

I dunno, if I look at it now, I kind of feel like it maybe inhibits it a little bit. Um [pauses], I dunno, it's weird, because...the last couple of years when we've gone on tour, you do get these little splinter groups of people, like kind of doing their own thing, going off on their own. And, you know, if you look at those groups of people, you could say that they were slightly based around like social class or whatever, you know, or kind of like a shared kind of social identity...

This suggests, *prima facie*, that diversity constrained bounded solidarity at Caggston, or, more accurately, that it facilitated bounded solidarity at a sub-group level, but inhibited it at club level. However, Duncan then went on to say, ‘But, um, I dunno, it's weird as well, because so many people have come and gone over the last like ten years from like really wildly different backgrounds and stuff, but everyone, everyone weirdly kind of seems to find their place’. Moreover, as we saw in chapter six, every Caggston member, including Duncan, identified a strong, *club-level*, shared identity that had developed over years of regular interaction and had facilitated the exchange of resources.

So, how should we understand this interaction between diversity and bounded solidarity? A close analysis of members' comments and my observations highlights two interesting processes. The first takes us back to our earlier discussion of 'third places' and the benefits that people can derive from them. Voluntary sports clubs are similar to third places in that friends often come in 'sets' and these sets can bring certain mental health benefits that individual meetings with friends cannot. Langner and Michael (1963: 284) ascribe such benefits partly to the fact that 'the larger the group...the greater the pressure to avoid all topics of conversation which might lead to argument or disharmony'. Duncan's comments suggest that this general process was operating at Caggston:

People come from quite different sort of economic sort of backgrounds and stuff like that...I don't really know whether or not it's ever caused a clash of culture...I don't know like how much people are conscious of it and don't say anything about it, or, you know, whether no-one feels the need to say anything...Um, but you're kind of aware that, yeah, that people do come from different backgrounds...It's weird. No-one talks about it, really.

The second process relates to club culture. As discussed on multiple occasions, members routinely described Caggston as 'a family'. In doing so, they also tended to refer to its uniqueness, or strangeness. For example, Bob said, 'I think all of us play because we just get some sort of strange buzz out of the group of people that we are, you know. I mean, it is quite a weird bunch, isn't it?' Elsewhere, he referred to 'our slightly off-beat group'. So, beyond the basic 'club-as-family' culture, there was a very strong emphasis on the strange, 'off-beat' nature of Caggston. Looking at this now, it could be argued that this 'club-as-weird-bunch' culture mitigated the potentially negative impact of diversity on bounded solidarity. As Duncan said:

[The club] is almost encouraging of a certain eccentricity, I guess, which I think can have a sort of tendency to transcend those types of boundaries. If people are a bit sort of eccentric, then you stop worrying about whether they're kind of, you know, what socio-economic background they're from and stuff like that.

I observed this on numerous occasions at Caggston: much of the talk was around the ‘weirdness’ or ‘strangeness’ of the group. However, this was in itself quite strange, because, from what I observed, the members of Caggston (with perhaps one or two exceptions) could hardly be described as ‘weird’ or ‘eccentric’. In fact, independent of my observations, Duncan said something very similar:

When you actually think – I mean, there are a few kind of like eccentric characters within the team, I would say. But I wouldn’t say it was full of eccentric characters. And I would say that like, you know, you know, when I think about people like Chris and Dave and, um, like Charlie and people like that, then you think, well, like these guys aren’t particularly eccentric sort of blokes.

This suggests that the rhetoric around eccentricity fulfilled a certain function, namely to ‘manage’ diversity. It was a way that members could acknowledge the club’s diverse membership profile, without explicitly discussing members’ dissimilar socio-economic backgrounds, because of the possible tensions that might cause. This is a relatively brief sketch with relatively tentative conclusions, but it brings us back to the basic argument of the thesis, namely that processes of social capital development are embedded in socio-organisational contexts and these contexts can shape social interaction and social capital development in multiple ways.

SUMMARY

This chapter has demonstrated that various elements of socio-organisational context influenced the development of social capital. It showed how both small and large clubs could broker the formation of social ties and how club structure could influence the development of social capital, either by providing members with a sense of ownership, or by enabling members to ‘indulge’ themselves by avoiding decision making. It also showed how social interaction was influenced by the nature of the focal activity and illustrated some of the features of different focal activities. In addition, the analysis showed how the ‘choice element’ that underpinned members’ participation,

the relatively co-operative and non-hierarchical aspects of voluntary sports clubs and the perceived diversity of club members facilitated the formation of social ties and the wider development of social capital. Throughout, the analysis demonstrated the inter-connectedness of the various elements of socio-organisational context; and, in critical realist terms, the way that context and mechanisms interacted to produce social capital outcomes.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore empirically how social capital developed in the context of voluntary sports clubs. In so doing, it also engaged in debates around conceptualisation and methodology in social capital research. A number of key issues have emerged from this thesis, with direct implications for the study of social capital and with wider implications for the study of organisations. In this chapter, I seek to examine these issues and draw broad conclusions from the thesis.

First, I look at the main findings and their key implications. These primarily relate to the empirical work carried out at the case study clubs, but they also relate to the conceptualisation of social capital and the contribution of critical realism. Second, I look at the wider implications of these findings for the study of organisations. These include the importance of an organisational embeddedness perspective, the necessity of focusing on purposive and non-purposive actions and the value of comparing across work and voluntary association contexts. Third, I look at the limitations of this study, specifically the difficulties associated with access and my research role; the limitations of my level of analysis; and issues of time. Finally, I explore the possibilities for future research in this area. In particular, I focus on possible future case study research within a realist evaluation framework; extensive research on contexts, mechanisms and outcomes; studies of organisational ties; and studies of ex-members.

MAIN FINDINGS AND KEY IMPLICATIONS

Conceptualisation

To pick up on an early theme from this thesis, social capital has suffered from what Portes (1998: 3) terms ‘conceptual stretch’. Although this thesis was not intended as a detailed conceptual analysis, it has illustrated at least two key issues that are worth highlighting here. First, the discussion in

chapter two re-emphasised the general distinction between network and attitudinal approaches to social capital and, following several other authors (e.g. Field, 2003; Foley and Edwards, 1999; Jackman and Miller, 1998; Portes, 1998), it argued for the greater theoretical coherence of the former. The immediate and basic implication of this is that many of the studies in the attitudinal approach can be criticised on conceptual grounds. Indeed, as the authors above and more recent reviews (e.g. Glanville and Bienenstock, 2009) have noted, the methodological problems that afflict many of these attitudinal studies can be attributed, in part, to the logical inconsistencies in their conceptualisation of social capital.

A further implication of this network-attitudinal distinction relates to policy. As discussed in chapters one and two, the attitudinal version of social capital, following Putnam, has had much more political penetration than the original network version. And, as also discussed, the predominantly neo-positivist researchers within the attitudinal approach are increasingly questioning the role of voluntary associations in social capital development, due to the absence of a consistently strong statistical relationship between associational membership and (attitudinal) indicators of social capital. If the results of such studies (despite their conceptual and methodological shortcomings) become ‘accepted wisdom’, this might feed into policy making, albeit most likely through a drawn-out process of ‘knowledge creep’ (Weiss, 1980). If this happens, it might lead to a decline in political support for voluntary associations.

Second, the conceptual discussion and subsequent case study analysis suggest that researchers should seek to maintain an analytical distinction where possible between social capital, its sources and its outcomes. Following Portes and Landolt (2000: 532), I conceptualised social capital as ‘the ability to secure resources by virtue of membership in social networks or larger social structures’ and I argued that this *ability* to secure resources can, in some senses, be analysed separately from the mechanisms that give rise to it and the outcomes that arise from it. This is by no means a consensus position. For example, Finsveen and van Oorschot (2008) argue against it

and Coleman's original definition of social capital was explicitly functional, equating social capital with its outcomes. Moreover, social capital scholars have long argued (and indeed my empirical analysis showed) that social capital processes are often self-propagating. Nevertheless, the empirical analysis also showed that, in certain instances, Portes's (1998: 5) argument that one can 'distinguish the resources themselves from the ability to obtain them' is valid. The key implication of this is that social capital studies that seek to understand how social capital develops need to look beyond the resources people access and focus on their ability to access resources and the mechanisms that give rise to it.

