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PROMOTING ACTIVE RETIREMENT: A CASE STUDY EXAMINING THE MOBILISATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL TO ACHIEVE DESIRED ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

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This work is dedicated to Ciarán and David

ABSTRACT

Community and voluntary organisations harness and develop network ties and resources, volunteerism and civic participation. Organisations contribute to society's social capital stock and play a role in maintaining social cohesion, supporting civil society and generating social renewal. National community and voluntary organisations can operate at a macro (national), meso (regional) and micro (local) level. In doing so, different forms and mixtures of bonding, bridging and linking social capital can be created at these various levels. This research examines different forms of social capital within the various levels of a national community and voluntary organisation and explores how this social capital is mobilised in achieving organisational aims and objectives. This research utilised a case study framework, centred on the structure, activities and operation of the Federation of Active Retirement Associations, whose aims are to address issues relating to isolation and loneliness. This research employed a triangulated-methodology, which included both quantitative and qualitative data gathered through nine semi-structured interviews; observations at both a regional and national level; and 31 self-administered survey questionnaires, together with a secondary quantitative analysis of the organisation's archives.

This research demonstrates that the Federation has tapped into a changing societal profile by establishing a network to address issues important to older people, through a process of active participation. The continued increase in membership affiliations, together with the changing profile of local associations to smaller, more close-knit and parish-based organisations, has enabled the development of large reservoirs of strong ties and mobilised bonded social capital at the local level. The research identifies the importance of meso (regional) structures, supported by development officers, in the development and mobilisation of the Federation's social capital as a whole and bridging social capital in particular. However, this research provides evidence of a lack of mobilisation of the organisation's reservoir of social capital at a national level, in achieving organisational goals such as supporting collective participative activity. By examining how the differing forms of social capital within this case study are mobilised, this research may assist practitioners within the community and voluntary sector in mobilising their own organisation's social capital.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The economic, social and political landscape of Ireland has been transformed over the last decade as illustrated by:

- A ranking of twelfth in the world in terms of Gross National Product (World Bank, 2004)

- Being a destination of immigration rather than emigration (Central Statistics Office, 2004) and

- Northern Ireland enjoying "greater political stability and higher levels of economic growth" (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2005, p.1).

This changing socio-economic landscape has been accompanied by a growth of individualism and personal freedom, a disconnectedness between individuals and family, neighbours, neighbourhoods and society in general and a decline in traditional controlling forces of church and state within society (Putnam, 2000; Junker-Kenny & Tomka, 1999). Consequently, many are beginning to feel isolated and "vaguely and uncomfortably disconnected" (Putnam, 2000, p.402). This unbridled rise in individualism can lead to an impoverished society in terms of social capital, manifested in reduced participation in community groups, less social contact between people and a diminution in trust (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003).

An important challenge for Irish society is to develop a means of sustaining the economic development of the past number of years, while in the process proactively encouraging and nurturing community and civic engagement. This view is supported by the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) who state that:

> A key challenge for Ireland in the 21st century is to identify and harness, the strength of community ties and resources[1], in contributing towards a just and harmonious society (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.5)

Developing community engagement and ties also has the effect of maintaining social cohesion, supporting civil society and generating social renewal (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002; National Economic and Social Forum, 2003; Etzioni, 1995). A lack of support for these community ties and connections have led commentators to suggest that:

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[1] A resource can be defined as "a new or reserve supply that can be drawn upon when needed" (Princeton, 2006, p.1)

> Unless new forms of social engagement are developed, our stock of social capital…will decline and the future for society will be bleak. (O'Brien, 2006, p.3)

There is agreement that the conceptual origins of social capital are based upon actions, activities and outcomes that cannot be "accounted for by other forms of personal capital such as economic or human capital" (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2001, p.20). Put another way:

> There are many objects of great value to man, which cannot be obtained by unconnected individuals, but must be obtained - if at all - by association. (Webster, 1833, p.1)

However, while a specific, all embracing definition of social capital has not yet been achieved (Putnam, 2000; World Bank, 1998; Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002; Jacobs, 1961; Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Lin, 2003), there is general agreement on three core themes. These are the connections or ties between individuals and network units; the shared norms and values such as trust, mutual understanding and reciprocity within a network; and that social capital remains a form of capital, where investment in social relations can have expected returns. This thesis explores these themes together with the differing perspectives and views surrounding social capital and arrives at a working definition.

The expounded beneficial outcomes of social capital include the development of social cohesion; poverty alleviation; sustainable human and economic development; and improved quality of life issues (World Bank, 2004; National Economic and Social Forum, 2003). In particular the World Bank (1998) has gathered data to demonstrate the positive benefits of social capital in improving social cohesion and economic prosperity, while Putnam (2000) presents material which indicates that social capital can shape and improve the behavioural development of children and positively influence economic prosperity both locally and nationally. Putnam (2000) also presents evidence that neighbourhoods that have a high social capital index are cleaner, friendlier and safer than neighbourhoods with a low index. In neighbourhoods where youth are not supervised and guided, there are greater levels of crime – both petty and major. Where low levels of social capital are evident there is less participation in community organisations and less volunteering. Social capital is important in an organisational or business setting for the purposes of promoting innovation (Ruef, 2002), speeding up modes of communications within the organisation (Granovetter, 1983) and the provision of loans and grants for new ventures (Healy & Côtés, 2001). At the macro level, Narayan and Cassidy (2001) have outlined that social capital has positive economic

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outcomes in the areas of governance, safety and security, community solidarity and political engagement.

It has been proposed that by supporting community and voluntary groups, levels of social capital in Ireland can be improved (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003). The relationship between social capital, participation in groups and positive consequences for individuals and the community "is a staple notion that dates back to the work of Durkheim and Marx" (Portes, 1998, p.2). Community and voluntary organisations bring together networks of ties, resources and volunteers to address certain aims and objectives (Szabo, 1999; National Committee on Volunteering, 2002). Indeed the National Committee on Volunteering (2002) outlined the strategic importance of voluntary activity in maintaining social stability and in generating social renewal. Szabo (1999) argues that when networks are formed, positive social capital is formed - "the networks and norms created by groups are thereby said to be a positive form of social capital" (p.2). However, while community organisations form networks and bring together resources, it cannot be said that this contributes positively to society in all circumstances. Community groups can negate the development of positive social capital, if their intolerance leads to sectarianism, ethnocentrism or corruption (Putnam, 2000). However, community organisations generally contribute to maintaining social cohesion, engagement in civil society and the development of positive stocks or reservoirs of social capital, so long as the consequences are mutual support, co-operation, respect of diversity and trust – a position supported by Putnam (2000).

The different forms of social capital have been described as "bonding; bridging and linking" (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.33). Bonding social capital links people together with others like themselves. This is captured in the maxim 'birds of a feather flock together'. These strong ties can provide important emotional, personal and health related benefits, while countering the effects of isolation and loneliness (Edwards, 2004) and enabling a high level of intimacy, self-disclosure and emotional support (Granovetter, 1983). Bridging social capital is created when social ties "cut across differences such as race, class or ethnicity" (Sander and Lowney, 2003, p.4) or other such immediate groups. Such a connection of individuals to those who are significantly different is key to the idea of weak ties, which are "vital for an individual's integration into modern society" (Granovetter, 1983, p.202). Linking social capital, while closely related to bridging social capital, can be considered as the weak ties

represented in the relationships of an individual or group, accessing people and institutions with power or influence (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003), these people and institutions being outside the immediate community.

By enhancing the mixture of relationships and blend of ties that bind together individuals and communities, while valuing the core bonded networks such as family and near neighbours, encourages the development of social capital within the wider society (Putnam, 2000; Healy & Côtés, 2001; Granovetter, 1983; Leonard, 2004). Indeed, Leonard (2004) proposes that the beneficial effects of social capital, as mentioned previously, is dependent on these mixtures of bonding, bridging and linking social capital. She outlines that:

> A number of studies have demonstrated how areas rich in some forms of social capital habitually under-perform economically compared to other regions (Leonard, 2004, p.930).

This is also supported by Edwards (2004), who emphasises the importance of the mixture of different forms of social capital:

> Weakness or exaggeration in any of these *[forms of social capital]*, leading to lack of balance between them, can be limiting to the people involved, oppressive or dangerous to others or a threat to social harmony. (Edwards, 2004, p.103)

Leonard's (2004) work with the closed networked communities in Belfast provides evidence of the importance of the mixture of different forms of social capital. In her work, these close knit communities have a high degree of bonding social capital, which assists in the creation of subsistence level economic activity. However, she identifies that this bonding social capital can also act against the broader development of the community. Indeed such a dependence on bonded social capital is often parochial and can adversely impact on individuals obtaining jobs and prosperity:

> The very factors that promote its development such as tight bonds of trust and solidarity may ultimately prevent its entrepreneurial members from reaching their full potential. (Leonard, 2004, p.929)

In other words, an individual in a very bonded community may be held back from interacting with the wider society and thus fail to obtain the additional benefits that may accrue from such an interaction. This perspective reflects Putnam's (2000) stance, that bonding capital is essential to 'getting by' while bridging capital is important to 'getting ahead', and that a mixture/balance of the different forms of social capital is needed within society.

Some national community and voluntary organisations operate at different levels of society. Affiliate groups may work within a localised geographical area, linking into a county or regional structure and then to a national body. These levels at which an organisation operates can be described as the macro/national, meso/regional and micro/local levels (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003). By researching the internal and external ties of a national community organisation, the mix of the various relational ties present at the different levels of an organisation can be explored, which addresses the first research question of this thesis – *what forms of social capital exist within the different levels of a national community and voluntary organisation?*

The societal contribution of a community group is dependent upon whether these forms of social capital are latent or mobilised to achieve desirable aims and objectives. Without the mobilisation of the organisation's reservoir of potential social capital, this capital remains simply that – potential, with social capital having little effect on outcomes. This is reiterated by Putnam (2000) who argues on the importance of "active and involved membership" (p.58) to social capital and civic engagement. The mix of different relational ties and forms of social capital and their mobilisation within a community and voluntary organisation to achieve a set of objectives is central to this thesis. There are a number of facilitating factors that can at the same time indicate the existence of different forms of social capital and provide evidence as to the mobilisation of an organisation's social capital. These facilitating factors include: the diversity, density, size and mobility of the network members; power structures and leadership; participation and volunteering levels; friendship; innovation; communication modes and structures; collective actions and activities; sharing of support and knowledge; the organisation's role in conflict resolution; and sources of funding (Edwards, 2004; Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002; Nayaran & Cassidy, 2001). By examining these facilitating factors and their evidential outcomes, light is cast on the forms of social capital in an organisation and the second research question – *how are these forms of social capital mobilised to achieve desirable organisational objectives?*

In order to address these two research questions a 'case study' framework is utilised. The case study centres on the structure, activities and operation of the Federation of Active Retirement Associations. The Federation is a national community and voluntary organisation whose primary activity is the encouragement of retired men and women to participate in social contacts and in self-help activities of an educational, cultural and

sporting nature. This organisation was chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, it embodies and has captured in its aims and objectives many of the issues that are purported to being important in the social capital debate, these include volunteering and active participation, a reduction in isolation and loneliness, social inclusion, cohesion and quality of life issues. And secondly, it is a national and community organisation that is experiencing a growth in membership, which is related to an increased stock of social capital (Healy & Côtés, 2001).

As such, it is interesting to determine what it is about the Federation that is effective in promoting social capital and what forms of social capital are created. This is achieved by investigating the internal and external ties of the Federation and analysing the organisation in terms of the aforementioned facilitating factors. The influence of the structural model of the Federation, its relational ties and forms of social capital on promoting and mobilising its social capital to fulfil the requirements of the Federation's stated aims and objectives are examined. Finally, through this case study, other organisations may gain an understanding on how to make their group more effective in promoting and mobilising social capital.

In this chapter, concentration is placed on defining the two core research questions (what forms of social capital exist within the different levels of a national community and voluntary organisation and how are these forms of social capital are mobilised to achieve desirable organisational objectives) and on placing these questions in the context of the current social capital debate. A personal perspective is also given in this chapter. In chapter two, a more detailed analysis of the societal context in which social capital theory operates is conducted. The contribution to the development of social capital by community and voluntary networks is explored with particular reference to their origins and composition. This leads to a more specific discussion on the origins of the Active Retirement movement and places the work of the Federation in the context of the wider debate regarding retired people. This section also outlines the organisation's values and ethos, its aims and objectives and relates these to the different structural elements at the micro, meso and macro level. Chapter three reviews the available literature on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of social capital, engages in the debate that surrounds social capital and critically discusses its interdependence on network theory. The chapter outlines how the facilitating factors such as membership size and diversity impacts upon the creation of different forms of social capital within

organisations and can indicate the mobilisation (or lack of mobilisation) of an organisation's reservoir of social capital. This thesis' research process entails the employment of a triangulated-methodology, which includes both quantitative and qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with selected officers and staff (past and present); observations at Regional and National Council meetings and within Head Office; and self-administered survey questionnaires, together with a secondary analysis of the organisation's archives, as is detailed in chapter four. Chapter five outlines the results of this qualitative and quantitative data with reference to the research questions. In this chapter analysis is conducted through the process of critical reflection, on how these results inform our knowledge and the implications of our findings with regard to the Federation's differing forms of social capital and their mobilisation. Finally, chapter six concludes on how this research confirms and identifies specific departures from current knowledge and outlines further areas of possible research for the Federation and for the wider community and voluntary sector on how social capital can be promoted and mobilised within voluntary organisational structures.

Personal perspective

It is important for the reader to have some insight into the researcher's background and bona fides in regard to the research, the reasons why the researcher chose this topic and the researcher's personal perspectives on the issues involved (Halton, 1999).

The researcher has been involved in community organisations at both a local and national level for the past 17 years. At a local level, he has coached basketball at both club and school level; he was secretary of Kilcock and District Community Council from 1996 to 2000 (a time of major infrastructural and residential development in the area); and is deeply involved in Monaghan junior football at club and county level. At a national level, he was appointed onto the National Committee on Volunteering and drafted the Information Technology component of the final report "Tipping the Balance" (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002) and he was appointed in 2002 as coordinator of the joint Muintir na Tire / Department of Social and Family Affairs Information Technology Project, which investigated the role that new technologies can play in revitalising a national community organisation. He was also National Secretary of Muintir na Tire for five years– a national organisation representing Community

Councils and Community Alert groups in Ireland.

As a result of these experiences, and in particular the failure to revitalise Muintir na Tire as a national movement, the researcher began to consider some questions. Why is it that some national organisations experience difficulty in maintaining affiliate group membership, while others have an expanding membership base? How do national bodies make themselves relevant to their local affiliates? What role does social capital play within a national community and voluntary organisation? How does an organisation's social capital help it to achieve its objectives? Is the organisation's structure important in obtaining desired outcomes? Is it possible that by examining one national organisation lessons can be learnt and optimal models proposed for other sister organisations? It is to this end that the research was focused.

The researcher is convinced that community and voluntary groups can provide beneficial community services, develop outlets for the youth and others to partake in activities and can address issues of isolation and loneliness. He believes that the national umbrella bodies for local community groups are beneficial if they fulfil, as outlined by Varley (1991), the functions of:

- Co-ordinating and planning at a national level
- Servicing and being relevant to affiliated groups and
- Representing local groups as a body at national level.

These issues are also explored in the context of this case study.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

On the 7th April 2006 Claire Harte died, she had lived for 40 years in a Dublin community and her body lay undiscovered in her home for six weeks (Macklin, 2006). This event does not tie neatly into more clichéd scenarios of a neglected, withdrawn, lonely recluse. Indeed, the former senior clerk was an avid churchgoer, keen photographer, a member of the John McCormack Society and had a wide circle of friends, albeit not in her neighbourhood. However, in the snug Shamrock Street of 24 houses where she lived, Claire chose to "keep the world beyond her doorstep" (p.2) and her friends only knew each other by first names "which made keeping in touch difficult, other than through Claire herself" (p.2). This tragic story indicates that while Claire had 'bonded social capital' in terms of a number of close friends, they didn't link across to one another (bridging capital). While being a member of a local organisation may not have guaranteed Claire a more dignified death, it could have brought her closer to her immediate neighbours. Putnam (2000) echoes this when he outlines that while a particular society may be comprised of a number of virtuous and good people, if these individuals are not linked into networks and are isolated, then that society "is not necessarily rich in social capital" (p.19). These issues can probably be better said by 88-year-old Mary Peacock of Shamrock Street:

> ...The corner shop and post office being gone is a huge loss to us all. These were great ways of keeping an eye on each other and making sure everybody was all right. We might have a bit of money in our pockets nowadays, but we've lost an awful lot. People don't look after each other any more. It's horrible now. (Macklin, 2006, p.2)

The linkage between old age, neighbourhoods and loneliness was explored by Scharf, Phillipson and Smith (2003):

> For several reasons, the neighbourhood may represent a more important element of older people's sense of identity than would be the case for younger people. Many older people will have spent a substantial period of their lives in a particular neighbourhood, deriving a strong sense of emotional investment both in their home and in the surrounding community. (Scharf, Phillipson & Smith, 2003, p.3)

Community and voluntary organisations form a link between government policy and the mobilisation of social capital on the ground, so as to avoid recurrences of this tragedy.

This chapter explores theses linkages in a societal context. In particular, the chapter explores the function that social capital performs in society, the role of government in promoting social capital, together with an analysis of the current state of the Irish community and voluntary sector. This chapter also outlines the context of the Federation's work within the broader social capital debate regarding retired people. It traces the progression of the Active Retirement Movement into a national community and voluntary organisation; and examines its philosophy, values and ethos of enhancing the quality of life through participative activity.

Societal context of social capital

Contemporary sociological thought sees society as both solid and fluid (Mehta, 2005; Meyer, Ramirez, Frank & Schoferat, 2006) - solid insofar as the institutions governing society remain constant throughout time (the legal system, education system, political system) and fluid in the sense that change can occur (laws can be amended, curricula can be altered, new methods of teaching and subjects introduced, political boundaries changed, election of governments). These systems will alter and change over time, but they will persist as solid institutions and govern the lives of citizens. Therefore the cultural, political, legal and institutional frameworks, which are all contained within a society's superstructure, can be regarded as a social contract, which is both solid over time and fluid in the present (Edwards, 2004). This social contract offers people a framework, a set of rules or conditions governing daily life, which provides a form of stability allowing for short, medium and long term planning and network development. It is through this framework that social capital is developed (Edwards, 2004). Aside from facilitating the conditions under which social capital can develop, societal institutions, which make up the framework, can also have direct effects on the formation of social capital.

These views are supported by the World Bank (2003) and they highlight social capital as a basic requirement for a properly functioning society. The World Bank (2003) outlines the importance of trust and values but broadens the discussion out to include civic responsibility and governance issues, as well as society's structures and networks. Indeed the World Bank (1998) has chosen social capital as a useful organising idea and has argued that there is increasing evidence showing that social cohesion is critical for societies to prosper economically and for development to be sustainable:

[Social capital] is not simply the sum of the institutions which underpin society, it is also the glue that holds them together. It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust and the common sense of civic responsibility, that makes society more than a collection of individuals. Without a degree of common identification with forms of governance, cultural norms and social rules, it is difficult to imagine a functioning society. (World Bank, 1998, p.1)

Edwards (2004) outlines that there is a close relationship between social capital and cultural, political, legal and institutional conditions, because they are themselves "results of historical human interaction" (p.17) and are developed, encouraged and maintained in a community or society. If people are reasonably secure in their everyday lives and have belief or reasonable faith in their system of governance, they are generally more comfortable with the business of politics, commerce and participating in community groups. In essence, this social contract frees up time, which might have been spent on determining the day-to-day conditions that are applied through these systems of governance, which can be invested in other resulting networks, leading to the formation of social capital.

The perceived benefits of social capital include (World Bank, 1998; World Bank, 2004; National Economic and Social Forum, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001):

- Improvements to social cohesion, community solidarity, political engagement and poverty alleviation
- Economic prosperity, sustainable human and economic development and positive economic outcomes in the areas of governance
- Improvements in quality of life issues and
- Enhancing the behavioural development of children.

Putnam (2000) and Walker (2002) provide evidence that indicates a strong positive linkage between the health of the individual and involvement in community/participative activities. Specifically:

If older people remain active, they help themselves to avoid ill health and instead become assets for their community as and when they participate in civic life. (Walker, 2002, p.55)

Berkman and Glass (2000) support this by outlining that:

...After controlling for initial health status, the extent of social connectedness, that is, the degree to which individuals form close bonds with relations, friends and acquaintances, was associated with increased life expectancy. (Berkman & Glass, 2000, p.68)

Edwards (2004) outlines that the perceived positive effects of social capital "are likely to flow from the functional operation of networks" (p.19) and can include an increased sense of identity and belonging; lowering transaction costs; increased capacity of a community to achieve goals; and an increased conflict resolution capacity. This is echoed by the Cork County Development Board (2002), which regards social capital as a resource within the community with particular societal and individual benefits. They outline social capital in terms of trust, participation in community groups, reciprocity and individual social activity levels:

> The concept of social capital sounds abstract, but it couldn't be simpler, do you trust people? How many clubs, societies or social groups are you a member of? If your child gets sick do you have support to call on? Basically, how much social contact do you have in your life? These social ties, according to research will help you live longer and are probably worth money to the economy. (Cork County Development Board, 2002, p.1)

When the Cork County Development Board's view of social capital is considered, it is legitimate to outline that social capital is something that most people may not even be aware that they possess. For instance, many people may be members of a snooker club, a residents association or a 'Reclaim the Streets' organisation - but they do not say to themselves that they are components of social capital. The general population may not appreciate the value of social capital until there is a lack of it. It is then that we may feel alone and isolated with few people to turn to. This is echoed in the lyrics of the song 'The Big Yellow Taxi':

> They paved paradise
> And put up a parking lot
> With a pink hotel, a boutique
> And a swinging hot spot
> Don't it always seem to go
> That you don't know what you've got
> 'Til it's gone
> They paved paradise
> And put up a parking lot
> (Mitchell, 1970)

Role of Government

The National Economic and Social Forum (2003) recommends that the state:

> Has an important role to play through a proactive and enabling process in partnership with a mobilised and empowered civil society. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.7)

The Irish Government accepts this need to foster and maintain community spirit and to assist communities struggling with issues of social disadvantage or drug use (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2003). Indeed the most recent programme for Government has placed the development of social capital, as a means to promoting social cohesion, on the Irish political agenda (Ahern & Harney, 2002) and gives a commitment to fund an ambitious programme of data gathering on social indicators to ensure that policies are developed on the basis of:

- Sound information
- Promoting social capital in all parts of Irish life through a combination of research and public activity, particularly on a local community level and
- Continuing to support initiatives to expand corporate social responsibility.

