"Neoliberalism and Community: A conceptual analysis of neoliberal austerity and its variegated impacts on community in Bristol".

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Stefan Zylinski
Supervisor: Oscar Berglund
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Abstract

This study is a conceptual analysis of neoliberalism, made up of a literature review on the one hand and a case study, document analysis and interviews on the other. On this basis, this study explores the variegated impacts of neoliberalism - as manifest in austerity - on community, situated in a case study of Bristol. The dynamics that emerge reveal differentiated impacts of neoliberal austerity on community; while many aspects of community have been eroded, particularly for deprived areas, for wealthy areas the gaps left by the retreating state can offer opportunities for some groups to provide in its absence. In exploring this topic, I examine first, the importance of community and how to foster it; second, the notions of neoliberalism and neoliberalisation; and finally, how these manifest through austerity to shape communities in Bristol. Rather then seeing neoliberalism as the source of all ills, this study analyses how it interplays with numerous other processes and factors to shape community; in doing so, I find a subtle but important contribution by neoliberalism in eroding many aspects of community, and with it, helping to create the rhetoric of the atomized individual.

Contents

Introduction

"They are casting their problems at society. And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first".
Margaret Thatcher[1]

The waxing and waning of community, in its protracted fight with individualism, has long been debated (Putnam, 2000). The latest stage of this saga, in the second half of the twentieth century, has seen many students and scholars of political economy capitulate to the attraction-in-hindsight of attributing all blame to neoliberalism (Venugopal, 2015; Anderson, 2000). This is too simple a conclusion.

Neoliberalism has been one of the most influential ideologies in recent history, and with its foremost figureheads – Margaret Thatcher – preaching the non-existence of society, it is an attractive leap of logic to see neoliberalism as responsible for the decline of community and corresponding rise of individualism (Flew, 2014). Yet, there are numerous factors that have contributed to such trends, from the rise of technologies and globalisation, to the decline of the traditional family structure and formalised religion (Putnam, 2000). Nonetheless, neoliberalism has played its part too, whether in attacks on trade unions and flexibilising labour markets, or spreading market logics and narratives throughout the socio-economy (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Milbourne & Cushman, 2012; Brown, 2016).

Most recently, neoliberalisation can be seen manifest in Britain in austerity, which has had deep and complex impacts (Peck, 2012). It is well-documented that as Britain has undergone sweeping cutbacks and reforms across the public sector and welfare state – losing vital services and facilities, from social and disability care, to parks and libraries – society has suffered deeply; from rapidly rising homelessness, the longest fall in real wages in recent history, and soaring poverty and deprivation, to housing and financial insecurity, millions resorting to food banks, and rapidly declining

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[1] Source: The Guardian, April 2013

mental and physical health outcomes (Allen & Elliot, July 2016; Coulter, 2016; Slay & Penny, 2013; Quaglio et al., 2013). Such impacts cannot be under-stated – they have seen the longest fall in living standards in Britain for nearly a century, and have contributed to huge increases in existing inequalities, the effects of which will persist for many years to come (Oxfam, September 2013; Standing, 2011; Beatty & Fothergill, 2016).

Yet, as such impacts continue to unfurl, there is another more subtle, variegated and deeply significant consequence of austerity; namely, that is to erode many aspects of community in Britain, expressed in this study in terms of social capital and community. This study explores how this has taken place through two key mechanisms; on the one hand, by eroding and removing those institutions and services – both public sector and third sector – that help to foster community by acting as a space for and facilitator of social capital, while on the other, by increasingly pushing citizens into financial and economic insecurity, mental and physical ill-health, and so causing them to retreat from community life into social isolation and loneliness (Kennet et al., 2015; Hastings et al., 2017; Unwin, April 2016; Beatty & Fothergill, 2016; Oxfam, September 2013; Slay & Penny, 2013). The dynamics that emerge reveal differentiated impacts of neoliberal austerity on community, serving to aggravate existing inequalities; while more deprived areas see many aspects of community eroded, in wealthier areas the gaps left by the retreating state can provide opportunities for some groups to provide in its absence (Jones et al., 2015; Kennet et al., 2015). In short, this is yet another way by which processes of neoliberalisation serve to aggravate existing inequalities, in this instance in community and social capital (Aalbers, 2008).

Neoliberalism does not bare sole responsibility for the decline of community and increasingly individualised and atomised society in modern Britain – this process has been emerging for a number of decades, and is the result of numerous interplaying factors. Yet, as processes of neoliberalisation increasingly extend and impose market-based logics and regulatory developments, particularly taking advantage of crises to do so, such processes, here manifest in austerity, have made a subtle but important contribution to eroding many aspects of community, and with it, to further create the rhetoric of the atomized individual (Brenner et al., 2010).

To explore the above dynamics, this study focuses on Bristol. Bristol is one of the wealthier – albeit highly unequal – cities in Britain, has been relatively insulated from the worst affects of austerity, and has a thriving voluntary and community sector (VCS) (Jones et al., 2015). While compared to other cities in the country Bristol may not reveal the full depths of harm caused by austerity, it is a useful case because if significant trends are found here, then it may serve as a lesson to show that such dynamics in cities more affected by austerity may be all the greater. As such, this study will be structured as follows. The next section will explore the methodology of this study, which includes a literature review on the one hand, and a case study, document analysis and series of interviews on the other. Chapter I will explore the notion of community, primarily expressed in social capital, how this can be fostered, and the broader trends in community. Chapter II will then turn to neoliberalism, the process of neoliberalisation and austerity. Chapter III will then explore how neoliberalisation manifests in urban austerity and the ways this impacts those factors that feed community, here focusing on the vital – albeit not exhaustive – factors of local government and the third sector, and their relationship with the citizenry. Finally, the conclusion will draw these arguments together and make suggestions on future research.

Methodology

(i) Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how the variegated affects of neoliberalism – as manifest in austerity – shape community. With this broader purpose in mind, the study first explores notions of community – primarily understood in terms of social capital – the importance of such concepts for human well-being, and their broader trends in recent years. The second chapter of this study explores the relationship between neoliberalism, neoliberalisation, and austerity. Finally, the third chapter examines how such processes have had variegated impacts on community in Bristol, seen through the mechanisms of local government, the third sector and their relationship with the citizenry. In sum, this study is a conceptual analysis of the variegated affects of neoliberalism on community in the specific context of Bristol, based on a theoretical literature review on the one hand, and the methods of a case study, document analysis and interviews on the other.

(ii) Research Methods

Epistemological Foundations:

This study is grounded in the epistemology (approach to knowledge) of constructivism, which understands that truth is subjective (Gray, 2013). In turn, it is built on the ontology (what constitutes reality) of interpretivism, which understands reality to be culturally and historically derived, as it is situated in people's interpretations of the world (Gray, 2013). As such, this paradigm frames how methodology, theory and methods are approached (and thus how knowledge itself is obtained), which typically in qualitative research (although not exclusively) is induction, a "model in which general principles are developed from specific observations" (Babbie, 2011: 21; Snape & Spencer 2003). In short, this is a qualitative study, and in this tradition it is about examination and interpretation for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships (Babbie, 2013).

Theoretical Literature Review:

This study is built on a literature review and conceptual analysis of a broad range of literatures, covering the topics described above. The use of a literature review here provides for a comprehensive study and interpretation of the theories and literatures

around the specified issues and phenomena, setting the scope of the investigation, providing a critical account of the topics in question and the relationships between theory and phenomena, integrating empirical evidence where appropriate, and offering the potential for new insights (Turner et al., 2018; Aveyard, 2010).

Necessarily, this method is conducted in a systematic manner, using rigorous methods to identify, appraise and synthesize relevant information, with a comprehensive searching strategy (Aveyard, 2010). Based on the research question and key concepts, I searched for and analysed the relevant literature on the topic (Aveyard, 2010), using – in essence – a snowball sampling technique as the basis to find further literature in this process, allowing me to dig into the body of knowledge on the subject (Babbie, 2013). Various sources were used as part of the search, including Google Scholar, government websites, newspapers, library catalogues, various data-bases (e.g. IBSS), conference literature, and the university library.

The nature of such a literature review is in part theoretical, and thus the aim is not to establish hard relationships of causality. However, as the literature demonstrates, many of the component parts and relationships explored within this study – for example, the importance of community and social relationships in fostering well-being, or the relationship between the voluntary sector and the state in supporting social capital – do have significant empirical evidence behind them. As such, although in part conceptual, the study has sought to link together varying processes and trends to tell a broader story.

Case Study:
The use of the case study method enables focused attention to be applied to a single instance of the social phenomena in question to produce explanatory depth and insights; here, it is the city of Bristol (Babbie, 2013). Such a process – unless as a comparative study – has by its nature limited potential for generalizability, as it is only a single instance of the phenomena (Babbie, 2013). Indeed, the choice of Bristol as a case has limitations. Bristol is quite a wealthy (albeit unequal) city, has been relatively insulated from the worst impacts of austerity relative to other urban areas, and has a rich and thriving community and voluntary sector; thus, perhaps it is not ideal to explore the full effects of austerity. Nonetheless, it is a useful case in that if

significant trends are found in Bristol, then it can serve as a lesson to show that such dynamics in cities more affected by austerity may be all the greater.