Outcomes of social capital

This brings us on to the outcomes themselves, i.e. the resources that people acquired through their involvement in the clubs. Although this was not the primary focus of the thesis, the case studies did illustrate that people accessed multiple resources at the clubs. Here, it is important to note four things. First, as we saw in chapter four, many people discussed outcomes that related to identity and recognition. While this has already been recognised in the social capital literature (see, e.g., Crossley, 2008; Lin, 2001), there are still many social capital studies that focus on the material resources that people access and neglect these 'identity benefits'. My empirical findings, building on previous studies, suggest that researchers who are seeking to understand the full effects of social capital need to pay attention to identity processes. This, in turn, suggests that they need to take account of social psychological research on group processes, a point I return to below.

Second, the case studies demonstrated that 'sporting' outcomes were very closely bound up with 'social' outcomes. This has a specific implication for the study of social capital development in voluntary associations, namely that the 'object of interest' and the 'social rewards' of membership are often complexly linked (more on this below). It also has a more general implication for the study of sport's social outcomes, namely that researchers need to pay

close attention to the social processes involved in sporting activity. As Coalter (2007a) shows, there are a huge number of studies that examine the impact of sport participation on, among other things, physical and mental health, education and crime. These studies often start from the presumption that participation in the sporting activity itself leads directly to the outcome of interest. However, the much smaller set of studies that have explicitly sought to examine the mechanisms involved have often found that the physical activity itself is not so significant. For example, as Biddle et al. (2004) concluded, physical activity may enhance psychological well-being, but it is likely that the prevailing psychological climate and social interactions will be more crucial than actual physical activity. The case studies in this thesis provide support for such conclusions, at least from the members' own perspectives.

The third thing to note about the outcomes of social capital is that they can be negative as well as positive. Again, this is now accepted in much of the social capital literature, but the very fact that it feels necessary to mention it is proof of the positive focus that has characterised so much of the writing on social capital. Portes (1998: 15) identified four main negative consequences of social capital – exclusion of outsiders; excess claims on group members; restrictions on individual freedoms; and downward leveling norms – and the case studies provided some evidence of all of them. In particular, they showed how the formation of strong and compartmentally intimate ties among some members could lead to the exclusion of others, in some cases causing members to leave the clubs and in other cases causing members to remain, but feel like 'outsiders'. This process of exclusion was strongest at the clubs where bounded solidarity was strongest, reinforcing Portes's (1998: 18) observation that 'sociability cuts both ways'. The obvious implication of this is that researchers need to attend to the negative, as well as the positive, outcomes of social capital. This will help avoid treatments of social capital that see it not just as a public good, but *for* the public good (Sreter, 1998).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Having said all this, the low 'exit costs' associated with voluntary leisure organisations (Fine, 2003) meant that there was relatively little evidence of negative outcomes at the clubs, a point I return to below.

The fourth and final point about the outcomes of social capital is that while they can vary enormously in scale, the (micro) mechanisms that give rise to them appear to be the same. As illustrated in chapter four by the comparison between Olly at Caggston and Michael at Treelford, the resources people access can range from a counter-signed passport and help moving furniture to joint property purchases and legal support for a start-up company. Yet the willingness of people to provide such resources to others within a voluntary association context develops through the formation of social ties and the principal mechanisms of social capital development. One implication of this, as discussed above, is that researchers should not assume that an absence of material resource exchange implies that mechanisms of social capital development are not operating; it may simply indicate that people are involved in ‘resource poor networks’ (Coalter, 2007a: 53). The wider implication of this is that a full account of how social capital develops and leads to outcomes must take account of the macro mechanisms that affect how resources are unevenly distributed within societies, as well as focusing on the micro mechanisms of social interaction. Again, I return to this point below.

Social ties

The finding that social capital outcomes, despite their varying scale, emerged from the same processes shifted analytical attention to these very processes. And here the case studies showed, very strongly, that the development of social capital is intimately bound up with processes of tie formation. The immediate, obvious implication of this is that researchers interested in social capital, certainly at an individual and small-group level, need to attend to the ways in which people form social and organisational ties. There are two main findings from this thesis concerning tie formation. First, the case studies showed that, as well as forming ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ ties (interpersonal relations that are regularly discussed in the social network literature), members very commonly formed ‘compartmentally intimate ties’ (Small, 2009a: 87). As discussed in chapter five, such ties often had an intimate

quality, but activities and interaction were directly related to the club. Within the case studies, members consistently emphasised the significance of these ties and contrasted them favourably with work ties and, in some cases, with close friends and family.

This finding, which was one of the clearest of this thesis, has two important implications. First, it provides a corrective to accounts of social ties and social capital that rely on clear dichotomies. Small (2009a), who found that mothers at childcare centres also formed such ties, pointed out how this confounded existing theoretical models in the social network literature that relied on a distinction between strong and weak, or primary and secondary, ties. Indeed, he stressed the originality of his finding, calling these compartmentally intimate ties ‘theoretically unexpected relations’ (Small, 2009a: 87). In one sense, Small is being slightly disingenuous. As Lofland (1995: 191) pointed out almost twenty years ago, ‘Since the late 1970s, increasing numbers of researchers, armed with masses of (usually ethnographic) data, have confronted the classic distinction between primary and secondary relationships and found that distinction sadly wanting’. Indeed, she then went on to outline a series of studies, including some dating back even further than the 1970s, which described social ties that were strong, but domain-specific.⁴⁷

Yet in another sense, Small is right: there is still an overwhelming tendency to rely on dichotomies in much of the social network and social capital literature. We can see this in the discussion of bonding and bridging social capital. Although this is a slightly separate debate, researchers often equate bonding with strong ties and bridging with weak ties and thus perpetuate this dichotomous treatment. As noted in chapter two, Blackshaw and Long (2005: 245), among others, have challenged this dichotomy, arguing that ‘the ‘like us/unlike us’ presumption that lies at the heart of the distinction between bonding and bridging is hard to appreciate given the multi-dimensionality of

⁴⁷ These include Stone’s (1954) depiction of the ‘personalizing consumer’, Wireman’s (1984) depiction of ‘intimate secondary relationships’ and Lofland’s (1989) own depiction of ‘unpersonal/bounded relationships’.

any individual'. My empirical analysis bolsters this challenge. Ultimately, as discussed in chapter five, the problem lies with the common conceptualisation of social ties, in which several dimensions – length and regularity of involvement, emotional intensity, resource flows and so on – are collapsed into one. As the case studies demonstrated, and as the other studies mentioned here have also noted, it may be more useful to consider these various dimensions of tie strength separately.

The second implication of the finding that people formed compartmentally intimate ties is that it strengthens what Lofland (1995: 192) calls 'the critique of...the "primacy" of the primary'. That is to say, the significant emphasis that members placed on their compartmentally intimate ties contradicts the privileging of primary, or strong, ties which is implicit or explicit in much of the literature. Interestingly, Lofland (1995) notes that, to date, the critique has largely taken the form of 'positive' claims about weaker ties, such as Granovetter's (1973) 'strength of weak ties' argument and Oldenburg's (1989) analysis of 'third places'. While she notes a small body of work that has incorporated 'negative' arguments that identify the harmful aspects of strong ties, highlighting Sennett (1970; 1977) in particular, she stresses that this is still not common. This thesis, albeit in a very minor way, can be seen as contributing to this latter, 'negative' argument. As noted in chapters five and eight, several members discussed the benefits of compartmentally intimate ties by explicitly talking about the negative aspects of so-called primary ties, such as close friends and family.

The second main finding concerning tie formation is that members considered that they had formed social ties, in the main, non-purposely. That is to say, they considered that they had joined the clubs with a primary focus on the sporting activity itself and had formed social ties (and developed social capital) as a by-product of their involvement. It must be recognised that this is a very complex issue; indeed, what the case studies really showed was that members' actions were patterned in complex ways around both the 'object of interest' (sport) and the 'social rewards' of membership (Fine, 2003). Nevertheless, the analysis provided sufficient evidence that

members formed social ties through non-purposive, ‘emotional’, expressive and/or habitual action to suggest that basic rational choice accounts might not capture the various processes of social capital development.