The presence of Professor Putnam at a recent governmental policy development meeting, together with the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht's 'Task Force on Active Citizenship' draws increasing attention to issues such as community development, sense of identity and investment of people's time into civic activities. The Task Force in particular seeks:

> To recommend measures which could be taken as part of public policy to facilitate and encourage a greater degree of engagement by citizens in all aspects of life and the growth and development of voluntary organisations as part of a strong civic culture. (Department of the Taoiseach, 2006, p.1)

All of which make up some of the key tenets of social capital, network development and the wider community and voluntary sector. However, while the recommendations from the National Economic and Social Forum (2003), the National Committee on Volunteering (2002) and the White Paper on a framework for supporting voluntary activity (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2000), give clear guidelines on the development of civic society, to date these have been largely ignored (O'Brien, 2005). Such a lack of implementation of policy, while it may not directly effect individual events such as the death of Claire Harte, does form a context under which the community and voluntary sector operates.

Community organisations

The units that can make up a network are numerous but include family, friends, acquaintances, neighbours, colleagues and organisations including: government, community and voluntary organisations and business groups (Edwards, 2004). While individuals produce and maintain social capital, organisations act as reservoirs and sources of social capital to pursue desired organisational outcomes. National community and voluntary organisations are considered sources and receivers of social capital in their own right and contribute significantly to the wider society's social capital. These organisations can be seen as an increased institutionalisation of community and volunteer activities. They are networks comprising of individuals, established around any or all of a number of understandings of community.

Understandings of community

In terms of an Irish community and voluntary organisation, these understandings can be broadly based upon place, interest, attachment and solidarity, which can reflect varying relational ties between the individuals comprising the community network (Smith, 2004b).

A territorial or place community can be viewed in terms of people having something in common and this shared element is understood geographically (Smith, 2004b). The rural parish and its GAA club are synonymous with being a territorial or place community. Another way of labelling this is as locality. The GAA is also a national organisation with county and provincial bodies at the meso level. Each of these can also be considered as place communities e.g. the Monaghan GAA County Board. In a city context, Jacobs (1961) details that "the first relationships to form in city areas, given any neighbourhood stability, are those in street neighbourhoods" (p.143) and that these relationships based mainly on locality tend to result in a strengthening of ties.

Just as place can lend itself to the establishment of many types of community albeit based on socio-economic, geo-political, or psychological boundaries and territories, so too can particular interests spawn a similarly broad and diverse set of communities.

Such communities emerge from a set of shared interests – churches, PTAs, businessmen's associations, political clubs and local civic leagues. In terms of interest, Smith (2004b) specifies:

> In interest or 'elective' communities people share a common characteristic other than place. They are linked together by a type of social capital based on shared attitudes beliefs or values such as religious belief, occupation or ethnic origin. (Smith, 2004b, p.1)

In this way we may talk about the farming community, the Catholic community or the Chinese community. Developments in the sociology of identity and selfhood have played an important role in expanding our perception of such groups by "opening out the conceptual space within which non-place forms of community can be understood" (Smith, 2004b). Indeed, Healy and Côtés (2001) associate economic benefits in developing an individual's or group identity:

> Whatever the motivation for co-operation and trusting, investment in individual and group identity can lead to the creation of dense social networks and ultimately better economic and social outcomes. (Healy & Côtés, 2001, p.41)

Elective groups and intentional communities (ranging, from cyber-communities to 'car-boot sale' enthusiasts) are a key feature of contemporary life. Historically, "the strong association of voluntary organisations with social services" (Donnelly-Cox & Jaffro, 1999, p.9) dates back to the 19th century Roman Catholic institutional development. Community and voluntary organisations such as FASA (Falls Road Against Substance Abuse) arose amid the creation of socially disenfranchised groups. This view is supported by the National Committee on Volunteering (2002) who states:

> Increasing urbanisation and associated social problems saw the rise of many community groups coalescing around issues such as unemployment and drug abuse...rights of women, people with disabilities. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p.10)

The concept of attachment or 'communities of meaning' can be a reflection of one's own identity. This is supported by Cohen (1985) who argues:

> People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning and a referent of their identity. (Cohen, 1985, p.118)

The latter part of the 19th century also saw the growth of cultural nationalism and the Gaelic revival movement in Ireland. Voluntary organisations like Conradh na Gaeilge and the GAA were instrumental in developing solidarity based on participative activities. These activities defined what it meant to be Irish, as determined by these organisations (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002), thus reflecting a community based upon "attachment or communities of meaning" (p.9). Though similar to elective

communities the core difference is that a person can be automatically a member of an interest community - through their choice of livelihood and ethnic identity - without having to participate. Greater participation levels exist in communities of attachment. This is contrary to what Putnam (1995) refers to as chequebook participation where:

> For the vast majority of their members, the only act of membership is writing a cheque for dues or occasionally reading a newsletter. Few ever attend any meetings of such organisations and most are unlikely ever (knowingly) to encounter any other member. (Putnam, 1995, p.71)

Frazer (2000) adds in relation to 'communities of attachment' the view that such communities bring together a number of elements including solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust. The Irish co-operative movement is a good example of this type of community, where farmers joined together in solidarity to achieve better market value for their produce:

> Cooring *[from the Gaeilge verb comhair to help, involved the exchange of labour in agricultural work where households helped each other]*, meitheal *[Gaeilge for work group, traditionally where a group of farmers work co-operatively]* and social solidarity…at an informal, non-organisational level, was the key to maintaining and sustaining rural communities." (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p.9)

Incorporating these ideas, Sir Horace Plunkett pioneered the notion of self-help at community level when he formed the co-operative movement in the 1890s, as did Canon Hayes through the formation of Muintir na Tire and in doing so mobilised the social capital of communities/groups to obtain additional benefits or resources (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002).

Local and national community organisations

Community and voluntary organisations can be classified into "local groups and non-local groups" (Savage, Isham & McGrory-Klyza, 2005, p.118). A local group is based upon a set of social criteria including:

> Communication, direct participation and shared venue, which typically but not necessarily, imply geographical proximity of members. (Kempton, Holland, Bunting-Howarth, Hannan & Payne, 2001, p.561)

An example of a local group in this context would be a residents association, GAA club or local active retirement association. A non-local group, as based on the political criteria of state, regional, national or international boundaries, typically but not necessarily, implies geographical distance of members. An example of this type of

organisation would include Government sponsored bodies such a Duchas, or the national component of non-governmental organisations such as the Federation of Active Retirement Associations. A further classification can be made to local and non-local groups into those that are autonomous and those that have affiliates:

> An autonomous group is one which is self-formed and self-governed and, though it may be part of larger networks of coalitions, is not subject to formal by-laws of a non-local group. (Savage, Isham & McGrory-Klyza, 2005 p.119)

An affiliate group is governed by formal by-laws of the umbrella body. In this context national community and voluntary organisations can be seen as a subset of non-local autonomous groups with local affiliates, within the wider community and voluntary sector.

National community and voluntary organisations can also be divided in terms of their membership base. The Gaelic Athletic Associations have local groups throughout the country to which individuals become members (Gaelic Athletic Association, 2006). These groups then affiliate to county and national structures. Consequently, the Gaelic Athletic Association operates on a national, regional and local level. Green Peace operates a different model whereby there is an individual membership base rather than networks of affiliate groups (Putnam, 2000).

In Ireland, there are over 350 national community and voluntary organisations listed in the Institute of Public Administration Year-book (2006). However this could be an under-estimate as other research has indicated that organisations are generally under represented in official listings (Savage, Isham & McGrory-Klyza, 2005) and so the actual figure may be higher still. In addition to these voluntary organisations, Government sponsored groups such as Comhairle and the National Economic and Social Forum can be considered part of the community and voluntary sector. The positioning of national organisations within this sector is summarised in figure 1 below.
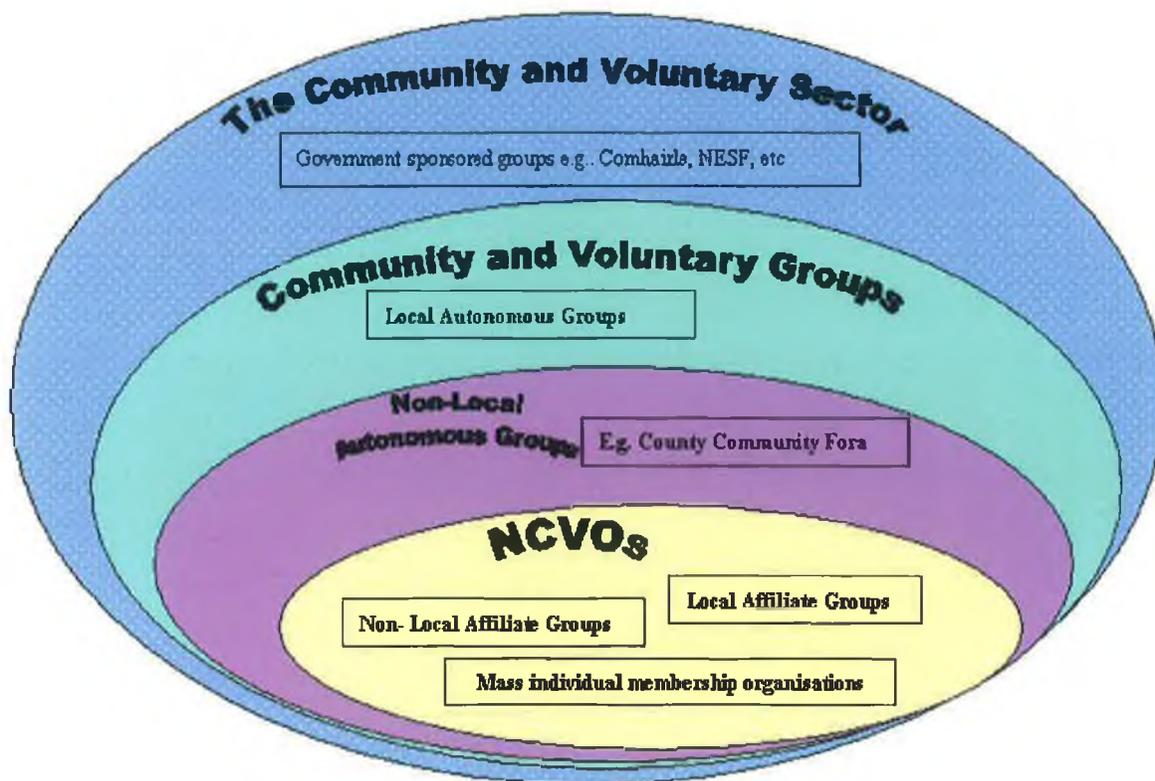
Figure 1: Structure of community and voluntary groups in Ireland

Different organisational types

Further distinctions within community and voluntary organisations can be made based on the work of Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002), who outline the following alternative distinctions among types of organisations: formal versus informal organisations and horizontal versus vertical organisations.

Regarding formal and informal organisations, Sander and Lowney (2003) has a view that formal (e.g. a dues-paying organisation with committees and by-laws) versus informal (e.g. street game) are important distinctions of classification because:

> Many connections that begin more informally sometimes morph into more formal social relationships. Formal ties are more likely to ensure that these ties persist over time. So while it is often easier to start informal social ties, participants in more informal relationships have to pay special care to make sure that these bonds deepen over time through additional activities *[and]* social interchanges. (Sander and Lowney, 2003, p.4)

While most national community and voluntary organisations have a formal structure, internet based cyber-communities such as 'Ireland Off-Line' are distinctly informal in nature. Formed in May 2001, this organisation has the mission statement of being "dedicated to bringing about the next step in Internet access for Ireland" (Ireland

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Offline, 2006, p.1). 'Ireland Off-Line' shows where the franchising of responsibility to autonomous individual groups negates the need for a formalised organisational structure.

A vertical organisation is one with definite grades and reporting mechanisms (Department of Defence, 2000), while a horizontal organisation have few line commands and a reduced hierarchical structure. While Putnam (1995) proposes that horizontally organised networks contribute to social capital formation, vertical relationships inhibit it. This position seems to be based on the premise that within horizontal organisations the flow of information is smoother between each level of the organisation. This in turn can promote participation and inclusiveness. However, there is not a general acceptance to this point of view. Berman (1997) disagrees by stating that "The boy scouts are a hierarchically organised group and yet is favourably regarded" (p.567) and studies in different contexts reveal that the horizontal nature of an organisation does not necessarily translate into increased stocks of social capital (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002). Horizontal organisations are becoming more prevalent because of the development of the Internet and other technological advances, such as internet based teenage 'blog' websites (IDCOM, 2005).

The history of the Active Retirement movement

The societal issues of isolation and loneliness, the promotion of active participation and the increasing social cohesion and civic participation of older people, are a driving force for the Federation of Active Retirement Associations in establishing a local network structure and campaigning on relevant issues such as the loss of community facilities, local shops and post offices (Nealon, 2002b). The Federation purports to enhance the quality of life and well-being of retired people in Ireland through participative activities, social contacts and through the promotion of a more positive attitude to ageing and retirement (Federation of Active Retirement Associations, 2000b).

Ireland's first Active Retirement Association was established in 1978 following an exhibition held in Dun Laoghaire, called 'Focus on Retirement' (Carey, 2004). Little recorded information exists on this early period but it is known that the success of the first Active Retirement Association in Dun Laoghaire spread and by 1985 there were 21 other associations in the Dublin area and one each in Wicklow and Waterford (Source:

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Archives, Affiliation records). The late Kathleen McMenamin carried out a professional study of Dun Laoghaire Active Retirement Associations for the Catholic Social Service Conference (Carey, 2004). Her report concluded that the active retirement movement had important benefits and potential:

> The Active Retirement Associations should consider the formation of a Federation of Active Retirement Associations. The formation of a Federation would create a closer bond between the associations and provide opportunities for the sharing of experiences and ideas, which is especially helpful for the newer associations. In addition, such a Federation would provide the active retired with a public voice, which should be used to influence policies affecting their lifestyle. (Carey, 2004, p.3)

In 1985, Maurice Kennedy, a founder member in Dun Laoghaire called a meeting of representatives of existing groups to consider the formation of a Federation of Active Retirement Associations. This meeting approved the establishment of the new Federation and Maurice became its first National President. Shortly afterwards, Muiris Prenderville along with other members developed a constitution for the new Federation and since then the organisation has grown to over 360 groups nationwide. The Federation's constitution laid the foundations for the present structure of the organisation, which has three distinct network components: that of the local Active Retirement Association (micro level), the Regional Council structure (meso level) and the national body (macro level). Indeed these are the levels categorised by the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) at which networks can develop.

The different levels of the Federation

The micro, local or personal level is described as that level where interpersonal relationships facilitate the resolution of collective action problems. The meso, intermediate, community or neighbourhood level exists where there is a presence of community-wide norms of trust, belonging and co-operation and a mutual trust and willingness to intervene for the common good. And the macro, societal, regional or state level describes how networks together with shared norms, values and understandings facilitate co-operation within and among groups (Healy & Côtés, 2001).

In order to provide a context within which the Federation operates, its various component structures (local groups, Regional Councils and the national body) and their 'raison d'etre' are outlined in the following pages. In each case the different objectives

and functions of each level and their impact on social capital are explored. The different meanings of communities within each level are discussed, followed by details of the membership, structure and the expected ties present. This establishes a baseline upon which the differing forms of the Federation's social capital are examined and how they are mobilised at the micro, meso and macro level.

The local associations

At this local or micro level, the main objectives of local Active Retirement Associations are (Federation of Active Retirement Association, 2002a):

- To provide a focal point for active people of both sexes, who are retired and in the 55-plus age segment
- To actively participate in educational, cultural, sporting and social activities
- To promote the spirit of self-help and independence
- To encourage members to use their energy, talents, skills, knowledge and experience to benefit each other and the community and
- To encourage a positive attitude to ageing and retirement.

A sample of the activities pursued by the membership of the different Active Retirement Associations includes social outings and trips, art classes, training courses and sporting activities (appendix 4)

At a micro level, most Active Retirement Associations very often reflect a parish area and provide over 55s with opportunities of participation and activity. So in a community sense, Active Retirement Associations can be considered as elective and geographically based organisations.

The local associations are comprised of individuals who pay an annual subscription membership. This membership elects a local Executive Committee to provide for its administration, management and control on an annual basis. Ideally there are between seven and eleven committee members (Federation of Active Retirement Associations, 2000). The committee then elects the chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and treasurer. These groups can affiliate if they agree with the Federation's objectives, pay an annual affiliation fee and have appropriate insurance. They can then also appoint delegates to the Federation's AGM, National Council and Regional Councils meetings.

The adoption of a common constitution by all affiliated local associations within the Federation signifies a shared representation, interpretation and system of meaning between its growing membership base. This, alongside their declaration of a shared vision regarding the aims and objectives of the Federation as a whole, could indicate the organisation's potential social capital.

At this local level, the interpersonal relationships between individuals are utilised to facilitate collective actions such as facilitating activities for retired people and establishing local associations. This network then aids the development of social capital at the micro level by providing the means through which the members can create and sustain reservoirs of social capital. In providing these opportunities for interactions between individual members, local associations combat feelings of loneliness and isolation. The welcome that a new member may receive when they first come to a local meeting and whether there is an ongoing friendly atmosphere is important. Such a welcome is relevant to the development of the Federation in terms of the establishment of new local associations, attracting new members and increasing the activity level of existing members. While the local associations primary objective is to provide activities in a self-help manner, this provides companionship and encourages sustained activity (Prenderville, 2003). This can only be done when a network is formed and individuals contribute both their social (mostly highly bonded relationships), human and sometimes financial capital. It is necessary to understand that in these cases the latent social capital contained within these community and voluntary networks must be mobilised by its members and like any other form of capital, the mere presence of social capital within an organisation does not automatically confer any power or political weight unless it is utilised or there exists the strong threat of it being utilised by the members.

The Regional Councils

Once a local association affiliates to the Federation by subscribing to the constitution that outlines the aims and goals of the organisation, they show willingness to co-operate with other associations. Associations come together at a regional level and form a distinct network at a meso (or intermediate) level and can be considered as an elective community of local associations. The primary functions and objectives of the Regional Councils (Federation of Active Retirement Associations, 2000b) are to:

- Promote the aims of the Federation by:
    o Linking the organisation's micro operations with the macro level i.e. the local with the national structure and
    o Allowing the exchanging of ideas and the formulation of strategies for the common good of all associations within the region.
- Promote the establishment of new associations
- Assist and develop existing Active Retirement Associations and
- Promote co-operation between local associations

Every Active Retirement Association within a region can send two delegates to the Regional Council meetings. The Regional Council's annual general meeting sees the appointment of a Regional Executive Committee. The Regional Council meets on average four times a year to exchange ideas, formulate strategies and organise meetings, outings and festivals. (Source: Archives, Minutes of Regional Council meetings). Most decisions are still made at the full Regional Council meeting, rather than by the Executive Committee, making the Regional Councils horizontal in nature, something which Putnam (1995) believes is more suitable to the development of social capital.

The regions are largely independent of the national structure and can raise funds on an autonomous basis. However a third of all affiliation fees into the Federation are re-distributed to the regions, with a subsidy of €2500 for training and development purposes. In 2005 core funding was received which has been ring fenced for the employment of part-time Regional Development Officers.

The different Regional Councils involve themselves in many activities including: training of officer courses, which is a confidence building exercise and run in all Regional Council areas; 'ARA Go On' festival which runs in the Western Region with 363 attending this year; Pitch and Putt competitions; tea dances (most regions); the three day 'Active Retirement Golden Years Festival' featuring talent contests (South East); and all Regional Councils take part in the annual Art exhibition which was started in 1996. The Western Region Council obtained a research grant in 2002 for a project involving University College Galway. This grant covered the costs of compiling a survey on the 'Attitudes to Ageing and the Older People' in the Western region (Hodgins & Greve, 2004).

The regions were originally organised on the basis of the old Health Board areas, for financial reasons. However, these old Health board boundaries may not be as effective in the sourcing of funding following the reorganisation of the Health Boards into the Health Services Executive and the four 'Super regions'. As the Regional Councils are organised on a two or three county basis, so can be deemed to be a community with some geographical basis. As such the Regional Council is a useful organisational tool and link from the national level to the local Active Retirement Associations. Figure 2 below summarises the breakdown of the 26 counties into their respective regions as well as highlighting their main sources of funding and their year of establishment.

Region	*Counties*	*Established*	*Development Officer funded by the:*
Western Region	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon	2000	Health Board and Federation of Active Retirement Associations
Southern	Cork, Kerry	2001	Federation of Active Retirement Associations
South Eastern	Wexford, Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary SR	2001	Health Board
Mid Western	Limerick, Clare, Tipperary NR	2001	Health Board
Eastern	Dublin, Wicklow, Kildare	2003	Federation of Active Retirement Associations
Midland Region	Meath, Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath	July 2005	Federation of Active Retirement Associations
North West Region	Sligo, Donegal, Leitrim	February 2006	Federation of Active Retirement Associations

Figure 2: A breakdown of the regions by county, year established and main sources of funding

During the late 1990s, in an attempt to progress the active retirement movement further, the decision to appoint Development Officers was made. The first appointment was in 2000 to the Western Region and was funded by the Western Health Board. All Development Officers are members of the Active Retirement movement themselves and are retired. The financial remuneration is minimal with a monthly payment that covers travel, some subsistence and meeting costs. Six further Development Officers have been appointed to the Mid-West, East, South, Midlands and South East regions with two sharing the task in the North West area. The Regional Council directs the day-to-

day operations of the Development Officer. The primary function of these officers is to encourage and aid the formation of new associations and to support existing ones.

The Federation at a national level

The key objectives of the Federation at a national level according to the organisations current constitution (Federation of Active Retirement Associations, 2002b):

- Provide a means by which affiliated associations may secure appropriate support to enhance their individual and collective activities
- Provide information, advice and assistance to these associations
- Promote co-operation between affiliated Active Retirement Associations
- Assist the development of existing associations and actively promote the setting up of new associations
- Ensure a corporate voice for local associations by:
  - o Representing their views and acting on their behalf in discussing matters of common concern with central and local authorities and other relevant bodies
  - o Increasing public awareness of the contribution, which older persons make in their communities and in society in general and
- Ensuring that the Federation is non-party political and non-sectarian.

The Federation's activities include: intervention at a local level where there may be a problem; encouraging empowerment and capacity building with small allowances to the Regional Councils for training; providing an attractive insurance package; distributing mail shots for hotels; and giving advice on travel insurance (Source: Interviewee, B). The Federation provides the local associations with a constitution, advice leaflets and a start up pack that the development officers work through with the group. At this national/macro level, the Federation also tries to address as a corporate body, issues in the area of independent living for older people.

Nationally or at a macro level, the Federation can again be considered an elective community of local associations or networks and one where solidarity should be prevalent. The Federation of Active Retirement Associations (2002b) aims to facilitate co-operation within and among regional levels and local associations. The Executive Committee comprises of the officers (National President, Vice-President, Secretary,

Treasurer and PRO), chairpersons of the Regional Councils and six members elected at the AGM. While the delegates to the National Council meetings are responsible for developing the overall policy and future planning of the organisation, the Executive Committee oversees the management of the organisation. The Executive Committee meet on a monthly basis or as is appropriate and set up sub-committees from time to time to look at specific issues. This structured co-operation provides a larger reservoir of social capital with which they may achieve collective activities such as negotiating cheaper insurance packages for members. The Federation is also serviced at a national level by a Head Office, which has a full-time Administrator and part-time secretary, appointed in the period 2001-2002.