Document Analysis:

To delve deeper into the case of Bristol, I use the document analysis method. This method can include a wide range of sources, from official statistics and local government committee reports, to visual data, historical documents, and newspaper articles; together, they can reveal the aspirations and intentions of a period or place, the socio-politico-economic issues therein, the frames of meaning to wider context, and be used as a medium to understand the course of events (May, 2011). In this instance, this study will draw from sources that include Bristol City Council data and cabinet documentation, third sector reports, and newspaper articles, amongst others. There are potential problems here – from errors and inconsistencies, questions of credibility and distortion, and potential bias in the documents being selectively read (May, 2011). However, such threats of bias were reduced by being rigorous in my approach to data analysis – using a form of content analysis – where themes were derived and basic codes were developed to find meaning from the context of the textual data, with selected extracts then used as part of the broader analysis (Babbie, 2013).

Interviews:

The final method was a series of qualitative interviews. The interviews were with Bristol City councillors from various political parties. Local councillors operate in an important strategic space between communities on the one hand, and local government on the other, and so offer significant potential for insight in exploring the issues in question.

Qualitative interviews as a method of data collection provide the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of complex and dynamic social phenomena and processes (Babbie, 2013). In particular, using semi-structured interviews allows for a design that is flexible, iterative (coming closer to a clear model of phenomena with each round of information gathering and analysis), and continuous (redesigning questions throughout the project) (Babbie, 2013). As such, the interview process is essentially a conversation where the researcher establishes the general direction and

pursues a specific set of topics in depth, probing deeper where necessary (Babbie, 2013). Of course, one must be wary in the design and delivery of questions and of the risks of bias – for instance, it was important in question design to ensure that all items are clear, respondents were competent and willing to answer, questions were relevant to the respondents, that they were as short as possible with no negatives or biased terms, and that no question pushed the respondent to certain answers (Babbie, 2013). The interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes each, and covered a number of key topics and questions (Appendix 1). In addition, the process of conducting these interviews required a number of other stages.

a) Sampling: The sampling method for these interviews was non-probability, combining purposive and self-selection sampling. The population sampled from was the seventy local councillors of all political parties that make up Bristol City Council – this was the group that would be most useful to the purposes of the study (Babbie, 2013). I emailed each councillor directly through the Bristol City Council website (Your Mayor and Councillors, 2018), describing in brief the nature of the project and what their involvement would mean, and included those that self-selected to be involved (Babbie, 2013). In total, nine councillors chose to take part in the research. While it is faster and easier, the nature of such sampling methods is that there is significant risk of self-selection bias – participants may reflect and exaggerate specific traits or issues, for instance, if there is no clear balance between political parties – meaning the sample is not representative in that the distribution of the samples characteristics cannot be assumed to have the same views or experiences as the broader population (a greater risk with non-probability sampling generally); thus one cannot generalise absolutely from the findings (Babbie, 2013). Nonetheless, this remains a useful method to get a picture of the experiences of councillors in relation to the issues at hand (Babbie, 2013).

b) Ethics: For these interviews to take place, there were important ethics processes to go through, beginning with an application of ethical approval from the university (Appendix 4). For those involved in the interviews participation was voluntary, and after reading the provided information sheet (Appendix 2) informed consent was gained in that each participant chose to participate with full knowledge of the risks involved, confirming as such by signing the provided consent form (Appendix 3)

(Babbie, 2013). In accordance with standard academic data protection requirements, the interviews were conducted using a password-protected phone and all audio recordings were quickly transferred to a password-protected university server (Babbie, 2013). In turn, to ensure confidentiality, all audio recordings of interviews were transcribed into text with all identifying features removed (e.g. names, addresses, etc.) and replaced by ID numbers, with a password-protected ID file created that listed names and numbers and was stored separately to the transcripts and audio-files (Babbie, 2013).

c) Data Analysis: Based on the nine interviews, a thematic analysis was conducted on the data gathered. Although there is no clear framework, the key to such an analyses is to identify the key themes and patterns in the data, coding and categorising accordingly, and then summarising and inserting relevant segments into the broader text (Babbie, 2013). There are risks of bias here from the researcher, in that some themes could be over-emphasised or missed (Babbie, 2013). However, through a rigorous approach and careful analysis such risks were avoided, and in turn valuable insights were gained.

(iii) Reflections and Considerations

As a qualitative, conceptual analysis based on a literature review on the one hand, and a case study, document analysis and interviews on the other, the chosen methods were suitable as this study is primarily a preliminary exploration of the relationships and processes at play. While certain components and relationships within this study do have empirical support – meaning part of the work has primarily been to knit these aspects together – future research might use quantitative methods to explore specific relationships in greater depth, for instance, the relationship between state and third sector support and social capital, the relationship between austerity, social capital and isolation, or in comparing cases around the country.

In addition, it is important to note that while the sources or facilitators of social capital focused on in this study – local government and the VCS, and their relationship with the citizenry – are vital, they are not exhaustive. For example, local businesses can play an important role here too, although this too has a complex relationship with broader neoliberalisation and globalisation processes, amongst others (Unwin, April

2016). However, in this study I chose to focus primarily on those factors that provide services directly to communities, in turn helping to foster social capital, and which have been directly impacted by the fiscal retrenchment of the state through austerity (Kennet et al., 2015). Local business was impacted by austerity, in terms of business rates and falls in demand, but there is a qualitative difference in impacts here; thus, this is treated as an independent, external factor (Ruddick & Kollewe, February 2017). However, in future research, the contribution of local business to this debate would be important to address, as it plays a role in supporting social capital within communities.

I

The first part of this study explores the notion of community - primarily expressed in terms of social capital – and how it can be supported in the wake of the immense socio-economic changes seen in the last half-century.

(i) Community & Social Capital

The concept of community is difficult to define and elusive (Peters & Jackson, 2008; Means & Evans, 2012). For example, there are different notions of community, delineating varying sizes or levels; there are communities of place (locality) and interest (beliefs, interests, etc.), amongst others, and typically these different conceptions are linked temporarily, spatially, physically or psychologically (Smith, 2013; Peters & Jackson, 2008; Tannahill, 2014; Farahani, 2016). At its core, community is a relational concept (implying both similarity and difference); it builds on the crucial aspects of tolerance, reciprocity, and trust, constituting the networks that bind friends, family, neighbourhoods and civic society, providing a vital sense of belonging, sociability, support, information, and identity (Peters & Jackson, 2008; Tannahill, 2014; Smith, 2013; Monbiot, 2017; Wellman, 2005).

A useful in-road into understanding community – and in particular, community well-being – is the concept of social capital (Smith et al., 2002; Bagnall et al., 2017; Putnam, 2000). The literature on social capital is broad and rich, and while other approaches provide useful insights, for instance Bourdieu (class and inequality) and Coleman (social capital as a resource), this study primarily draws on the work of Putnam (Siisiainen, 2000; Martikke, 2017; Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988). For Putnam, social capital refers to the connections and bonds among individuals, families, friends, neighbours, the workplace, civic associations, and internet groups, and the networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust that arise from them; thus, it has both a private and public dimension, as individuals interacting for personal benefit creates broader externalities (Putnam, 2000; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Harper, 2001). Social capital provides the glue that holds society together – the social connections that constitute social capital are important for the rules of conduct they sustain, involving mutual obligations, networks of community engagement and frequent interaction amongst diverse peoples, in turn facilitating cooperation and trust

for mutual benefit, offering the potential to resolve collection action problems of government or market failure (Putnam, 2000; Ostrom, 2000; Ostrom & Ahn, 2007; Domenichini, 2007; Siegler, 2015; Keeley, 2007; Patel, 2016).

Social capital comes in many forms, sizes, and uses, and like other forms of capital – physical and human – social capital can be put to negative purposes (Putnam, 1993, 2000). While typically the affects can be positive for those within a group, they can be negative for those without, as social capital can foster dynamics of privilege, exclusion, or prejudice (e.g. gangs, etc.) (Putnam, 2000; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Keeley, 2007; Ostrom, 2000). In part, this reflects the fact that there are different forms of social capital, where the key distinction is between bridging (inclusive) and bonding social capital (exclusive). Bonding social capital – perhaps the more common form – helps to undergird specific reciprocity and mobilise solidarity (Putnam, 2000). For example, dense networks in ethnic enclaves provide crucial socio-psychological support for the less fortunate members of the group; by nature this form is inward looking, reinforcing exclusive identities and homogeneity, and potentially creating illiberal or intolerant effects (Putnam, 2000; Martikke, 2017; Nelson et al., 2003). In contrast, bridging social capital is better at generating linkages to external assets or social circles (e.g. for information, jobs, etc.), offering the potential to generate broader identities; this form tends to be more outward looking, encompassing broad groups of people across social cleavages (e.g. civil rights movements, youth service groups, etc.), stimulating a broad reciprocity and enhancing community cohesion (Putnam, 2000; Martikke, 2017; Nelson et al., 2003). However, the distinction here is imperfect, and many groups will contain elements of both forms (Putnam, 2000). The most salient point is that social networks are powerful assets for individuals and communities, and social capital is always better then its absence because connectedness and belonging generate numerous benefits (Martikke, 2017; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004).

Fundamentally, human beings are deeply social and altruistic animals, with unparalleled sensitivity to the needs of others, a peerless ability to create moral norms, and who require social connection like they need food and shelter (Monbiot, 2017; Parsfield et al., 2015). This is reflected across a broad range of disciplines, from psychology, to evolutionary biology, and in studies on human values too, where most

people prioritise intrinsic values (community, friendship, connectedness, etc.) over extrinsic values (status, power, wealth, etc.) (Monbiot, 2017; SDT, 2018; Maslow, 1943; Hawley & Cacioppo, 2010; Harari, 2011).