The implications of this for the study of social capital are two-fold. First, researchers need to pay attention to how motivations around objects of interest and social rewards intertwine and how they affect tie formation and social capital development. For example, members of the case study clubs repeatedly emphasised that they had *joined* the clubs with a primary focus on the object of interest, but they had *remained* at the clubs largely because of the social rewards of membership. Second, in a more general sense, it provides a corrective to social capital accounts that privilege the actions of individuals. As discussed in chapter five, Bourdieu (1986: 250) argued that maintaining the ties that generated social capital ‘presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed. This work...implies expenditure of time and energy.’ But, as Small (2009a) demonstrated in his study of childcare centres, and as my empirical analysis also showed, such ‘work’ was often carried out *by* organisations, rather than individuals themselves. This exemplifies the organisational embeddedness perspective, which, as noted at the outset, underpinned this thesis. I elaborated this perspective throughout my empirical analysis; and I now highlight some of the more specific findings by focusing on the principal mechanisms of social capital development and the ways in which they were shaped by key elements of socio-organisational context.

Mechanisms of social capital development

The first and most basic issue that emerged from the analysis is that the principal mechanisms of social capital development operated differently for different people in different organisational settings. For example, the evidence suggests that bounded solidarity and enforceable trust are more likely in small, regularly interacting groups with dense networks of interlocking ties. Thus, in the case studies, there was more evidence of these

mechanisms at Caggston (small) and Faxhill (medium-sized), than at Treeford (large). There was most evidence at Caggston, as it was a one-team cricket club with members who had often played together at the club for many years. In addition, the ‘club-as-family’ culture at Caggston promoted intimate tie formation and enabled a process of collective identification. There was some evidence at Faxhill, but as the players interacted most regularly within their own teams, the mechanisms tended to operate at team, rather than at club, level. Also, Faxhill was a younger organisation with much higher player turnover, so members had had fewer opportunities for lengthy, regular social interaction. Furthermore, the ‘club-as-achievement-vehicle’ culture was not as conducive to tie formation and collective identification.

The case study analysis also suggests that, *ceteris paribus*, bounded solidarity and enforceable trust are more likely within team sport than individual sport. This is due in part to the regularity of interaction, noted above, but it is also due to the self-conscious ‘groupness’ that develops within team sport. As noted in chapter eight, Fine (1987: 190) found in his study of small group culture within Little League baseball that ‘sports teams, with their emphasis on the socioemotional side of shared activity and with their clear and explicit task goals, seem particularly likely candidates to develop collective traditions and shared meanings.’ The case studies bore this out.

The evidence around value introjection was quite tentative: members found it difficult to identify whether or not their club involvement had affected their core values, although, on balance, most felt that it had. Where the evidence was strongest was around those who had been involved in the clubs from an early age. This reflects the general consensus that moral socialisation (if such a process does operate to instil values in people) occurs mostly during early socialisation experiences. It also has a particular importance for those studying the role of voluntary associations in the development of social capital. As Stolle and Hooghe (2004: 426) argue, incorporating the insights of the political socialisation literature, ‘current social capital studies, by focusing almost exclusively on the study of adults, miss an important part of the

explanation of how social capital is actually generated'. The implication of this finding, as Stolle and Hooghe (2004) point out, is that social capital researchers need to pay much closer attention to adolescent experiences in voluntary associations.

This brings us on to the second major issue concerning the principal mechanisms of social capital development, namely the 'type' or 'level' of social capital that might be developed. As discussed, this thesis was explicitly focused on the interaction of individuals and small groups within clubs. Consequently, it focused on the ways in which members developed the ability to secure resources within specific organisational contexts. Nevertheless, it provided some evidence concerning what Torche and Valenzuela (2011) term the 'universalistic potential' of social capital mechanisms. Although the evidence was speculative, it suggested that value introjection (perhaps interacting with bounded solidarity) could operate to establish obligations between members and those outside the clubs, i.e. non-members. This provides some limited support for the basic 'spill-over' thesis that underpins Putnamian versions of social capital theory. At the very least, it indicates that some association members *themselves* consider that their involvement positively influences their values of tolerance and co-operation. The direct implication of this is that social capital researchers who are tempted to dismiss the role of voluntary associations, due to the findings of some quantitative attitudinal studies, should not be so quick to do so (more on this below).

The third issue concerning mechanisms is that, in addition to the principal mechanisms of social capital development, we should take into account two other processes, namely 'achieving' and 'leaders providing impetus'. The analysis showed that achieving helped to develop social capital at the clubs through encouraging greater social interaction among members and, in certain circumstances, that under-achieving helped through developing bounded solidarity. This may be particular to certain types of sport, given their explicit focus on achievement (further research is needed in different contexts). But, even if it is, it does not negate the more general finding that

there is an intimate connection between a focal activity and social capital development (more on this below). On ‘leaders’, the analysis demonstrated that key individuals were often able to absorb the ‘set-up costs’ associated with building social capital, something Krishna (2007: 954) found in a very different context (villages in India). This implies that social capital researchers need to pay attention to the motivations and actions of key individuals within organisations.

The final issue around mechanisms is another predictable-but-important one, namely that there can be multiple ‘readings’ of the various mechanisms and/or the mechanisms can reinforce or counteract one another. This was evident in the discussion in chapter six around reciprocity exchanges and the possible rational choice, emotion theory and ‘anthropological’ readings of the mechanism. As demonstrated there, even very close observation of social interaction and very detailed interviews might not lead to clear distinctions between different theories of social action. This is predictable in the sense that a critical realist perspective would anticipate it; but it is also important in the sense that many social capital researchers do not recognise or acknowledge it. As discussed in chapter two, the mechanistic turn in social capital research has not necessarily been accompanied by research approaches that are able to identify and tease apart the various mechanisms that are operating to develop social capital. I return to this issue below.

Key elements of personal context

One of the tenets of critical realism is that mechanisms can operate in different ways according to context. As Sayer (2000: 15) says (quoted earlier), ‘The same mechanism can produce different outcomes according to context, or more precisely, according to its socio-temporal relations with other objects, having their own causal powers and liabilities’. Throughout the analysis, I sought to understand which elements of context were most significant in shaping the mechanisms of social capital development. In doing so, as discussed in chapter seven, I drew a broad distinction between ‘personal context’ and ‘socio-organisational context’, the former referring to

key aspects of individuals, the latter to key aspects of the clubs. As this thesis was characterised by an organisational embeddedness perspective, my analysis was principally concerned with the latter, i.e. socio-organisational context. Nevertheless, I also identified some salient elements of personal context.

These were, as detailed in chapter seven: (i) life-stage and personal circumstances; (ii) level of ability; (iii) level of involvement at the club; and (iv) pre-existing attitudes towards clubs. As a critical realist perspective would suggest, these elements of personal context interacted with the principal mechanisms of social capital development to affect outcomes. For example, people's life-stage (i.e. whether they were in work, or retired) and personal circumstances (i.e. whether they were single, married, with or without children, etc.) significantly affected the time they were able, or wanted, to devote to club activities. This, in turn, shaped their social interaction, social tie formation and social capital development. Again, many will find this unsurprising. However, to return to the research critique of chapter two, the implication is that social capital studies based on unsophisticated data about associational membership (i.e. simply whether someone is a member or non-member), is unlikely to capture much about the interaction processes involved.

The second element of personal context, level of ability, varied in salience across the clubs. As discussed in chapter seven, it was particularly important in structuring interaction at Treeford, principally because tennis requires players of similar ability; it was much less important at Caggston, because the relatively uncompetitive nature of their matches and the nature of cricket itself enabled players of differing abilities to play in the same team. It is possible that this element of personal context is particularly salient in sports clubs and may therefore be of less importance in other voluntary associations. However, it has been noted elsewhere: for example, Fine (2003) discusses the way in which knowledge and ability in the world of mushrooming can affect the social dynamics of mushroom collecting clubs. Furthermore, level of ability can be taken, more broadly, to refer to any status

distinctions that are salient in a particular social context. What this finding implies, once again, is that we must pay attention to the myriad ways in which the ‘object of interest’ (Fine, 2003), or the ‘focal activity’ (Feld, 1981), shapes social interaction and hence social capital development.

The other elements of personal context – level of involvement and pre-existing attitudes towards clubs – have been discussed quite regularly in the social capital literature, so I do not discuss them at length here. However, it is worth pointing out that my findings, albeit limited, do not correspond with several studies in the attitudinal approach. For example, studies such as Wollebæk and Selle’s (2002a; b) and Wollebæk and Strømsnes’s (2008) found no significant differences between active and passive involvement in voluntary associations and various attitudinal measures of social capital. They conclude from this that level of involvement might not affect the development of (attitudinal) social capital. By contrast, the case studies suggested that a higher level of involvement did enable members to develop social capital (conceived of as their ability to secure resources) more effectively. Ultimately, these are studies with different conceptualisations of social capital and different research approaches (extensive vs. intensive), so there is limited scope for comparison. Nevertheless, such findings do call into question some of the claims made about voluntary associations in the attitudinal approach.

