Developing a better understanding of community foundations in the UK’s localisms

Tobias Jung, Cass Business School; Jenny Harrow, Cass Business School; Susan Phillips, Carleton University

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Abstract
Recent UK policy emphases show growing attention to localism interconnected with philanthropy. This appears to offer significant opportunities for community foundations, geographically embedded multipurpose charities envisaged as combining various grant-making roles with community leadership. Using a theoretical framework derived from political geography, we explore and conceptualises how community foundations conceive and operationalise their community leadership role across the UK’s localism discourses; we find their strategies and approaches to be differentiated rather than shared. This challenges the understanding of ‘community foundations’ as a single model in its UK expression and questions their envisaged potential as collective pan-UK lead-players within localism policy.

Keywords: community foundation; philanthropy; localism; Big Society
Introduction

Localism and philanthropy, their interface and interaction, have become central tenets in public policy discourse across the constituent parts of the United Kingdom (e.g. Cabinet Office 2010a; Scottish Government 2008; Building Change Trust 2011; Pugalis 2011). This presents significant opportunities for, and expectations of, community foundations (e.g. Cabinet Office 2010a, 2011). These are geographically embedded philanthropic yet multi-purpose organisations held capable of combining grant-making with resource generation, donor services and community leadership. With their inherent focus on place, community foundations seem predestined to play a central role in localism and have been posited as central to rebalancing the relationship and interaction between state and civil society (e.g. Walkenhorst 2008).

On the surface, community foundations across the UK appear to recognise the opportunities of localism. Under the auspices of their UK membership and practice-quality accrediting body, the Community Foundation Network (CFN), they position themselves as both local drivers of innovation and pan-UK mobilisers and leaders of community philanthropy (e.g. CFN 2009). Similarly, within UK policy debates, community foundations are perceived as keepers of grantmaking management expertise, potential money magnets, and thus ‘as one of the most valuable tools in our armoury’ for achieving the vision of localism (Prashar 2010). How far such rhetoric on, and perceptions of, community foundations play out in practice is generally unclear (Carman 2001; Diaz and Shaw 2002; Graddy and Morgan 2006); from within the UK, the evidence-base is very limited. Alongside an entrepreneurship-focused single case study of one of Europe’s largest community foundations, the Community Foundation for Tyne & Wear and Northumberland, by McLean et al. (2012), the sole published academic study of UK community foundations by Daly (2008) indicates that they have displayed only isolated examples of community leadership, concentrating instead on donor development and future sustainability. In the absence of wider analysis, conceptual ambiguities surrounding community foundations and a predominantly US-focused and practice-centric discourse,
there is a need for a strengthened and more nuanced understanding of community foundations, their roles and characteristics.

In this paper we start to explore and conceptualise how community foundations conceive and operationalise the role of community leadership in the policy discourses on localism within the constituent parts of the UK. In the next section, we outline the community foundation concept and highlight some of its inherent tensions and challenges. Drawing on political geography, we then examine two central tenets of community foundations, ‘place’ and ‘place leadership’, and propose an exploratory lens that combines Agnew’s (2011) conceptualisations of ‘place’ with Mabey and Freeman’s (2010) categories of ‘place leadership’. Considering the different expressions of localism across the UK and community foundations’ leadership roles therein, we argue that our exploratory lens suggests the need for a more differentiated understanding of the community foundation idea, its leadership roles and potential; the portrayal and perception of community foundations as a singular, pan-UK collective for community philanthropy leadership (e.g. CFN 2009) needs to be seriously challenged.

The work forms part of a wider, continuing comparative study of community foundations in the UK and Canada. It draws on our review of academic and ‘grey’ literature on community foundations (reference removed for review), on analysis of primary documents (annual reports, websites, reports in the public domain), and on insights from semi-structured interviews with community foundation chief executives across the United Kingdom (n=13).