There is vast and growing evidence demonstrating the importance social capital and community. For example, social connections, relationships and civic participation are amongst the most robust correlates of subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction, and are crucial in supporting mental and physical health outcomes, and in creating socially sustainable communities (Delmelle et al., 2013; Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Giordano et al., 2012; Giordano & Lindstrom, 2010; Verhaeghe & Tampubolon, 2012; Peters & Jackson, 2008; Aiden, 2016; Nelson et al., 2003). At the same time, the antithesis of community – social isolation and loneliness – is deeply damaging; research shows that social isolation and loneliness can have severe impacts on both physical and mental health outcomes, generating strong risks of mental health issues, and magnifying socio-economic problems such as inner-city poverty (Aiden, 2016; Parsfield et al., 2015; Bristol Ageing Better, 2018; Monbiot, 2017).

More broadly, social capital and a strong sense of community, down to small acts of support and kindness, can increase feelings of safety and security, residential satisfaction, community identity, civic participation, and individual and community empowerment (Farahani, 2016; Anderson et al., 2015; Putnam, 1993; Nelson et al., 2003; Parsfield et al., 2015). Where social capital is high, there are innumerable benefits; from improvements in educational attainment, child welfare and development, reduced crime and drug use, increases in employability, and savings in health and welfare spending, to pushing governments to be more efficient, honest, less corrupt, and more responsive, and generating powerful effects on the efficiency of production processes (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Ostrom, 2000; Peters & Jackson, 2008; Putnam, 2000, 2001; Parsfield et al., 2015; Siisiainen, 2000).

The importance of social capital is such that it is now viewed as an essential compliment to physical and human capital, where none are sufficient on their own (Putnam, 1993; Ostrom, 2000; Harper, 2001; Savioli & Patuello, 2016). Like these other forms of capital, it can cause harm and is no guarantee of improving welfare alone, but social capital is a critical factor for affecting how physical and human

capital affects productivity and growth (Ostrom, 2000; Putnam, 1993; Akcomak, 2008; Blackshaw & Long, 2005). In short, social capital is one of the three pillars of sustainable economic development, along with human and physical capital (Siegler, 2015; Putnam, 1993). As such, social capital represents an important mechanism of support for society in the face of rapid socio-economic change.

(ii) Trends

For centuries scholars have prophesised the collapse of community in its longstanding war with individualism (Putnam, 2000). Most recently this debate has risen again with the work of Putnam. Putnam observed that since the 1970-80s (after the 1960s period of growth) the fabric of community in America has been unravelling; people have become increasingly isolated, tens of thousands of community organisations have closed, fewer people are members of or going to community meetings, local organisations, trade unions, or church, and fewer people know their neighbours, vote, or even spend time chatting with acquaintances (Putnam, 2000, 2001). Putnam recognised that this trend was not yet global, but he saw evidence that Britain and Europe might soon follow; over the last number of decades and in virtually all industrialised countries, participation in political parties, unions, and churches has fallen, electoral turnout has reduced dramatically, and in Britain such trends have been accompanied by a significant drop in generalised trust (Putnam, 2000, 2001). This is particularly prescient because in Britain and around the world, there is increasing evidence of an epidemic of loneliness and isolation taking place – a crisis of alienation, discontent and disempowerment affecting all generations (Monbiot, 2017; Worsely, April 2018; Hari, January 2018).

Some reject the comparison between Britain and America, stating that there has been no equivalent erosion of social capital; individuals are seen to regularly associate with one another and engagement in community affairs remains steady – although trust has fallen – and this is because of Britain's dense civic history of engagement and resilience, rooted in educational reform, a changing class structure, and the increasing role of the third sector in public service delivery (Hall, 1999; Harper, 2001). Yet, although the decline may not be as pronounced as in America, the weight of evidence suggests decline in Britain too. From the 1970-80s and accelerating since 2001 – where up until the 1970s these trends had been declining – the country has polarised

economically, become increasingly socially fragmented creating large geographical divisions in political disaffection, become increasingly political disengaged, and neighbourhoods have become far less mixed (Dorling et al., 2008; Carlisle et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2002). While generalised trust has fallen significantly over this period, participation in political parties, unions, the church and voter turnout have all fallen, and voluntary organisation membership and participation appears to be in long-term decline (Putnam, 2000, 2001; Richards & Heath, 2015; Patel, 2016; Grenier & Wright, 2003; Siegler, 2015). Most of all, such trends combine with data showing that ten per cent (2011-12) of people in Britain feel lonely all, most, or more then half of the time, twenty-seven per cent of people do not trust their neighbours, and seventy per cent would not know their neighbours names or recognise them in the street (Siegler, 2015; Legal & General, 2009). With each decade, Britain has become increasingly atomised and isolated, losing community life and seeing significant declines in social capital (Dorling et al., 2008; Brower, 2011; Easton, December 2008; Grenier & Wright, 2003; Unwin, April 2016; Patel, 2016). Indeed, with the onset of the 2007/8 financial crisis and accompanying austerity, the evidence suggests that the stock of social capital has declined yet further (Lindstrom & Giordano, 2015).

Although the declines witnessed in Britain are not as radical as that in America, the reality is that those activities that support communities and social capital are increasingly concentrated, exacerbating existing inequalities. For example, patterns of voluntary organisation participation, charitable giving and political engagement are increasingly concentrated in the middle to upper classes, and these socio-economic divisions are widening (Grenier & Wright, 2003; Richards & Heath, 2015). This is the result of the old working class institutions (e.g. mutual aid organisations, trade unions etc.,) that fostered greater equality and reciprocity having been weakened or eradicated through processes of de-industrialisation, while participation has instead been increasingly concentrated in various middle-upper class based groups, exemplifying unequal relations (Grenier & Wright, 2003). Such distributional issues are critical to understanding social capital in Britain, have gone unaccounted for by those like Hall, and while remaining deeply embedded, act as a significant drag on efforts to increase and broaden social capital (Grenier & Wright, 2003).

Such trends are the product of a complex array of socio-economic developments and pressures affecting Britain. There are numerous factors at play; from declines in the traditional family structure and people leading increasingly busy lives, to technologies that – despite their many benefits – drive people apart (the automobile, the double-edged sword of social media, entertainment and celebrity culture, and increasingly personalised and passive entertainment and leisure consumption) (Monbiot, 2017; Aiden, 2016; Putnam, 2000, 2001; Smith et al., 2002; Easton, December 2008). Likewise, processes of globalisation have weakened connections within communities, seen jobs increasingly outsourced, and that large corporate branches have replaced local shops, while rising mobility and urban sprawl mean people spend more time in the car or travelling (Dorling et al., 2008; Putnam, 2000; Monbiot, 2017; Easton, December 2008). At the same time, while the labour market has changed radically, with rising self-employment, part-time, insecure and low pay jobs, and the emergence of the gig economy, housing markets and urban spaces have changed significantly, seen in growing student populations, high levels of immigration, and declining housing security as modern housing markets are increasingly financialised (Unwin, April 2016; Carlisle et al., 2009; Easton, December 2008; Putnam, 2001; Monbiot, 2017). Many of these changes represent important innovations and opportunities – this should not be underplayed, and it is important to avoid any 1950s nostalgia – but at the same time, such changes have created significant pressures and challenges, part of which is expressed in declining community on the one hand, and the rise of individualism on the other (Carlisle et al., 2009; Putnam, 1995).

At once a part of and product of such trends, the very notion of community is changing. As societies urbanise and industrialise, a movement away from communities of place to those of interest has taken place, representing the rise of single-stranded, surf-by interactions, one-shot, special purpose, and self-oriented, replacing dense, multi-stranded bonds (Lyon & Driskell, 2011; Putnam, 2000). Large groups with local chapters, multiple objectives, and diverse constituencies are increasingly replaced by effervescent, single-purpose organisations; those grass-roots organisations that brought people face-to-face with their neighbours are being replaced by the rise of staff-led interest groups, moving from place-based social capital to function-based; and most of all, territory – once an inseparable part of community, forging local interests – is no longer a pre-requisite for social interactions

in the urban (Putnam, 2000; Farahani, 2016; Harper, 2001). There is no absolute dichotomy between communities of place and interest, as they interact and overlap in complex ways, but the old emphasis on community of place must be rebalanced in light of the emerging growth of communities of interest (Means & Evans, 2012; Farahani, 2016; Lyon & Driskell, 2011).

Technologies such as the Internet, social media and smartphones play an important role in this transformation, because they have seen that communities of interest increasingly operate online, moving inside private homes and away from public spaces; this reduces direct and face-to-face interactions between people, making community sparsely knit, specialised in role, varying in connection, and unbounded, with fewer ties to neighbourhoods, friends, or co-workers (Wellman, 2005; Bergland, 2015; Legal & General, 2009; Means & Evans, 2012). Perhaps such changing communities can act as a substitute, or help to facilitate social capital in some instances (e.g. online communities), but for some, they are only complimentary at best (Farahani, 2016; Martikke, 2017; Burns, 2012). This is because the advantage of place-based communities is that they provide an opportunity for everyday face-to-face interaction (strongly associated with positive well-being and mental health outcomes), emotional or material aid, resolution to local problems, and empowerment, with community organisations providing reasons for residents to meet and resolve problems, while online communities of interest cannot achieve this in the same way (Farahani, 2016; Bergland, 2015). All forms of interaction are not equal, but while notions of community are changing, any form of community is better then its absence (Wellman, 2005).