Key elements of socio-organisational context

Perhaps the more interesting (and important) findings from this thesis concern socio-organisational context. As discussed, the empirical analysis provided strong evidence that social capital development is organisationally embedded; and, in particular, it identified certain elements of socio-organisational context that were important in shaping the mechanisms of social capital development. First, as discussed in chapter seven, the clubs structured members’ opportunities for, and length and frequency of, social interaction, which in turn shaped the way in which they formed ties and developed social capital. Importantly, closer analysis suggested that clubs

structured interaction both purposely and non-purposely. The implication once again here is that, as with individuals, researchers must attend to organisations' global and local non-purposive actions.

Second, the case studies showed how organisational culture can affect social capital development. For example, the 'club-as-family' culture at Caggston, by encouraging the involvement of family and friends and prioritising sociality over sporting success, fostered long-term involvement and the formation of strong and compartmentally intimate ties. The 'club-as-achievement-vehicle' culture at Faxhill aided tie formation through achievement among some members, but the relatively short existence of the club and its prioritising of sporting success over sociality inhibited tie formation across the club as a whole. At Treeford, the 'club-as-sanctuary' culture, in direct contrast with work, enabled members to express 'leisured' social identities, which, in turn, facilitated the formation of weak and compartmentally intimate ties.

As noted earlier, these case studies were not detailed ethnographies; I do not claim, as traditional ethnographers would, to have holistically described the socio-cultural life of these groups (O'Reilly, 2009). Nevertheless, even these relatively basic sketches of club culture demonstrate the variation within one particular associational sector. This carries an implication for social capital research, namely that organisations, even those of the same basic type, differ in many important respects; and these differences shape the way in which social capital develops. Foley and Edwards (1999: 162) warned that there were 'analytical risks inherent in treating even two ostensibly similar groups as equals with respect to social capital'. The empirical analysis in this thesis re-iterates this warning.

Third, the analysis itself went beyond these basic sketches of club culture to identify key elements of socio-organisational context that shaped social capital development. As discussed in chapter eight, these included two relatively 'tangible' elements, namely size and structure, and five more 'intangible' elements, namely the voluntariness of associations, the

importance and nature of the focal activity, the co-operative (or competitive) nature of engagement, the ‘hierarchicality’ of the organisation and the diversity of its membership. These latter, ‘intangible’ elements are of more immediate interest, because, although they have been discussed in the general social capital literature, they have perhaps been less well examined in specific organisational settings. The analysis in this thesis enables us to examine how they interacted with the principal mechanisms of social capital development to affect outcomes for different groups and individuals.

As chapter eight showed, these interactions can be complex. For example, looking at the voluntariness of associations, the analysis showed that members at Treeford experienced their involvement as entirely voluntary; and that this ‘choice element’, which contrasted quite clearly with work, facilitated their formation of social ties. At Caggston and Faxhill, on the other hand, some members experienced their involvement, on occasion, as an obligation; and, on these occasions, this negatively affected social interaction and inhibited tie formation. Having said this, the sense of obligation that these individuals felt also helped to create bounded solidarity within their respective teams, or clubs, which, in turn, fostered the development of social capital. This is just one example, but it is illustrative of the complex ways in which various elements of socio-organisational context can interact with each other and with the principal mechanisms of social capital development.

A critical realist perspective

Finally, in terms of my main findings, I wish to reflect upon the contribution that critical realism made to my analysis. I discuss limitations and methodological reflections in more detail below, so here I will refer more specifically to the implications of critical realism for the study of social capital. The primary contribution of critical realism to this study has been my explicit focus on mechanisms, my concern with careful conceptualisation and my intensive study of how various elements of context interacted with mechanisms to produce outcomes. At a basic level, this focus is not that different from many of the recent research prescriptions in the social capital

literature. However, as discussed in chapter two, these various research prescriptions (and the critiques of previous research from which they emerge) have rarely been grounded in critical realist philosophy. That I did so here might not have had particularly strong, immediate implications for the study itself. However, at the very least, it enabled empirical work on social capital to be located within a coherent ontological and epistemological framework that incorporated a generative view of causality and an interpretive dimension to the analysis.

Specifically, the critical realist perspective encouraged me to do two things. First, to focus on careful conceptualisation. As discussed in chapter two, previous empirical studies, both extensive and intensive, have been hampered by vague or flawed conceptualisations of social capital and/or incoherent organisational categories. In this thesis, I sought to conceptualise social capital carefully and to analyse it consistently within carefully described organisational contexts. Second, it encouraged me to focus on the *interactions* between contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. As Westhorp (2008: 156-7) notes, 'realist theory...acknowledge[s] complex patterns of causation operating in open systems. Simply 'listing' features of the context and 'listing' mechanisms will not be adequate to identify the ways in which multiple causative factors interact with each other, and with features of the context, to contribute to outcomes.' In this thesis, I sought to move beyond listing mechanisms and features of context in order to empirically explore how they interacted in the broad process of social capital development. As I explain below, future research can build directly on these identifications of 'context-mechanism-outcome' interactions through what Pawson and Tilley (1997: 117) call 'realistic cumulation'.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANISATIONAL RESEARCH

In discussing the wider implications of this thesis for organisational research, I wish to focus on four key issues, namely (i) the importance of an organisational embeddedness perspective; (ii) the usefulness of organisational comparison; (iii) the nature of voluntary associations; and (iv)

the usefulness of sport as a context for studying organisational processes. To take up the first issue, the analysis in this thesis has shown how purposive and non-purposive individual and organisational actions affect people's ability to secure resources (i.e. their social capital). This emphasises the importance of an organisational embeddedness perspective. Many authors in both economics and sociology have discussed the general concept of embeddedness (see, e.g. Granovetter, 1985; Nee and Ingram, 1998) and authors such as Small (2009a) have examined it in relation to social capital. This thesis has demonstrated that an organisational embeddedness perspective is useful, because it recognises that processes of social interaction, social tie formation and resource exchange are strongly influenced by the organisational contexts within which people routinely participate.

The second issue – the usefulness of organisational comparison – was evident throughout my empirical analysis. In one sense, it was a useful element of the multiple, nested case study design, since I, as the analyst, was able to compare tie formation and the mechanisms of social capital development across the clubs. However, it was perhaps even more useful when the research participants themselves made comparisons. In the case studies, some of the sharpest analysis was possible when participants used organisational comparison to identify more precisely how mechanisms operated, which elements of personal and socio-organisational context were most salient and, significantly from a critical realist perspective, how these elements of context interacted with the mechanisms. For example, in chapter eight, we saw how Henry's detailed organisational comparison between Treeford and a local lecture group allowed him (and me, as the researcher) to specify more clearly what it was about the focal activities and the interactional contexts at the two organisations that he felt shaped his ability to form social ties. Elsewhere, people made detailed and insightful organisational comparisons (either on their own, or prompted by me) between the clubs and their work, family, friends and other organisations.

The third issue, which extends from the above, is more specifically related to voluntary associations. As discussed in chapter eight, one of the interesting findings that emerged from organisational comparison was that people varied in how voluntary they considered their participation in the voluntary sports clubs to be. Several other authors have discussed this in relation to sport and play. For example, as Fine (1987: 187-8) points out in his analysis of Little League baseball:

Goffman...notes that fun is the only legitimate reason for playing games; yet such an explanation is not wholly adequate for addressing the reasons why individuals engage in sports, especially team sports. Agreeing to participate in sports involves making a commitment to the group and to the activity; that agreement is seen as providing a "contract" that should not be broken because of lack of "fun."

The wider organisational implication here is that researchers should not assume that all voluntary associations, even voluntary leisure organisations, are experienced as pure fun by their members. Although the analysis demonstrated a basic distinction between work and the clubs, many members discussed work-like elements of their associational involvement. In voluntary sports clubs, this distinction related in part to differences between team and individual sport, with the former often requiring a stronger obligation and more work-like aspects. In other voluntary associations, there may be other elements of focal activities that create such a distinction. Organisational researchers need to be attuned to such nuances of associational experience.