Community foundations

Community foundations originated in the US in 1914. The historical context of their development, their subsequent spread and growing international popularity, are well documented, predominantly from North American perspectives (e.g. Carman 2001; Carson 2003; Lowe 2004; Bernholz et al. 2005; Graddy and Morgan 2006; Sacks 2008; Hodgson et al. 2012). In essence, a community foundation is a multipurpose philanthropic organisation, operating in ways distinct from other philanthropic vehicles.
Combining five separate yet interrelated functions – resource development, financial stewardship, donor service, grantmaking and programme support, and community leadership – a community foundation has been defined as:

'an independent philanthropic organisation working in a specific geographic area which, over time, builds up a permanent collection of endowed funds contributed from many donors, provides services to those donors, and makes grants and undertakes community leadership activities to address a wide variety of current and long-term needs in its service area. The foundation is governed by a board of citizens broadly reflective of the community it serves' (Feurt 1999:25).

This multiplicity of underlying expectations, aspirations and roles presents unique challenges. As grantmaking and grant-seeking public charities deriving funds from multiple sources – individuals, governments, businesses and private foundations – community foundations must actively attend to the development and management of diverse networks, be keenly oriented to donor interests and services, and provide good stewardship of their resources (Graddy and Morgan 2006). Simultaneously, community foundations are envisaged to be 'community leaders' through combining financial means, such as grant making and matchmaking, with non-financial approaches, such as mobilising public attention, shaping policy discourse, being advocates for change, and building capacities (e.g. Easterling 2011). Pressures to add value to their community through leadership roles are growing: localism opportunities arise just when emerging loan-oriented social investment institutions may increasingly attract would-be community foundation donors. Consequently, making the requisite institutional adjustments to develop and expand these leadership and social change capacities and to balance them with endowment building and donor services are considered to be the greatest challenge to community foundations (Hamilton et al. 2004; Sacks 2005; Graddy and Morgan 2006; Daly 2008).
These practical challenges are accompanied by conceptual ambiguity: community foundations have been perceived as both model (e.g. Graddy and Morgan 2006; Wang et al. 2011) and movement (e.g. Sacks 2000; Carson 2002; Lowe 2004; Hodgson et al. 2012). The former is the original understanding of community foundations and provides an organisational blueprint that stresses functionalist and managerial characteristics associated with effective and efficient grantmaking and endowment building; the latter perspective developed as the model was transferred to and re-interpreted within non-US contexts and leans more towards values, vision, ‘giving voice’, and organisational fluidity across diverse contexts.

In the UK, community foundations were introduced in 1975. However, what community foundations are and what they could achieve remained poorly understood for some time (Leat 2006); they only ‘hit their stride’ during the 1990s (Feurt and Sacks ND). By the end of the 1990s, 50 community foundations existed and expansion has continued over the past decade. A significant difference of those created after 2000 is that most developed as grantmaker-managers for statutory funds, thereby being much more reliance on state flow-through funding than the original model of a community foundation envisaged (Daly 2008). A timeline of key events for UK community foundations is provided in Box 1.

**Box 1 here (diagram not available in draft)**

With combined endowments of over £309million (CFN 2012a) and annual grantmaking activities exceeding £52million (ibid.), the UK’s community foundations are major philanthropy players and among the largest grantmakers to the voluntary sector (Pharoah 2011). When mapping the distribution of community foundations across the UK, marked national difference are noticeable: Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales each have only a single quality accredited community foundation; the rest of them are unequally spread across different parts of England. Furthermore, the discourse on community foundations as an institutional form masks a huge diversity in size, age and activities across the UK’s community foundation, as will be outlined in our examination of
developments in the UK’s constituent parts.

**Community and place leadership**

Despite community leadership being advocated as a defining characteristic of community foundations, the literature on what constitutes their leadership role and how they foster it is sparse, generic, frequently messianic, and predominantly practice and non-UK based. The practice of community leadership is argued to have proven challenging (e.g. Easterling 2011), but with very limited academic work (see Graddy and Morgan 2006; Daly 2008; Graddy and Wang 2009; Wang et al. 2011), a strong research- and evidence-base is missing. Furthermore, a reflective, critical discourse on what counts as ‘community’, i.e. about the very core of the community foundation idea, is absent, with ‘community’ generally being referred to as a geographic space or place (e.g. Feurt 1999).