The Federation's network components, as discussed above, is summarised in the figure 3 below. These three components could be regarded as individual networks operating at a local (micro), regional (meso) and national (macro) level. In such a structure each level addresses different aspects of the Federation's aims and objectives. As such, the nature and mobilisation of the social capital at each level impacts on the Federation as a whole and is examined in detail in this thesis. While each level have reservoirs of social capital in their own right, they simultaneously form part of a much larger network which should function to further create and maintain the levels of social capital, which in turn assists to achieve desirable aims and objectives.
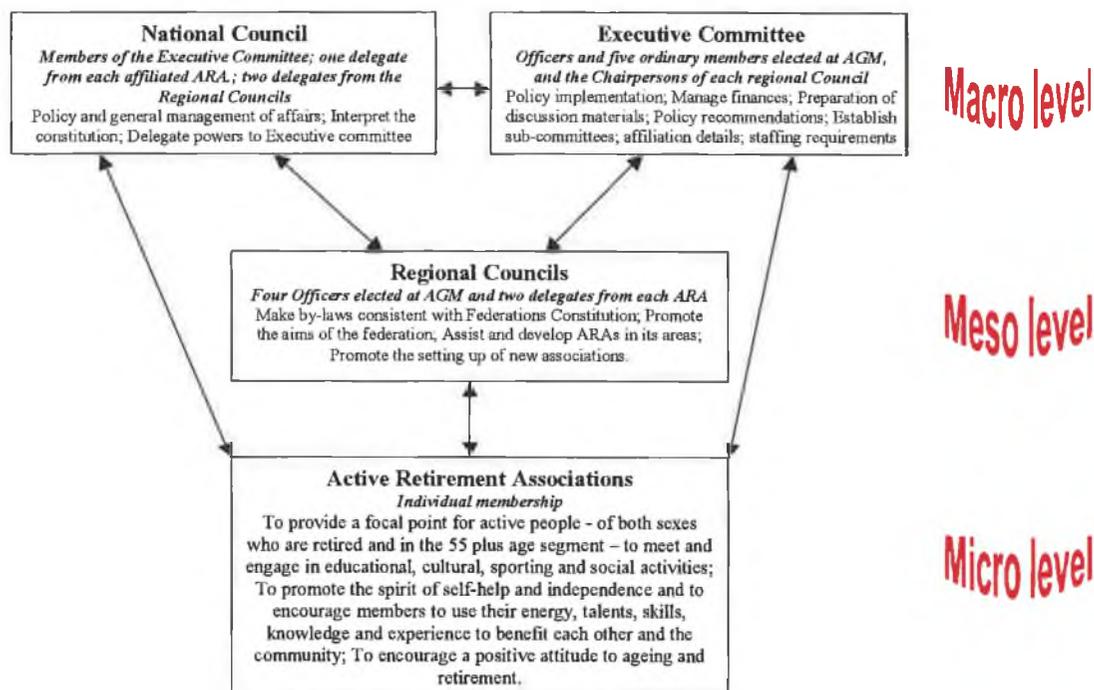
Figure 3: Organisational structure of the Federation

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review is structured into three broad sections.

Firstly, an analysis is undertaken of the various concepts and definitions which underpin current social capital debate within a cultural, political, legal and institutional context. In particular the various current definitions are reviewed with reference to three main themes. These themes are the role of human interactions within a network, the shared norms and values (including trust, reciprocity and efficacy) that underpin or lubricate a network and the idea that similar to other forms of capital, investment can be made into a network's ties to achieve certain goals. These definitions are contextualised with regard to the relationships and interactions of social capital, society and its various institutions. The purported benefits of social capital are reviewed with particular reference to how social interaction improves the health of older people and addresses issues such as loneliness and isolation.

The second section starts with a discussion of how networks are integral to the concept of social capital. The different relational ties and the corresponding forms of social capital are outlined. A review is conducted as to how the mixture of the differing types of social capital can impact on the mobilisation of an organisation's reservoir of social capital at a micro, meso and macro structural level.

The last section reviews the indicative factors of the different forms of an organisation's social capital. These factors are also explored in terms of them being facilitators in the mobilisation of an organisation's social capital to achieve its aims and objectives. Such an examination of these factors can thus provide a framework for answering this thesis' research questions.

Social capital concepts and definitions

There are differing perspectives of social capital in the current social capital debate. This is hardly surprising, as the whole concept of social capital is relatively new in comparison to other sections of social theory and has led to a "reluctance to impose a narrow definition on a still-evolving conceptual debate" (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.2). However over the last number of years, there has been an increased involvement in the number of practitioners examining the subject from differing academic backgrounds (social, economic etc). While this wider involvement has led to agreement on the foundations and key ideas for social capital, there is little or no consensus on a single unifying definition. These views are supported by Lin (2003), who states that the social capital concept "has been a relatively recent development in theory and research" (p.21) and by Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) who state that:

> Only in the last 20 years has it *[social capital]* captured the attention of practitioners and academicians from different backgrounds...*[and that the]* lack of an agreed-upon and established definition of social capital, combined with its multidisciplinary appeal, has led to a spontaneous growth of different interpretations of the concept. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.2)

While these different interpretations are important to tease out the nuances and differing perspectives, such a 'catch all' approach to the idea of social capital could be the very un-doing of the concept. The broad application of a vague notion of social capital to all aspects of human activity may lead it to eventually meaning everything to everyone and nothing to anyone. This view is supported by Lin, Cook and Burt (2003) who state:

> Without a shared perspective, systematic operation and programmatic studies, social capital may be in danger of becoming one of the many fads and fashions that come and go in sciences and social sciences and ultimately be abandoned for its lack of distinctive features and contributions to the scientific knowledge. (Lin, Cook & Burt, 2003, p.7)

However as one reviews the literature a number of unifying themes emerge that can assist in reaching a working definition and place in context the term social capital for the purposes of this thesis. These themes can be summarised as:

- The role of human interactions within a network (Cohen & Prusak, 2001; Healy & Côtés, 2001)
- The shared norms and values (including trust, reciprocity and efficacy) that underpin or lubricate a network (Edwards, 2004; Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002) and

- The idea that similar to other forms of capital, investment can be made into a network's ties to achieve certain goals (Lin, 2003, Health Promotion Agency & Age Concern Northern Ireland, 2004; Putnam, 2000).

Human interactions

In the early 1980s social capital was described in terms of social infrastructure, such as the provision of roads, schools, hospitals, public libraries, museums, swimming pools and playing pitches serving the community as a whole (Lobley, 1980). In particular, the provision of community centres could provide focus points for community activities and social interaction (Edwards, 2004). So while community halls are tangible assets, this description does not take into account the less tangible, but equally important, personal interactions within societies and networks. Indeed infrastructure is important to the development and/or sustainability of social capital but without human interactions or connections, no amount of infrastructure can cultivate social capital. Such a viewpoint is supported by Jacobs (1961) and Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002), both of whom outline that unlike other forms of capital, social capital exists in the structure of connections between and among people. Putnam (2000) also supports this idea of social capital existing when there are connections between individuals, when he states:

> Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals. (Putnam, 2000, p.19)

These stocks of active connections between individuals are crucial to the formation of social capital and in turn are closely tied with the interactions and relationships between individuals (Cohen & Prusak, 2001). Therefore, without these interactions or relationships, no contribution can be made to an individual's stock of social capital and the more interactions or ties that an individual conducts, the greater their potential reservoir of social capital. Accepting that society is comprised of wider connections then the absence of interpersonal connections may mean that the individual is also unable to contribute to the social capital of society as a whole. Lin (2003) supports this position, by stating that "the interacting members who make the maintenance and reproduction of this social asset possible" (p.24). In this manner, the connections and interactions of volunteers, within and across community organisations, are both important for the maintenance of social capital and as an indication of a society's level of social stability and cohesion. This viewpoint is supported in the National Economic

and Social Forum report (2003), which maintains that volunteering is a key component of social capital and by the National Committee on Volunteering (2002) which emphasises:

> The strategic importance of voluntary activity in maintaining social stability and in generating social renewal is being specifically recognised in the context of the European Union. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p.13)

Therefore the connections or interactions between individuals within the framework of the community and voluntary sector are key components in developing and improving Ireland's stock of social capital and thus help address issues such as social cohesion, isolation and loneliness (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003).

Shared norms and values

As well as connections between individuals - shared values, norms and behaviours are central to the development of social capital. They are integral factors in the creation and development of social connections, as proposed by Cohen and Prusak (2001) "elements that bind the members of human networks and communities and make co-operative action possible" (p.4). This view is also supported by Healy and Côtés (2001) who state that social capital is the "networks, norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups" (p.41). Essentially they act as a lubricant (Edwards, 2004), easing the formation of connections through a shared set of beliefs. This enables a degree of trust to exist among all participants in each other and forms the basis for a set of commonly prescribed rules, regulations and norms.

Norms and values can be considered the rules and expectations by which a society guides the behaviour of its members, while the values can be defined as the cultural standards which serve as broad guidelines for social living (Macionis & Plummer, 1998). Norms and values have also been described as qualities "that may exist within networks and serve to enhance the functioning of networks" (Edwards, 2004, p.26). Indeed they can be considered as supportive and productive interactions that maintain a network's dynamic relationships. Consequently their existence or otherwise can facilitate activity and thus impact on an organisations ability to achieve aims and objectives.

The themes of trust, reciprocity, efficacy and friendship are central to understanding organisational norms and values. These themes are essential to the healthy functioning of networks and are considered facilitating factors aiding the establishment, mobilisation, expansion and continued survival of social connections. These elements can:

- Be a support and assistance for individuals
- Encourage co-operative action
- Lend themselves to the development of long term shared goals and aims
- Support community development (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003)
- Provide for rules and sanctions to govern people's behaviour
- Reduce the need for energies to be spent on negotiation and enforcement and
- "Encourage the sharing of knowledge and ideas" (Edwards, 2004, p.26).

Trust

Trust is a norm and value that is essential to the effective operation of any network. It is considered both as an integral aspect to social capital and as an outcome to increased levels of social capital. Trust is defined as:

> The confidence in the reliability of a person or a system based on the expectation that people or organisations will act in ways that are expected or promised and takes into account the interest of others. (Edwards, 2004, p.26)

Putnam (2000) has outlined that trust tends to be cumulative and self-reinforcing. Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) argue that trust and adherence to norms are important aspects of social capital:

> Trust is an abstract concept that is difficult to measure in the context of a household questionnaire, in part because it may mean different things to different people. The SOCAT *[social capital assessment tool]* approach therefore focuses on generalised trust (the extent to which one trusts people overall) and on the extent of trust that exists in the context of specific transactions such as lending and borrowing, or taking care of children during their absence. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.52)

Elements of trust are involved from an informal personal level and to an institutional level. At an informal personal level or micro level, family members, friends and colleagues are best placed to encourage the development of trust (Boslego, 2005). This is relevant to local community groups in terms of establishing strong bonding ties, resulting in high levels of bonding social capital. At the institutional level or macro level, trust can be a reflection of sentiments towards the various authorities such as

government, police and the judiciary. It also refers to the confidence in the capacity of institutions to take reasonable actions in the administration of their duties (Sudarsky, 1999). Intrinsic to institutional trust is the trust people have in the administrators of the institution.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity can influence an individual's opinion of others as indicated by Boslego (2005) who argues that:

> Having friends, a sense of belonging in a community and regular reciprocal interactions with other people reinforces people's generalized notions of the niceness and honesty of others. (Boslego, 2005, p.29)

The concept of reciprocity can range from 'if you scratch my back, I'll scratch your back' to purely altruistic motives of financial donation to charities. It can be a selfless relationship with one party willing to give what is needed on the basis of trust and belief in doing right (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002). On the other hand it could be quite a selfish approach, with the giving party expecting increased returns for favours granted. Edwards (2004) defines reciprocity as the relationship between two parties where there is mutual action, giving and taking. He goes on to list examples of the actions involved in reciprocity as including, money, sponsorship, time and the sharing of information. This is in line with aims, ethos and values as laid out in an organisation's constitution, societal norms, mores[2] and folkways[3]. Edwards definition implies that reciprocity is closely related to trust between two parties, however Falk & Fischbacher (2001) views reciprocity in a much starker context of:

> Reciprocity is a behavioural response to perceived kindness and unkindness...people reward kind actions and punish unkind ones. (Falk & Fischbacher, 2001, p.2)

However, Fehr and Gachter (2000) argue that reciprocity is not the same as co-operation, retaliatory behaviour or altruistic actions:

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[2] Society's standards of proper moral conduct
[3] A society's customs for routine (Answers Corporation, 2006)

> Reciprocity is fundamentally different from "co-operative" or "retaliatory" behaviour in repeated interactions. These behaviours arise because actors expect future material benefits from their actions; in the case of reciprocity, the actor is responding to friendly or hostile actions even if no material gains can be expected. Reciprocity is also fundamentally different from altruism. Altruism is a form of unconditional kindness; that is, altruism given does not emerge as a response to altruism received. Again, reciprocity is an in-kind response to beneficial or harmful acts. (Fehr and Gachter, 2000, p.2)

Whether reciprocity can be considered co-operative, altruistic or neither is not the issue for this thesis, what is important is that there seems to be agreement that reciprocity impacts positively on the development of social capital, "reflect*[s]* active social connections" (Sudarsky, 1999, p.32) and is a key indicator of social capital (Walker, Coulthart, Morgan & Mulvihill, 2000). Consequently, reciprocity is important for open communication and exchange of resources and thus the lack of reciprocity may demobilise an organisation's social capital in achieving desirable objectives. However, an over dependence on reciprocity can be an indicator of a closed, subsistence level existence as detailed by Lomnitz (1977):

> Since marginals *[those in a poor neighbourhood]* are barred from full membership in the urban industrial economy they have had to build their own economic system. The basic social economic structure of the shantytown is the reciprocity network...It is a social field defined by an intense flow of reciprocal exchange between neighbours. The main purpose...is to provide a minimum level of economic security to its members. (Lomnitz, 1977, p. 209)

The closed nature of these reciprocal relationships can limit the development of bridging social capital, which Leonard (2004) views as important in communities rising above subsistence level economic activity.

Efficacy

A sense of efficacy refers to "the belief that an individual, group or community has in their capacity to produce desired outcomes by their own actions" (Edwards, 2004, p.33). Community efficacy (a shared sense of empowerment and capacity to effect change at the community level) and volunteering have been highlighted as key elements in cognitive social capital (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003). The National Committee on Volunteering (2002) also outlined best practice procedures and quality assurance systems to support volunteering. These protocols cover areas including competency, standards, selection and recruitment policy, complaints procedures, charter of rights and duties, recognition / award systems, out of pocket expenses and volunteer

welfare and security policies. Knowledge transfer between previous and existing elected Executive Committees of any voluntary organisation, ensures that:

> ...The volunteering experience within volunteer-involving organisations is supported through better management, recruitment and retention policies. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002 p.109)

They also acknowledge the role played by these volunteers:

> It is widely recognised that many volunteers now work in a management role with responsibilities as employers and financial managers. Voluntary members and directors of boards of management have specific legal responsibilities for employment, health and safety legislation...if boards are to continue to attract members from the target groups of the organisations involved, ongoing training in the roles and responsibilities of management is vital. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p.113)

Friendship

Social inclusion, support and friendship are affected by the connectedness of communities as outlined by Smith (2004b) when he discusses the link between spirituality, community and social relationships-

> On occasion or at such times members experience a centred and bounded entity that includes the self as such; they engage in exchanges and sharing that are personalized; the orientation to each other and to the whole engages the person. It is from such occasions that 'the spirit of community' or 'sense of community' is achieved... the aspiration to community is an aspiration to a kind of connectedness that transcends the mundane and concrete tangle of social relationships. (Smith, 2004b, p.3)

Any heightened sense of belonging or acceptance as a result of community support or social inclusion will enable the creation of strong bonding ties (which are discussed in the next section) and a heightened sense of belonging. This is closely related to the notion of friendship, which is the relationship between people that involves: liking, affection and mutually beneficial loyalty (Edwards, 2004). Friendship is seen as an important aspect of social capital:

> As the number, types and quality of relationships between people within social networks and the shared identities that develop, can influence the amount of support an individual has, as well as giving access to other sources of support. (Edwards, 2004, p.61)

Friendship contributes to social capital as it infuses a sense of belonging, increased levels of trust and the sharing of information – and can be considered both as a form of bonding and bridging ties. Integration into the community is a process through which "an individual or group is welcomed into a community or group and made to feel

accepted and included" (Edwards, 2004, p.88). Integration is closely related to the concept of friendship in the countering of isolation, which is a deep and incomprehensible feeling of loneliness and is unfortunately experienced by many over 55's in our society.

Investment in social capital

The third theme common to the definitions of social capital is that social capital can be viewed, like other forms of capital, in terms of investment with a view of returns or as Lin (2003) puts it "investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace" (p.19). Lin (2003) goes on to state that social capital can be described as "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (p.29), such as pursuing desired organisational aims and objectives. This idea of investment to develop social capital for wider societal benefits has been expounded by the Health Promotion Agency and Age Concern Northern Ireland (2005) when it states:

> The challenge facing Government, voluntary, community and older peoples' organisations, health and social care providers and the wider society, is how and to what extent investment is made in the development of social capital. (Health Promotion Agency and Age Concern Northern Ireland, 2005, p.5)

In relation to community organisations, the Irish state has a role to invest in the connections between individuals through a proactive and enabling process. Such a process can mobilise and empower civil society; foster and maintain community spirit; and assist communities struggling with issues of "declining populations, unemployment, language issues, social disadvantage or drug use" (Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, 2003, p.6).

Working definition of social capital

Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) have brought many of the above themes together and define social capital broadly as:

> The institutions, relationships, attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.2)

Borrowing on this definition and along with the above core concepts, a working

definition of social capital is used for the purpose of this thesis. It is the investment into the connections between individuals and groups of individuals, which are aided by a shared set of values and beliefs and contribute to co-operative and organisational outcomes. Like other forms of capital, investment can be made to develop, deepen and strengthen these connections. These interactions between natural, economic, human, cultural and social capital are now examined in terms of their impact on an individuals or communities well-being.

Other forms of capital

Traditionally, the alleviation of poverty was seen in terms of the deployment of natural, human and economic capital and neglecting the social or cultural capital aspects of society:

> The effort to alleviate poverty traditionally has used and was based on natural capital, physical or produced capital and human capital. Together they constitute the wealth of nations and form the basis of economic prosperity. It has now been recognized that these three types of capital determine only partially the effort to keep poverty at a minimal level. People overlook this because they forget to recognize the way in which the poor interact and organize themselves to generate growth and development. The missing link is social capital. (Ismawan, 2000, p.7)

Cairns, Van Til and Williamson (2004) propose that "social capital and cultural capital, though separate concepts, work together to help people obtain their goals" (p.54). They view cultural capital as:

> Knowing how to act and present oneself in order to fit in...knowledge of cultural cues which indicate that an individual is a member of a group and should be given access to those relationships. (Cairns, Van Til & Williamson, 2004, p.54).

Basing their work on Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Woolcock (2000) the National Economic and Social Forum (2002) proposes that people with economic capital are well positioned to acquire these cultural cues and further exploit them:

> One of the factors that make economic inequality so destructive is the potential it offers those who are economically powerful to easily and visibly convert money (economic capital) into other valued forms of capital. Those with most economic capital are best positioned to acquire cultural capital such as formal education but also work-related learning or social capital, such as valuable social networks a fact that further reinforces their dominance. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, p.49)

One of the means by which the economically powerful can acquire cultural cues is by education:

Education is one essential cultural process that has a direct impact on economic equality. It is often presented as a neutral exercise, giving credentials to those with greatest competence. However, those with wealth can buy cultural capital in the form of education credentials through extra investment in their children's education both in and out of school, and investment in ancillary goods and services which boost educational achievement including grinds, summer schools, travel, student exchanges, etc. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2002, p.49)

As such cultural capital can be viewed in terms of primarily a family orientated form of capital. This is supported by Healy and Côtés (2001) who suggest that cultural capital is a:

Collection of family based resources such as parental education levels, social class and family norms and practices, which influence academic success. (Healy and Côtés, 2001, p.24)

Healy and Côtés (2001) also propose that in addition to social capital and the closely related concept of cultural capital, the capacity to satisfy a society's needs depends on the interaction between human, natural and economic capital.

Human capital can be considered as the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal well-being (Healy & Côtés, 2001). Like any other form of capital, governments can invest in human capital through education and training. The eventual return on this investment comes in the form of a more highly skilled workforce. Societies with better human resources are generally more productive (Lobley, 1980). But a key difference here is that both society and an individual can invest in human capital:

Far from being a homogeneous society, there are different opportunities or motivations in the acquisition or non-acquisition of human capital, so that the worth of labour as a commodity varies across individuals (Lin, 2003, p.10).

In a break from traditional Marxist viewpoints of worker exploitation, there is a modification of the relationship between the labourer and capitalist (Lin, 2003). Labourers in the newer model were no longer treated as replaceable commodities but rather as commodities that can boost and develop their own capital and thus increase production for the capitalist. Individuals can increase their capital by training/education, making themselves more attractive to an employer and therefore being in a position to request increased wages. When individuals join national community and voluntary organisations they often bring their skills and experience with them and facilitate knowledge transfer within the organisation. This viewpoint is supported by Edwards (2004) who argues "Individuals within networks bring their

personal stock of human capital (skills and competencies) to the network" (p.15). An increase in human capital brought to a national community and voluntary organisation through the individual can therefore aid the development of that organisation. A decrease in the variety of human resources can limit knowledge and may stifle development. As such the challenge for an organisation is to access and mobilise this and other forms of capital to achieve organisational goals.

Natural capital is the renewable and non-renewable resources which enter the production process and satisfy consumption needs, as well as environmental assets that have amenity and productive use and are essential for the life support system (Healy & Côtés, 2001). The depletion of a community's natural capital stock can have a major impact on a community's well-being (Edwards, 2004). The presence of abundant natural resources can be the basis for increased economic activity.

Economic capital is production like machinery, equipment and structures, but also non-production related infrastructures, non-tangible assets and the financial assets that provide command over current and future output streams (Healy & Côtés, 2001). An overall increase in the economic capital of a country can increase sources of funding available at both governmental and individual level. The presence or absence of economic capital can aid or obstruct the development of national community and voluntary organisation and thus its stock of social capital. The interaction between economic and social capital could be explained on the basis that if there is a dip in a country's economic activity, there is a resulting dip in the Governments tax take; with a consequent cut in social spending on schools, community centres, cultural and recreational facilities. Not alone will this have an effect on both the individual and community but can effect national community and voluntary organisation sources of funding and their capacity to develop activities. However, the lack of economic resources can cause the establishment of certain types of voluntary organisations aimed at combating issues relating to poverty and unemployment.