Building on this, the final issue relates to the study of organisational processes through sport. Recent reviews by Wolfe et al. (2005) and Day et al. (2012) demonstrate that the usefulness of sport for studying organisational phenomena is increasingly being recognised. For example, Wolfe et al. (2005) reviewed 18 studies of organisational processes within sport from five top management journals and Day et al. (2012), drawing from a wider range of journals, reviewed more than 40. These reviews and the studies they describe show how (predominantly professional or elite

amateur) sport can be used to study organisational phenomena like competitive advantage, stakeholder management, team working and organisational identification. This thesis sits within this broader argument and adds to it the insight that *voluntary* sport can also provide a useful site for the study of work processes.

As discussed in these reviews and elsewhere, organisational researchers are increasingly interested in issues of competition and co-operation and in the different ways people identify with their organisations and organisational sub-groups. This is because work, especially knowledge work, is increasingly moving in a team-based direction (Wuchty et al., 2007). This thesis has demonstrated how such issues can be examined empirically within voluntary sport. For example, in chapter six, I explored how the mechanism of enforceable trust operated at Caggston to produce both collective benefits in the form of team loyalty and organisational survival and negative consequences for some individuals in the form of exclusion and restrictions on individual freedoms. Studies in the organisational literature, such as Barker's (1993) ethnographic analysis of concertive control in self-managing teams, offer interesting parallels. As discussed above, it is always important to take account of the variation in organisational context (i.e. some people may consider that their voluntary sports club experiences are more or less 'work-like' than others). Nevertheless, by combining a sensitive appreciation of contextual differences with a close observation of organisational processes, studies within voluntary sports clubs may offer interesting insights into work life.

LIMITATIONS

Like any study, this thesis has its limitations. Indeed, the influence of reflexivity, discussed in chapter three, means that it often feels easier to discuss the limitations of a particular study than it does its contributions. In this section, I wish to consider two broad sets of limitations: first, those associated with the study itself, i.e. aspects I sought to cover and ways I carried out the research, which, on reflection, might have been improved;

and, second, those outside the study, i.e. aspects that I did not seek to cover, but which, by their absence, might be considered limitations. In the first of these broad sets, the main limitation was my lack of access at Faxhill. I discussed this at some length in chapter three and I do not wish to repeat myself here. However, to recap briefly, I feel that the basic differences in social background between me and the members, the perception among some members that I was closely associated with the main organiser and my inability to join the main activities of the club (through lack of time and footballing ability) meant that I was unable to get on the ‘inside’ of the group. In particular, I was unable to conduct many in-depth interviews with members. This limited my access to data, certainly around the members’ perspectives, and meant that my treatment of Faxhill was thinner than that of Caggston and Trefford. This is evident in my empirical analysis (chapters four to eight), where there is a stronger emphasis on the findings from Caggston and Trefford than on those from Faxhill.

I sought to overcome and/or compensate for this in several ways. As discussed in chapter three, I always sought to ‘present myself’ as appropriately as possible and I attempted to manage the perceptions of research participants regarding my independence from my primary contact. Although I do not feel that I integrated particularly well, I was still able to spend considerable time observing matches and training and participating in post-football drinks, which gave me ample opportunity to chat informally to members and listen to their conversations. This meant that, in the analysis and write-up, I was able to draw on a reasonable amount of observational data. In addition, I sought to focus on the areas where I felt I had gained most insight, namely the perspectives of the organisers and the purposive and non-purposive actions of the club. For example, I felt very confident discussing the balance between competitive success and bonding that the club organisers sought to promote. Nevertheless, overall, I would have preferred much greater access at Faxhill.

A further possible limitation of the study, related to this lack of access at Faxhill, is the overall research role I adopted within my fieldwork. As

discussed in chapter three, I adopted a ‘peripheral-member-researcher’ (PMR) role (Adler and Adler, 1987) and, although I had several reasons for this, one of them was my lack of access at Faxhill and my wish to maintain some sort of balance in my research role across the different clubs. My PMR role had advantages, in that I felt I was able to maintain a certain distance from the research participants and avoid the possibility of ‘going native’. However, there were times during the research process when I felt that more direct, personal experience of some of the core processes might have been useful. That is, I feel that the research might have benefitted from my adopting either an ‘active-’ or ‘complete-member-researcher’ role (Adler and Adler, 1987). Of course, it is difficult to second-guess such things. As many authors have noted, and as I discussed in chapter three, there are advantages and disadvantages to any researcher role. However, reading ethnographic accounts of sport and leisure organisations, such as Crossley’s (2008), Fine’s (1987; 2003) and Wacquant’s (2004), made me think that more active participation in the group’s core activities might have yielded even greater insights.

Another possible limitation, perhaps a corollary of my PMR role, is that I tended, in my write-up, to rely more on interview data than on observational data. I did use both in my analysis and, as discussed in chapter three, I felt that my research benefitted from this ‘methodological triangulation’ (Denzin, 1970). However, I often felt more comfortable grounding my written arguments in interview data. On reflection, I think this is because, at some basic level, I considered that the reader might be more interested in hearing things ‘from the horse’s mouth’. Some may not consider this a limitation. However, it was apparent to me and no doubt to the reader, so I felt it worth discussing.

One further possible limitation was the lack of focus in the write-up on certain dimensions – in particular, gender and power. Several authors have argued that these dimensions are under-theorised in many social capital accounts. For example, Lowndes (2000) emphasised the importance of considering gender dynamics in attitudinal research on social capital and Fine (2001;

2010) has repeatedly argued that social capital theory is inattentive to issues of power. I touched on the latter issue in chapter eight in relation to hierarchy, but I did not discuss it in detail; nor did I discuss how gender dynamics influenced social interaction at the clubs. Overall, my analysis of the evidence did not suggest that these were key influences on tie formation and social capital development; and this is why they were not discussed in detail. Nevertheless, there is always the likelihood that my focusing on certain dimensions means that I was less attentive to others; future research on social capital and sport could focus more explicitly on these issues.

As regards the second set of limitations, i.e. those aspects that the study itself was unable to address, the main issue related to level of analysis. As discussed from the outset, this thesis focused mostly on micro-level, and partly on meso-level, processes. That is to say, the case studies focused on how social capital developed through social interaction within specific organisational contexts. When outcomes of social capital were discussed, these related mostly to individuals and to the organisations themselves. The main consequence of this is that the study did not enable much empirical investigation of how these micro-level processes were influenced by more macro-level processes.

As noted in chapter two, ‘the value of social capital at any given level depends on the larger context, including the insertion of the individual or group in question into networks of relations at higher levels’ (Foley and Edwards, 1999: 148). It is these ‘networks of relations at higher levels’ that this thesis did not address directly. Research suggests this ‘insertion’ might affect social capital development in different ways. First, the networks of relations in which the organisations themselves are situated can affect people’s access to resources. For example, Small’s (2009a) study of childcare centres in New York found that mothers’ social capital was, in part, dependent on how resource rich and diverse the organisational networks of the centres were. Second, the broader networks of inequality which characterise contemporary societies can affect people’s ability even to join voluntary sports clubs. This, again, is something that is regularly mentioned

in the wider literature on sport and social capital (e.g. Blackshaw and Long, 2005; Coalter, 2007a), but it is not something this thesis was able to address directly. Although I explored issues such as how new members joined the clubs, those I observed and those I interviewed were, necessarily, those who had sufficient access to material resources to be members, as well as sufficient willingness to interact socially and co-operate, at least to a certain degree, with other members. I return to this issue below.

A final limitation of the thesis was that I was unable to study processes directly over long periods of time. As noted throughout the thesis, time is key to social capital development; as Putnam and Feldstein (2003: 286) put it (quoted earlier), social capital development is ‘incremental and cumulative’. Within the case studies, I deliberately sought to explore the temporal aspects of members’ accounts: how their involvement had changed over time; how they had formed ties; how their ability to access resources had changed; and so on. This is a classic means of collecting, or ‘constructing’, process data (Langley, 1999). However, longitudinal research, incorporating long-term participant observation and repeat interviews with participants, may have provided even greater insight into the precise way the mechanisms operated and the precise ways in which those mechanisms interacted with elements of context to produce outcomes. Such longitudinal analysis was beyond the scope of this study, but, again, it may be possible in future research, an issue I turn to now.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As with limitations, it often seems easier to discuss possible avenues of future research, rather than discuss the contributions of a particular study. Here, I wish to focus on four. The first builds directly on my main findings and extends the critical realist perspective. As discussed in chapters one and three, this thesis adopted, in a broad sense, the framework of realist evaluation, which seeks to answer the basic question, ‘what works for whom in what circumstances and why?’ As Pawson and Tilley (1997) explain, the function of each case study within realist evaluation is to refine our

understanding of ‘context-mechanism-outcome configurations’. Importantly, though, as Pawson and Tilley (1997: 115) point out, ‘most evaluation studies seem to be one-off affairs [that] neither look back and build on previous findings, nor look forward to future evaluations’. So it is with much of the case study research on social capital. As discussed in chapter two, many case studies have either drawn on different versions of social capital, or they have employed vague or incoherent versions of the concept. Moreover, while many have discussed general processes of social capital development, the vast majority have not sought to specify which mechanisms operate in which contexts to produce which outcomes. This means that it has been difficult to build up a detailed understanding of how social capital develops.