Political geography, however, highlights that place is a multifaceted notion, incorporating both physical and phenomenological conceptualisations (e.g. Relph 1976; Canter 1997; Agnew 2011). It can relate to ‘location’, a specific geographic setting and its relationship to other settings, to ‘locale’, the informal or institutional material contexts for social relations, or to ‘sense of place’, the subjective emotional association with a place (Agnew 2011). Place, therefore, is a complex relational endeavour made up of fuzzy fragments incorporating larger and smaller settings, systems, activities, and perspectives (Collinge and Gibney 2010a). This more interdependent and contextual understanding of place is receiving increased attention in the literature on place-based philanthropy (e.g. Glueckler and Ries 2012). While so far a broader articulation of this in relation to community foundations has been missing, it seems to offer a useful lens to understand community foundations, their activities and potential.

Within the literature on ‘place leadership’ various conceptualisations of the notion have been proposed (e.g. Sullivan 2007). Generally, though, the area is lacking theoretical coherence and integration, as well as empirical underpinnings (Mabey and Freeman 2010). Trying to order and map...
the diverse discourses on place leadership, Mabey and Freeman (2010) identify four interrelated, yet distinct, conceptual clusters: dialogic, constructivist, critical, and functionalist. The dialogic perspective rejects singular, objective and static conceptions of place or leadership. Leadership in its traditional sense is non-existent. Instead, the focus is on the act of ‘leading’, a multi-actor process with affective, unstable loyalties, that provides a partial, ill-defined, ongoing, ascribed and negotiated identity of leader. A similarly non-hierarchical perspective of leadership is taken within the constructivist approach. This perceives place leadership as a distributed and interdependent set of collective activities across a network of collaborators, jointly working towards a co-created and shared vision of the future. In the critical perspective of place leadership an emancipatory focus takes centre-stage. Leadership, communal or distributed, needs to channel diverse voices towards a context governed by principles of social justice. Finally, the functionalist perspective takes a mechanistic, skills-based approach around competencies and practices needed for successful community leadership (Mabey and Freeman 2010).

Taken together, the literatures on ‘place’ and ‘place leadership’ provide a useful exploratory lens for developing our understanding of community foundations as outlined in Box 2. Mapping notions of place on one axis, and notions of place leadership on the other, the spectrum covers the concrete assumptions about the nature and requirements of leadership within a functionalist perspective and the physical realities of ‘location’ at one end (i.e. mirroring the traditional assumptions of community foundations as model), to the abstract ideas associated with dialogic leadership of place and the subjective and complex notions of ‘sense of place’ at the other end (i.e. reflecting the more opaque characterisation of community foundations as movement). The boundaries between these categories are necessarily blurred and it seems useful to perceive the categories as additive and co-existent as one moves from the inside towards the outsides of the axes i.e. a community foundation leaning towards ‘dialogic’ place leadership and ‘sense of place’ might incorporate parts of the more concrete categories ‘location’ and ‘critical’, but not vice versa. To explore how the UK’s community foundations relate to this spectrum, the next section will describe the ‘localism’ contexts across the nation states of the UK and the characteristics of the community foundations therein. Thereafter, we map and discuss
Localism and community foundations across the UK

The implications of 'official' localism: community foundations and England's 'Big Society'

Localism has been part of official policy across the UK for the past decade or more (e.g. Pugalis 2011), gaining renewed prominence in England with the Westminster Coalition Government's 'Big Society' agenda. This promised a 'new era of people power at the centre of the new government' (Cabinet Office 2010a). Big Society policy components include 'empowering communities', 'encouraging people to take an active role within their communities' and 'transferring power from central to local government' (Cabinet Office 2010b). The focus on localism is interlinked with policy thinking on philanthropy. Thus, the Giving Green Paper (Cabinet Office 2010c) was presented as complementary to the Localism Bill for England, the latter setting out decentralisation opportunities, a new general power of competence for local authorities, and new neighbourhood roles in planning and public services (House of Commons Library 2011). The House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee's Big Society Inquiry retained the localism aspect of its interest 'in the wider theme of smaller government' (House of Commons 2011). Notwithstanding policy proclamations, Big Society-led approaches to policy and practice in localities appear increasingly undermined by governmental austerity measures and third sector funding shortfalls.

