

Neighborhoods and social infrastructure: place, belonging and interactions (3)

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UK local government justification, critique, and resistance to the transfer of social infrastructure

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Methods and methodology

Discursive institutions

“When one is attentive to the unfolding of disputes, one sees that they are limited neither to direct expression of interests nor to an anarchic and endless confrontation between heterogenous worldviews clashing in a dialogue of the deaf. On the contrary, the way disputes develop when violence is avoided, brings to light powerful constraints in the search for well-founded arguments based on solid proofs, a search that thus manifests efforts towards convergence at the very heart of disagreement” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991], p. 13).

- CAT as a ‘deliberative institution’ ‘a ‘political-social order... that derives from a process of critique, debate and deliberation, and which is profoundly structured’ (Eulriet 2014, p. 417).
- ‘Orders of Worth’ (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006 [1991]) – local norms and values deployed to semantically justify and subordinate critique and resistance.

Findings: four 'orders of worth' – local values and norms driving CAT

'Market and bureaucratic norms of new land management that decouple assets from their social, service and care roles

'Civic / community' norms work in multiple ways to justify civil society engagement in CAT

'Self-government' norms are used to justify transfer to micro-institutions of the state

'Austerity' justifies the shift of assets from local authorities to civil society (community groups and micro-institutions of the state)

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Local norms and values

"...financial pressures [where] the Welsh Government budget is £1billion less [than in 2010-11] in a budget of £15billion [and] it's important we make the best use of all the resources we have" (Welsh Government Officer 2019).

"... the credit crunch we were starting to really hit the rocks; how could we save money? ...Between 2011-12 and 2019-20 the local authority saved £144.7 Million across its entire budget through a strategy of reducing costs, employing fewer people, putting more services online, sharing services with other councils, and the redesign of service delivery" (Nerton Council Officer 2019).

"...funding gap of a further £88 Million in the next five years... leading the Local Authority to radically rethink the way the Council works, how it spends money, how it works with partner organizations and with local people and communities" (Northwick Local Authority 2018).

- Austerity as a defensive position where alternatives to cost cutting are not considered and local authority officers fear of losing their jobs (Fuller 2017). .

‘Market and bureaucratic’ norms of new land management decouple assets from their social, care and service roles



'Market and bureaucratic' norms of new land management decouple assets from their social, care and service roles (1)

Local norms and values

- Develop a modern portfolio of assets that supports services but has lower running and maintenance costs,
 - Rationalization of the estate through disposal which can bring in capital receipts'
 - Collaborate with public sector and community partners to identify opportunities for property and service partnerships (Llandinas Local corporate asset management plan 2019).
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- '**Truth tests**' (Boltanski 2011 [2009]) where ritualized assertions help to reduce uncertainty and confirm the current order of things (Stones 2014).
 - 'Rendering technical' (Li 2007) value of the spaces becomes assessed on 'technical' land management issues