In response to this general issue, Pawson and Tilley (1997: 115-152) argue for a process of ‘realist cumulation’, in which researchers draw explicitly on previous findings, design future studies sensitively and seek to draw out middle-range theories in the form of context-mechanism-outcome configurations. In doing so, they appeal to Mitchell’s (1983) discussion of ‘logical generalization’ and Sayer’s (1984) discussion of ‘qualitative abstraction’. There is not sufficient space here to explain the whole process in detail, but the premise is simple. Future research, in the form of case studies, could build directly on the findings of this thesis to specify further the mechanisms of social capital development, the salient elements of context and, most importantly, the interactions between context and mechanism. For example, as discussed above, this thesis identified five key ‘intangible’ elements of socio-organisational context that shaped the mechanisms of social capital development. Future case study research could examine these context-mechanism interactions in other voluntary sports clubs, other voluntary associations and other types of organisation, which should allow clearer specification of the various interactions.

The second possible avenue of future research also builds directly on my empirical findings, or, perhaps, could extend from future ‘realist cumulation’, as described above. This would be to examine context-mechanism-outcome configurations in extensive research. Survey research could be done among

members of voluntary sports clubs that asked detailed questions about mechanisms, personal and socio-organisational context and particular resources that members had accessed through their involvement. As discussed in chapter three, such extensive research would not, in critical realist terms, enable causal explanation. However, it could provide information on how widely these contextual elements and processes are distributed in particular populations.

There are previous examples of this kind of intensive/extensive research approach in the social capital literature. One is Small's (2009a) study of childcare centres, mentioned regularly throughout the thesis. This incorporated both intensive research (in-depth interviews and centre-based case studies) and extensive research (an individual level survey of mothers and an organisational level survey of centres). While Small's study was conducted on a much larger scale than this thesis, it represents an interesting possible avenue for future research. As discussed in chapter two, previous extensive research on social capital, particularly in the area of voluntary sports clubs, has suffered from problems of data quality. As Seippel (2006: 179) argues (quoted earlier), 'we need data designed more explicitly for sports studies, which distinguish more clearly between various aspects of organizational structures and activity, for the many possible networks emerging from a voluntary organization and for the specific topic of sport'. Building directly on the intensive research in this study might enable researchers to collect more appropriate data that can provide insight into these 'various aspects of organizational structures and activity'.

The third avenue of possible future research again draws from Small's (2009a) study. It is to examine whether, and, if so, how, members form 'organisational ties' at voluntary sports clubs. In his study, Small (2009a: 131) draws a distinction between social ties and organisational ties, which he describes as 'the connections, brokered by the childcare center, that mothers made to other organizations or their formal representatives'. These organisational ties enabled mothers to access an array of services, information and material goods that contributed significantly to their well-

being. Small (2009a: 151) also specified four mechanisms through which the centres helped broker such ties, namely validation, storage, referral and collaboration. Examining such ties and brokerage mechanisms in voluntary sports clubs would provide a richer understanding of social capital development and would provide further insight into its organisational embeddedness.

The fourth avenue I wish to explore does not build directly on my findings; rather, it extends from a realisation of one of the limitations of the current research. As discussed above, case studies of voluntary associations almost always focus on current members, which, given the low 'exit costs' of associational membership, means that they tend to focus on people who experience their involvement positively. However, as noted at several points throughout the thesis, 'the same mechanisms appropriable by individuals as social capital can lead to a set of negative outcomes for others' (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 532). In relation to voluntary associations, this means that it is important to understand how some people experience negative outcomes from the mechanisms of social capital development that, as we have seen, many members benefit from.

Such research could focus on people who have joined clubs and subsequently left because of negative experiences. This would enable a greater understanding of different perspectives on tie formation and mechanisms of social capital development and it would address the call of realist evaluation to understand what works for whom in what circumstances and why. Although studies of current members, as demonstrated in this thesis, can explore differences in the way that mechanisms operate for different people, the strong likelihood is that people who remain in membership will have developed social capital through their involvement. By exploring those who did not develop social capital, future researchers will be better able to refine our understanding of the context-mechanism interactions that have application in a particular domain.

In addition to these four avenues, there are plenty of other future research possibilities. For example, research could examine any one of the principal mechanisms of social capital in more depth in other contexts. Moreover, as discussed in chapter six, research could seek to determine which ‘readings’ of particular social capital mechanisms have most explanatory power. In addition, as discussed above, researchers could undertake more longitudinal studies of social capital development within organisations. Such research would fit into the now increasingly well-articulated strand of ‘process research’ on organisational phenomena (Langley et al., 2013). Furthermore, as Finsveen and van Oorschot (2008) advise, research could usefully focus on one particular type of resource that people access through their networks. This would facilitate comparison between cases and might allow researchers to specify more clearly which mechanisms of social capital development are most likely to lead to which outcomes.

SUMMARY

This thesis began with a quote which suggested that involvement in a voluntary sports club was about sport and, on top of that, some ‘other stuff’. This thesis has sought to investigate some of this ‘other stuff’ through an examination of social capital. In particular, it has sought to understand the mechanisms through which social capital develops and the ways in which these mechanisms are shaped by various elements of context. Overall, it has demonstrated the appropriateness of an organisational embeddedness perspective, which ‘suggests, above all, that what researchers have called a person’s social capital depends substantially on the institutional practices of the organizations in which the person routinely participates’ (Small, 2009a: 177). This final chapter has elaborated the main findings of the thesis and discussed their implications for the study of social capital and for the study of organisations more generally. It has also looked at the limitations of the study and explored opportunities for future research. As regards the latter, there are many. No doubt, with a nod to social capital theory, there are individuals and groups of more or less well connected researchers ready to take them up.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: EXTENDED EXTRACT FROM ‘FIELD NOTES’

Caggston, Sunday 27 June 12:50-19:50

- Another really hot day, good for watching cricket
- 18 there for Caggston: team (11), Roger (not playing), Kate, Daisy, Karen, Lucy and her friend and Debbie (comes much later)
- The family aspect is really crucial to the whole atmosphere and functioning of the club – Karen (Olly’s wife) and Lucy (Olly’s daughter) are always there – this is ‘what they do’ on their Sunday every week of the summer
- Discussion of ‘Caggston wives’ (collective identity) between Kate, Daisy, Karen and Debbie
- Here, there is a certain sense of obligation – Daisy (Duncan’s wife – 28 years old) hadn’t been down at all this season and it had been ‘noted’ in a jokey/not entirely jokey way, so she felt she had to come (I got this from Duncan). I’m still not sure how this plays out throughout the club, how much is obligation, how much is free and total voluntary enjoyment, etc. – need to ask this more in interviews!
- The issue of tour came up again – this is often discussed: the tour takes place on the first August Bank Holiday weekend every year – team, plus wives, girlfriends, children, friends go for three days, camping, playing games, drinking a lot – and it is a vital annual event, which generates lots of stories and a palpable sense of shared history
- People are eager to locate themselves in those stories. For example, Kieran was saying that ‘*He* had been playing’ in this game Daisy was talking about from last year’s tour
- Tour has been a key means of bonding, creating a group, sense of collective identity
- But, it is threatened this year because of bad behaviour where they stayed last year and certain incidents (e.g. broken window)
- Other discussion later among the players (Duncan, Chris, Glen) identified Kieran and his girlfriend as the ones who broke the window