Within this context, however, the multiple roles ascribed to community foundations should make them well placed to respond to Big Society's localism-growing-philanthropy agenda. A the Merseyside Community Foundation (2010:2) publication noted:

'We are uniquely positioned to comment on the Big Society, being one of the largest funders of community activity in the area, and the fastest growing source of new philanthropic money' (see also Tyne and Wear and Northumberland 2010).
On the other hand, funding cuts and policy direction present major obstacles.

From within our limited sample of the diverse set of community foundations in England three themes emerge: a masking of diversity, a predominance of functionalist leadership, and a strong focus on geographic location. Throughout policy discourse, as well as in the public portrayal of community foundations by CFN, the inevitable imbalances and variations in size, age and activities frequently seem to go unacknowledged and appear somewhat masked. For example some English community foundations cover a whole county (e.g. Norfolk Community Foundation), while others focus, with lack of clarity, on parts of a city (e.g. London Community Foundation and East End Community Foundation both cover parts of London). Among the English CFN members in 2009/10, four had no endowments recorded at all, with the remainders’ endowments ranging from £1,000 to £13million. Similarly annual grantmaking ranged from £22,000 to over £4million (Pharoah 2011). Moreover, with CFN membership linked largely to its accreditation scheme, aimed at endorsing and encouraging what CFN perceives to be best practice across its network (CFN 2012b), it is possible at any time for small community foundations to exist outside the ambit of CFN and thus act as less visible local policy players. This gloss of non-existent uniformity is accompanied by what appears to be a very mechanistic understanding of community foundations’ leadership role and of ‘place’: the former seems linked to the Government’s austerity measures, driving the need to find independence through endowment maximisation, the latter to the increasing need to focus and levels of competition.

Policy suggestions and initiatives that imply overall institutional security for community foundations, such as accessing Government matched-funding initiatives for endowment building (e.g. the previous Government's 'Grassroots Endowment Challenge' or the current Government's 'Community First Fund'), obfuscate the challenges and limitations brought about by governmental spending cuts. Amongst our interviewees, there was a consensus that community foundations in England had been too reliant on government flow-through funding, expanding and contracting in line with government contracts. Not only did this present a lack of independence towards more strategic community grantmaking, but also meant that community leadership was predominantly aspirational: the key focus
for all English respondents, independent of resources and size, was endowment-building and developing more sustainable models of working. However, respondents had concerns about the extent to which this would be possible in light of various constraining factors, such as: community demographics; the intensity and strength of local business; the vitality and capacity of the rest of the voluntary sector; a lack, of wealthy individuals in their vicinity.

While within the complex English third sector tapestry, community foundations are unique institutions in localities, other geographically-based third sector organisations with local leadership roles may be overlapping or competing with them for philanthropic attention. The most evident of these are the Councils of Voluntary Service and Voluntary Action, many with older pedigrees than community foundations (e.g. Harrow 2010). Moreover, in Liverpool – where Merseyside Community Foundation operates – Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services (LVCS) co-created a Liverpool 'United Way' in 2008, becoming 'United Way Worldwide's national partner for the UK' (LVCS 2012). Also originating in the US, United Ways are geographically-based fundraising and fund-distributing charities with strong local identities (Barmann 2002). Traditionally, US distinctions between United Ways as communities' 'checking accounts' versus community foundations as 'savings accounts' were made (Ragey 2005). This, however, seems increasingly less relevant and clear in a UK context, with inter-institutional tensions as well as collaborations, as both claim a localism mandate. Additionally, there has been increasing cross-geographic competition. As one interviewee pointed out: the ‘top ten large national charities suck up all the funds’ and ‘big national programmes need to stop localised giving’.