The interactions between these different types of capital interact to impact, in a positive or negative manner, on the well-being of individuals and communities (Edwards, 2004). This well-being is linked to the areas of health, education, employment, family and community functioning, economic growth, justice, culture and social cohesion. The impacts on these areas may range from a macro level to the micro level. These

interactions can also produce what Healy and Côtés (2001) refer to as 'regrettables', such as crime and pollution. In turn further resources in the form of environmental protection agencies, police and judicial systems must be deployed to manage these 'regrettables' (Edwards, 2004). The interactions between different forms of capital can produce positive impacts such as increasing the level of educational attainment and infrastructure, or negative 'regrettables' such as the degradation of volunteerism. The reliance and interaction of each type of capital for the proper functioning of society and the linkage of investment of resources within a social capital framework are developed by Edwards (2004) and exemplified in figure 4 below. As such, in considering the impact social capital can have in achieving desirable organisation goals it is important to keep in mind these interactions within a societal context.
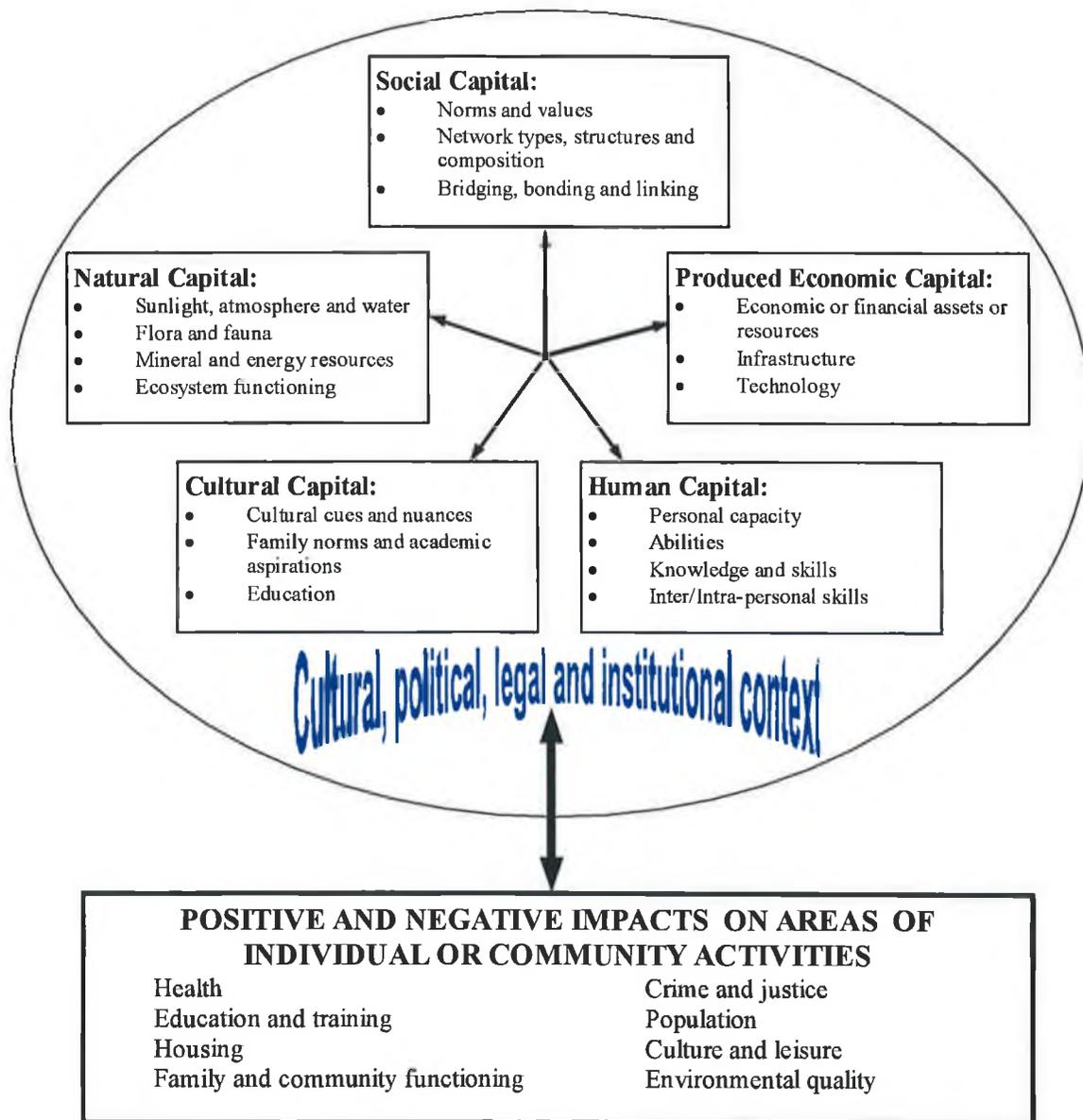
Figure 4: Impact of resources on areas of individual and community well-being (Based on Edwards, 2004, p.13)

Network theory and social capital

Introduction

Where individuals interact networks are created and it is through networks that social capital is formed (Edwards, 2004). Networks are regarded as integral to the concept of social capital and crucial to its formation, as they aid the creation of social capital by providing the means through which people can access resources. Lin, Cook and Burt (2001) indicate that groups can have, gain and maintain social capital and that "resources embedded in a structure are distinguished from resources possessed by individual actors" (p.33). The social intermediation study field research guide (Szabo, 1999) outlines, "the networks and norms created by groups are thereby said to be a positive form of social capital" (p.2). This arises because social capital exists in the structure of connections between and among people (Jacobs, 1961) and networks are themselves structures of interactions between individuals. Consequently, as networks are created or developed so too is social capital.

Network openness

Network openness has been defined as "the structure and strength of links between people and groups in a given network" (Edwards, 2004, p.74). A highly open network may refer to a set of links in which few members are linked to others and may result in many members existing in isolation. In these networks there are less well-established norms and trust levels and less possibility for sanctions being imposed. However they may allow diversity to flourish and the range of resources within the network is more varied. A closed network generally refers to a bonded group, in which each member tends to know the other. The strength of a more closed network is a sharing of norms, a developed sense of trust and a "clear expectation about the way each member of the network will relate to another" (Edwards, 2004, p.74). In these networks there is little room to deviate from established norms, greater capacity for the application of sanctions and there is the possibility that members of the network may become oppressive and intolerant (Edwards, 2004). This view is supported by Leonard (2004) who, by researching the closed networked communities in Belfast, reported that whilst providing for subsistence level existence, closed networks can act against the broader development

of the community in terms of economic activity and sectarianism. Within the context of this research, the openness of local organisations is explored by examining the ties and relationships within the organisation's network.

Relational ties and the different forms of social capital

Ties exist wherever two or more individuals in a network, exchange or share resources such as goods, services, social support or information. The strength of these ties are normally assessed by looking at a combination of factors including frequency of contact, duration of association, intimacy of the tie, provision of reciprocal services and kinship (Haythornthwaite, 2002). Sander and Lowney (2003) outlines that the connections between individuals are represented as strong ties (someone with whom you might discuss a serious health problem or difficulties in your marriage) or as weak ties (episodic, single stranded and more fleeting ties, like those that would form in a one day park cleanup). Within an organisation the strength of ties depends on the context of the relationship. The ties amongst members at a local affiliate level, where there is frequent interaction might be considered strong. At the same time the ties between these members and a governing body may well be weak in nature. Strong and weak ties are closely linked to the differing types of social capital and it is the mixture (or lack of mixture) of these ties which leads to the formation of the distinct types of social capital known as "bonding; bridging and linking" (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.33).

Strong ties and bonded social capital

Strong ties are closely linked with bonding social capital and can provide important emotional, personal and health related benefits to its members through close ties and support. Such strong ties can counter the effects of isolation and loneliness by the formation of friendship (Edwards, 2004) and enable a high level of intimacy, self-disclosure and emotional support (Granovetter, 1983). Bonded communities are typical of family networks; specific ethnic or class-based communities; or of organisations that are kinship based. The majority of strong ties require a huge input of time and effort to maintain, except for close family ties:

> Though some people can maintain intimacy without frequent contact, these are
> primarily kinship relationships. (Haythornthwaite, 2002, p.386)

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In this context, bonding social capital is the linking of people with others from the same background interests and values and is captured in the maxim, 'birds of a feather flock together'. The idea of bonding capital being essential to 'getting by' (Putnam, 2000) is central to this discussion. Leonard (2004) argues that bonding social capital when it occurs among homogenous populations is often parochial and importantly, "benefits those with internal access" (p.929). Leonard (2004) continues:

> The very factors that promote its development such as tight bonds of trust and solidarity may ultimately prevent its entrepreneurial members from reaching their full potential. (Leonard, 2004, p.929)

In other words, individuals in a very bonded community may be held back from accessing better jobs and interacting with the wider society. This is echoed by Healy and Côtés (2001) who detail that without the mollifying effect of bridging capital, highly bonded communities can cause pursuit of narrow interests and can "actively exclude outsiders" (p.42).

Weak ties and bridging social capital

It is proposed that a key benefit for an individual in possessing weak ties is that individuals connected by weak ties have better access to and sharing of job information (Granovetter, 1973), access to other networks (Kirke, 1995), integration into society (Granovetter, 1983) and promoting communication (Wellman, Salaff, Dimitrova, Garton, Gulia, & Haythornthwaite, 1996), in particular communications using new technologies (Wellman, 2001). Granovetter's (1973) argument is based on the premise that individuals without weak ties rarely extend their contacts beyond their clique, as their time is usually spent maintaining their strong ties (Granovetter, 1983). Individuals with few weak ties could be deprived of information from different parts of a social system and are confined to receiving "provincial news and views of close friends" (p.202). Granovetters basic premise is that weak ties are "vital for an individual's integration into modern society" (p.202) and that bridging ties were far more likely to connect individuals who were significantly different from one another. The argument is that the weak ties between two closely-knit groups of friends are not merely a trivial acquaintance but rather a crucial bridge. These bridges or weak ties can speed up the diffusion of information or ideas, which can lead networks to having a greater capacity for change and an enhanced ability to co-ordinate activities. Individuals with closer

weak ties have enhanced job opportunities and a wider access to resources, not normally available within their closed or bonded network.

Weak ties can lead to the development of bridging social capital. Bridging social capital refers to the relationships between friends, associates and colleagues with different background and interests (Edwards, 2004) or with different socio-economic status, age, generation, race or ethnicity (Woolcock, 2000). Bridging may also refer to a relationship "where a single person or small number of people are members of diverse groups" (Edwards 2004, p.103). In relation to people entering the labour market, bridging social capital becomes important for finding quality employment which may lead to opportunities for further bridging relationships (Edwards, 2004). This is very closely related to Granovetter's Theory, where weak ties can also facilitate access to resources and information not normally available within a close/bonded network.

Within an organisational framework weak ties are important to increasing communications and the flow of information within the network. Indeed, it is also important in terms of forming relationship with networks that are external to an organisation – being part of a network of networks.

Linking social capital

Linking social capital refers to:

> The relations between different social strata in a hierarchy where power, social status and wealth are accessed by different groups. (Healy & Côtés, 2001, p.42)

And:

> Connects groups and individuals to others in a different social position. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.34)

Linking social capital can be considered as the weak ties represented in the relationships of an individual or group, with people and institutions with power and influence. Such ties are also outside the group's immediate community. Linking social capital also represents the influence that a group can have by being represented in a local or regional forum where their interests can be articulated. Individuals and organisations can enhance their possible stock of linking social capital by increasing the number of community organisations that they are affiliated with. Such affiliations provide them with greater opportunities to access groups and individuals in different social positions

to themselves e.g. more powerful or socially advantaged.

While bridging social capital is created from "social ties that cut across differences such as race, class or ethnicity" (Sander and Lowney, 2003, p.4), such a definition makes little difference between bridging and linking social capital. This overlap can be resolved by considering bridging ties as those connections between "distant friends, associates and colleagues" (Healy & Côtés, 2001, p.42) and that linking social capital connects different types of people and groups (e.g. ethnic, gender, political or regional). Such linking social capital can be particularly effective for people seeking social and economic gain beyond their immediate society (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003).

Community and voluntary organisations can also operate as a part of a wider network linking with other organisations, government or business groups. Indeed being part of a wider network is important for obtaining resources and contacts, as Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) argues:

> Groups with linkages often have better access to resources...such as from government or non-governmental organisations. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.47)

By examining an organisation's external connections, an assessment can be made of the group's stocks of linking social capital and the impact that mobilisation (or otherwise) of this form of social capital has on its aims and objectives.

The mixture of bonding, bridging and linking social capital

Smith (2004a) summarises bonding social capital as inward looking, with a tendency to reinforce exclusive identities and homogeneous groups. In contrast, bridging social capital may be more outward looking and encompass people across different social divides. These different types of social capital can be summarised as bonding [to people like you for getting by in life]; bridging [to people not like you for getting on in life]; and linking social capital [to people at a different step in the social ladder for obtaining access to resources and knowledge] (Putnam, 2000). The National Economic and Social Forum (2003) outlines:

...Too much bonding and too little bridging can stifle and restrict personal initiative and innovation.........*[however]* too much bridging and too little bonding can leave individuals personally vulnerable. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.34)

An overburden of bonding social capital can have detrimental effects such as, the exclusion and oppression of others and the marginalisation of those with different viewpoints. Appointments to positions of power not balanced with trustworthiness and bridging social capital can lead to nepotism or corruption (Edwards, 2004). In a well functioning community or organisation it is the mixture of these different types of social capital that is important. A lack of one type and an over exaggeration of another can lead to oppressive limitations being put on people and can even be dangerous, a viewpoint supported by Leonard (2004) and Putnam (2000).

Leonard (2004), in her studies of Belfast communities finds evidence that contradicts Putnam's (2000) assertion that "employed people are more active civically and socially than those outside the paid labour force" (p.191). Leonard (2004) found that without sufficient bridging capital, employment opportunities within closed networks remain at a subsistence level. She argues that the view that bridging capital is needed to 'get ahead' is not without substance, but the economic promise that high social capital equals prosperity was not evident in the Belfast studies.

Indeed, the mobilisation of different forms of social capital may be more appropriate to achieving differing organisation aims. Linking social capital when mobilised is an effective means of accessing key decision makers, while bonded social capital is important in deepening friendships within a group. It is the mixture and balance of these different types of social capital that is important for the achievement of different objectives.

Factors that indicate the forms and mobilisation of social capital

Introduction

The different elements that can indicate different forms of social capital and their mobilisation can be categorised in a number of ways. The first broad categorisation utilises the structural and cognitive dimensions of social capital (Uphoff, 2000).

Structural social capital is the:

> Relatively objective and externally observable social structures, such as networks, associations and institutions and the rules and procedures they embody. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.3)

This structural dimension refers to the pattern, configuration and purpose of social interactions (Uphoff, 2000). Central to the structural dimension of social capital is the existence of network ties, the configuration of the network ties and the ability of networks to serve as resources other than that for the purpose that they were originally established (Alexopoulos & Monks, 2004). Alexopoulos and Monks (2004) propose that the structural properties of social relationships "constitute major resources of benefits" (p.5), such as gaining access to valuable information and knowledge flows.

The second dimension of social capital:

> ...Known as 'cognitive social capital' comprises more subjective and intangible elements such as generally accepted attitudes and norms of behaviour, shared values, reciprocity and trust. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.3)

Alexopoulos and Monks (2004) outline that the cognitive dimension refers to resources that provide "shared representations, interpretations and systems of meaning among parties" (p.6). Important aspects of these resources are shared understandings, language, codes and narratives. The occurrence of a shared vision can also enable greater cognitive social capital as it can facilitate knowledge sharing and integration amongst individuals and groups by providing a purposeful meaning to their actions (Uphoff, 2000).

However, there is no clear boundary between these two concepts, but rather a sliding

scale from elements being predominantly structural in nature (networks, membership, leverage power), to having cognitive elements such as indicators of trust and adherence to norms and social interaction.

The main characteristics of a network structure conducive to the production of social capital have been detailed by Nayaran and Cassidy (2001) as: the number of memberships; contribution of money; frequency of participation; participation in the decision-making process; membership heterogeneity/diversity; and the source of the group's finance. However, Edwards (2004) identifies additional characteristics such as: the modes of communications within the network; the transience/mobility of the network; and the power relationships of the network. Some of these elements act as indicators of mobilisations (such as the participation) rather than the extent of the potential reservoir of an organisation's social capital.

Edwards (2004) goes on to categorise the elements of social capital within a cultural (language, history, accepted behaviours and shared beliefs, religion, sport, art and cultural events), political (separation of powers between the legislature, executive and the judiciary, universal adult suffrage, transparency and accountability of political process, rule of law and representative elected government), legal (an independent judiciary, a body of law covering criminal, civil, property and constitutional matters, a regulatory framework for commercial activities and international conventions and agreements covering areas such as human rights) and institutional (organised societies or the buildings used for the promotion of a particular object) context. This is a recognition that:

> These conditions *[cultural, political, legal and institutional]* are interdependent and overlap. They provide the context in a community or society for the development and maintenance of social capital, as well as having an important influence on other types of capital in terms of determining the conditions of utilisation and distribution of other types of capital. (Edwards, 2004, p.17)

These categories are visually represented in figure 5 below and summarised as:

- Network composition (with emphasis in this thesis on the network composition of national community and voluntary organisations), which pertains to the individuals or groups that comprise of the network, i.e. family, friends, neighbours and organisations
- Network structure includes such items as the size, diversity, density and mobility of the network membership, communications structures of the network and the

power relationships within the network

- Network types, these are the bonding, bridging and linking ties that lead to the establishment of the different forms of social capital
- Network qualities are the norms and values of the network which has been previously discussed and
- Network transactions which include: sharing support and knowledge, common action and activities, conflict resolution, participation/volunteering, sources of funding and innovation.
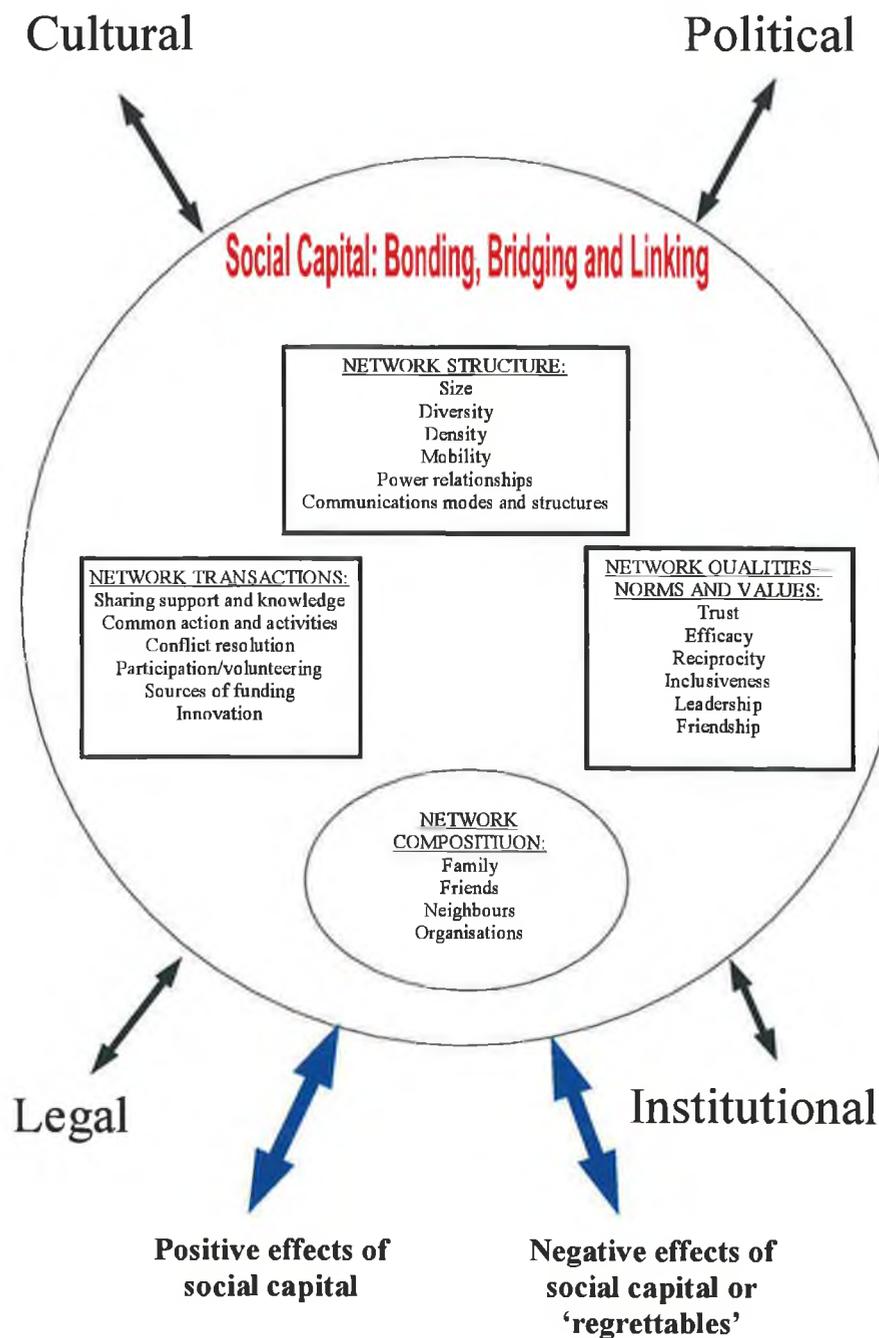
Figure 5: The elements of social capital within a cultural, political, legal and institutional context (Based on Edwards, 2004, p.14)

When related to the structural dimensions, the network composition and structure could be categorised as structural social capital. The network qualities and transactions can be equally placed in the cognitive social capital category. In essence, Edwards (2004) and Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) are describing the same thing, but categorising it in different ways. These different categorisations of the same item may be a result of social capital being a relatively new branch of academic investigation. Indeed such a proposition is supported by Bryson (2004) who outlines that within new branches of research it is a common occurrence that different methods of categorisations are utilised.

Network qualities, or the norms and values of a network, have been discussed in previous sectors. However, the classification of the facilitating factors into network structural factors (the size, diversity, density and mobility of the network membership, communications structures of the network and the power relationships within the network) and network transactional factors (sharing support and knowledge, common action and activities, conflict resolution, participation/volunteering, sources of funding and innovation), lends itself to form a framework to address the thesis' research questions.

Network structural factors

Network size

For Bourdieu (1986):

> The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent...depends on the size of network connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected. (Bourdieu, 1986, p.249)

As such the size of a network can be a reflection of the amount of effort and investment put into relationships by the individuals that make up that network, which is also supported by Edwards (2004). Putnam (2000) views the size of a network that an individual is involved with as a "useful barometer of community involvement" (Putnam, 2000, p.49).

Networks vary in size from very limited to a large number of individuals or associated

groups. The size of the network can affect the stock of social capital that exists within that community and can influence the "range and quality of resources accessible" (Edwards, 2004, p.68), while Szabo (1999) outlines in relation to group lending programmes (as opposed to individual lending programmes) that "members have a greater ability to enact change due to their co-operation and strength in numbers" (p.5). Indeed membership of groups can be used to improve the personal positions of individuals through their interaction in previously inaccessible networks of power relationships – and so impacts upon an organisation's size.