- But they were quite defensive about whether or not they had done anything too bad on the tour – I definitely got a sense of group identity and ‘them against us’: Glen was talking about the kitchen being a bit untidy, etc. and that being the main issue (i.e. not a big issue)
- Also, I got a sense of slight class issues – Glen was talking about the village where they stayed being ‘middle England, one of those English villages, picture postcard’ – and how there was a bit of a clash with Caggston and some of the members coming into this middle England, posh environment and the other team, etc., not enjoying them staying at the campsite and being a bit rowdy
- The differences in backgrounds at the club are quite extreme (Glen discussed this in his interview); Karen was discussing Curtis (a club member, very close friend of Kieran, almost brother?) who had a criminal record and couldn’t find any work, doing a few manual labour courses, etc. – others very middle class, university, etc., Ben very well-off partner at City firm
- This different backgrounds thing is important, I think. As Glen says in his interview, it doesn’t necessarily result in people forming close friendships with people from different backgrounds, but it perhaps increases the sense for members that it is a break from the normal routines of their lives – family, friends, work, etc. – because they are spending long periods with people they wouldn’t necessarily interact with socially all that much
- For some club members, there is a definite enjoyment (tinged with annoyance) about how pernickety some of the older members (especially Roger, and sometimes Bob too) are about the club – this again is part of the feel of the club – this was emphasised by Bob often discussing minute aspects of the league rules and constitution (Glen and Duncan often discuss this – Glen jokingly and dismissively referring to chat about the League Secretary, etc. – source of genuine amusement/resignation between some members, e.g. Glen and Duncan)
- Also highlighted when Roger made a big deal of throwing the (temporarily lost) match-ball back to the middle, when Caggston were

only four runs from a really heavy defeat – tedious attention to detail (Duncan picked up on this incident later as indicative of this type of fastidious, pernickety behaviour – viewed with a mixture of indulgence and annoyance)

- Really noticed how totally relaxed and outgoing Glen is at the club (not always true in all situations) – clearly feels very comfortable in the club environment – has a status within the club, well-liked, respected, etc., clearly enjoys the social interaction
- I am noticing a clear ‘club’ identity – Duncan consistently talks about how idiosyncratic, special, ‘strange’ Caggston is – ‘different’ to other sports clubs (I don’t see this really at Treeford – people appreciate the club, of course, and the facilities and the people they meet through it, but there is not the same ‘club’ identity – this is no doubt due to disparities in size, but there is also a remarkable intimacy with Caggston, built up, I think, through regular interaction over long periods (i.e. the Sundays are long, but also many years of involvement, and the way it is intertwined with family and existing friendships))
- On the way home, Glen talked again about the Haddon family (Roger, Olly, Karen, Darren, Kieran and Lucy) – he said ‘I’m not sure the family would work without the club’ – his point was that the Sundays at cricket give the family a safe, supportive environment to play out their family dramas. He also said they (the family) give the other club members licence to intervene, play the role of mediators, although he said that most do not (they tend to try and stay out of disputes)

APPENDIX B: EXTENDED EXTRACT FROM ‘GENERAL REFLECTIONS’

June (1)

1. It appears that the processes through which people build social capital are for the most part unconscious. (Or habitual? Or not directly instrumental?) People seem able to identify social capital itself (broadly defined as access to resources in networks) and outcomes of this. However, questions which really try to get interviewees to specify what it is that leads to this are often initially answered either with genuine ‘don’t knows’ or steering off to discuss other topics.

June (2)

1. Related to the reflection above, I think this is because these seem to the interviewees like such natural processes of social interaction. This is a finding in itself, though. There appears to be nothing unusual about the types of social interaction club members have with one another. The key issue is context!

2. On context, I am getting a real feeling from formal interviews and informal conversations that key issues are:

(i) the sense of the sports club being a refuge/holiday from normal life – job stress, family stress etc. This appears to be important because it creates an atmosphere of relaxation within which the social interactions that take place might be more likely to facilitate the creation of a supportive network or group (or at least, a group/network/club ‘feeling’).

(ii) the mental and physical benefits that sport can provide – several people, particularly at Trefford, have talked about how tennis gives people mental relaxation (they can just concentrate on hitting the ball) and how this, plus after-game drinks, can really provide a relaxed, fruitful context for positive social interaction that can lead to this group/network forming. (This is perhaps slightly different in tennis and cricket and may be again with football, which is more frantic – again differences between sports.) George talked

about how the club had ‘kept him sane’. Michael talked about how, for some people, the club had held them together through personal trauma – divorce, etc.

(iii) the (relatively) non-hierarchical nature of sports clubs. Several people have referred to how everybody is equal at the club – it can really offer an opportunity for people to interact without the hierarchical interference of work situations, which can obstruct free and easy social interaction. However, there are no doubt subtle social hierarchies at some clubs, but perhaps Treeford, compared to other tennis clubs, has less overt hierarchy (e.g. compare to West Regency (Lake, 2008)).

(iv) there being a (perhaps notional) diverse membership. Everybody talks about this – people from lots of different backgrounds. Viewed ‘objectively’ and demographically, most sports clubs are not, I expect, very bridging in nature – members tend to be relatively wealthy, professional, white, middle-aged, etc. But, what appears to be important is the *perception* that there are people drawn from different backgrounds. Also, in comparison to people’s families, friends, jobs, the other sports club members they interact with probably *are* different, even if this does not cut across major ethnic and social boundaries. For example, people have discussed in interviews (e.g. George, Mary at Treeford) that there are doctors, lawyers, academics, marketing, advertising people, etc. In many ways, this is a narrow demographic of middle/upper-middle-class professionals, but the fact is that members appear to feel a sense of the club being a ‘bridging’ organisation. (Relate this to the research – that the bonding/bridging distinction might be more an issue of perception/social-psychological distinction than a clear demographic one.) Here, there are clear differences between Caggston and Treeford (and perhaps a wider difference in sports – tennis is still a middle-class sport!), because the former really does comprise clear social class differences within its small membership.

(v) the (seemingly obvious) fact that voluntary associations are, by their nature, *voluntary*. People come to them because they *want* to be there, so social interaction takes place among people who are voluntarily there and probably keen to interact.

(vi) the length and regularity of involvement. To build up a network and get benefit from it (access resources through it), you need to interact with people over a relatively sustained period. For example, Michael said it maybe took a couple of years to get to that stage (but he was often going to the club every night and all day Saturday and Sunday). Infrequent involvement would not really have the same effect.

3. Related to (i) and (v) above, I think this really highlights why voluntary associations might play a key role in the development of social capital. Some authors (e.g. Stolle?) have questioned why voluntary associations might play such an important role (as set out in Putnamian versions of social capital theory), given the relatively small amounts of time people, on average, spend there, compared to time spent with family, friends, at work, etc. The answer might be that this is what they *choose* to do in their *spare* time. This is their real passion and can play a really important role in people's lives. The old adage, you can't choose your family, and work for many people is not somewhere they always enjoy being (it also is often riven by hierarchical issues).

June (3)

1. After my discussion with Duncan on Monday night, I realised again the importance of keeping an open mind when discussing the issues (research questions) with participants. Over the last week or so, I felt I had begun to identify patterns in some of the interviews and observations around what appeared to be key contextual factors that facilitated social interaction, bonding, collective identification, etc. (see June (2) above). While discussing my reflections with Duncan, I got the sense that while he agreed on some, he didn't necessarily share the same views as other participants (e.g. the idea of the club as a refuge – but is this his specific situation as son of the founder and thus 'expected' to take on responsibility?). I must keep in mind that while it is important to identify patterns and similarities between people's accounts, this should not mean I form rigid interpretations of the data and miss other perspectives.

2. I am feeling more comfortable down at Caggston, but am still unsure how I should go about talking more formally to other members. I must also make sure I do not rely too heavily on my existing contacts (Glen and Duncan), but get views and perspectives from as many as possible.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ice breakers

- How long have you been a member?
- How did you first become a member?
- What were your reasons for first joining the club?
- What do you feel you get out of your involvement in the club?

Personal involvement in the club (and other associations)

- How much time do you spend doing club stuff per week (e.g. matches, training, organising, drop-in play, socialising, etc.)?
- Are you involved in helping to organise the club in any way (e.g. volunteering, on committee, helping out)?
- Are you still a member for the same reasons that you first joined?
- What are your expectations of being a member of this club? What do you expect to get out of it?
- Have these expectations changed?
- What is important to you about being a member of the club?
- Are you a member of any other clubs or associations at the moment?
- Have you been in the past, when you were a kid, etc.? Please describe.
- Do you consider yourself a ‘clubby’ type person, i.e. someone who enjoys joining and being a member of clubs in general?
- How is your experience here different to other sports clubs, voluntary associations, work, other types of organisation?