It's utopian to assume that if people were not online they would be engaging in a civic organisation or volunteering; rather, it seems the internet fills a hole in absence of other forms of participation and in response to the increasingly busy and stressful lives many people lead (Wellman, 2005; Lyon & Driskell, 2011). Nonetheless, insofar as the gradual transformation from locally embedded notions of community of place to technology enabled forms of community of interest represents a reduction in face-to-face and physical contact, then this has the potential to give rise to isolation and alienation. This is precisely what theories of community loss (via place) relate to; namely, a decline in social interaction and rising psychological alienation (Farahani,

2016). In this way, the trends described – from socio-economic pressures to changing communities – reinforce and reflect one another, and in turn contribute to the rising crisis of isolation and loneliness, social fragmentation and disempowerment, and individualism and atomization that countries such as Britain are facing (Monbiot, 2017; Unwin, April 2016; Aiden, 2016; Carlisle et al., 2009; Brower, 2011).

(iii) Fostering Community

In the wake of the immense socio-economic changes taking place, contributing to the decline of community in Britain and a rising crisis of isolation and loneliness, the antidote lies in supporting communities through fostering social capital (Unwin, April 2016; Martikke, 2017; Monbiot, 2017). In terms of how community or social capital is generated and supported, the interviews with local councillors from Bristol conducted as part of this study shed some light here. For example:

Participant 4: *"That sense of community and instinct is a basic human thing... That desire is universal, but the capacity for people to be able to do it might vary... I don't know if it needs fostering and supporting... I find its well-meaning people, whether voluntary sector or statutory, stepping in to try and support that – actually, what it can do is to smother and inhibit it... But there is something around enabling people to do that, and supporting the capacity of community to do this"*.

Participant 5: *"How do you form a community? It's an organic, evolving, precious thing that will come out of the community itself. It would be helped by those local activists who want to address certain issues, and help shape it, but there's a lesson from history – there's long-term movements and sudden shocks that makes stuff happen"*.

Participant 6: *"The council can't do it on its own if there isn't an existing sense there already. The council can help by providing assets, buildings, maintenance, staff, etc. But the community needs to provide boots on the ground, local support and time"*.

Participant 7: "*What the council and state needs to do is build institutions that develop the built environment, which can encourage the social environment to thrive*".

Participant 9: *"Local government does have a responsibility to foster a sense of community between people, but not alone – the third sector, and faith sector play a big role... I do see role for the council, or state, in all of that – but it only works if you've got people in those communities who want it to happen. You need advocates from those communities to make it work".*

The above extracts illustrate the challenging and complex nature of supporting and fostering strong communities and social capital; not only are the historical roots of civic community often deep and can take time to develop, and that social capital is elusive and highly context specific, but that it can erode if it goes without use or investment, or be smothered by poorly executed policy (Ostrom, 2000; Monbiot, 2017; Unwin, April 2016; Patel, 2016; Putnam, 1993). Nonetheless, while around the world civic life is blooming, the above extracts also highlight that there are a number of sources, interacting in complex ways, that serve to generate or facilitate social capital: local government, the third sector, and the citizenry (Unwin, April 2016; Monbiot, 2017).

The state, through carefully constructed policy and its various institutions that serve the city can be an important source of social capital (Putnam, 1993; Monbiot, 2017; Unwin, April 2016). Whether its democratic political institutions increasing trust, or government institutions facilitating the resolution of collective actions problems, there is a wide variety of national and local government policies – playing important, complementary roles – that can influence the level of social capital available to individuals and communities (Ljunge, 2013; McCulloch et al., 2012; Ostrom, 2000; Putnam, 2000). It is necessary that any such action sees decision-making devolved to the local scale, providing real decision-making power and resources to the community; this empowerment can enable local people to identify and resolve local problems within their communities, in turn strengthening community identity and the potential for development (Tannahill, 2014; Putnam, 2001; Delaney & Keaney, 2006). Likewise, investing in broader networks of local democratic engagement can help to support community resilience and empowerment in response to shocks, particularly for deprived areas that otherwise rely on fundraising and volunteers (Henderson et al., 2018). In particular, many of the most effective efforts involve building community resilience and participation by addressing issues in poor transport, neighbourhood

environments, local services, community infrastructure (cultural groups, community centres, etc.) and access to facilities, as well as broader socio-economic problems whether in income or employment (Bristol City Council, 2010; Griffiths, 2017). This is because the provision of services by local government – from support for vulnerable groups, to parks and community centres – provide spaces and opportunities for the facilitation and support of social capital and community (Hastings et al., 2017; Young Foundation, 2012).

The VCS is increasingly important for local democratic action, sustainable development, the provision of services, and creating opportunities for community leadership and decision-making, which – contributing to place, providing space for social interaction, and bringing people together for common purpose – all act as important generators of social capital (Henderson et al., 2018; Parsfield et al., 2015). For example, through targeted, community-led interventions – from co-produced social groups for single mothers to reduce isolation and low well-being, and digital social prescribing tools to combat social isolation, to peer-to-peer youth training schemes for car mechanics, and inter-cultural cooking competitions – significant successes can be achieved (Parsfield et al., 2015). Research shows that supporting such interventions to build and strengthen networks of social relationships will generate numerous benefits, from improvements in participant well-being, reducing isolation and loneliness, increasing employment, education and training, increasing rates of volunteering and civic participation, increasing empowerment, reducing health costs and reliance on welfare benefits, providing means to collectively tackle problems, and creating an equitable distribution of power and democracy (Parsfield et al., 2015). However, it is very important, whatever the form of organisation, that such third sector efforts, particularly in deprived areas, have formalised and systematic support (Grenier & Wright, 2003; Putnam, 2001). The process of supporting the VCS comes in many forms, and is unpredictable, locally specific, and non-linear, but through a strategic approach to develop deliberative, intelligent and participatory engagement within communities, significant success can be gained, and it can be highly cost effective to do so (Parsfield et al., 2015). For example, studies (e.g. Lambeth, London) show that supporting civic renewal and community in generating a thick participatory culture costs around £400,000 for fifty-thousand people (approximately 0.1% of local spending), and those costs will pay for themselves many

times over, as participation boosts the protective factors for those suffering from severe and multiple deprivation, manifest in numerous ways from reductions in health and social care costs, curing isolation and falling crime, to reducing exclusion, reinforcing altruistic nature, creating more vibrant neighbourhoods, and improving quality of life (Monbiot, 2017; Delaney & Keaney, 2006). Once ten to fifteen per cent of local residents engage regularly – typically after around three years - a tipping point is reached where community begins to solidify, new activities and enterprises flourish, participation is normal, and jobs are increasingly generated locally (Monbiot, 2017). While it may take investment from a local council or government, such examples demonstrate that supporting community-led action and initiatives can have numerous benefits that play an important contributory part in generating social capital.

The ability of the citizenry to support the generation of social capital is dependent on internal capacity, external forces and mechanisms of support from local government and the third sector. In many deprived areas, a lack of resources and capacity may undermine efforts at community action, and financial strain may reduce every-day reciprocity (McCulloch et al., 2012; Unwin, April 2016). While a wealthy area may have a civic core that is constituted of resource and time rich individuals who can run and fund voluntary services, in deprived areas – where the need is greatest – there may be a distinct lack of the resources, time and capacity, which threatens to tip an already deprived areas into deeper problems (Hastings et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2015). Like other forms of capital, social capital reflects wider patterns of inequality to that extent that racial and class inequalities in access to social capital may be as great as those in relation to financial and human capital, as the quantity of social capital may depend on access to other forms of capital (Putnam, 1993; Martikke, 2017; Blackshaw & Long, 2005; Fine, 2007; Bourdieu, 1986). The challenge for such deprived areas is that many of the problems they face (chronic poverty, deprivation, etc.) cannot be solved by such communities on their own, as they are likely the product of external economic forces outside community control (McCulloch et al., 2012). Yet, it is particularly in those urban areas where people may be too busy to interact and where deprivation is great, breeding loneliness, isolation, and despair, that fostering social capital is as fundamental as the financial and human capital base of any successful urban area (Unwin, April 2016; NEF, 2013; Tannahill, 2014; McCulloch et al., 2012).

As such, while grassroots voluntary organisations can play an important role in supporting community cohesion, the scale of the challenges in deprived areas means that engagement and participation – the generation of social capital – is more likely to successfully occur with core funded and professionally organised services, consistent state support, and an organised political response (Means & Evans, 2012; Lindsey, 2012; McCulloch et al., 2012; Putnam, 1993; Siisiainen, 2000; Richards & Heath, 2015). As such, government or charity support is required to enable communities to develop and flourish, particularly those that are deprived, not just in supporting social capital, but in human and physical capital too – the three forms of capital are complimentary, and if they are not supported together then community development will falter or halt.

II

This section of the study will explore the ideology of neoliberalism and the process of neoliberalisation, with the purpose of understanding how they fit into the broader narrative in regards to community and individualism charted so far.

(i) Neoliberalism

The term 'neoliberalism' is more often then not poorly defined and perplexing, variously describing everything from Bollywood films to global economic hegemony; yet, no one identifies as neoliberal anymore, and it is a term used almost exclusively by its critics (Venugopal, 2015; Flew, 2014; Anderson, 2000; Chang, 2003; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Dean, 2014). Nonetheless, the term neoliberalism denotes a phenomenon, born in the twentieth century, of deep significance.