However, an increase in the size of a network does not automatically increase the stock of social capital, as even though networks are crucial to the formation of social capital they cannot create social capital independently of human interaction. Moreover, while an increase in network size increases the opportunity for the formation of social capital, the corresponding increase in social capital is dependent on the level to which this opportunity is fully mobilised. Another consideration with regard to network size is the forms of social capital that it indicates or encourages. This is discussed by Keating, Swindle and Foster (2005) who propose in relation to older persons networks:

> Overall, the smaller, more kin-focused, proximate care networks seem most likely to be sources of bonding social capital while the more diverse, less dense support networks have more potential to link seniors with other resources. (Keating, Swindle & Foster, 2005, p.44)

As a network grows differing layers or levels can emerge and as this occurs so too does the possibility of increased isolation. Consequently, the importance of bridging and linking social capital within the network becomes important to reduce the negatives effects of this growth. In this way an analysis of an organisation's network size - in terms of affiliate member groups, the number of individuals within each local group and the size of network that the national body is part of – can give an indication of an organisation's forms of social capital available for various degrees of mobilisation to achieve desirable goals.

Network diversity

Edwards (2004) expounds that acceptance of diversity and inclusiveness are important in creating a just and harmonious society. In developing a strategic framework to promote equality, the National Economic and Social Forum (2002) outlines three approaches to supporting diversity:

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- *Affirmation of diversity* where value is given to difference and new assumptions are established to underpin how we organise our society;
- *Negotiation of diversity* where the practical implications of identity and diversity are named and negotiated into policy, practice and provision; and
- *Accommodation of diversity* where structures, systems and institutions change to allow for different norms, values, ways of living and needs. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2002)

Diversity acceptance refers to the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, which display respect, understanding and appreciation of difference. Edwards (2004) argues that for community groups to function co-operatively, the group needs:

> The capacity to accept and include diversity, whilst allowing the network and its members to maintain a sense of identity. (Edwards, 2004, p.39)

Inclusiveness can be a description of a more active form of diversity acceptance. Exclusion can lead to a lack of access to resources by individuals or groups and can "lead to discord within or between communities and the fracturing of social cohesion" (Edwards, 2004, p.38). Indeed a lack of diversity and an openness of networks can result in exclusion and inequality which leads to elitism, exclusivity and reduce access to innovation, information and resources:

> Viewing social capital as a group resource, it is possible that certain individuals and groups are excluded from social networks of the advantaged or powerful elites. "Not-in-my-back-yard", NIMBY, behaviour is also manifested in closed social groups. Similarly, innovation, enterprise and reaching-out to individuals and groups beyond one's immediate network may be impeded. Hence, social capital can be used as a resource to strengthen community belonging and engagement on the part of the disadvantaged as well as a resource which can be used against them. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.30)

However a blanket tolerance of all organisations such as anti-Semitic groups, could damage social cohesion. So tolerance needs to be balanced against the personal freedoms of the community, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in line with anti-racism legislation (Dáil Eireann, 2002).

Diversity in the membership base affects a network's structural social capital as the varying backgrounds from which the members are drawn increases the probability of greater variety of resources being available to the overall network composition. This is supported by Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) who propose that diversity of a membership base may have a positive or negative impact on social capital and that it is possible to rate the internal diversity of an organisation according to certain criteria, these being: kinship, religion, gender, age, political affiliation, occupation and education. An assessment of the diversity of the membership of an organisation would

therefore include elements such as gender, age, background and education. Whilst a lack of diversity can lead to a reduced stock of social capital, increased diversity does not automatically confer greater social capital upon the group. Increased diversity merely develops opportunities to access social resources, which can then form the basis for increased social capital.

Within an organisational context, the diversity of the organisations membership can indicate whether an organisation can be termed heterogeneous or homogeneous. Heterogeneous organisations can be considered as those groups with a diverse membership, as opposed to homogeneous organisations where the membership is comprised of units from the same educational, religious, economic or cultural background. In relation to heterogeneous versus homogeneous organisations, Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) outlines that this internal heterogeneity impacts on social capital in terms of creating solidarity, co-operation and consensus and on economic welfare in terms of obtaining employment. This is supported by Leonard (2004) who highlights that social capital, when it occurs among homogenous populations, is often parochial and can adversely impact on individuals obtaining jobs and prosperity. This is also verified by research that purports to show that heterogeneity of social ties may increase linkages with various networks and therefore provides access to resources not normally available (Edwards, 2004). Drawing on data gathered from five US cities, Portney and Berry (1997) conclude that compared with social, self-help and issue-based organisations, participants in neighbourhood associations have a heightened sense of community and civic engagement:

> All else equal, more homogeneous neighbourhoods are more likely to have more effective neighbourhood associations. (Portney & Berry, 1997, p.639)

So while heterogeneity may be important in accessing and sharing resources, homogeneous structures are characterised by high levels of trust and reciprocity due to various differences within the groups (Edwards, 2004). Thus, an assessment of an organisation's diversity indicates the forms of social capital within an organisation and the importance of shared values and norms for the affirmation, negotiation and accommodation of diversity.

Network density

Where an individual is associated with a number of organisations they are said to have a high density of membership (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002). An individual can retain membership of a number of organisations without it proving problematic. This is apparent where members of the farming community can also belong to a local sporting group. Similarly people can subscribe to a sense of local, county and national identity without fear of eroding any sense of belonging with other groups. However this is not always the case, as dual membership of groups can also prove problematic depending on the nature of the organisations. Whereas there exists a strong sense of belonging and local identity among the natives of Hong Kong, the majority do not readily accept their national identity as Chinese (Bowring, 2005; Chun, 2002). Also in terms of interest-based communities, there are similar problems of multiple memberships e.g. belonging to a gay rights movement and the Catholic faith. This can often be explained by assessing the shared values, norms and behaviours of each group and identifying any overlap or contradicting aims. It then becomes apparent how dual membership of certain organisations can prove possible or problematic.

However, where an individual can sustain membership of a variety of social networks it can be surmised that their inclusion into each new network can involve their bringing to that network a resource of new social capital. This has the dual effect of enriching both the social capital already contained within that new network and the social capital of the networks in which that person is already a member. Edwards (2004) supports this by detailing that density is measured by the degree to which people occur in similar networks and share a variety of common interests. He continues that:

> In a dense network there is likely to be a good knowledge of available resources and a high level of co-operation. (Edwards, 2004, p.74)

However, in a network of low density connection may be sparse and "members may not be aware of resources available to them" (p.74). The density of connections can also be considered important for promoting well-being and economic growth (Healy & Côtés, 2001).

In a similar manner, the density of membership of a community organisation can be considered in terms of the external networks that these groups form part of. What is not

clear from the literature is whether the membership density of an organisation is an indication of the potential reservoir of an organisation's bridging/linking social capital, or whether it is a reflection of an organisation's ability to mobilise its existing social capital to develop further bridging or linking social capital. In an effort to address this issue, the density of external linkages of an organisation is assessed and split into two broad strands. Firstly, the networks that an organisation are part of by right or by means of local interaction, can be viewed as a potential reservoir of bridging social capital – that could be mobilised to further a group's aims. The second set of networks that an organisation can be involved with is where a group's existing social capital is utilised to gain membership to a body not normally accessible.

Mobility of membership

It is by taking a snapshot of a network at a moment in time that the size and activity levels of a network can be quantified. However, involvement in community and voluntary organisations (i.e. the network size) may be transient in nature or may be sustained over a period of time. Transience and mobility is applicable to national community and voluntary organisations in terms of turnover of member groups and the sustainability of involvement over a long term (Edwards, 2004). The greater the period of contact with a specific group, the greater the potential to develop ties and therefore build social capital (Edwards, 2004). The length of involvement may be dependent on:

- The purpose and relevance of the group
- The welcome individuals get in the organisation and
- How they are made feel at home.

In studying the patterns of civic involvement, Putnam (1996) finds that older people are more likely to be involved in civic activity than younger people, who are engaged in more intermittent acts of civic involvement. Szabo (1999) takes an interest in the theme of ex-clients and dormant groups among micro finance initiative schemes because:

> It has been found that in some cases, micro-finance groups will operate for a time and then cease to be active for a variety of reasons. (Szabo, 1999, p.5)

His paper was a pre-testing manual for ascertaining levels of social capital and so had no conclusions. However, his questions focused on why there is turnover of affiliated groups; why groups ceased to exist; why members left a group even though it was beneficial to the poor; and:

> Do groups stop functioning because they are ineffective or because group members have 'graduated' and no longer need the services provided by the group. (Szabo, 1999, p.29)

This has importance in this research because while an analysis of the size of an organisation's network is important, it is useful to examine the length of time that groups are established which is indicative of the mobility within the network. Another important aspect to consider is that higher levels of transience between organisations may increase bridging social capital through greater establishment of weak ties. These elements are explored in the following sections together with indicative evidence of the mobilisation of the aforementioned potential reservoir of social capital.

Power structures and leadership

Power structures have been defined as "the relative positions of power between individuals, within or between groups and between individuals and organisations" (Edwards 2004, p.81) and can influence the ability of groups to meet the needs of all members, particularly those that have been marginalized. Power relationships are beneficial both at the individual and group level as they can enable and increase a group's resources and provide a social dynamic within a network. This social dynamic can establish some people as dominant, thereby bringing a wealth of social contact to that individual and simultaneously providing advantage to an individual of a lower network from someone in a higher network (Lin, 2003). However power relationships, as well as enabling the group's ability to address the needs of some of its marginalized members, can themselves marginalize people in the decision-making process of an organisation (Edwards, 2004). The National Economic and Social Forum report (2003) outlines that:

> The ability to participate more fully in society and decision-making is not equally distributed: some groups and individuals with important human, social and economic resources have greater access to decision-making and social advantage. (National Economic and Social Forum report, 2003, p.80)

Szabo's (1999) work in India found that women involved in micro finance initiatives benefit from social inclusion and empowerment, as:

> Consensus building and democratic structures of many groups coupled with the increased economic security resulting from the micro finance initiatives can lead to confidence and skill building among the women involved. (Szabo, 1999, p.9)

In Ireland, the Community and Voluntary Sector is recognised as a Social Partner, alongside Employer/Business, Trade Unions and Farming/Agricultural Sectors (Westmeath County Council, 2006). County Fora is a statutory, county-based network of community and voluntary organisations aimed at facilitating local groups to participate in wider civic society issues, giving "communities the right to a voice in local decision-making" (National Economic and Social Forum 2003, p. 83). They have helped develop positive features for these communities such as "enabling local groups and ground level activists to find a focus, sense of unity and dialogue" (p.83). However, it is unclear whether interaction by a local association in these County Fora has a positive or negative effect on a parent national body. While local associations interact with other local organisations, which can be seen as a form of bridging social capital, such interaction could loosen the ties with the national body. Unfortunately there is no available research on the impact of local County Fora on the operations of national community and voluntary organisations, but anecdotal evidence exists in Monaghan where local resident associations prefer to affiliate with the County Fora for services such as advice, training and support (ACRA - National Body of Resident Associations, 2006; Monaghan Community Forum, 2006), rather than affiliate with the national body representing resident associations – thus weakening the national network.

Leadership is closely associated with power relationships and is traditionally conferred on an individual or group on the basis of personal characteristics and experience, or through tradition and/or by occupying a position of authority (Edwards, 2004). The leadership style of an organisation can impact on confidence levels among the members and the resulting levels of confidence will in turn themselves impact on the willingness of members to involve themselves in the creation of social capital for the benefit of the group and the long term planning and development of the national organisation. Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) in evaluating the relative roles of the leader and the members in reaching decisions and of the effectiveness of the organisation's leader outlines that, "Those organisations that follow a democratic pattern of decision-making are generally believed to be more effective than others" (p.45). Varley (1991) outlined in relation to Community Development Co-operatives (CDCs) that:

> The poor performance of CDC management boards in setting strategic objectives and in monitoring management's performance at once reflects and is a product of the CDC tendency to become management (as against membership) led. (Varley, 1991, p.59)

If an organisation becomes management led, it is imperative that that management is properly qualified in order to negate any problems that may occur with interaction in wider networks. Varley (1991) refers to a community group's interaction with state officials, who were less than happy with what they considered the organisation's "amateurish management practices" (p.60). Therefore power relationships and leadership play an important role in the operation of networks and affect the ability of a network's participants to draw on stocks of social capital contained within that network. In this way, an analysis of the power relationships and leadership within an organisation can shed light on its facilitating nature to produce and maintain social capital.

Network transactional factors

Participation and volunteering levels

As outlined earlier, an increased size and diversity of a network does not necessarily correspond to an increase in social capital, as a degree of active participation with shared values and norms are required in order to mobilise any latent social capital within an organisation. Put another way, social capital cannot be developed by individuals acting on their own but depends on social interaction and participation. This is supported by Putnam (2000):

> Card carrying membership may not accurately reflect actual involvement in community activities...what really matters from the point of view of social capital and civic engagement is not merely nominal membership but active and involved membership. (Putnam, 2000, p.58)

Healy and Côtés (2001) argue that social capital is built through active participation and that trust is a contributing factor. They also outline that the fall in participation rates in voluntary organisations in the United States was accompanied by an even sharper fall in participation rates at meetings. However, they outline that participation rates are higher in the older age brackets. The National Economic and Social Forum (2003) state that the percentage of Irish adults who, in a 12-month time frame, attended a public meeting was 17.5% and that the percentage of adults over 55 but under 65, who in a twelve months time frame attended a public meeting was 21.4%. Their research also indicated that 71.9% of over 55's made a voluntary donation of money to charities, schools, or church over the previous 12 months, as shown in figure 6 below. This supports Healy and Cotes (2001) assertion that participation rates are higher in the older age brackets.

Percentage of adults who, in the previous 12 months: [A] attended a public meeting; [B] joined an action group of any kind; [C] contacted an appropriate organisation to deal with a particular problem (e.g. a local County Council or residents association); [D] contacted a T.D., public official or local representative; and [E] made a voluntary donation of money e.g. to charities, school, Church

	A	B	C	D	E
All respondents	17.5	5.5	10.7	14.0	63.6
Gender					
Male	21.6	6.7	11.2	15.1	60.6
Female	13.4	4.3	10.4	13.0	66.5
Age category					
18-29yrs	15.3	7.8	9.4	11.0	51.4
30-39yrs	20.3	3.8	13.5	16.8	58.8
40-49yrs	22.8	6.5	16.2	16.7	68.1
50-64yrs	21.4	4.3	15.3	18.1	71.9
65+yrs	6.7	3.4	4.0	6.9	62.8

Figure 6: National civic participation levels (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.54)

There seems to be a move away from public issue based organisations to more self-help organisations (Healy & Côtés, 2001). The level of face-to-face encounters has also fallen but these are being replaced by less formal and "less sustained forms of commitment" (p.104). Healy and Côtés (2001) also highlight research in the United Kingdom, which indicates that the rate of participation by women in the community sector has grown. However, this is contradicted by Downes (2006) who reports that in Ireland men are three times more likely to be a volunteer in a community organisation (albeit for less amount of time than traditionally given) than women. Healy and Côtés (2001) also report a link between the participation of older people in training programmes and their participation in the community sector. Indeed, they outline the importance of voluntary organisations, as places that foster a learning culture and are a component of a virtuous circle between initial educational attainment, lifelong learning and civic participation.

Such participation can be social, economic or civic in nature. Social participation is "the involvement in activities that are valued in their own right and reflect personal interests or a desire for individual enjoyment and gratification" (Edwards, 2004, p.43). Economic participation is "the taking part in activities that are economic in nature" (Edwards, 2004, p.63). Economic participation is the basis of many social relationships including those formed through the participation of paid employment and the conduction of business (Edwards, 2004). This issue would apply to a national community and voluntary organisation in a limited manner.

Civic participation is the involvement in activities reflecting interests and engagement in issues such as governance and democracy (Edwards, 2004). Civic participation is the two-way communication between government and citizen with the overall goal of better decisions affecting both parties with full support of the public. However, this communication can also occur through community-based organisations comprised of individuals speaking together with one voice to try and have a greater input in the decision-making process. Jacobs (1961) introduces the idea that a basic requirement for neighbourhoods to function together is a "means for civilized self-government [at a local/street level]" (p.127). This highlights how and where community-based organisations can first arise. Varley (1991) provides us with a reason why these various community groupings do not then form one single network to represent all their views. In his opinion, this has never occurred as:

> Community development has never emerged as a significant political issue because community action is too disparate to comprise a coherent social movement. (Varley, 1991, p. 66)

The vibrancy of the community and voluntary sector is instead facilitated by the engagement of many organisations from the sector in the social partnership process (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003). Therefore it is important that the groups themselves are part of networks with other bodies through civic participation. Civic participation is closely linked to community support and social inclusion, which are important aspects of social capital as they are concerned with the connections between people and their communities. These connections are integral to the process of civic participation through community groups. Community support is the involvement in activities that provide assistance to other individuals, groups and the wider community. These activities are voluntary in nature, can be carried out through an organisational structure or by the individual (Edwards, 2004) and also incorporate elements of reciprocity and community efficacy. The National Committee on Volunteering (2002) recommends that:

> Volunteering policy contains strategies that target participation and address differences in participation, such as age, educational attainment, socio-economic status, regional variation and cultural diversity. Such strategies, therefore, must, actively promote social inclusion. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p.107)

By creating a sense of inclusion through community support networks, which is an element of cognitive social capital, community groups are addressing the inequalities

suffered by those members of society disenfranchised by age, educational attainment, socio-economic status, regional variation and cultural diversity (Healy & Côtés, 2001). In doing so they are utilising an element of social capital contained within their own networks to further their aims and objectives. This can take many forms e.g. providing group loans for economically disenfranchised farmers in rural India or encouraging social contacts and activities for the over 55's. Szabo (1999) pays particular attention to the theme of social inclusion through community support networks in order to highlight to what extent micro finance initiatives reach the poorest members of society and examines the opportunity costs to members that may deter the poorest from civic participation.

Innovation

As a result of a wider access to information and resources, innovation can be an important outcome of bridging social capital (Ruef, 2002). This is because networks of weak ties are more likely to be sources of new ideas than a network of strong ties. While strong ties promote conformity and trust, weak ties promote new sources of information and teams of individuals with weak tie relationships are generally more innovative. Networks of strong ties tend to be less successfully innovative:

> Since membership *[within these networks of strong ties]* in movements, or goal orientated organisations, typically results from being recruited by friends. (Granovetter, 1983. p.202)

When networks of individuals are directed towards a definite goal, additional information can be gathered but there may be a stifling of innovation. Networks that are diverse in ties (i.e. bonding and bridging), are large in number and are comprised of individuals from different backgrounds are more likely to be innovative (Ruef, 2002). This view is supported by Healy and Côtés (2001) when they outline, "Innovation is increasingly based on collaboration, rapid learning and networks" (p.47). Wide and diverse networks can promote the transfer of information, opinions or views that are less conformist and thus facilitate innovation.

Communication modes and structures

Communication is important in providing individuals with identity, social roles and social support mechanisms (Edwards, 2004). Increased communication is likely to result in an individual perceiving others in a more favourable light and this positive evaluation can then result in the development of social support networks. This increased communication will in turn, lead to increased numbers of strong ties. Granovetter (1983) supports this view "as tie strength increases from weak to strong, so does the motivation to communicate" (p.201). Such a strengthening of ties can assist in developing co-operation and trust within a community.

Regarding modes of communications, there are four influences on the level and type of contact that an individual has with people. These are:
- The proximity of their networks
- Their need for interaction
- The methods of communication used and
- The frequency of contact influencing the exchange of support and other resources.

The modes of communication deployed within national community and voluntary organisations are vital in the mobilisation of the social resources contained within its ranks towards the achievement of its aims and objectives. Because the various levels within an organisation have differing aims and objectives, appropriate modes of communication are necessary. An assessment of the communication structure at the different levels within an organisation can provide evidence of mobilised social capital to achieve communicational aims and objectives.

At the local affiliate level, the strong ties developed through increased interaction and communications are closely linked with bonding social capital and can provide important emotional, personal and health related benefits to its members through close ties and support. The proximity of these local affiliates will also affect the type of networks that individuals will form. Edwards (2004) proposes that the closer groups are geographically, the more likely their ties will be part of a support network. Such support networks often fulfil the need for interaction with others. This increased

communication among members often takes place at the micro level, as it is at this stage that there are more opportunities for interaction via the provision of social activities. The modes of communication at this micro level tend to be more informal and face-to-face. Such meetings can prove a satisfying form of contact and Onyx (2001) recognises their importance in relation to the development of social capital. This frequent contact at a local level is significant in the formation of bonding social capital which enables activities to develop and can counter feelings of isolation and loneliness.

At the national or macro level, the modes of communication used by organisations tend to be more formal in nature. This interaction represents communication between weak tie networks where valuable bridging social capital is formed. Such bridging capital enables an organisation to meet and overcome the challenges that may prevent them from fulfilling their aims and objectives. This is because these weak tie networks are more likely to be sources of new ideas because of their wider access to information and resources, which in turn leads to greater innovation and capacity to overcome challenges. The modes of communication employed by the community group in the creation of this bridging social capital can have an effect on the speed in which various relationships are formed through personal interaction and can also determine certain aspects of these relationships. For example, faster forms of communication may allow for faster transfer of knowledge, yet this could result in less face-to-face interaction, particularly in respect of the internet technologies.

Historically letters and postcards were the traditional forms of communication, particularly between people at great distance apart. The new methods of communication, the internet, intranets, e-mail, text messaging and chat rooms, have been replacing the more traditional methods. However, these new technologies rely on availability, a certain degree of training and access to technology which has given rise to generational communication difficulties, i.e. late adopters (Nealon, 2002a; O'Donnell, McQuillan & Malina, 2003).

This lack of availability and access to technology can also be a major hindrance to any national community and voluntary organisation and may restrict their ability to achieve their aims and objectives. As an example, Muintir na Tire has a similar membership base to Federation of Active Retirement Associations (Nealon, 2002b), comprising of individuals forming into community councils and community alert groups. Nealon

(2002b) conducted research with 96 Community Councils of Muintir na Tire and a further 109 of their Community Alert Groups. This showed that over 77% of Muintir na Tire's affiliated groups do not have ownership of a computer. The research also outlined that 54 Community Councils and 95 Community Alert groups have never used the Internet and of those that use the internet, 19 and 11 respectively do so only an occasional basis, as shown in figure 7 below. O'Donnell, McQuillan and Malina (2003) also explore the concept of "late adopters" which refers to the lack of computer literacy skills amongst segments of society including older people and housewives.