More in-depth about the club

- Could you tell me a bit more about what the club’s like?
- Would you say it has a distinctive culture? If so, please describe.

Other club members

- How would you describe the other members of the club?
- Would you say they come from quite similar or different backgrounds?

Social ties

- How would you characterise your relationships with other club members?
- Do you tend to meet up outside the club? Please could you give me some examples?
- Do you call each other up about non-club stuff?
- Would you help each other out with things outside of the club? (Examples)

Social capital

- Do you feel that being a member of the club has made you feel part of a group? (Could you tell me a bit more about that, please?)
- What does this group feeling mean to you?
- What would you say has led to this kind of group or network forming? (Open-ended)
- Do you feel like you benefit from being part of this group or network?
- What are some of the benefits you would say you get from being part of this group or network?
- Could you please give me some examples of the bad things about being part of this group or network?
- Would you say that club members are useful in providing information to other members (e.g. job news, or other information)?
- Do you get this kind of thing from elsewhere in your life (e.g. friends, family, work)? How does it compare?

Co-operation

- Would you say you co-operate well with other people in the club? Could you give me some examples?
- How important would you say co-operation is in the club?
- What kind of factors do you think affect whether people co-operate? Are there any aspects of being a member of the club that affect this?

- What kinds of things do you feel make this kind of thing more likely/happen more often?
- Would you say that the way you and other club members co-operate is important in creating that group or network between you?

Members' values

- Would you say members of the club have similar or different values (e.g. political views, views on life, general outlook)?
- Do you think that being part of the club has altered your values/outlook at all? Could you give me any examples?
- What kind of factors do you think affect people's values? Are there any aspects of being a member of the club that affect people's values?
- What kinds of things do you feel make this kind of thing more likely/happen more often?
- How important would you say that sharing values or shaping each other's values is in creating that kind of group/network?

Leaders

- Are there particular leaders within the club?
- How do they affect the atmosphere, values, etc?
- Do they encourage people to come together as a group, bond, etc?
- How important would you say that leaders are in creating that kind of group/network?

Club life affecting life outside the club

- How do you feel your membership affects your life outside the club? Do you feel that some of the co-operative, group, trust, behaviour affects your life outside? Please could you give me some examples?
- How important do you consider your club membership and club activities compared to other parts of your life (e.g. friends, family, work, political activity, other hobbies)?

Personal details

- How old are you?
- Are you employed? If yes, what do you do?
- Are you married?
- Do you have kids?
- Have you lived in the area long?

Other people to interview

- Can you recommend anyone else that I could interview for this research?

APPENDIX D: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

CAGGSTON	FAXHILL	TREEFORD
One-to-one interviews		One-to-one interviews
Ben	Frank	Claire
Bob	Mark	George
Duncan	Gavin	Henry
Glen		Leslie
Olly	Group interview 1	Mary
Rob	Jerome	Michael
Roger	Andre	Neville
Tom	Corey	Patrick
	Jack	Roland
Group interview 1	Sean	
Pete		
Sarah		
Group interview 2		
Daisy		
Fran		
Karen		
Kate		

APPENDIX E: EXTENDED EXTRACT FROM ‘CODING REFLECTIONS’

1. Decided to code interviews in the order in which they were done – this, in a sense, relates to the protocols of analytic induction (see Westhorp (2008: 158 ff.) for discussion of AI within the framework of realist evaluation). Although I did not begin formal coding immediately after the first of interviews, I was, in a sense, already analysing and coding the data in my head and this did, to a certain extent, inform future rounds of data collection and analysis (as per AI).
2. The broad headings of context, mechanism and outcome seemed the most appropriate way of beginning coding, with sub-headings.
3. I have split context up into ‘club context’ and ‘personal context’, the idea being that the latter refers to personal characteristics, e.g. length/pattern of involvement, motivations for joining/staying involved, etc. and the former to aspects of club life, e.g. club ethos, club facilities, surroundings, etc. However, you could question whether such an analytic distinction can be drawn between them. For example, much of the so-called ‘club context’ material is personal views on the club, rather than ‘objective’ club details.
4. What constitutes context and what constitutes mechanism? This is an issue that Pawson and Tilley (1997) discuss (see book). For example, should aspects of social interaction (e.g. talking to people in the field, or when waiting to bat) be described as mechanism(s) of social interaction, or as personal context (e.g. motivation to maintain involvement), or as club context (e.g. club ethos and atmosphere)?
5. The key issue, as Westhorp (2008: 175) discusses is interaction *between* mechanism, context and outcome (the realist formulation). At the moment, in this early stage of coding, I am coding chunks of text as context, mechanism and/or outcome (all sub-divided). This will allow, I hope, an understanding of

different contexts involved (including building up a rich contextual picture of each club), different mechanisms at play and different outcome patterns. However, simply noting/counting different aspects of context and different outcomes, without explanatory mechanisms interacting with the contexts to produce outcomes will not provide *realist* explanations. Therefore, in later stages, I will need to focus on the interaction between context, mechanism and outcome. There is an argument for doing that at this stage, i.e. only examining sections of text where it appears that there is an interaction between context and mechanism and/or mechanism and outcome. However, I think there is still value in coding chunks ‘individually’ and then looking at the interactions at a later stage of analysis (while bearing them in mind at this stage).

6. Issues around time: currently separate coding for time (i.e. hours spent at club in typical ‘session’ – more on how this relates to social interaction); pattern of involvement (i.e. more quantitative, i.e. how regularly you play, etc.); social interaction (broader mechanism (?), but obviously related to time spent). These codes may need to be merged/rearranged.
7. Should there simply be a broad category of ‘perceptions about the club’? It is analytically (and philosophically) difficult to separate club context (i.e. as if it were fixed) from personal context (i.e. perceptions about involvement, motivation, etc.).
8. Motivations for involvement (under personal context) overlap with outcomes (i.e. often personal level outcomes).
9. I realise that I need to code particularly some of my own questions about outcomes. Much of my questioning starts with a statement about the broad outcome (e.g. social capital, feeling part of a network/group from which you gain resources – differently expressed) and then asks interviewees to explain the processes that lead to it. For coding purposes, therefore, it is *I*, rather than the interviewees, that mention the outcome and then *they* link to it. In realist analysis (c.f. Westhorp, 2008: 175), it is important to look at the

examples where mechanism, context and outcome are linked directly. For that reason, I need to include my own questions within the coding.

10. Overlap between motivation for maintaining involvement and motivation for joining in the first place – might need to combine these codes, but still seems sufficient distinction at this point to keep them separate.

11. Shared narrative and shared identity obviously overlap, but there are some comments specifically about *stories* that seem important.

12. There also appears to be an issue around how competitive the club culture is. At the moment, I am coding Duncan (4th interview), but this has cropped up in all of the previous interviews too – usually coded under club ethos/changes in club ethos/motivations, etc.

13. There are obvious overlaps between certain aspects of club context – i.e. club ethos, size of club, facilities, structure, hierarchy.

14. I am starting to think (during analysis of Duncan, 4th interview) that I might be able to group factors under the broad heading of club context into more tangible factors (such as size, facilities, structure) and more intangible factors (club ethos, that is, *perceptions* of club ethos). Some might overlap, e.g. hierarchy (partly more tangible description of whether there is a formal structure in place, partly more intangible *feelings* of what the club is like). Also, sets of factors will influence each other, i.e. size will affect (perceptions of) club ethos, etc. Indeed, there is obviously no neat division. This goes back to (3) above and is, of course, more fundamentally a philosophical question – is there any reality external to the person perceiving it. Even something like size of club may depend on length of time involved (e.g. at the beginning, when you don't know anybody, it may feel like there is a sprawling mass of people you don't know and everyone knows everyone else, etc.; over time, it may be the same size 'objectively', but it may feel smaller to established members).

15. Related to (3) and (14) above, it is clear that motivations for maintaining involvement (i.e. broadly, ongoing experience of the club) is linked closely to (perceptions of) club ethos and, as per (8) above, outcomes (often in a personal sense). For example, in Duncan's interview, he consistently links the presence of people (as motivation for involvement) to the ethos of the club (togetherness, etc.) to what he gets out of it (personal enjoyment, feeling of community, etc.).