The term 'neoliberalism' denotes an ideology that first emerged in the 1930-40s as a transnational, dissenting movement and deliberate reconstitution of economic liberalism – where Hayek, Friedman and others built on Austrian, Ordo, and Chicago forms of liberalism - predicated in opposition to the Keynesian paradigm (Brenner et al., 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Flew, 2014; Kotz, 2002). After WWII, neoliberal ideas took root in and were disseminated – accelerating its spread and imposition - by various sources on both sides of the Atlantic, including leading universities (e.g. Chicago), think tanks (e.g. IEA), military agencies, academic communities, free trade regulatory zones, and international financial institutions (e.g. WTO, IMF, etc.) (Brenner et al., 2010; John, 2012; Hall, 1993; Flew, 2014). By the 1970s, there was an broad body of ideas, politicians to articulate them (e.g. Thatcher, Reagan, etc.), and numerous centres of persuasion backed by large corporations and banks, all promoting neoliberal ideas in America and across Western Europe (Stedman Jones, 2014; Kotz, 2002; Flew, 2014; Sloman & Wride, 2009). Yet, given its multiple sources, even at birth neoliberalism was a networked hybrid, unevenly developed ideological form (Brenner et al., 2010).

It is an important recurring theme that economic crisis brought neoliberalism to ascendency. In Britain, the economic crisis of the 1970s, felt in a protracted spell of stagflation that put severe pressure on the fixed exchange system of Bretton Woods

soon causing its collapse, saw the Conservative Party led by Thatcher sweep to victory in 1979; this was the political embodiment of the intellectual counter-revolution against the Keynesian paradigm (Prasad, 2006; Sabatier, 1993; Cambell, 2002; Brenner et al., 2010; Hall, 1993; Gamble, 2014). This crisis was an expression of the process of globalisation (Whiteside, 2000; Schmidt, 2002). Globalisation was not a new phenomena, but from the 1970s (and particularly the 1990s), a new form had emerged; it was characterised by the rise of multi-national corporations, transnational capital increasingly divorced from states operating as a new mode of accumulation, the integration of global production lines and financial systems, and the changing of the nature of the nation state, and it produced more intensive and extensive relationships, moved faster, deeper, and farther, creating greater interdependence, competition, and integration at more points of intersection across the world (Robinson, 2012; Keohane & Nye, 2000; Kotz 2002; Ampuja, 2015).

There is an important symbiotic relationship operating between neoliberalism and globalisation – globalisation has and continues to provide the real-world justification for the narrative of neoliberalism, which in turn, through its various policy regimes, propels the process of globalisation further forward (Kotz 2002; Ampuja, 2015; Peck & Tickell, 2002; Schmidt, 2002; Marsh et al., 2006; Gamble, 2014). This has produced an enormous range of policy and reform - from pro-market regulations, reduced social welfare, tighter budgets, targeted low inflation, floating exchange rates, and the removal of capital controls, to efforts to liberalise financial markets and flexibilise labour markets, privatisation, marketization and the commodification of the public sphere, and the unleashing of financialisation processes and the dissemination of financial logics to all spheres of socio-economy (Schmidt, 2002; Marsh et al., 2006; Gamble, 2014; Jessop, 2009; Kotz, 2002; Brown, 2015; Aalbers, 2008; Weber, 2010; Pike & Pollard, 2010).

Many see hegemony and convergence in such processes (Gamble, 2014; Venugopal, 2015; Flew, 2014). Yet, even if neoliberalism is to some extent loosely, intellectually tied to neo-classical economics and a utopian vision of market rule and competitive individualism, there are numerous sources and forms, contradictory elements, and varying transnational developments and mutations, which together are irreducible to a

single coherent ideology, set of ideas or policy prescriptions (Dean, 2014; Birch & Mykhnenko, 2009; Venugopal, 2015; Plehwe et al., 2005; Theodore et al., 2011).

(ii) Neoliberiberalisation

The primary theme that unites neoliberalism is that its processes and policies are all market-centric regulatory restructuring, projects or processes (Brenner et al., 2010). Beyond this tendency, while it is tempting to impose in hindsight a simplified model of global domination, such an account would be false – there is no convergent, hegemonic system. Rather, there are dynamic, inconsistent, mutating, contradictory and adaptable varieties of neoliberalism, which are historically specific, and intersect differently in countries, regimes and contexts all over the world (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2009; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Theodore et al., 2011; Brown, 2015, 2016). As such, neoliberalism should be conceived as a process, rather then an order – as a process of neoliberalisation, not a doctrine of neoliberalism (Theodore et al., 2011).

At its heart, neoliberalisation is a contradictory, contingent and path-dependent process of state authorised market transformation and restructuring (Peck & Theodore, 2012; Pinson & Journel, 2016). Ever since it first emerged in the 1970s, the operation and trajectory of neoliberalisation has been discontinuous, uneven, lurching, and contradictory, littered with serial policy failures, crises, adaptations, and counter-movements, utilising opportunistic moments or dramatic ruptures to reconstitute state-economy relations (Brenner et al., 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Dean, 2014). In particular, because the economic tenets and practises interact, exploit, transform and reproduce inherited and uneven geo-institutional landscapes, national-political concerns and constellations of power, this process has produced geographically specific, variegated, hybrid and regional political economies, developing along non-convergent path dependencies, representing distinctive yet interconnected forms (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2009; Peck & Theodore, 2007; Theodore et al., 2011). This variegation of neoliberalisation processes has produced constitutively uneven, but transformative shifts in the qualitative form of regulatory uneven development, and particularly since the 1990s – representing a progressive deepening of the process - has seen that the very rules of policy development that govern processes of regulation and policy transfer, are increasingly re-cast to favour market-oriented reform (e.g. WTO, IMF, etc.), locking in and enhancing capital mobility and extending processes

of commodification and marketization (Brenner et al., 2010). In that respect, what unites this complex and nuanced process is that in all contexts neoliberalisation denotes the "politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification (Brenner et al., 2010: 184).

At once expressing the contradictory, multi-scalar nature of neoliberalisation and it's market-centric core, while in rhetoric it is anti-statist, neoliberalisation proves adept at using state power in the pursuit of spreading new forms of market led regulatory restructuring (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The powers and institutions of the state are appropriated to place market verification – extending market metrics and practises, market values and economic decision-making – at the heart of all socio-economic processes and relations, so that they are framed, valued and measured by economic terms ('economization'), not just radically transforming regulatory approaches, governance, the meaning of public-private relations, and market state-relations, but all institutions and social-cultural action, individuals and society too (Dean et al., 2016; Wacquant, 2012; Brown, 2005, 2015, 2016). The state is re-engineered as the core agency setting rules, fabricating subjectivities, social relations, and realising markets; the market and economy require intervention and orchestration, yet the market is the organising principle of all state-economy activities (Brown, 2005; Wacquant, 2012). This process can be seen across scales, in cities and local government, the third sector and the citizenry.

The urban space has been a strategic site of neoliberalisation. Acting as crucial space for economic growth, innovation, processes of financialisation, and the absorption of capital surpluses, cities have been the centre of successive waves of neoliberalisation (Theodore et al., 2011; Harvey, 2012). First, during the 1980s the urban was the key arena for neoliberal 'roll-back' strategies, involving the dismantling of the institutional foundations of the Keynesian post-war settlement and social assistance programs, assaults on organised labour, the deregulation of state activities for markets and profits, the privatisation of public assets, and cutbacks in public spending (Kennet et al., 2015; Theodore et al., 2011; Peck & Tickell, 2002). From the 1990s, this was followed by neoliberal 'roll-out' strategies, which extended the reach of market discipline, competition and commodification, enhanced capital mobility, devolved governance and institutional experimentation, and constructed and consolidated

neoliberalised state forms (Kennet et al., 2015; Theodore et al., 2011; Peck & Tickell, 2002). On the one hand, this is the basic imperative of mobilising economic space as an arena for growth, commodification, and market discipline; on the other, conditions to promote competitiveness have been reconceptualised to include the social and ecological, amongst others; thus, the 1980s roll-back was superseded by new forms that seek to address the challenges and contradictions created by neoliberal crises and sustain accumulation, manifesting in efforts too to insulate powerful actors from endemic market failure (Theodore et al., 2011).

Processes of neoliberalisation have subtlety shaped the VCS too. Under New Labour, the VCS was actively promoted and supported by an enabling state; financial support increased significantly for the VCS and the sector grew substantially as a result (Alcock, 2010; Jones et al., 2015). This expansion manifested in rising VCS involvement in public service delivery, as government support switched away from grants to contracts; between 2000–15, income to contracts for services increased by approximately fifty per cent (from £10bn to £15bn), while grants fell by fifty per cent (£5bn to £2.5bn) (Jones et al., 2015; MacMillan, 2011; Landau, January 2013; UK Civil Society Almanac, 2018). While on its own this represents an increase in income from government to the sector, the partnership (since the 1990s) between the state and VCS has entailed the sector become increasingly organised through the operational mechanisms of procurement and performance, necessitating that voluntary and community organisations (VCO) are market responsive, are subject to rising competition and contestability in public service provision (as they compete with the private sector for contracts), and in turn are de-socialised and removed of all ethical or moral content and purpose (Carmel & Harlock, 2008; Milbourne & Cushman, 2012; Landau, January 2013). This process has changed the very meaning of the VCS, not only shifting responsibility for service delivery, but the associated risk of failure to the VCS, where a rising market culture and regulatory frameworks, increasingly large contracts, growing corporatisation of services, and reduced accountability, have restricted autonomy, innovation and the VCS advocacy dimension, representing the accelerated marketization of public services (Milbourne & Cushman, 2012).

At the same time, such processes shape the citizenry also. Through neoliberalisation, the state has embarked on a dramatic intensification of coercive, disciplinary forms of

intervention to impose market rule and to manage the results, contradictions and failures of marketization (Dukelow & Kennet, 2018; Theodore et al., 2011). This sees state intervention controlling and dominating individuals, shifting responsibility for socio-economic risks and uncertainty onto them, and using various mechanisms (e.g. workfare, debt, etc.) to discipline them (Lemke, 2001; Brown, 2005; Dukelow & Kennet, 2018). This is coercive commodification, and it serves to reproduce existing class, racial, and gender hierarchies, locking people into precarity and insecurity (Dukelow & Kennet, 2018). This process – emerging and developing unevenly – is amongst neoliberalism's most politically salient features, and through its subtle and implicit propagation of competitive individualism has played an important, contributory part in driving the trend toward social isolation taking the place around the world, weakening social bonds and make humans more disconnected then ever before (Brown, 2016; Brown, 2015; Theodore et al., 2011; Monbiot, 2017).