Consequently, the role of information technology within a national community and voluntary organisation is examined in terms of its level of usage, how information technology can assist achieving aims and objectives and the impact on the issue of 'late adopters' by the predicted rise in more technologically trained personnel affiliating to the organisation.
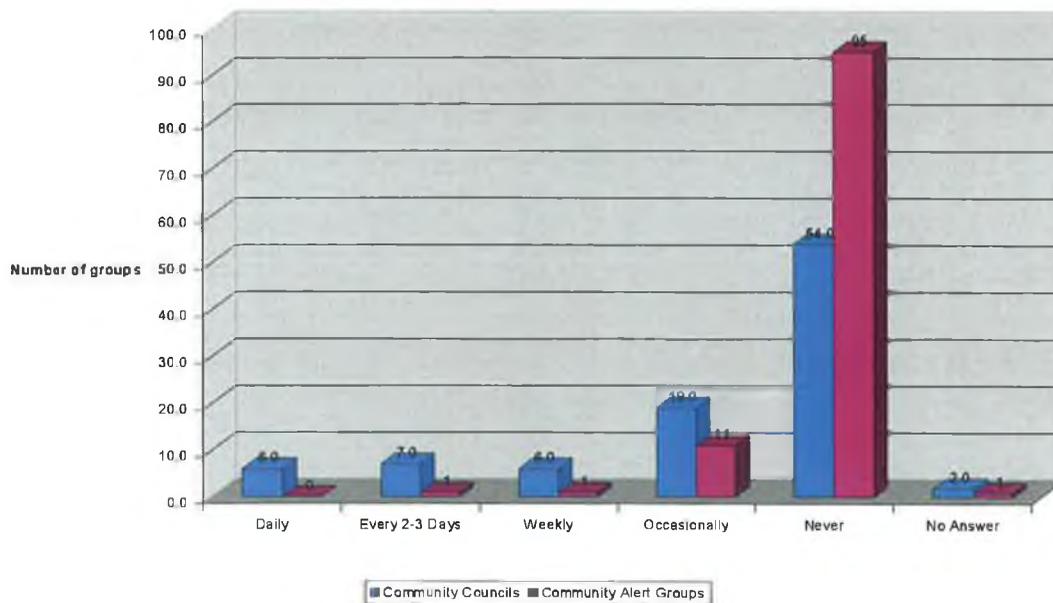
Figure 7: The level of usage of the internet by community groups (Nealon, 2002)

Information technology has an importance in terms of efficiency and ease of communication in relation to external relationship. However, it is important to appreciate that it is primarily within the internal national to local interactions that information and communication technology has relevance. At a local level face-to-face encounters are most prevalent and technology is largely redundant. Consequently, it is the development of a communications structure between national and local networks, that is of importance. Such an information technology supported structure would enable

faster dissemination of information, develop its weaker ties and inspire more innovation.

Collective actions and activities

Co-operation between members of networks, either through joint ventures directed at furthering the aims and objectives of an organisation, or by simply adhering to the norms and values of that organisation is defined as: a shared action or actions to achieve a common goal (Edwards, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Networks cannot create social capital independently of human interaction and co-operation between members of the network is essential in the development of social capital. Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) supports the idea that co-operation or collective action impacts on an organisation's social capital. They differentiate between co-operative action and forced collective action such as that found in totalitarian societies or in systems where governments can force large groups of people to work together on infrastructure projects or other types of common activities. They argue that this cannot be considered as co-operation in a social capital context. Accordingly, the co-operative action should be viewed in terms of the type of activities undertaken collectively and the willingness to participate in collective action (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002).

The levels of trust contained within networks will impact on and be impacted upon by reciprocity and co-operation. They provide all members engaged in reciprocal or co-operative relationships some degree of security that the alliance will be honoured, whilst simultaneously enriching the levels of trust through each successful act of reciprocity and co-operation. This ensures a virtuous circle of trust, which enables social capital, and in turn enables further trust. Both structural and cognitive social capital needs to be combined to fully reach a groups potential for mutually beneficial collective action:

> While cognitive elements predispose people toward mutually beneficial collective action, structural elements of social capital facilitate such action. (Krishna and Schrader, 2002, p.19)

In this context, by examining an organisation's collective activities an assessment of the organisation's mobilised social capital can be arrived at.

Sharing of support and knowledge

The sharing of support and knowledge about the network includes aspects of physical, financial and emotional support, empowerment and conflict resolution. The physical, financial and emotional support can be provided in times of need or as part of daily life.

Empowerment can be encouraged through the sharing of knowledge and information and in the exchange of "skills and information between friends and acquaintances" (Edwards, 2004, p.94), which is closely related to more bonded type networks. Empowerment can encourage common action and indeed the National Economic and Social Forum report (2003) outlines:

> Volunteering has been evolving away from more traditional and paternalistic models towards models based on empowerment of those assisted and involved. (National Economic and Social Forum, 2003, p.80)

Szabo (1999) proposes that involvement with community can empower members with skills and confidence:

> The skills and confidence members, particularly women, develop from their interaction in the group setting and their involvement in decision-making, leading group meetings and organising group affairs. (Szabo, 1999, p.19)

Szabo (1999) also proposes that this empowerment facilitates the education of girls and the undertaking of leadership roles in other organisations. As such participation in a community organisation can empower members, develop their capacity and make available new skills to the network in pursuit of desirable aims and objectives.

Conflict resolution

The issues of resolving conflict and applying sanctions are important to a society's operation. Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) state:

> The presence of conflict in the village or neighbourhood or in a larger area is often an indicator of the lack of trust or the lack of appropriate structural social capital to resolve conflicts or both. (Grootaert & Bastelaer, 2002, p.53)

It is the ability of a network to manage disagreement and conflicts that is indicative of the health of the network and thus its bank of social capital (Edwards, 2004). Where conflict goes unresolved, this may indicate a weakness of that community in terms of its capacity to successfully deal with a conflict. The mechanisms that a group can employ

to deal with conflicts are negotiation, consultation and compromise. Within the context of a national community and voluntary organisation these mechanisms can depend on the norms and values as laid out in the organisations constitution, the trust levels within the organisation and the personal contact of individuals in position of leadership.

In the application of sanctions the interest of the collective is generally placed above that of the individual (Edwards, 2004). Sanctions accompany certain norms and values that a community agree upon, which reinforce the norms for that network and are generally included in the organisation constitution. Positive and negative sanctions can be applied in a formal or informal manner. An example of the application of a formal negative sanction might include legal penalties such as prosecution and imprisonment. Formal positive sanctions might include recognition for community activities through awards and accolades such as the 'People of the Year' awards. Informal negative sanctions may include ostracising measures and discrimination (Edwards, 2004). However this aspect falls outside the remit of this study.

Sources of funding

The impact of economic intervention and the sourcing of funds can impact on an organisation's social capital capacity as:

> Economic intervention has also developed another kind of social capital described as self-reliance. People realize that they cannot depend on local government forever. They perceive that if they work together they can solve their problems. They contend that they can find other sources to improve their lives. The ability to solve problems enhances their self-confidence. It is a new worth achieved by the villagers. (Ismawan, 2000, p.20)

Prior to the present decade funding within the Irish community and voluntary sector was disjointed and unstable, largely due to the country's economic performance. Varley (1991) proposes that:

> Community action in Ireland owes its marginal position to the stance politicians and the state have adopted towards it. While self-help is central to the ideology of community groups, in practice *[these groups]* …have been heavily dependent on state assistance. (Varley, 1991, p.68)

The competition for Government funding has become an increasingly complex affair involving submissions of increasingly detailed financial reports, budget proposals and tenders. Government funding is significant and accounts for 60% of the €4.5 billion which the non-profit sector is worth (Downes, 2006). While Varley (1991) claims that

the dependence on state aid may have been somewhat contradictory to the central ideology of self-help, there may have been an inverse effect with community and voluntary organisation's learning to draw on the social capital in order to gain advantage over other competitors. This can take the form of drawing on network ties to gain direct access to local politicians or other persons involved in the decision-making process in an effort to appeal directly to them for preferential treatment. Utilising services in helping complete funding applications in a more professional manner increases the chances of a successful funding decision. Networks are used to source all available types of funding which the community and voluntary organisations may be eligible to apply for. The professionalism employed by many community and voluntary organisations involved in sourcing funding has become increasingly widespread. The National Committee on the Volunteer (2002) has proposed best practice protocols in how to show Value for Money in terms of costs and benefits to the individual, the organisation and to the clients of community and voluntary organisations. These protocols are important in terms of applications for governmental funding.

Regardless of the self-help versus government funding arguments, a heavy dependence on a particular source of funding has shaped the development of many community and voluntary organisations. An organisation's aims and objectives can be influenced by the sources of funding that it receives. This was highlighted by Varley (1991), in relation to Community Development Co-operatives, which are funded by the Scottish Highlands and Islands Development Board when he notes:

> ...In addition to making available an array of essential support services, [the development board] ties the funding it provides.... to the practice of medium and long term development planning. (Varley, 1991, p.68)

This approach influences the long term aims and objectives of the Community Development Co-operative by creating possibly restrictive conditions attached to it's funding. As Varley (1991) points out, funding can often come with ties and pre-requisites and these conditions under which funding is given may cause discrepancies with the long term development of the aims and objectives of a receiving body.

The question then is whether accessing government funds is an example of community and voluntary organisations exploiting resources available through an expanded network, or whether it is a sign of organisations' reluctance to pursue a path of self-help. Indeed, a move to greater dependence on internal funding or subscription may

actually negatively impact on the activities and participation on the ground by reducing available funding at the local level. What this thesis focuses upon is the mobilisation or otherwise of the organisations social capital to obtain external funding; the impact that this funding has on achieving desirable aims and objectives; and the relevance of the self-help ethos on the building and strengthening of ties.

Summary

The concept of what is termed today as social capital is not new. While a single agreed definition has been elusive amongst the various academic practitioners of social capital, three core principles underpin most social capital definitions. These principles are that human interaction or connections are required to form social capital; that shared values or norms such as trust, reciprocity, efficacy and friendship are needed to sustain and lubricate these interactions; and finally that similar to other forms of social capital that investment can be made into human connections to achieve specific results. There are many benefits attributable to social capital including its beneficial effects regarding social cohesion and economic development, combating isolation and loneliness and improving the health of those that participate in civic society.

Networks are essential to the theory of social capital as they contain the strong and weak ties that make up the connections between individuals. These differing strength of ties are associated to different forms of social capital i.e. bridging, bonding and linking. While strong ties can be important in promoting friendship and countering feelings of isolation, they can also lead to closed networks, ignorance and scepticism of new ideas and interests. Weak ties can be of great benefit internally in promoting communication and information flows and externally in developing new initiatives. The mixture of the different types of social capital is important as, an imbalance of one particular type over another can be isolationist and restrict an organisation's development.

There are a wide range of factors that indicate the types and mobilisation of social capital within an organisation such as the size of network, frequency of participation and modes of communication. These indicators can be categorised under two general headings network structural factors and the network transactional factors. These defined indicators can lend themselves to a study of the social capital within an organisation and are of particular importance to this study when one considers the

thesis' research questions, namely what forms of social capital exist within the different levels of a national community and voluntary organisation and how are these forms mobilised for desired outcomes?

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This thesis aims to examine and achieve an understanding of the elements that indicate the different forms of social capital within the Federation and how these forms are mobilised to achieve desired outcomes at the organisations micro, meso and macro levels.

Such an examination is part of a long tradition of people being concerned with their environment and striving to understand the nature of the phenomena it presents to their senses (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). Methodology refers to those techniques that elicit responses to predetermined questions, record measurements, describe phenomena and perform experiments (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). However the aim of this thesis' methodology is not only to obtain data that enables an understanding of the thesis' research questions, but also to achieve an understanding of the methodology process itself through research design.

The discussion on research design centres the use of a case study framework, the triangulation of data sources and the importance of identifying and gaining access to individuals, or 'gatekeepers', with key information. As part of the triangulation process the qualitative methodologies of semi-structured interviews and observations and the quantitative methodologies of self-administered surveys and secondary quantitative analysis of archival data are used.

Gatekeepers and ethical considerations

The President and Administrator of the Federation granted this researcher initial access to the Federation's archives, activities and members. As such they can be described as acting as "gatekeepers" (Atkinson & Hammerly, 1983, p.27) to the committee members, development officers and to the organisation's archives and documentation. They define a gatekeeper as an actor with "control over key resources and avenues of opportunity" (p.28). In this capacity, gatekeepers therefore exercise control over key stages of the research process and often orientate the researcher towards specific

directions or findings, often acting to safeguard what they perceive as their legitimate interests, which creates unavoidable bias in the research process.

Fontana (1977) lays out clear guidelines for consideration before commencing any studies. These include locating an informant and accessing the setting. Gatekeepers are a valuable tool in helping the researcher gain not only access to a setting but also gain a certain amount of trust from the participants. Gatekeepers should ideally be well known and respected throughout the proposed study group, otherwise the level to which that person can bring you in to the group will be limited in terms of contacts and levels of trust regarding the disclosure of information (Whyte, 1955).

Consequently it was important to establish a relationship of trust between the researcher and the leadership of the Federation. This was achieved through contact with a former treasurer of the Federation, who was known to the researcher. This contact provided a letter of introduction to the current President and Administrator of the organisation. The President acted as the primary gatekeeper involved in this research and was instrumental in providing access to the Federation at all levels. Being President of the organisation made her one of the prime candidates for consideration when choosing a gatekeeper, as she combined an excellent knowledge of the Federation from the bottom up, endorsed the research and allowed greater access to settings and individuals.

Bryman (1988) warns that Gatekeepers may have quite different expectations from those of the researcher and that the most common reservation that can block research access concerns confidentiality. To combat this he suggests that the researcher should try and respond positively to such fears of confidentiality:

> Raise these fears first so as to indicate that this is a matter which has been thought about and built into the study design. (Bryman, 1988, p.59)

Unconsciously a Gatekeeper can affect research, as affiliation with them may cause some participants to present differing answers to research questions than may otherwise be given, believing that the Gatekeeper will have unrestricted access to the work. Strict assurances of confidentiality as discussed above were given to all participants throughout the study helping prevent this occurring.

Yet in choosing to operate with a Gatekeeper the researcher has to be aware of the possible effects that Gatekeeper can have on his or her work. The Gatekeeper may want to guide the work in a certain direction in order to highlight or cover up certain areas of the proposed research, which for one reason or another they may not want explored. So it is important to use a Gatekeeper as a sounding board for ideas rather than as a second editor.

It is assumed by many researchers that a qualified competent researcher can, with a certain degree of objectivity, clarity and precision, report on their own observations of the social world and include the experiences of others (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). It was further assumed that these researchers could blend the information obtained through qualitative and quantitative methods. To ensure that the perspectives of the researcher, as outlined in the thesis' introduction, do not lead to any bias in either the gathering of results using these methods, or their interpretation, a number of actions were undertaken:

- A wide reading and analysis of the Federation (by way of the internet and government sources) was undertaken to obtain a deep prior knowledge of the Federation before any discussions took place
- Comprehensive research design prior to engaging with the Federation and
- A rigid application of methodology technique guidelines.

Research design

A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that would connect theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and methods for collecting empirical data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This flexibility is reiterated by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) when they outline that there is no single blueprint for planning research but rather that the research design is governed by the notion of "fitness for purpose" (p.73). Put simply methodology and research design is determined by what is examined and the questions posed.

Case study framework

The case study framework is utilised in this thesis, in which the aims and objectives together with the internal and external relationships of the Federation's network are investigated. According to Platt (1992), a case study aims to capture validity through the empirical study of contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. However, to what extent case studies can be said to be representative of the greater whole or provide a holistic view of reality has been debated widely and across disciplinary boundaries (Mason, 1996). In light of these debates, the purpose of focusing upon a case study in this thesis is to provide a snap shot of the different forms of social capital and how they are mobilised to fulfil the requirements of the Federation's stated aims and objectives, in a specific historical and social context. Furthermore, by using this case study to critically illuminate the social capital concept in this specific instance, it is hoped that it will facilitate broader theoretical connections (ties and networks) within the Irish voluntary sector. In the initial stage of any case study it is the researchers priority to recognise the key areas that give promise of yielding the most amount of knowledge and understandings relevant to the thesis questions (Becker, 1963). After identifying these areas triangulation allows the researcher the scope to identify and gather this information and reflect on our understandings of how social capital can be mobilised to achieve objectives.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use by the researcher of a variety of methods, designed for collecting either qualitative or quantitative data on the subject matter, or in this case on the Federation. Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) view is that no single method can grasp the subtle variations in ongoing human experience. Grootaert and Bastelaer (2002) support this view by suggesting:

> Growing empirical evidence indicates that social capital is best measured using a variety of qualitative and quantitative instruments (Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002, p.9).

Putnam (2000) similarly indicates that a variety of instruments are needed to measure social capital when he outlines his strategy to triangulate as many independent sources of evidence as possible. This is because:

No one thought ahead to collect the really perfect evidence that we now need…As a result we need to look for convincing proof not in a single pair of polls, or even a single series of surveys, but instead for convergence across a number of different series, each carried out by different researchers. (Putnam, 2000, p.415)

He summarises as a core principle

No single source of data is flawless, but the more numerous and diverse the sources, the less likely that they could all be influenced by the same flaw. Two independent strands of evidence are better than one and more than two are better still. (Putnam, 2000, p.415)

This thesis' research process entailed the employment of a triangulated-methodology, which included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, in order to examine the thesis' research questions. As such, qualitative primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews and observing at the Federation regional and national meetings, as well as working in the national office. Quantitative primary data was generated through self-administered survey questionnaires. A secondary analysis of the organisation's archives and documentation provided complementary quantitative data. Thus, although not infallible, these techniques can provide a useful instrument of research when they are combined as part of a triangulated methodology and grounded theory.

Qualitative methods

Introduction

This study leans heavily on the use of qualitative methodologies, with particular use of certain types of quantitative methods such as survey research. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical material detailed by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as being; case study, personal experience/introspective analysis, life story, interviews, observational interaction and visual texts to name a few. They state that:

Qualitative research, as a set of interpretative practices, privileges no single methodology over another, each bring their own unique benefits to a project, illuminating areas and highlighting perspectives hitherto unreachable through other formats of research. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p3)

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The two main types of qualitative techniques employed throughout this case study are: semi-structured interviews and observations at a regional meeting, a national conference and within the national office.

This qualitative form of research will allow for a more accurate portrayal of the Federation of Active Retirement Associations and an informed analysis of their organisation with respect to the thesis' research questions. However there are drawbacks to this qualitative form of research. The main criticism levied at this type of ethnography-involving techniques such as interviews, is the threat of researcher bias (Atkinson & Hammerly, 1983). Indeed Atkinson and Hammerly (1983) point out that the main challenge to the objectivity of the researcher lies not only in the effect of researcher bias but, given that their accounts of any given case study are constructions, that they would automatically reflect the presuppositions and socio historical circumstances surrounding that production. In practice what this means is that the aspirations of social science to produce universal knowledge which may not be capable of being validated entirely but which can be validated to a high extent, is contradicted by the fact that the objectivity of any case study will always be compromised by the socio-historical circumstances of its production.

Observation

Robson (1993) proposes that:

> A major advantage of observation as a technique is its directness. You do not ask people about their views, feelings or attitudes; you watch what they do and listen to what they say…the language of people, and other behaviours associated with language, are often of crucial interest and importance in any enquiry. (Robson, 1993, p.191)

It can be argued that all social research is a form of observation, as we cannot study the social world whilst simultaneously removing ourselves from it. This view is related to the Heisenberg's uncertainty principle of general/quantum physics (Institute of Physics, 2006), which argues that once something is observed and studied, then the nature of that thing is fundamentally altered and unable to be observed as it is or was (Atkinson & Hammerly, 1983). If this is the case then at one level all things subject to scientific scrutiny, be they of the natural or social sciences, are subject to some influencing factor. The only way to allow for this and control its effect throughout any study is by being aware of its influence at all times and presenting any findings in context of this factor

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

There are additional drawbacks to observation. The power relationships between the researcher and those studied are inescapable and invariably mediate the type of information gathered as participants often provide information which they believe the researcher wants to hear. With these considerations, Atkinson and Hammerly (1983) have laid out certain factors deemed to affect the role of the researcher with regard to the process of data collection through observation. These factors are:

- The extent to which the researcher is known to be a researcher within the group
- The level and depth of knowledge the researcher has on the groups prior to observation
- The type, variety and number of activities the researcher will engage in with the group in the field and how this locates him/her in relation to the various conceptions of category and group membership used by the participants, and
- The orientation the researcher adopts within the group, i.e. insider or outsider

By training oneself to recognise such power relationship factors before commencing any fieldwork, one can limit the effect that they may have on any resulting data and subsequently how they influence the outcome of the research. Every effort has been made to control for these power relationship effects in this thesis' case study. The level and depth of knowledge about the group prior to observation was high as it is important to understand the respondent's network and the forces that might stimulate or retard responses. This enabled the research to be focused on aspects of direct relevance to the thesis research questions.

The researcher attended and observed, the inaugural Midland Regional Council meeting on 27th July 2005, a National Council meeting on 19th April 2006 and attended in the organisation's Head Office for a week from 14th to the 25th June 2005. These observations were aimed at assessing the language used by the leadership and individual members at meetings, the body language and interaction between participants and whether the meetings were highly formalised affairs or not. Such data provides supportive or supplementary information in line with Robson (1993) who outline that observation can be used:

> ...As a supportive or supplementary technique to collect data that may complement or set in perspective data obtained by other means. (Robson, 1993, p.192)

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Interviews

The other qualitative method utilised in this study; interviewing, is one of the key tools to address the thesis' research questions. The interview context requires the interviewer to play a neutral role, never interjecting their opinions and always be aware of possible researcher bias. They must establish a balanced rapport with the participant and maintain an air of casual friendliness whilst simultaneously remaining directive and impersonal (Fontana & Frey, 1994). The three main techniques used to conduct interviews are structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviewing and are applicable to all types of interviews including individual and group interviews/focus groups.

Structured interviewing is one in which a respondent is interviewed using a series of pre-established questions with limited response categories. In this form of interview there is little room for variation, except for the occasional open-ended question. The pace and the series, in which the questions are asked and controlled by the interviewer, who strives to make each individual interview identical. The structured interview is a set of mostly close-ended questions, which are "previously determined to elicit adequate indicators of the variable under examination" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.363). Despite these pre-determined controlling conditions Fontana and Frey (1994) are still aware that errors can occur in structured interviews, usually in one of three ways:

- Respondents provide answers biased by what they perceive to be a socially desirable response or omit relevant information
- The interview can prove unsuitable for collecting certain types of socially sensitive data by being too formalised or inadequate wording of the questions e.g. sexual abuse studies and
- Poor interviewing techniques can affect understanding of questions and affect responses e.g. abbreviating questions and failing to explain selections properly.

While this structured interview technique will yield rational responses it often overlooks or inadequately assesses and analyses the emotional dimension (Robson, 1993). Thus unstructured interviews, utilising mostly open-ended questions also known as non-directive interviewing, are more useful in assessing the emotive dimension of participant responses. However it is naive to assume that they are not without their shortcomings. Unstructured interviews can act as a form of social control that shapes participant responses and where the researcher maintains a minimal presence by asking

too few questions, can create an interpretative problem for the participant. Moreover the passivity of the researcher can produce an extremely powerful constraint on the participant to talk (Silverman, 1994).