Localism intertwined with nation building: community foundations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland

The remaining jurisdictions of the UK differ substantially from England: in the flavour of new localism (while Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all necessarily embody place-based policy, the Westminster Government's Big Society idea has minimal claim in these parts of the UK); in the importance of nation-building projects; and in a less dense network space, with only one community foundation for each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
Scotland

Scotland faces similar, if not more severe and complex, pressures and problems associated with decreasing public sector budgets to England. Sparsely populated by UK standards and with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita that has traditionally been behind that of the UK (Armstrong 2007; Scottish Government 2011) Scotland faces a broad set of socio-economic challenges, especially within remote and rural parts where little money and indigenous funding dominate the picture.

Whilst the ideas of community engagement and empowerment underlying Big Society visions have had longstanding relevance and acceptance by Scottish third sector organisations, some Scottish third sector leaders have been very critical, describing the Big Society as ‘a toxic brand’, ‘a con trick’ and ‘a cover for cuts’ (e.g. Sime 2011). Scottish politicians regard policy adoption of the Big Society as unnecessary (e.g. Swinson 2011), arguing that the Scottish Government, dealing with devolved issues since 1999, does not need the UK Government to provide the levers to deliver its own, prior, version of localism and community leadership. It is also argued, that the policy style emerging in Scotland is in any event more consensual and negotiated than elsewhere in the UK (Keating 2005), underpinned by values of social democracy and egalitarianism (McEwen 2002; Jung et al. 2010; Munoz 2011). This makes Big Society notions seem standard practice rather than aspirational. Examples of this range from Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), where public agencies work with the communities to design and deliver more appropriate and better services, to community-based approaches to land reforms and ownership, illustrated by the Scottish Land Fund (Scottish Land Fund 2012).

Unlike England, with its plethora of community foundations, the whole of Scotland is covered by the Scottish Community Foundation (SFC). Branding itself as ‘Scotland’s expert in charitable giving’, SCF’s vision and mission are ‘to be the leading philanthropy organisation in Scotland for stronger communities’ and ‘to inspire giving for Scotland’ (SCF 2012). Working across all 32 Scottish councils and on average distributing £3.5m per year, it points out that across Scotland only the Lottery and the
Scottish Government support more third sector organisations. According to SCF's latest published yearbook (SFC 2010a), its grants range from small one-off awards to large multi-annual contributions. Despite a traditional commitment to small-sized grants, the last few years have seen SCF moving towards longer and more strategic grantmaking as reflected in the setting-up of a dedicated fund aimed at supporting organisations that wish to reorganise or reposition themselves and merger activities (SCF 2010a).

Since its establishment in 1996, SCF has seen a massive shift in its resource basis. Originally, 80% of its grants were made on behalf of statutory bodies; as of 2010, 79% of its grants were made on behalf of private and corporate clients, the remainder coming from Lottery contributions and the public sector (SCF 2010b). Given recent volatility in the Scottish funding landscape, including reductions in corporate philanthropy, SCF has increasingly had to act as facilitator to provide third sector organisations with guidance on dealing with funders, especially in relation to the accountability requirements of Single Outcome Agreements. This shift is reflected in SCF’s self-perception and activities, both of which are geared predominantly to what Carson (2003) calls a donor-focused community foundation rather than a community-focused foundation: donor services and matchmaking dominate (e.g. SCF 2010a).

Thus, rather than being an innovator, active agent for change, or community leader in a traditional sense, the SCF perceives its key role as a facilitator of local people around local issues that can assess community needs and provide independent funding. The role of 'on the ground innovator' appears instead to be fulfilled by the Development Trusts Association Scotland (DTAS), the national body for community-based regeneration work (DTAS 2011), as well as the Scottish Funders’ Forum, a gathering of funders in Scotland who are committed to best practice and to maximise the impact of funding for the benefit of Scotland' (SFF 2011), and informal interest groups, such as the Scottish Grant Making Trust Group, a group of 34 independent grant makers that focus on learning and knowledge-exchange.
Wales