Across the described dimensions, neoliberalisation operates through trial and error experiments, often under conditions of crisis (Theodore et al., 2011). This is because neoliberalisation is a process riven with internally generated crises that are the very product of its cumulative waves of transformation and restructuring (Peck, 2012; Callinicos, 2012). This process has a remarkable capacity to capitalise on the very economic cycles and localised policy failures it helped to create, providing an opportunity for the intensification of neoliberalisation (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Kennet et al., 2015; Brenner et al., 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2012). As such, neoliberalisation repeatedly falls forwards through cumulative episodic moments of rebranding and institutional reinvention; policy-makers repeatedly lean into the crises they have created, nudging programmes forward on a non-linear pattern of evolution and creative regulatory destruction that remains contextually specific yet deeply driven by extra-local logics, networks, incentives, and constraints (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Most recently, neoliberalisation has manifested in Britain in the form of austerity, following the financial crisis of 2007/8. Even though it's widely recognised that the 2007/8 financial crisis had little to do with state spending – rather, the breadth and depth of financialisation processes - its effects are measured in terms of a fiscal crisis of the state (Peck, 2012; Callinicos, 2012; Tonkiss, 2013). Neoliberalism operates as an ideological frame, defining the politically tractable solution from which

mainstream remedies are sought in the service of precisely those interests – financial capital and corporate interests at the expense of labour - that caused the crisis (Peck, 2012; Callinicos, 2012; Berglund, 2017). In this way, austerity can be understood as an ideologically based crisis discourse that legitimises fiscal constraints and state retrenchment by portraying austerity as the necessary response to market conditions to restore budgetary integrity (to 'appease investor confidence') (Stanley, 2016; Konzelmann, 2014; Fuller, 2017; Peck, 2012). As such, it represents an acceleration of disciplinary neoliberalism through the coercive commodification of social policy, where to enable the re-inflation of financialised capital the logics of disciplinary neoliberalism have been further embedded into urban policy, governance and practise (Dukelow & Kennet, 2018). In short, British austerity is merely another example of neoliberalisation capitalising on financial crises as an opportunity for the intensification and renewal of market logics, forces and relations to produce more extensive and intensive commodification of space, the public sphere, and citizenry (Peck, 2010; Peck, 2012; Krugman, June 2012; Kennet et al., 2015). Such processes have had deeply significant impacts on communities in Britain – this is the subject of the next chapter.

III

As Chapter I has shown, social capital can be generated or facilitated by a number of sources, including; the government, the third sector, and their relationship with the citizenry (Unwin, April 2016). Yet, the processes explored in Chapter II – neoliberalisation manifest in urban austerity – can pose a significant, albeit variegated, threat to such sources, harming their capacity to support communities and facilitate the generation of social capital. This is the topic of the following analysis.

(i) Government

Neoliberalisation as manifest in urban austerity has seen that responsibility for fiscal retrenchment is devolved and offloaded, with the task of budget cutting, and the formulation of discursive neoliberal institutions and governance mechanisms handed from central government downwards to local authorities, actors, and agencies, where capacity to respond is uneven at best (Peck, 2012; Fuller, 2017; Hastings et al., 2017). This process creates a widening chasm between devolved responsibility and diminished urban capacity, generating a persistent state of competitive anxiety in the urban, while at the same time, strategies of localisation often worsen the regulatory problems they seek to resolve, causing economic stagnation, under employment, and creating further unpredictable mutations (Theodore et al., 2011; Peck, 2012). Downward budgetary pressures not only impacts 'poorly defended' areas of spending (e.g. programs for the poor, schooling and community facilities), but sets in motion a process of destructive creativity that cuts deep into the remnants of programs of social distribution and the welfare state in an already neoliberalised landscape, leading to further rounds of state and social action on neoliberal terms (Peck, 2012).

In Britain, this process is branded as part of a localism agenda – allied to the notion of the 'Big Society'; on the one hand, this sees cities pushed into the 'roll-out' of new institutions and policies, reproducing market rule in the context of an already neoliberalised landscape, while on the other, there is a direct challenge to the state (the 'roll-back') as bureaucracies are attacked, institutions dismantled, and rounds of privatisation initiated, and the public sector is portrayed as profligate and responsible for the recession (Kennet et al., 2015; Peck & Theodore, 2012; Featherstone et al., 2012). Urban austerity is experienced as part of a socially regressive dynamic of state-

led economic restructuring, aggressively intensifying the redistributive dynamics of neoliberalisation through the permanent retrenchment of the public sector, heavy reductions in spending, attempts to foster a pro-business climate, dismantling systems of social protection, shifting risk and responsibility to the public, and continued asset-price inflation (Green & Lavery, 2015; Hastings et al., 2017).

Since 2010, such processes manifest in unprecedented spending cuts to local government (Kennet et al., 2015; Patel, 2016). Between 2010-15, local authority income from central government has fallen by thirty-eight per cent, and by 2019/20 the central government grant to local authorities will have fallen by seventy-seven per cent, leaving twelve per cent of local authorities facing the risk of being unable to balance future budgets (LGA, December 2017; Kennet et al., 2015; Hastings et al., 2017; Patel, 2016; The Economist, January 2017). Such processes are deeply – and particularly – damaging for cities because they have a historic vulnerability to economic restructuring and speculative growth, are disproportionately reliant on public services and employment, have the highest concentrated social need and levels of economic marginalisation, have larger budgets, and are the lowest accountable scale where the books can in principle be balanced (Peck, 2012; Kennet et al., 2015; Hastings et al., 2017). It has meant that, while the demands on the state are heightened because the burden of austerity falls most on those who are most reliant on public services, the welfare state is no longer able to provide enough of a safety net or meet the needs of its citizens (Slay & Penny, 2013; Hastings et al., 2017). For example, many services across the country have been completely cut, while others have seen funding fall dramatically, causing dramatic reductions in access, and it is the poorest councils and urban areas (e.g. Liverpool, the North East) that suffer the most, and that were already the least well funded to begin with (LGA, December 2017; Fitzgerald & Lupton, 2015; Hastings et al., 2017; Jessop, 2015; Kennet et al., 2015; The Economist, January 2017).

In terms of Bristol, the city is the second richest per capita in Britain and is one of the most unequal, yet the experience of urban austerity is significant here too (Blackwood, May 2018; Jones et al., 2015). Although Bristol is in a better position then many councils (e.g. Northamptonshire has recently gone bankrupt) – and has been able to protect some vulnerable services, where many cannot – the city has still

seen £233mn in cuts since 2010 (with a budget deficit remaining of £108mn), and will lose the majority of its central government funding by 2020 (Ashcroft, February 2018; Kennet et al., 2015). The affects of this manifest widely; for example, from the city council losing a third of its staff, and significant reductions in funding for services including children's centres, homeless shelters, disability and adult social care, supported accommodation for mental health issues, and community transport services for the elderly, to Bristol's libraries being threatened with closure, cuts to the parks budget and the scrapping of Neighbourhood Partnerships, and community centres under threat (Turner, February 2010; Shanks, March 2017; Blackwood, May 2018; Presser, August 2016; Edwards, June 2018; BBC News, April 2018; Ryan, July 2017; Walker, July 2017; Ashcroft, November 2017; Watts, May 2018; Your Neighbourhood, December 2017; Mills, 2015). As across the country, because deprived citizens and communities rely upon these services the most, these cuts are in turn are disproportionately concentrated within such communities (Hastings et al., 2017; Featherstone et al., 2012).

Through its affects on local government, urban austerity impacts the strength of community in Bristol; the interviews conducted as part of this study provide valuable insights here, demonstrating the variegated impacts of austerity on social capital and community, and how this aggravates of existing inequalities. For example:

Participant 1: *"There's a divide where a wealthy community will flourish quite well under austerity because it can provide its own things if the council cant deliver something... But for a more deprived community I think austerity has exacerbated community problems... There are real stresses in there now because they don't have access to the social workers and stuff which absolutely need to be provided centrally and for order for them to flourish in terms of normal human relations".*

Participant 2: *"Austerity weakens the social glue".*

Participant 7: *"For more vulnerable people, it's more difficult to access services... and it's hard to get through to anyone to speak to them... For deprived areas, services tend to decline without the funding to get professionals to facilitate these things or offer support... There's only so much the state can do to foster social capital, but*

taking away things like libraries, community groups will certainly not help it. These things aren't going to build organically if you don't put the infrastructure in place for it to happen".