Open-ended questions allow subjects to respond freely, which allows the researcher gain a more comprehensive perspective of an organisation through the various views and opinions of its members. Macionis and Plummer (2002) cite a possible drawback to this research as "the researcher has to make sense out of what can be a bewildering array of answers" (p.44). An example of this type of question asked during research interviews was:

'What are the big issues facing local Active Retirement Associations'.

Close-ended questions refer to questions in which the range of answers are limited in nature or even simply require a positive or negative response. Although it makes the task of analysing results faster and easier, critics of the close-ended format claim that the narrowing of the range of responses might distort the findings. An example of this type of question asked during research interviews was:

'What position do you/have you held within the organisation?'

This study, in keeping with a mixed methodology approach, adopted the use of semi-structured interview techniques, using primarily open-ended questions, throughout all the field interviews, which provides for both rational responses, while accommodating the emotional dimension of the interview. This made confirmation and/or amendment of any previous understandings concerning the organisation permissible. Such an approach still allowed the freedom to delve into other new topics of relevance, as and when they arose. This freedom to pursue further areas of inquiry and concepts, which presented themselves during the course of the interviews, had some benefits including: greater understanding of the organisation, exploration of the indicators attached to social capital and its impact upon the Federation achieving its aims and objectives. There was one interview, where it was necessary for another individual to be present for the interviewee's assistance, due to their poor health. Wider use of group interviews were ruled out because these can become dominated by one person, making it difficult to discuss sensitive topics and posing a danger of 'group think' when respondents are asked for opinions (Fontana & Frey, 1994).

The initial set of interviews with the President and Administrator were an exercise to establish trust, rapport and obtain relevant factual information. The information gathered in the interviews would form, along with archive research, the core basis of; obtaining the facts and figures of the organisation; analysis of the different ties and relationships in the network for these key organisational leaders; and determining the key issues regarding the Federation, social capital and the research questions. The President and Administrator also participated in the open questions semi structured interviews. An additional five members of the national executive, as well as two development officers were chosen at random for participation in the interview sessions. Such a random selection ensured a minimisation of bias from the gatekeeper (in this case the President) and increased the probability of more holistic information and data to address the thesis' research questions. In particular the purpose of these interviews was to address a number of areas in terms of network analysis and to examine how the Federation achieves social mobilisation through its stock of existing social capital.

From the author's personal experience community and voluntary organisations are very reluctant to give out information on their organisation. This can be seen as a protection of the organisation's resources in the face of competition for limited funds. This view is supported by Varley (1991) who outlines:

> A perennial source of instability is that community groups…regularly find themselves in competition with one another for scarce state funding. (Varley, 1991, p.66)

This had an effect on the manner in which the interviews were conducted. Because of the reluctance to be interviewed by tape, contemporaneous notes were taken and typed up that evening in summarised transcripts. Appendix 2 outlines the type of questions that were asked at these interviews regarding the above items. The drafted summarised transcripts were sent out to the interviewees for factual correction and gave them an opportunity to provide additional information.

Quantitative methods

Introduction

Researchers use measurement methodology, statistical paradigms and documentation to locate subject groups within larger sample populations and to identify concepts for further analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Such an approach can be represented as quantitative research. Atkinson and Hammerly (1983) describe quantitative research as "the rigorous testing of hypothesis by means of data" (p.251). Quantitative methodology determines that the researcher, not the participants, decides what to study, how to study it - and perhaps most importantly - how to represent it (Atkinson & Hammerly 1983). This thesis uses quantitative techniques such as attitude surveys contained as part of self-administered questionnaires and secondary analysis of data from the archives of the Federation. Thus the research was designed not to provide any single version of the 'truth' but to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to analyse the extent social capital is created within and can be said to impact upon, the Federation of Active Retirement Associations achieving its aims and objectives.

Questionnaire

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) the questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher and often being comparatively straightforward to analyse. As such, self-administered questionnaires to all local associations in a particular region was an important quantitative research tool within a triangulation methodology in addressing the thesis' research questions.

The questionnaire was drafted, taking into account the length of the questionnaire, its appearance and being careful regarding the phrasing of questions as outlined by Denscombe (1998). His view is that in determining the length of the questionnaire that

only ask questions which will be absolutely vital for the research, there is rigorous weeding out of any duplication of questions and that the task of responding to the questionnaire is made as straightforward and speedy as possible. Denscombe (1998) also outlines that the key aspects in the appearance of the questionnaire are; single sided paper; use of space and size of print; use of coloured paper; desktop publishing; number the pages and answer column width. He goes further in outlining some of the issues in the wording of the questions/statements. These are:

- The questions will not be irritating or annoying to respondents
- The respondents will have some information, knowledge, experience or opinions on the topic in question
- The proposed style of questions is suited to the target group
- The questions require respondents to answer only about themselves or matters of fact they can realistically answer for others and
- The questions are on a topic and of a kind which the respondents will be willing to answer

In particular the questions/statements followed the guidelines in the following list; avoiding the use of "leading" (p.99) questions; avoiding the same question being asked in a different fashion; making sure the wording is completely unambiguous; avoiding vague questions; including sufficient options in the answer; using only the minimum amount of technical jargon; keeping the questions as short and straightforward as possible; including only those questions which are absolutely necessary; paying attention to the way questions are numbered; not making unwarranted presumptions in the questions; and avoiding words or phrases that might cause offence.

Some of the questions developed in the questionnaire were based on the agreement scale. The agreement scale achieves a wide range of scores by having respondents report the intensity of an attitude. This is accomplished by providing graduations within the response alternatives. This is supported by Henerson (1987) who outlines that "The respondents are asked to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 5 point scale" (p.85), these being: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. An example of this type of question asked in this research was:

How would you rate the level of mutual trust between (1=a lot of trust; 5 = little trust):	
FARA and local ARAs	1 2 3 4 5
The Executive Council and the local ARAs	1 2 3 4 5
Different Active Retirement Associations	1 2 3 4 5

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) deal with the issue of having a large number of statements to be ranked. In response to having ten statements to be ranked they suggest:

> The list in the questionnaire can be reduced ….in which case the range and comprehensiveness of responses that fairly catches what the respondent feels is significantly reduced. Alternatively, the list can be retained, a request made to the respondents only to rank their first (set amount of) priorities, in which case the range is retained and the task is not overwhelming. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.253)

Ranking scales according to Henerson (1987):

> … Gives you an indication of how a person ranks a number of things in relation to one another. It is a useful format when there are a limited number of things you would like to have ranked (probably no more than five). (Henerson, 1987, p.69)

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) outline that a rating scale builds "in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response whilst generating numbers" (p.252). An example of this type of question asked in this research was:

Please indicate in order of importance (1,2,3 etc.) how your Active Retirement Association communicates with FARA:	
E-mail	___
Telephone	___
Fax	___
By Letter	___
Face-to-face meeting (word of mouth)	___
Other _____	___

According to Henerson (1987) "the task of measuring attitudes is not a simple one" (p.11). This is because:

> The concept of attitude, like many abstract concepts, is a creation – a construct. As such, it is a tool that serves the human need to see order and consistency in what people say, think and do, so that given certain behaviours, predictions can be made about future behaviours. An attitude is not something we can examine and measure in the same way we can examine the cells of a persons skin or measure the rate of her heartbeat. We can only infer that a person has attitudes by her words and actions. (Henerson, 1987, p.12)

The questionnaire followed the above guidelines (Appendix 3) and were distributed to a set of local Active Retirement officers in the Midland region based on a non-probability sampling paradigm.

Non-probability sampling

There are two main methods of sampling - probability and non-probability sampling. The researcher must:

> Decide whether to opt for a probability (also known as a random sample) or a non—probability sample (also know as a purposive sample). The difference between them is: in a probability sample the chances of members of the wider population being selected for the sample are known, whereas in a non-probability sample the chances of members of the wider population being selected for the sample are unknown. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.99)

Denscombe (1998) outlines a number of reasons why non-probability sampling can be chosen. In particular:

> The researcher feels it is not feasible to include a sufficiently large number of examples in the study...The researcher does not have sufficient information about the population to undertake probability sampling. The researcher may not know who, or how many people or events, make up the population. (Denscombe, 1998, p.15)

This is particularly true in relation to the numbers of affiliate groups to national organisations. This thesis uses non-probability sampling because:

> Small scale research often uses non-probability sampling because, despite the disadvantages that arise from their non-representativeness, they are far less complicated to set up, are considerably less expensive and can prove perfectly adequate where researchers do not intend to generalise their findings beyond the sample in question, or where they are simply piloting a questionnaire as a prelude to the main study. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.102)

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) "a sample size of 30 is held by many to be the minimum number of cases if researchers plan to use some form of statistical analysis on their data" (p.93). As some questionnaires may not be returned, they also suggest that "it is advisable to overestimate rather than to underestimate the size of the sample required" (p.93). In this way the assembled questionnaire was sent to all 47 groups in the Midland Regional Council.

The Midland Regional Council was chosen as it was just being established and the key reasons behind this event could be assessed in the light of the thesis research questions. Another reason for choosing this set of Associations was that the respondents represent

a good geographical spread – as the region itself covers nine counties. Finally, the membership composition of these groups in terms of number of affiliates is comparable with the national profile of the Federation. This form of purposive sampling technique is in line with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) who outlines that:

> Researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs. (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p.103)

The majority of those that completed the questionnaire held either the position of chairperson or secretary of the local association, instead of every member in each group. This is also in line with Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) who outline that "constraints under which the research will take place" (p.89) in terms of time-scales, costs, human, physical and material.

Secondary archival data

Dunkerley (1972) points out that although a plethora of studies exist on organisations, there has been scant regard in recent literature towards inclusion of the history of the organisations studied and how these pasts reflect on present and future developments. Thus, in order to fully understand the accelerated accumulation of social capital by the Federation of Active Retirement Associations, especially over the period 1999 to 2004, the history of the Association since its conception in 1985 is examined through archival secondary data.

This secondary data includes resource material, attendance and minutes of past meetings and affiliations, pamphlets and previous articles published and sourced from the Head Office of the Federation. This provided information such as: historical background; detailed aims, objectives and mission statement of the organisation; transience of affiliations and membership profile since 1985 to present; the operational guidelines of local associations and Regional Councils; job descriptions of development officers; historical funding profile; geographical changes to the affiliation profile; and services (including information) provided by Head Office. In this manner this archival documentation held a valuable source of information that helps cast light on the potential social capital of the Federation and evidence of the mobilisation of social capital to achieve organisational goals.

Introduction

The primary aims of the Federation is:

- To build a national network of local Active Retirement Associations
- To promote and support participative activities through this network and
- To promote co-operation between the local associations
- To be a voice for retired people

- all of which is aimed at countering loneliness and isolation amongst retired people. We can consider the Federation having three distinct levels (macro/national, meso/regional and micro/local level) and that each level seeks to achieve these objectives through the mobilisation of social capital present in each level. Consequently, I have focused upon the Federation's organisational aims and objectives at the macro/national, meso/regional and micro/local level and how mobilised social capital has helped (or otherwise) in achieving these objectives.

I have presented the results within three sections in a manner that mirrors this structure through the lens of the different aims and objectives pertaining to each level. The first section examines the activities and objectives of the Federation at the macro level, followed by similar examinations at the meso and micro levels. These results are then discussed in terms of their implications in confirming and departing from existing knowledge. While many organisational objectives have both internal and external dimensions these are explored as they arise so as to avoid fragmentation. This structure will enable me to focus on the thesis' research questions asking, *what forms of social capital are present at each level, and how are these forms mobilised to achieve organisational objectives?*

Macro level – the national body

Varley (1991) outlines that affiliate groups look to the national organisation to co-ordinate, plan and represent local groups as a body at national level. He also argues that an inability to service affiliate groups and a reduction in the benefits that are expected from affiliation, leads to a decline in numbers. The continued rise in affiliations

indicates that groups see a benefit and have access to certain services available through the macro structures of the Federation i.e., the Executive Committee, Head Office and the National Council. In this section I have gathered information and data that casts light on the benefits that local associations view in being affiliated to the Federation and how the social capital within these macro structures are mobilised to achieve the following objectives:

- Supporting the local association's activities
- Developing institutional trust and conflict resolution capacity
- Ensuring effective communication structures
- Developing relationships with external bodies

Supporting the local association's activities

Many researchers support the idea that co-operation or collective action impacts positively on the development of an organisation's social capital (Edwards, 2004; Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002; Putnam, 2000). Indeed, the Federation in its objectives has placed importance on collective activities, as it aims to:

> Provide a means by which affiliated Associations may secure appropriate support to enhance their individual and collective activities. (The Federation of Active Retirement Associations, 2002b, p.1)

However, through responses to the questionnaires the officers of the local associations in the Midlands Regional Council have indicated that the national structure provides little by way of supports to local activities. The respondents were asked to identify

> 'How has the Head Office staff/ National Executive Committee assisted your ARA *[Active Retirement Associations]* to date?'

71% of the respondents felt that the National Executive Committee contributed nothing to their local association. While 40% of the respondents believed that Head Office contributed nothing to their activities, 26% believe that they had a role as an information and advice giver.

The respondents were also asked:

> 'Is there an activity that your ARA does that would not be possible without being affiliated to FARA?'

64% indicated that there was no activity that they could pursue without the Federation. These sentiments are also reflected in how the respondents viewed:

'What role does FARA have in helping you provide these new activities?'

In response to this question 54% of respondents believed that the Federation gave no support in the provision of new activities. However the provision of the Federation's group insurance package was identified by 23% as assisting the provision of additional activities. Asked to identify what nationally based services their local groups have used, 79% of respondents identified that they had used the Federation's insurance package, while 39% used the services of the Regional Development Officers, 42% undertook training courses, 45% sought advice and expertise and 28% participated in national or regionally organised competitions, as shown in figure 8 below.

Services used by the local association and provided by FARA
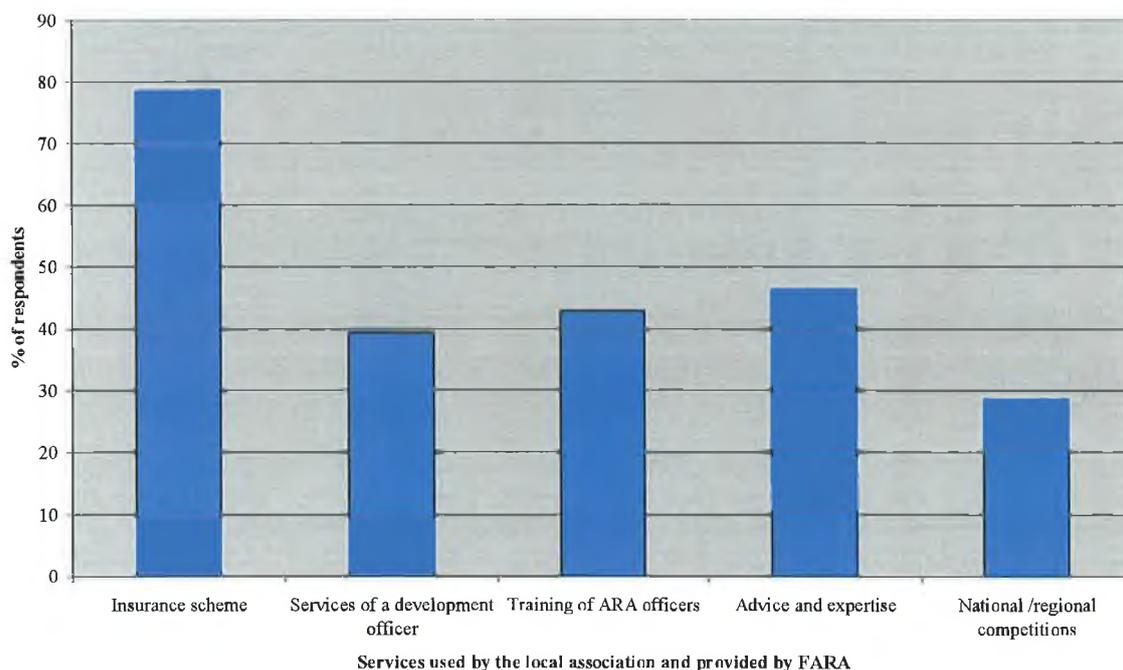
Figure 8: Services provided by the Federation at a national level and used by local association

Indeed the Federation's insurance scheme was identified as an important attraction for affiliation:

> One of the main attractions of local associations in affiliating to FARA is the public liability insurance scheme that the organisation operates. (Source: Interviewee, S)

The summary details of the Federation's group insurance scheme are provided in appendix 7 but of key importance is how the size of the Federation's membership was a strong lever in negotiations with the insurance provider:

> With the increase in membership numbers we were able to change our insurance providers and negotiate an improved rate of €1.42 per member per annum. (Source: Interviewee, B)

Consequently, the insurance scheme facilitates the provision of participative activities for the retired and helps the Federation achieve this core objective. Indeed, because the Federation provides this insurance package there is a lot of interest from Active Retirement Associations in affiliating. Indeed, it has been the case that groups who are formed to pursue their interest in bowling sometimes promote themselves as Active Retirement Associations and affiliate for the insurance. This is evidenced from the interviews:

> Some groups were only affiliating to take advantage of the Federation's insurance package...Indeed you could say activities equals insurance. (Source: Interviewee, W)

This is problematic for the Federation because even though the bowls group is providing an activity for its cohort, they are ignoring retirees in their community who don't want or are not interested in playing bowls. However, to ensure that affiliate groups provide a range of activities for their members they are required to adopt the Federation's standard constitution before affiliation. The need for this requirement is warranted because according to one development officer:

> In a small number of cases a new group will start first, contact the development officer to see how they can affiliate and get the insurance package. (Source: Interviewee, W)

This constitution promotes co-operation between affiliates and as such is instrumental in securing appropriate support to enhance a local association's individual and collective activities - a key organisational objective. Such an adoption helps control any deviation from the long term goals of the organisation by groups who Putnam (1995) describes as "chequebook members" (p.71).

However, the Federation seems to be far too dependent on a single public liability insurance package as an impetus for affiliation. Indeed the County Community Fora are now providing similar insurance packages and this situation is posing a real threat to the Federation being relevant to the local membership. While on the one hand it is not desirable that Head Office becomes solely an insurance broker, there may be an opportunity for Federation to seek attractive travel insurance packages for its membership, which in turn should continue to boost affiliation. Presently, Head Office facilitates local associations by organising mail shots for Hotels to their membership for a nominal fee (Source: Interviewee, B). However, a lot of the time these same holiday packages are advertised in the media and taken up by the individual Active Retirement

Associations without any interaction with Head Office (Source: Interviewee, K). The collective leverage of the Federation could be developed, in line with interviewee responses, into the area of group travel insurance rates for Federation members. These interviewees (B, W, E, A and O) outlined that they believed that:

- Holidays and mid-week breaks are an expanding activity amongst the local associations
- Many groups take up mid-week offers and off-season discounts and
- There are holiday officers within some of the local associations.

As mentioned earlier, 42% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that their group participated in the training of officer courses organised by the Federation at a national level. The literature review highlighted the importance of training in helping any community and voluntary organisation in achieving its aims and objectives:

> If boards are to continue to attract members from the target groups of the organisations involved, ongoing training in the roles and responsibilities of management is vital. (National Committee on Volunteering, 2002, p.113)

The training of officers in local associations is undertaken by development officers, members of the executive and by some of the Regional Council chairpersons. Indeed:

> Some of the development officers has experience in former careers in human resources and have devised officer-training courses. (Source: Interviewee, P)

As such the human and social capital of theses members were mobilised to provide these officer training courses. These courses dealt with issues of leadership, duties of the officers and committee rotation. The aim of these courses was to try to make the organisation as professional as possible and address an objective of supporting the activities of local associations (Source: Archive, Information leaflet on a training course). By providing training, support and knowledge to existing and new local associations there seems to be an increased sense of empowerment and capacity building. One interviewee highlighted that:

> The added incentive to learn new skills, together with joining an association of their peers, becomes a powerful motivator for some when deciding to join a local association. (Source: Interviewee, E).

So what do we know about the Federation at a national level supporting the activities at a local level? We know that while the majority of local associations view the national structures as having little impact on either continuing or developing their activities, there is a recognition that the Federation's group insurance scheme does facilitate the activities at a local level. We know that this insurance scheme is successful in

mobilising the leverage power of the membership base of the organisation and is a major attraction to affiliation (and as such further increases the membership base and thus leverage power even further). Finally, we know that the training provided by the national structures is assisted by the mobilisation of human and social capital resources at this level. However these courses are limited to officer training programmes and less than half of the respondents indicated that their group had participated in this training programme. This leads to the question why is there such a poor uptake in these courses and could it be due to a lack of institutional trust? – a key objective for the Federation.

Developing institutional trust and conflict resolution capacity

Trust is considered an integral aspect to social capital, a reflection of investment in relationships, a resource within networks and an outcome of increased levels of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Boslego, 2005). When confidence levels are high there is more willingness to commit to the creation of social capital for the benefit of the group and to assist in the long term planning and development of an organisation. In particular, trust in the organisation's leadership is key to the establishment and mobilisation of social capital (Edwards, 2004; Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002). As such, the leadership of the Federation is crucial in maintaining confidence and trust levels amongst members and draws on stocks contained within the Federation's network. Consequently, I gathered data on the attitudes within the Federation towards trust in general, and particularly, trust in the leadership of the organisation at both the national and local level.

Two questions were posed to respondents of the questionnaire:

> 'How would you rate the level of mutual trust between the national leadership and local associations?' and,
> 'How would you rate the level of mutual trust between Active Retirement Associations locally?'