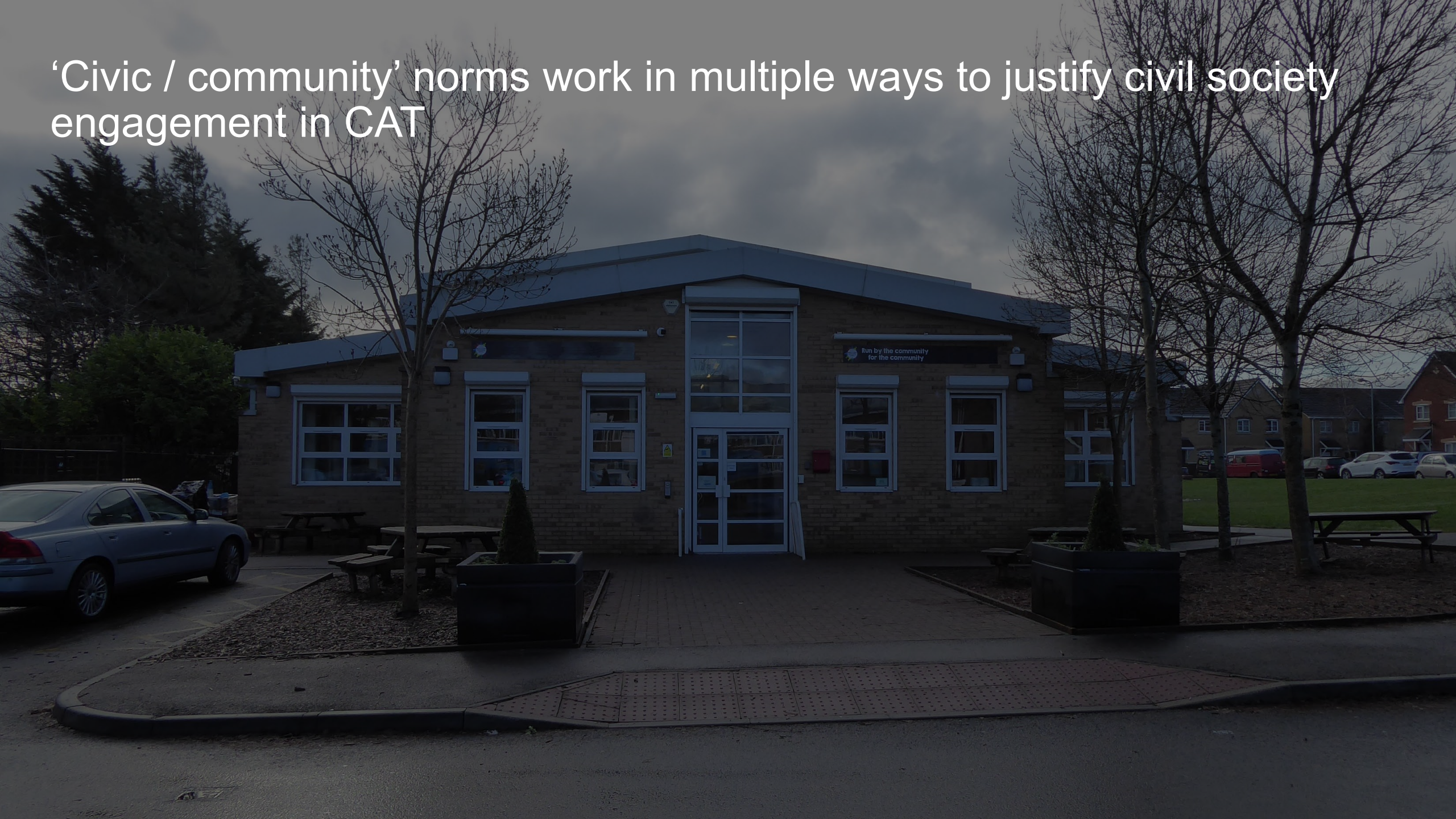
'Market and bureaucratic' norms of new land management decouple assets from their social, care and service roles (2)

Local norms and values

"...we had the debate internally, did we want a partnership agreement which is appended to the lease? you know saying that you must do this, and you must do that and whatever, and I think my position at that time was 'well, who's going to monitor that? because it ain't gonna be me'. ... I'm not going to sit there and sort of go through everybody's partnership agreement and put a tick or a cross on it every year about what they are doing and what they are not" (Northwick Local Authority Officer 2019).

- Healey (2022) refers to diversity of community activities from 'enriching associational life' by creating an infrastructure of social activities to engaging in social purpose beyond the individual to create projects to create a better future.
- Social infrastructure – through spaces of care - can offer respite in times of austerity (Cloke et al 2017).
- 'austerity afterlives' of community centres demonstrate care through momentary acts and political engagement (Turnbull 2023).

‘Civic / community’ norms work in multiple ways to justify civil society engagement in CAT



'Civic / community' norms work in multiple ways to justify civil society engagement in CAT (1)

Local norms and values

"...radical rethink about the way the [Local authority] works, how it spends money, how it works with partner organizations and with local people and communities" (Northwick Local Authority 2018).