Participant 8: *"People are already feeling that they don't have a say… and it's because we don't have any structures to listen with. This increases frustration levels… I can see it very clearly for young people, and very clearly for old people in supported housing, where many of them in my ward are very isolated... Where they used to have residential wards - people checking on them - now if they're lucky if they can ring an alarm in an emergency. So they're very isolated… They used to have coffee mornings and bingo on Wednesdays, and all of these were coordinated by council staff, and now they get nothing".*

Participant 9: *"Its difficult – there aren't strong enough organisations that bring people together in more deprived communities, though some areas are better then others. So the concept of community has been allowed to erode… Some communities of interest have become stronger, e.g. via social media, but communities of geography I think have weakened. And I think austerity has had its impact here in a negative way on those communities".*

The above extracts indicate how urban austerity, working through local government cuts, has had variegated impacts on community in Bristol. Deprived areas experience reduced and eroded access to those services and institutions that previously helped to support communities and social capital in Bristol, leading to marginalisation and increased social isolation for vulnerable households or rapidly deteriorating neighbourhoods as low capacity leaves little room to provide an alternative (Hastings et al., 2017; Young Foundation, 2012). Yet, not only are wealthy areas more protected from cuts – economic, social and human capital are more easily insulated together – but collective community action designed to influence policy is more common and effective in advantaged areas, enabling better-off service users to come together and fill the gaps left by cut council services (e.g. local libraries), offering the potential to enhance, even if under stress, social capital within such areas (Hastings et al., 2017). In this way, the variegated impacts of urban austerity serve to exacerbate existing

inequalities in community and social capital, restricting access for deprived areas and offering greater opportunity to wealthy areas.

(*ii*) Third Sector

In Britain, the VCS – over 161,000 registered organisations, employing 800,000 people, and with a GVA of £11.8bn - covers a wide range of activities, from social services (child welfare, youth services, social care, etc.) to development activities (improving wellbeing, economic welfare, etc.) (Jones et al., 2015). While the VCS has gradually neoliberalised since the 1990s as its role in public service provision has increased, the sector retains a crucial, interdependent relationship with the state, where the state provides the vital supportive framework and finance for its activity (Hall, 1999; Harper, 2001; Jones et al., 2015). Yet, with the advent of austerity the VCS has been severely effected (Alcock, 2010; Kennet et al., 2015).

Urban austerity represents a period of significant retrenchment for the VCS, having major implications for its shape, size, reach and future (Kennet et al., 2015). Since 2010, income and support from government has fallen year on year, following the general pattern of government spending; between 2010-12 funding to the VCS fell by nine per cent, charities have lost over £3.8bn in grants as the trend toward contracts for services increases, and this has been compounded by a recession-induced fall in charitable giving, where from 2010-12 public donations fell twenty per cent (Allcock-Tyler, February 2016; Jones et al., 2015; Kennet et al., 2015). Not only have the most deprived local authorities faced the greatest cuts in funding from central government, but in turn the VCS in these areas has suffered disproportionately, due to a higher dependence of the VCS in such areas on public funding, creating a higher probability of sector failure relative to wealthy areas (Jones et al., 2015; ACEVO, 2011; Hastings et al., 2012; McCulloch et al., 2012).

This process is framed in the rhetoric of the Big Society and localism, where the government expects the VCS to play a greater role in communities and service provision; yet, state support has dried up, while the emphasis on mechanisms of procurement, performance and market-logics for contracting requirements has renewed, and many organisations have been forced to close or reduce services, search for new revenue streams, or turn to volunteers and amateurs, an unsustainable fix as

volunteering levels have gradually declined in the long-term regardless of efforts by various governments (Milbourne & Cushman, 2012; Macmillan, 2011; Ferragina & Arrigoni, 2016; Rochester, 2018; UK Civil Society Almanac, 2016; Clayton et al., 2016). In reality, the rhetoric of communitarianism and social capital has been appropriated for political ends, serving only as window dressing for a reduction in the welfare state and to pass some of the burden of austerity to the VCS (Kennet et al., 2015; Monbiot, 2017; Harper, 2001; ACEVO, 2011; Slay & Penny, 2013). However, volunteering and community is not a substitute for effective government policy, rather a pre-requisite for it and in part a consequence of it, and any effort to reconcile this with neoliberal austerity will fall short (Parsfield et al., 2015; Ferragina & Arrigoni, 2016; Blackshaw & Long, 2005).

Bristol has a vibrant VCS sector with a rich history, yet between 2011-13 the city has seen a cumulative eleven per cent fall in VCS funding, with seventy-two per cent of organisations impacted since 2010, although this is quite low by national standards (Kennet et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2015). As a result, VCOs in Bristol have seen significant staff cuts, wage freezes, and increasing financial pressures as grants plummet – although Bristol is one of few councils to maintain a VCS grants budget, the new system, the Bristol Impact Fund, has last over fifty per cent of funding – and contracts for service provision become the primary means of government support (Jones et al., 2015). The interviews conducted with local Bristol councillors provide initial insight as to the variegated effects of such trends on the capacity of the VCS to support communities and foster social capital. First, they demonstrate the effects of the increasing neoliberalisation of the VCS and its contract culture, starting in the 1990s but renewed under austerity:

Participant 1: *"Now the voluntary sector is delivering massive contracts... The reality is there's not much difference between them and a private company in many ways"*.

Participant 3: *"Isn't it key, a whole part of local volunteers – they're passionate, they know what they want to do with their organization. If you basically say you can bid for this, but only if you meet our criteria we want, you risk alienating completely the people you need to keep engaging"*.

Participant 4: *"By taking away all of those grants, and issuing bigger contracts, with much stricter requirements and KPIs, which inevitably went to bigger and more business-like charities, not smaller community groups… There is a risk in that approach that you lose the real grassroots, ground up nature of community groups. You get more in terms of value for money, but sometimes the social value of having a number of smaller grants is better".*

Participant 6: *"The task of supporting communities is mostly being given to the third sector. There's a sense they're being asked to take on that role, but the rug is being pulled from under their feet at the same time".*

Participant 8: *"More and more the big national groups are getting the contracts, and we're losing the grassroots, hands-on organisations… Some of the third sector becoming more business-like is very important, in terms of say accountability. But I don't understand why we'd have a situation where we have third sector organisations competing against the private sector for council contracts… If they make profits it goes back to their shareholders, whereas a third sector organisation puts it back into the group they support and because they're a charity every penny stays within that group".*

Participant 9: *"I think the government would like the private sector to provide those services – and some of the Big Society rhetoric hides privatisation, and some charitable organisations are becoming like private sector organisations. There are problems with the contract culture – sometimes it can work and is effective… But the grant approach is important too… And charitable organisations are following the money".*

The above extracts highlight that while some of the changes in the VCS since the 1990s as a result of neoliberalisation have brought benefits – for example in efficiency-gains or accountability – at the same time, it has increasingly seen the loss of grassroots community organisations, a trend that has been particularly aggravated with austerity and the rapid decline of VCS grants; all forms of VCOs help to support social capital, whatever their activity, but such grassroots organisations are perhaps the most effective in this task, and are those that are suffering the most in response to

the pressures of austerity (Allcock-Tyler, February 2016; Directory of Social Change, 2018; Hall, 1999; Harper, 2001).

The interviews also demonstrate the importance of state support for the VCS in the wake of austerity. For example:

Participant 5: *"I'm worried that the attitude of our council is that they're relying on them instead of formal council services. The rhetoric is about letting communities get on with it, but really it looks more like stopping council officers and support without public funding".*

Participant 7: *"Community action is facilitated by local authorities, and we are removing funding from that.*

Participant 8: *"There probably is a trend… away form public services for public good, and away from community development... People work hard to develop pockets of community, buts its hard work and not there naturally… There's a lot of people working to make community work, but without the public resources there, its incredibly difficult".*

At the same time, such affects of austerity on the third sector are variegated, serving to exacerbate existing inequalities:

Participant 1: *"The voluntary sector is weaker in more deprived areas. So for instance, you go to Clifton, you've got endless activities put on by healthy, retired people… they know how to do the governance, because they're ex-solicitors, etc. But you got to Filton, and you can't find governors for schools or trustees for youth organisations…"*

Participant 2: *"Localism can work, but only for those who already have high levels of social and cultural capital… There are some parts of the city where people do have capacity and knowledge… And then there are other parts of the city where we're desperately trying to find people to help, but far more demands are being made on them in all sorts of ways then someone in the wealthier parts of city…"*

Participant 7: "*In affluent areas, maybe they don't need government funding… But while the affluent areas get nicer or stay the same, deprived areas will get worse, which as well as having worse wages, jobs, houses, etc., they're also seeing their environment decline, and when they see that, they think that no one cares*".

Participant 9: "*In some areas that community doesn't exist. Going to the larger council estates, you will find community organisations, and sometimes quite strong. But if you go into the smaller ones, community centres and youth centres have closed, there's no obvious community organisation or activism there, no group of people there that is the community. A large number of smaller council estates in deprived areas have absolutely nothing at all – that third-sector infrastructure just doesn't touch it*".

As these extracts highlight, in absence of government support for the VCS, as urban areas are significantly damaged by the erosion of basic services, and as venues of civic life are disappearing (libraries, parks, etc.), the threat to community and social capital is great, precisely at a time when this mechanism of support is most important (Unwin, April 2016; Keeley, 2007; Parsfield et al., 2015). In turn, they also demonstrate the variegated impacts of austerity on the third sector; those VCOs in Bristol – as around the country – that serve the most deprived and vulnerable groups have borne the brunt of funding costs (e.g. young, old, refugees, disabled), and at a time when demands on VCS services is increasing dramatically (Jones et al., 2015; Blackwood, May 2018; Kennet et al., 2015). In part, this demonstrates the problems with the Big Society-localism agenda; little regard is given to the spatial unevenness of VCS funding, and the social challenges facing the sector in deprived areas, where reductions in services and facilities can create significant restrictions in access and isolation in vulnerable groups particularly (Jones et al., 2015; Hastings et al., 2017; Young Foundation, 2012). While deprived communities are disproportionately affected by the retrenchment in the third sector, they typically lack the capacity and resources to fill the gap; in contrast, not only are wealthier areas less affected to begin with, but because of their greater capacity and resources, citizens in such areas can come together to fill the gaps left by the third sector's absence, offering the potential to increase social capital within such areas (Hastings et al., 2017). Together, these

dynamics – in a VCS that is increasingly neoliberalised, austerity significantly reducing vital state support for the VCS, and doing so in a way that disproportionately harms deprived areas while offering opportunities to wealthy areas – means many aspects of VCS capacity to support communities and foster social capital in Bristol is at risk, highlighting in turn the vulnerability of the VCS in its interdependent relationship with the state (Jones et al., 2015).