The case for distinctiveness of Welsh policymaking under devolution has been exemplified by a degree of 'clear red water' (Davies and Williams 2009), distinguishing Welsh social policy from that elsewhere in the UK. The directions and decisions of the Welsh Assembly in relation to its third sector policies bear out propositions for 'territorial policy communities' following the rescaling of government provided by devolution (Keating et al. 2009). Big Society policymaking has received short shrift. Policymakers have referred to it as 'a scam' (Smith 2011) and emphasise its English-centricity: '[C]ommunity engagement has and will continue to be a priority in Wales. We do not need to reinvent it as “the Big Society” or “localism”' (Bourne 2011). This was endorsed by Hansard Society (2011) research. This reported Welsh people more likely than citizens in any other UK nation to get involved in local projects, categorising 29% of people in Wales as 'willing localists'. It is in this context that the development and direction of the Community Foundation in Wales (CfWW) needs to be considered.

CfWW describes itself as 'an independent charity, established to provide a permanent source of funding for community-based projects the length and breadth of Wales' (CfWW 2008). A decade old, CfWW was created out of the defunct Powys Community Foundation and the struggling South East Wales Community Foundation. It operates within a business growth model focused on efficiency (WAG 2011). Its role as a key element of the infrastructure of the third sector in Wales is signalled by governmental infrastructure support for CfWW at an average of £62,000 from the Welsh Assembly's Third Sector Infrastructure Fund (WAG 2011). Importantly, CfWW is not an agent for flow-through statutory funding. With grants funded from donations from individuals, families, businesses, other charitable trusts, and by income from endowment funds, CfWW (2008:2) emphasises that 'uniquely amongst UK community foundations, we don't currently distribute any government or local authority grants programmes, our grants are funded from private sources, many of which we introduce from outside Wales'. Its key role 'in the funding mix' is that of an 'independent cause-neutral flexible funder' (CfWW 2008). Its mission - 'to strengthen and enrich local communities across Wales, by inspiring and managing philanthropy' - offers a resources rather than leadership focus. Whilst leadership does appear in its values statement, it appears latterly in a formidable list: 'knowledge, pro-active,
innovative, creative, inclusive, professional, advocating, leading, collaborating, inspirational, sustainable and graceful' (CfiW 2011).

In early 2011, a major Fund for Wales initiative began. With the strap line that 'whether it's £1 or £100,000 anyone can be a philanthropist and show a little love for Wales' (Fund for Wales 2012), it seeks to develop a community of donors from all over the world. Launching this Fund in London, CfiW is evidently setting its sights at diaspora philanthropy to further promote local and locality needs within Wales. In sum, it is defining its community leadership role very prominently in resource acquisition, development and distribution, if not specifically patriotic, terms.

**Northern Ireland**

History and social-political-economic context are important in explaining the role of community foundations, but arguably history and context are paramount in the case of Northern Ireland (NI). The political and economic divisions of decades of sectarian 'Troubles', the subsequent peace process (and funding for it) and devolution (punctuated by the return of direct rule from 2002 to 2007) give localism a distinctive flavour. To be relevant at all in difficult times, the community foundation had little choice but to demonstrate leadership for social change.

The unfolding process of localism in Northern Ireland can be read as a continuation of the process of devolution, including public sector modernisation, rather than some grand new ideology of community empowerment and restructured relationships. It is also part of the lineage of the longstanding commitment to social partnership that pre-dates formal devolution (Acheson 2010; Birrell and Willamson 2001). The principle of partnership has continued, although Acheson (2010) argues that the underlying interest on the part of government has shifted from the sector's role in civic engagement and policy making to ensuring its capacity to provide services through public procurement as part of radical welfare reforms involving greater outsourcing. As in England, the central government is encouraging increased community engagement and constructive relationships with the third sector but with less fanfare and marketing than its Big Society counterpart. As
elsewhere, these are increasingly complicated by the budget cuts that have rippled from the UK government, and by the policy drift (and sometimes outright paralysis) that results from the complexities of coalition government in Northern Ireland.