"We want everyone to be involved in this transformation. We know we can do it, but only if we do it together" (Northwick Local Authority 2018, p. 3).

"...support our communities to support themselves, and each other" (Northwick Local Authority 2018, p. 3).

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'Civic / community' norms work in multiple ways to justify civil society engagement in CAT (2)

Discursive work of 'community'

Used to dismantle social contract

Shift in support for people from state to voluntary sector demonstrates rupture of Keynesian social contract (Milligan and Power 2010)

Incorporation of civil society

- Articulation of conservative turn to community (Blond 2010), liberal communitarianism (Etzioni 1998), co-option into austerity localism (Levitas 2012, Newman 2014).

Opportunity

- 'Reading for difference rather than dominance' (Gibson-graham 2006).

Enclosure versus openness

- 'Communities of place' - self-contained and exclusionary (Taylor 2011) or committed 'progressive open minded, tolerant, inclusive and outward looking culture of local action' (Healey 2022, p.2) & 'Communities of difference' (Young 1986).

To whom does community work fall?

- Community filling in the gaps in service provision for the elderly, children and community services (Hall 2020). This community work is often gendered, racialized and classed, so unequal (Fraser 2017, Hall 2020).

‘Self-government’ norms are used to justify transfer to micro-institutions of the state



'Self-government' norms are used to justify transfer to micro-institutions of the state (1)

Local norms and values

- Efficiency¹ “... now Parish Councils say, we've got the investment, we got the sinking fundings to invest, we can look after it better” (Local Authority Officer 2019).
- Accountability¹ “...locally run, locally controlled, non-profit distributing, inclusive and democratic” (Nerton Local Authority 2012c, p.2)
- Familiarity¹ “[Parish Councils] ...would say, 'it's our patch of land, you know, we are in touch with what residents want” (Nerton Local Authority Officer 2019).
- Convenience¹ “...an aspect we never explored, we never really went into the volunteer side... we didn't have time to sit down and say, 'that's a good idea', and we just had to get on with it” (Nerton Local Authority Officer 2019).
- Low risk “they are a public body like ourselves, they are accountable to their constituents ...they have to consult, like we do. So, in terms of risk, it's low' (Nerton Local Authority Officer 2019).

'Self-government' norms are used to justify transfer to micro-institutions of the state (2)

Local norms and values

"The vast majority, if not all of these community facilities are far busier and have a broader program of activity than when we ran them as a council" (Nerton Council officer 2019).

"initially, I have to say that I was probably a bit skeptical about where it was gonna go and what it was gonna do, em, I have to say I've been impressed with the amount of work that has gone in" (Llandindas Local Authority Officer).

"...you only need one to two people to drop off and you'll have to find other motivated people to take their place" (Llandindas Local Authority Officer 2019)

- Post-hoc legitimisation of CAT practice, but vulnerable – as a successful present may not translate to a secure future and changing circumstance where long term ability to run assets may disrupt this logic.

'Self-government' norms are used to justify transfer to micro-institutions of the state (3)

Local norms and values

“Parish Councils raise their money through a local tax precept on residents. The problem is that this is so much easier for the richer areas compared to the poorer areas. Areas with lots of high banded properties with low numbers on benefits have a big advantage over areas such as ours, which if not corrected leads to the highest levels of Council tax in the poorest areas” (Local Parish Councilor 2017, p.3).

Conclusions

*Empirical data shows how local norms and values mobilise CAT
Demonstrates the management and provision of these spaces of social infrastructure.*

Conceptually understanding CAT as part of fiscal retrenchment / shift in care AND YET opportunity for progressive practice?

CAT

Saves assets from closure

Social, care and service roles may be protected

Community may be attuned to challenges of being together

Draws on logics of self-government

Diolch am eich sylw / Thank you for your attention



Social Infrastructure beyond local government: Justification, critique, and resistance to the transfer of community assets in the UK

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