(iii) Citizenry

Since 2010, Britain has undergone its deepest spending cuts since WWII (Oxfam, September 2013). This has had profound impacts on the citizens of Britain, with millions struggling to make ends meet – thus rising precarity and millions using food banks – in-work poverty overtaking out of work poverty, millions of public sector job losses, and the longest squeeze in living standards since the 1920s (Allen & Elliot, July 2016; Oxfam, September 2013; Oxfam, September 2013, b; Coulter, 2016; Slay & Penny, 2013). Life expectancy has stalled, mortality rates have jumped for the first time in half a century, rates of mental and physical ill-health have increased significantly, particularly amongst the most vulnerable, and the those suffering from homelessness have increased by one-third in the last five years (Quaglio et al., 2013; Jones, July 2017; Marsh, August 2017). While processes of neoliberalisation have, since the 1970s, aggravated trends of inequality, insecurity, declining trust and economic volatility, austerity has extended and deepened such movements, disproportionately affecting those that are the most deprived and disadvantaged, and thus that rely the most on public services, manifesting in a huge growth of economic insecurity, uncertainty, volatility, and stagnation (Konzelmann, 2014; Brown, 2015; Pike & Pollard, 2010; Standing, 2011; Beatty & Fothergill, 2016; Hastings et al., 2017; Gamble, 2014; Dore, 2008).

Between 2010-15, while Bristol remains one of the least deprived core cities in England, significant impacts of austerity can be witnessed; relative deprivation has increased by two per cent (to sixteen per cent) – with one-quarter of children and one-fifth of the elderly living in poverty – rates of unemployment and youth unemployment both rose (to nine and thirteen per cent respectively), and the city saw a cumulative fall of average spending power of -£117 per person, although this is much below the national average of -£214 per person (Mills, 2015; Kennet et al.,

2015). Such impacts have widened dynamics of inequality, imposing greater risk and more precarious futures on households, particularly those who are disadvantaged and more affected by benefit and service cuts (Kennet et al., 2015). The interviews conducted with local councillors provide some insight into the variegated affects of austerity on the citizenry and their capacity to engage in the community. For example:

Participant 1: *"The people who contact the council are from the wealthy areas, by and large, because they are the ones who know how to go online and get stuff done, and to lobby. My problem is engaging people in the poor areas, because far from being demanding, they go silent… If you've got a deprived community, they can quite often have fairly good social relationships within that community. But they don't have the potential to leverage help from outside, because they're all very similar in lacking capacity".*

Participant 2: *"Austerity has weakened community bonds… It's revealed the limits of capacity, and it's created a great deal of concern and anxiety… Living in uncertainty, contributes to bigger issues, in terms of people's well being, but also how we relate to each other – we may become more aggressive, intolerant and accusing others of taking away services from each other… and those are the kinds of things that happen when people feel they've been deprived, they look for someone to blame".*

Participant 5: *"There's a lot more worry out there; stress and mental health are clearly are related, and I sense more despair and disempowerment in communities then we used to have… I think people feel disengaged, and are worried about the future…"*

Participant 8: "*I think it fragments communities, and people stick to their own kind of person, and blame others for the unfairness… When no one has anything, everyone starts to think that other groups have got more then them and that can only get worse. And although we've not got much issue of hate crime in my area, we clearly do in others around Bristol, and I think when people are in poverty, they almost inevitably think other people are taking their housing, jobs, schools, whatever".*

Participant 9: *"We're seeing more people with mental health problems then we've seen in a long time. And I think that's the product of the anxiety created by austerity… There are also a lot of lonely people out there. In some communities bonds will be strong, in others maybe non-existent. I think this increase in poor mental health is a reflection of the breakdown of some of these societal things… And the trouble is some communities have been battered down so much, the stress and pressure makes it less likely for people to engage. There's real concern in some areas of violence bubbling under the surface – fears of rioting, social unrest... This blaming austerity on poor immigrants, refugees, not wealthy bankers – its very bizarre, but it does happen… This is in deprived communities, where deprivation and vulnerability is concentrated… It creates division between one deprived community and another, which is why we see this racial violence. As the poor get poorer, they tend to blame it on other poor people, and its easy if you're wealthy to be insulated from all this".*

The above extracts illustrate how austerity has had variegated impacts on the abilities of the citizenry to support the generation of social capital. While wealthy areas remain largely unaffected, there are clear connections in Bristol – as around the country – between deprivation, financial insecurity and economic risk, and negative mental and physical health outcomes, poor social relations and social isolation (Ballinger, November 2017; Labour Bristol, July 2018; Newitt, May 2015; Slay & Penny, 2013; Chen, January 2016; McGrath et al., 2015; Frank et al., 2014; Katikireddi et al., 2012; Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995; Fox & Chancey, 1998; Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 1998; Sverke et al., 2002). Not only are wealthy areas insulated from such affects while deprived areas suffer disproportionately, but such impacts are intimately related to issues of community and participation; as a result of deprivation, tensions increasingly manifest within and between deprived communities, reducing the capacity for even basic levels of everyday reciprocity (Unwin, April 2016; Ballinger, November 2017; Kennet et al., 2015). In turn, the relative insulation of the wealthy, starkly contrasting with the experience of the deprived, reinforces the increasingly unequal capabilities of different areas to engage within the community in absence of the state or third sector, reinforcing existing inequalities (Means & Evans, 2012). This heightens the importance of having core funded and professionally organised services, consistent state support, and an organised political response in deprived areas to re-build social capital – and indeed physical and human capital – for its vital health-protective

abilities in combating isolation and enhancing the resilience of communities in response to economic shocks (Mills, 2015; Kennet et al., 2015; Frank et al., 2014; Brown, 2005, 2016; Means & Evans, 2012; Lindsey, 2012; Siisiainen, 2000; Richards & Heath, 2015). In short, such patterns serve to illustrate the interdependent relationship between the citizenry and other sources of social capital, and in turn the variegated affects of neoliberal austerity in exacerbating existing inequalities within communities.

Conclusion

The last half-century has witnessed monumental changes that have altered the socio-economic fabric of Britain. From waves of technological innovation and globalisation, to transformations of family structures and the decline of formalised religion, such developments have opened up opportunities, and at the same time have created new challenges. Interacting with these processes has been the ideology of neoliberalism, which has had deep – albeit variegated – impacts, manifest most recently in British austerity. Together, this chaotic synthesis of processes has shaped the face of community in Britain; exacerbated and intensified by austerity since 2010, while many aspects of community have been eroded, particularly for deprived areas, the gaps left by the retreating state can offer opportunities for some groups to provide in its absence, typically in wealthier areas. Reflecting the contradictory, mutating, and variegated nature of neoliberisation itself, these emerging dynamics reveal the differentiated impacts of neoliberalism and austerity on community, aggravating and accentuating existing dynamics of inequality.

As this study has shown, such dynamics play out in Bristol in force; through the mechanisms of retrenchment in local government, the third sector and the services they provide, and rising isolation and financial insecurity in the citizenry, the capacity in Bristol to foster and facilitate social capital and community has been distorted – eroding for more deprived areas, while opening opportunities for the wealthy – precisely at a time when the vital support of social capital and community is most needed as a buffer against broader socio-economic challenges. Although the impacts here are significant, due to its relative wealth and a vibrant VCS, Bristol has been relatively insulated from the worst affects of austerity. Nonetheless, it should serve as an important lesson for other cities and urban areas around Britain: for those that have been worse affected by austerity – that is, those in more deprived parts of the country – the variegated impacts on social capital and community are likely to be even more harmful and extreme, extending existing inequalities further and compounding the deleterious impacts of harsher austerity. As such, this study also serves as a reminder of the importance of formal and systematic support for those activities, spaces and services that facilitate and support community and social capital, particularly for deprived areas. Social capital is – alongside human and physical capital – one of the

three complimentary and interlinked foundation stones of sustainable development; without investment, all forms of capital suffer, and society with it.

This study serves as a preliminary exploration of the mechanisms and variegated impacts by which austerity shapes community in Britain. To build on this work, there are numerous avenues for future research; from using quantitative methods to explore the causal mechanisms and relationships between the state and third sector in supporting community and social capital, and the affects of austerity and neoliberal reform in harming this capacity, to assessing the relative impacts of such processes across different urban areas and cities around Britain. Likewise, the role of local businesses in supporting community and social capital, and how this has been impacted by neoliberalism and austerity, is important here too. While this study did not explore the role of local business, instead focusing on local government and the third sector as providers of services, and their relationship with the citizenry, this factor does play an important, albeit qualitatively different role in supporting community and social capital too, and is thus an important topic for future research.

Contrary to the statements made by those like Thatcher, society does exist. Yet, as this study has shown, neoliberalism – while combining with numerous other factors, playing out through various mechanisms and impacting in variegated ways – has the capacity, like all ideologies, policy regimes and processes, to have deep impacts, shaping not only whole economies and the community, but the individual citizen too. It may not be the perfect manifestation of its ideological tenets, but through the processes and mechanisms charted in this study, neoliberalism makes a subtle but significant contribution to the evolution and growth of the atomized individual.

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