From its founding in 1979, following a decade of sectarian violence, and high unemployment, the Community Foundation of Northern Ireland (CFNI) has occupied a unique space in the philanthropic landscape of Northern Ireland and as the prototype of a community leader among its genre. Its leadership role has been shaped largely by the nature of the deeply divided community in which it was embedded, but also by its carefully crafted internal structures and dynamics. From its founding, the Foundation has always seen itself as more than a grantmaker (Kilmurray 2005). It has been committed to social change using its niche as a safe space for dialogue and its convening and brokering powers, and by supporting others to influence public policy. The CFNI set a strategic course, from which it has deviated little, to tackle poverty and related problems and promote community education and self-help, especially regarding health and social sectors, and it assumed a major part in ‘giving peace a chance’ (Kilmurray 2005). It supports advocacy organisations to influence public policy and puts a priority on ensuring that the marginalised voices get heard (for example, it was an early and continued supporter of women). A major factor in its success is that it engaged groups on both sides of the sectarian divide, without ever appearing to take a side. Its most recent mechanism for engagement, known as the ‘Observatory,’ helps community organisations connect with policy agendas supported by an advisory panel providing relevant policy intelligence to them.

The philanthropic environment in which the CFNI works is sparsely populated; with few other foundations or grantmakers outside government, CFNI has few ‘competitors’. Philanthropy in Ireland has historically been divided along Protestant/Catholic lines, which also coincided with urban/rural lines (Acheson et al. 2005), but by the 1970s most of the industrial-Belfast corporate money had dried up. The CFNI has thus long recognised the need to grow local philanthropy. It has done so with a focus on the middle-range rather than high net worth donor (which are few in number), although the
full potential of local philanthropy has probably not yet been realised (RSM McClure Watters 2011). Its position was greatly enhanced, however, by major funding from Atlantic Philanthropies (an international foundation that will spend out by 2016) and by EU funds for Peace and Reconciliation during the 1990s. The CFNI has facilitated matching of philanthropists with community projects, but it has been very careful about its role, refusing funds that were explicitly directed to support one side of the sectarian divide and avoiding tilting heavily toward donor directed funds (as is often lamented among American community foundations, see Ostrander 2007). As an ‘embedded’ grantmaker and leader (Sojourner et al. 2004), the position of CFNI has been complemented by the presence of a strong, national umbrella association, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), which as a membership body could assume the representational and advocacy role on behalf of the sector, allowing the CFNI to occupy an independent, neutral space, while supporting others to be advocates.

**Discussion**

Our findings to-date imply that marked differences in conceptualisations of place and leadership as well as the policy environments on localism exist across UK community foundations. These are set out diagrammatically in Box 3.

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**Box 3 here (diagram not available in draft)**

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Our sample of English community foundations and CfiW appear to be characterised as either the most narrow, or most clearly focused and specific, in relation to their understanding of what constitutes place and leadership. The large number of community foundations across England seems to provide strong geographic restrictions for community foundation activity and a strong focus on location, albeit demarcated at different competing and overlapping levels: cities, partial cities, towns, districts and counties. Similarly, within Wales, CfiW puts strong emphasis on the physical geography of Wales and its relationship with the other constituent parts of the UK.
It is unsurprising that within these two contexts a more functionalist approach to community leadership appears to predominate. In England, current government initiatives around community foundations centre on their endowment building. Furthermore, the strong tradition of community foundations acting as agents for government flow-through funding on the one hand, described by one respondent as being the philanthropic equivalent of 'sausage manufacturer - money 'in' and 'out'', and increasing competition for limited resources on the other, necessitate a focus on independence through endowment maximisation and an emulation of private foundations’ funding models. The same seems to apply to CifW, given its status as an independent grantmaker without any statutory funding flow-through. Importantly, findings did not suggest expectations that bigger local societies of donors and increased local giving alone would be adequate responses to the challenges in localities. Rather, that a functionalist approach to community leadership was a prerequisite for that community foundation role to exist at all.

Within Scotland, SCF seems to have moved beyond the notion of location to encompass locale. There is an implicit understanding of the informal social relations in the immediate national context and SCF explicitly participates therein. Here, with a strong tradition and necessity of localism, it seems, that there is less need for SCF to convene on local issues, lead partnerships, or mobilise knowledge; this leaves it to concentrate on resource acquisition and grant matchmaking. Given the focus on seeking funding for direct purposes whilst channelling diverse voices through its brokerage and matchmaking activities, SCF seems to incorporate both the functionalist side of leadership, but also incorporate parts of a more critical leadership perspective.

Finally, CfNI seems to represent the broadest conceptualisations of place and leadership. Given the range of emotional associations with Northern Ireland's geography and localities, CfNI appears strongly focused on a demanding, visionary understanding of 'peace' and the future of Northern Ireland. Recognising the multiple identities and claims in competing and collaborating organisations and communities, a constructivist leadership perspective with its focus on emancipations seems most evident. Within our sample, we did not find a dialogic perspective of leadership that completely rejects
leadership in its traditional sense. Whether this is even feasible within increasingly competitive and crowded third sector settings is unclear.

Although our work is exploratory and ongoing, the findings to-date raise a number of issues. Firstly, the contrasting contexts within which community foundations operate and their differing conceptualisations of place and leadership cast doubts on attempts at promoting a pan-UK mobilisation of community foundations as collective lead players in the renewed localism as promoted by CFN (2009): their needs, approaches and visions appear to be too varied. This diversity also questions whether initiatives geared towards community foundations’ endowment building might be so limiting and narrow in their conception and approach, that the multipurpose nature of some community foundations itself is challenged. Moreover, it raises the question whether it is the singularity rather than the similarity of community foundations that warrants localism policy attention.

Secondly, the work points towards the need for more detailed understanding of how ‘place’ and ‘place leadership’ are perceived and articulated within community foundations and their operating environment; whether these are based on conscious, strategic decisions, alterable as imperatives for leadership change, or whether there are internal and/or external structural factors that significantly shape and determine these notions. This is especially important given that although resource competition has been suggested as central to nonprofit individualisation (Barman 2002), the differentiation identified in our paper does not appear to have arisen solely therefrom.

Thirdly, the work highlights that community foundations should not be perceived as either model or movement. Instead they appear to cover a spectrum that ranges from a functionalist organisational blueprint at one end, to a roughly sketched outline more akin to a social movement at the other. This also presents the question of at which point a community foundation ceases to exist in all but name? As community foundations take on increasingly abstract conceptualisations of place and cover growing geographic areas, when does this organisational form morph into what is essentially a traditional private foundation, a question that is further underlined by CFN’s recent exploration about a
potential merger with the membership association for private trusts and foundations in the UK, the
Association of Charitable Foundations (e.g. Mason 2012).

Concluding comments

As Harrow and Jung (2011:1055) point out, within public policy contexts ‘enchantment with
philanthropy seems set to prefer idealism to realism’. In this respect, the UK discourse around
community foundations seems to be no exception. Despite the widespread appeal of community
foundations and their envisaged strong role around localism in UK policy discourse and practice
portrayal, a critical understanding of community foundations within these contexts is currently limited.
In this paper, we have started to explore some of the underlying issues surrounding place and place
leadership in relation to community foundations. Applying an exploratory lens based on the works of
Agnew (2011) and Mabey and Freeman (2010), we find multiple interpretations of place and place
leadership across UK community foundations within the UK’s nations. This challenges the popular
conception and widely articulated idea of community foundations as a shared model that allows them
to be grouped together, and being collectively distinct from other charity and philanthropy forms, in
terms of their roles and responsibilities. Similarly, the alternative perspective of community
foundations as movement does not seem to be representative either. Instead, it appears that the idea
of community foundations covers a spectrum that incorporates characteristics of both perceptions. As
such, it appears questionable whether a pan-UK mobilisation of community foundations as collective
lead players within localism policy is likely.

Having started to look at community foundations’ perspectives, it now seems important to explore the
receptivity towards and impact of community foundations’ place leadership from the viewpoints of
other stakeholders – such as local and central governments, as well as other third sector
organisations and networks – and to examine internal characteristics of community foundations that
impact on their leadership approach and strategy.

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