The responses to these questions indicated that 65% of the respondents had high levels of trust in these relationships, with only 8% having low levels of trust as shown in figure 9 below.
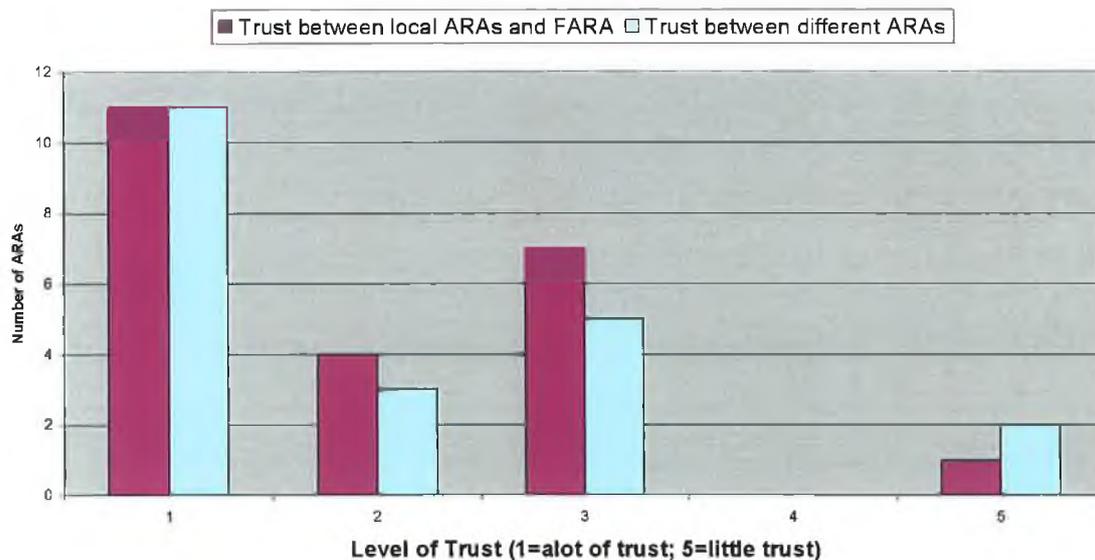
Figure 9: Levels of trust within Federation of Active Retirement Associations

The Federation's President, through good leadership skills, has a key role in mobilising its social capital to help achieve desirable aims and objectives. During the Regional Council meeting I observed that the National President has a very informal approach to meetings. Questions and queries were encouraged, taken at any time during the proceedings, listened to without interruption and feedback given in an open manner. This informal manner helped to create an easy going and discursive atmosphere. I also observed that the National President prefers a circular layout at meetings, as opposed to a more traditional theatre style layout and this seemed to develop a sense of trust between the participants at the meeting and increased participation in the discussions.

The interviewee responses also provided evidence that high levels of co-operation, trust and confidence exist between the President and fellow executive members. According to one interviewee this is achieved by:

> Eithne *[the National President]* encourages the exchange of ideas, ensuring that there is little waffle at executive council meetings and has taken the Federation to the marketplace and is selling a 'product' to potential members (Source: Interviewee, J).

I observed during the Midland Regional Council meeting that independence was important to the local membership, when three different delegates voiced their opinions that the membership must have 'ownership' of the local associations and the Regional Councils. Consequently, trust within the Federation is exemplified by the independence that the national body gives to both Regional Councils and local associations:

> Each Regional Council is independent with its own separate ethos and they can raise their own funds and run their own activities. (Source: Interviewee, O)

Such degrees of trust are a manifestation of the national structure devolving power and giving support to regional bodies.

Trust levels, both at a national level and locally, reflect an investment in the relationships within the Federation that assists in creating an atmosphere of trust and safety within local associations, which fosters high degrees of bonding social capital through strong ties. They also indicate that social capital is present and permeates throughout the organisation and that it can be mobilised to address a core objective of the organisation. The data indicates that there is some degree of collective responsibility rather than autocratic leadership. The leadership promotes an open culture, which encourages and maximises the flow of information and thus participation in the decision-making processes.

Building a consensual decision-making process

Decision-making is conducted within a power structure, which is defined by Edwards (2004) as:

> The relative positions of power between individuals, within or between groups and between individuals and organisations. (Edwards, 2004, p.81)

The literature tells us that power structures comprising of power relationships affect the ability of a network's participants to draw on stocks of social capital contained within that network and participate in decisions. This social dynamic establishes some people as dominant, thereby bringing a wealth of social contact to those individuals and simultaneously providing advantage to an individual of a lower network from someone in a higher network (Lin, 2001).

From the review of the archived minutes of Executive Committee and National Council meetings it was evident that the President chairs all such meetings. In a leadership role within the Executive Committee, the President has interactions between: fellow officers (Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and PRO), the chairpersons of the Regional Councils and the additional six elected members. Generally, these interactions are of a professional nature:

> Apart from one other member of the Executive, whom I would be very friendly with, I would describe my relationships with the other members as close but professional. (Source: Interviewee, E)

The present staff in Head Office were appointed in the period 2001-2002 (Source: Archives, Newsletters). While in the Head Office I observed a very welcoming atmosphere within the office and through discussion with the staff it was evident that they were very computer literate. The role of the Administrator at Executive Council meetings was described as follows:

> The Administrator attends and can voice opinions at Executive Council meetings but does not have a vote. However his opinions will very often be taken on board. (Source: Interviewee, E)

Many of the interviewees also outlined a general confidence in the administrative staff and that they bring with them into the Federation a "certain amount of contacts" (Source: Interviewee, K). Through the interviews with the President and Administrator, and observing them at both the Regional and National Council meetings, it was evident that a deep trust, respect and close tie had developed between the two individuals. This close relationship assists in the utilisation of both the Administrator's and President's human and social capital, to help achieve day-to-day operations and long term aims. Through the interview responses, there is an indication of a high level of idea-generation between the President and Administrator, which indicates aspects of innovation associated with the mobilisation of bridging social capital.

Bridging social capital is also exhibited by the new ideas and initiatives within the organisation being generated via the interaction between the executive and their sub-committees. Some of the initiatives outlined in the interviews included the national treasurer instigating a new accounting system (Source: Interviewee, J), the redevelopment of the 'Senior Times Exhibition' stand with the assistance of executive members (Source: Interviewee, E) and the organisation of the Arklow seminar (Source: Interviewee, B). In implementing these initiatives the Executive Committee and its sub-committee access both the human and social capital at a national level.

While the seminar was organised by the sub-committee it was left to Head Office to do most of the booking arrangements and preparatory work. In recent times there seems to have been subtle changes with sub-committees taking on more responsibility including a complete redrafting of a new constitution. In this case:

The sub-committee performed all the preparatory work, sought legal advice, consulted within the organisation and did the initial and final drafting – all without having to come back to us in Head Office. (Source: Interviewee, B)

The composition of this sub-committee was a former President, the current President and three other executive members. These members seem to have been appointed based on their past experiences as trade union officials and high-level civil servants (Source: Interviewee, B; E). This data provides evidence that the Federation maintains links with former Executive Committee members whose personal social capital is then mobilised for the benefit of the Federation, in this case in terms of drafting a new constitution for the Federation.

The questionnaire also gathered information from the respondents within local associations regarding their views on the style of leadership at the national and local level. The majority of respondents (75%) felt that the national leadership at least asked for their opinions during the decision-making process. At a local level, there is a belief that members are more involved in the decision-making process, with only 6% of respondents proposing that group members cannot contribute and decide on issues as shown in figure 10 below. However, as many of the respondents to the questionnaires were themselves either a chairperson or secretary in a local association, such results may contain bias.
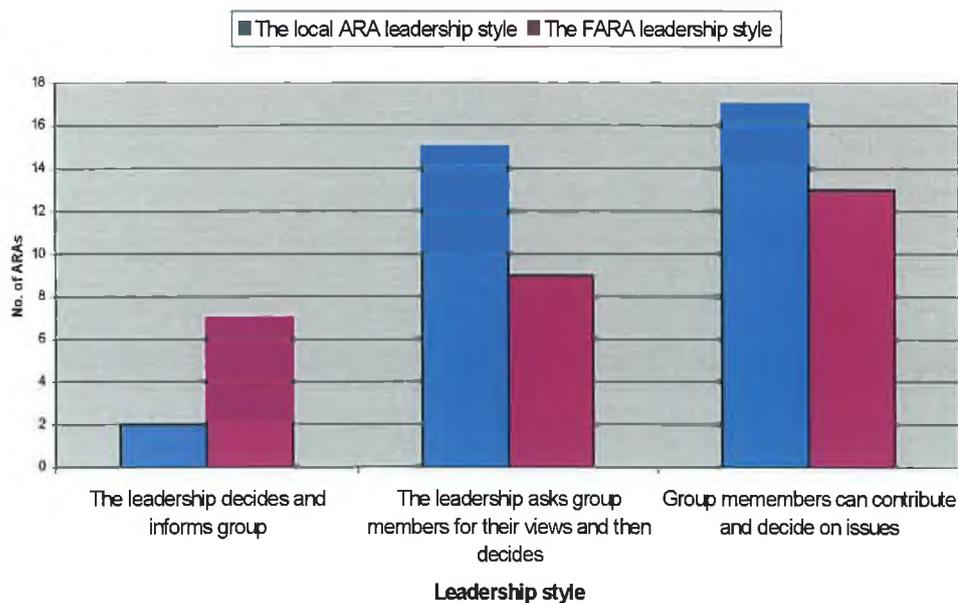
Figure 10: The leadership style at national level

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The Regional Councils is a key component in the Federation's decision-making structure. The regional chairpersons are members of the Executive Committee and it is their primary role to bring local issues from the grass roots to national level. This view is supported in various interviews with Regional Council Officers, who may be displaying their own bias:

> The Regional Council is a crucial link between the local ARAs and the National Executive (Source: Interviewee, P)

> It's very simple - the Regional Councils are the link between grass roots and Head Office (Source: Interviewee, O)

Indeed, during my observations at the inaugural Midland Regional Council meeting, one of the key influences in local associations coming together was to help to network with other associations and reduce the feeling that local associations are "on their own" (Source: Observation, Midland Regional Council meeting).

Within this context, the Federation's stock of social capital is mobilised by the interactions that make up the national structure, namely the President, staff and Executive Committee, together with their interactions with local association and Regional Councils. These interactions are summarised in figure 11 below and can be considered the power structure or decision-making pathways of the organisation. While this diagram indicates the connections between structures, these ties are between and amongst individuals. So while there may be ties between the national structure and a local association, it may effectively be a tie between the Administrator and one individual of the local organisation. Apart from the Regional Council structure, a question remains as to what has changed with the interactions at national level that has brought about the expansion of the Federation's membership and in particular, how has the diversity of the membership impacted on these decision-making processes?
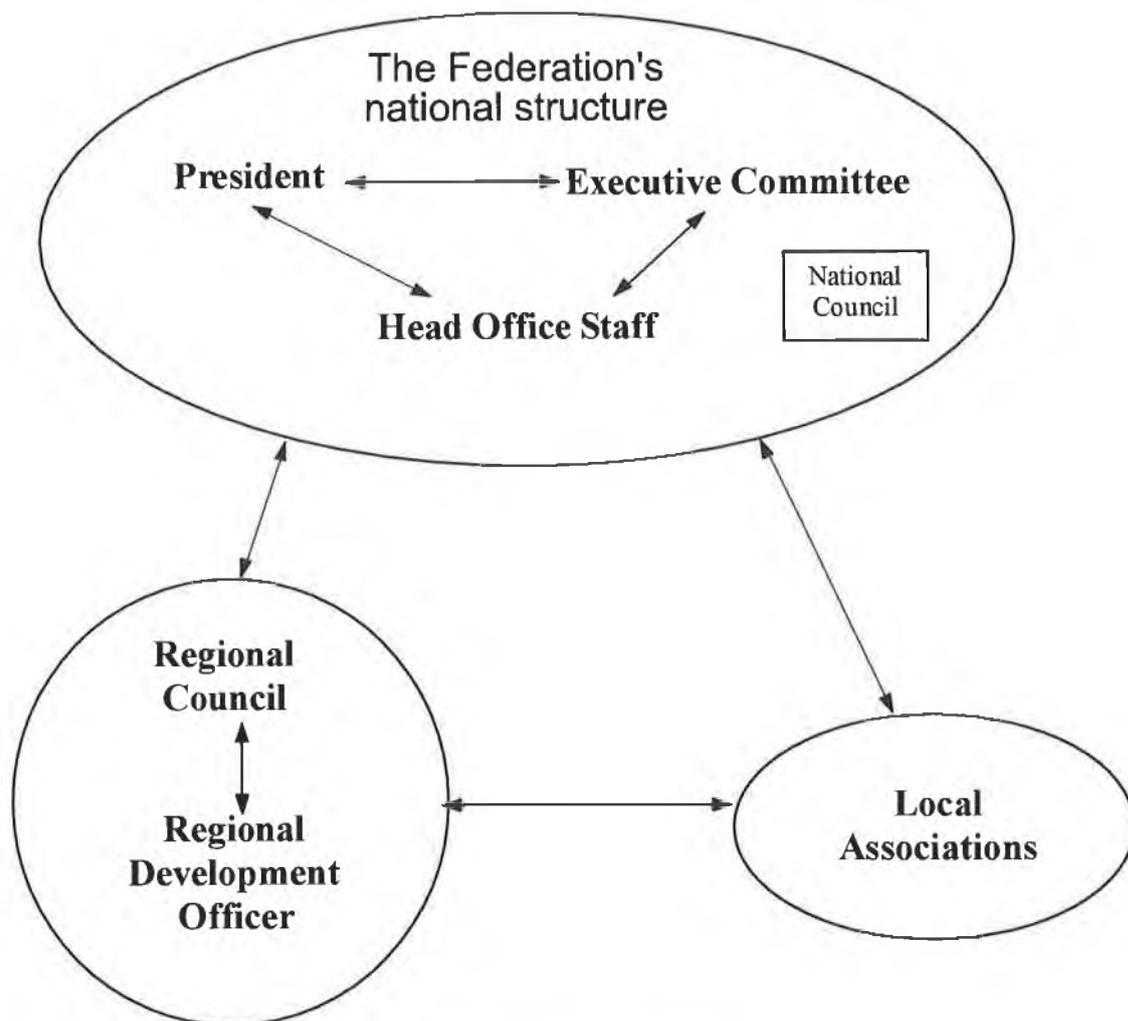
Figure 11: Internal interactions within the Federation

<u>Changes in the Executive Committee and diversity of membership</u>

It is indicated that previous Executive Committees were disorganised and had little vision of where the organisation needed to be taken (Source: Interviewee, J). This opinion occurred regularly in the interview responses, with participants responding in a variety of ways towards previous Executive Committees members in terms of:

> Some former members want to be seen, but lack ideas and experience (Source: Interview, J)

Also, while members might have ideas they:

> Do not follow through on their ideas. Past Executive Committee members were not 'champions' for their ideas. (Source: Interview, E)

These issues seem to have been reduced in recent years with interviewees responding that there was a greater mix and diversity within the Executive Committee membership. This diversity was examined through the interviews. There was a reasonable variation

of ages within the membership of the Executive Committee, from people in their sixties to those in their eighties. There was also a large variation in the background of the Executive Committee; some were retired trade union officials, managers and other members that:

> May have lacked education and work experience but were charismatic and good motivators. (Source: Interviews, J)

Interviewee O felt that this varied background brought different experiences and educational attainment to the committee table and:

> Enables the President to carry out her duties more effectively, with the support of a good backup team. (Source: Interviewee, O)

This issue of the diversity of the membership in terms of different experiences and educational attainment was examined through the questionnaire and interviews. The respondents to the questionnaire were asked to rank their attitudes to two statements, these being:

> 'There are people with various educational attainments in our group' and

> 'Our membership brings a variety of experiences to our Active Retirement Association'.

It is acknowledged that the reply of the respondents only gives the personal viewpoint of an individual respondent within that group, who were themselves officers of local associations. Within this caveat, the data obtained indicated that 75% of respondents agreed that there was a large variation in the educational attainment amongst the membership of local associations and 69% agreed that the members brought with them a variety of experiences. These results are presented below in figure 12.
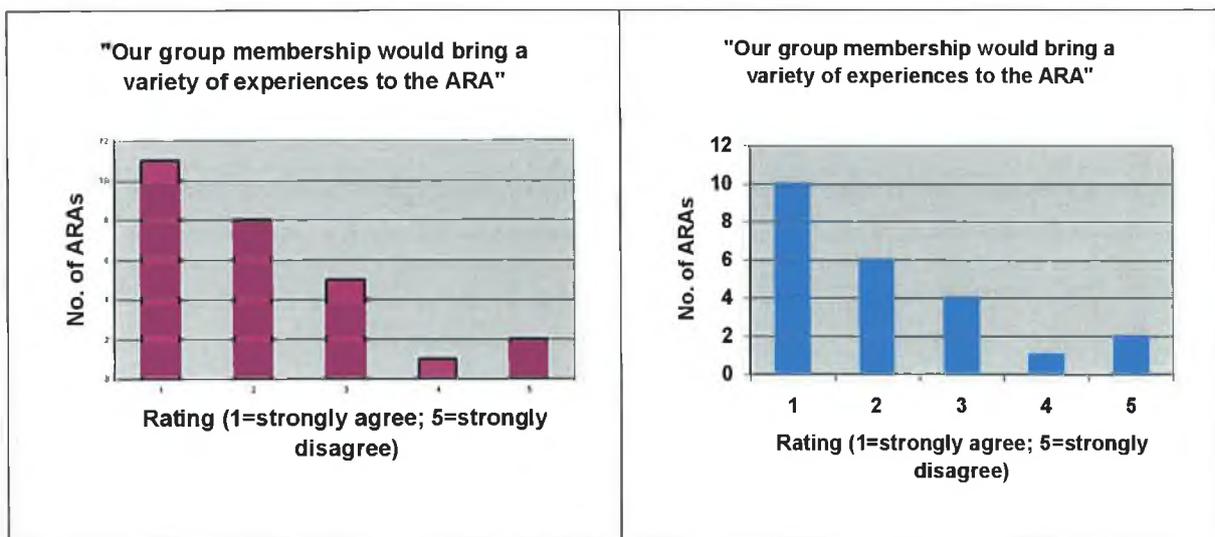
Figure 12: Rankings of the diversity aspects of the membership of local associations

The interview responses also suggested that the profile of individual members was changing, with one interviewee stating:

> There is a greater number of professionals or confident…outspoken individuals involved. (Source: Interviewee, J)

This was put down to the generational changes from the sixties and seventies – to those that worked in the eighties, nineties and retiring in the current decade. It was felt by some interviewees that older group members from the sixties and seventies:

- Do not know the mechanisms of the lobbying process (Source: Interviewees, J; E)
- That they lived through the marriage bar, which discouraged career development for many women (Source: Interviewees, J; E; B) and
- Many are retired housewives with no professional experience (Source: Interviewees, O; A; E).

One interviewee proposed that

> Group members from the eighties and nineties are different from previous generations as they are more travelled, more affluent, have opinions on what should be done for older people, are demanding more independence and want to have a say (Source: Interviewee, E).

This changing profile of the membership is supported by one interviewee detailing:

> There are more retired people going on more exotic holidays such as cruises, China and further afield (Source: Interviewee, J).

While this assertion could not be supported by other data it supports an indication of a changing and more affluent profile of older people. Another interviewee highlighted an increasing number of individuals joining Active Retirement Associations:

> Who had experience of lobbying, coming as they do from governmental and trade union backgrounds. (Source: Interviewee, J)

This changing profile and increased diversity of both the Executive Committee and wider membership indicates the existence of bridging social capital (Leonard, 2004), which has been mobilised to achieve organisational efficiencies and increased lobbying capacity. However, before we leave this issue of diversity we will explore how the Federation manages disagreements and conflicts that can arise due to the expansion of this diverse membership.

Conflict resolution

Edwards (2004) outlines that the ability of a network to manage disagreement and conflicts is indicative of the health of the network and the Federation's ability to mobilise its social capital. Where conflict goes unresolved, this may indicate a weakness of the Federation in terms of their capacity to mobilise its social capital to successfully deal with a conflict. Trust is also important in the issue of conflict resolution and, as argued previously, high levels of trust permeate the entire Federation. The main issues of conflict that arise at the local level are:

> When you have an officer within the ARA that has gone beyond their remit without consulting with the committee; or where a chairperson won't resign after 3 years; or where the chair is a dictator and won't listen to their members. Another area where there can be problems is when the treasurer is being too tight with money and will not reveal the state of the finances. (Source: Interviewee, O)

One method within the Federation to safeguard the organisation is the adoption of the standard Active Retirement Association's constitution prior to affiliation. This constitution is often the basis of resolving issues that may arise:

> The constitution is good to avoid problems such as a need to elect/change the chair. (Source, Interviewee, W)

Where conflict arises or continues, a number of pathways to resolution involving the mobilisation of the Federation's social capital was determined from the interviewee responses.

The first pathway is where conflict is resolved at a regional level. It is considered that:

> The Chairpersons and development officers of the various regions are best placed to ascertain the state of the individual associations and can ease any possible conflict that may arise. (Source: Interviewee, O)

In this situation, the bridging social ties between the officers of the Regional Council and the local associations are mobilised to 'head-off' conflict before it arises and deal with it when it does.

The second pathway identified is where officers of local associations contact Head Office directly:

> Sometimes we would get a phone call from a particular ARA who had a problem. If the ARA was within a Regional Council structure I would refer them to their local development officer. If this was not possible I would contact a different development officer or the President who would take up the issue. (Source: Interviewee, B)

Indeed this interviewee believed that:

> Only the officers of the ARAs have knowledge about the Federation at national level…And direct linkage between the ARAs and Head Office might only arise when there is a problem. (Source: Interviewee, B)

In this way, by assisting in the process of resolving conflict Head Office builds a greater sense of community between the local associations and Head Office. However, with an increasing membership base, the future ability of Head Office to mobilise its resources to deal with such micro level problems may be diminished. Indeed it may be more appropriate that such issues are dealt with by the Regional Councils who are closer to the conflict in question.

The final pathway identified is where there is a problem that may have a wide organisational impact. One such issue that has wider organisational impact is the tension between the Eastern Region and the wider organisation. There is a view from the country areas that the Federation is an extension of the Dublin Active Retirement Associations:

> A lot of Active Retirement Associations consider that the Federation is up there in Dublin and only link up with them when there is a problem. (Source: Interviewee, W)

This 'Dublin verses the rest' situation has been fuelled by combatant personalities and "because people were driven by self-fulfilment" (Source: Interviewee, B). One development officer outlined that:

> The Head Office - particularly *[name of the Administrator]*- has made a lot of efforts over the last number of years to steer away from any potential conflict between the Dublin associations and the wider network. (Source: Interviewee, W)

Further discussion with this interviewee and the Administrator determined that the following initiatives were undertaken to defuse this conflict:

- The establishment of the Eastern Regional Council
- This was followed with more face-to-face meetings between the Administrator, Eastern Regional Development Officer and the officers of the Eastern Regional Council and
- The development of Head Office in delivering services on a more national basis.

In relation to this final point, one interviewee outlined that:

> As the Head Office developed a network of ARAs outside of Dublin and widened its services to them – this in a way forced the Dublin ARAs to stand on their own feet and stopped them using Head Office as the Dublin ARAs office. (Source: Interviewee, J)

It appears from this data that, instead of damaging the organisation this tension has led to a situation where there is competition for officerships, new people coming on board the executive and new Regional Councils. Such an approach tends to indicate a capacity within the Federation to deal with problems that may arise by mobilising the social capital between the Administrator and members within the Dublin Active Retirement Associations. Figure 13 below, details these primary pathways of interaction identified in dealing with conflict resolution.

As mentioned earlier, the changing profile and increased diversity of both the Executive Committee and wider membership indicates the existence of bridging social capital, which has been mobilised to achieve certain objectives such as organisational efficiencies and increased lobbying capacity. These objectives are now explored in the context of the Federation's aim of ensuring effective communication structures.

Pathway 1: Problems dealt with on a regional basis
Active Retirement Associations member → Development officer
Could be both a weak or strong tie depending an the amount of previous engagement. Initiating contact with regard to a problem at a local level
Development officer → Active Retirement Association's member or group
Weak tie initially, but can grow to strong ties with more face-to-face contact. Development officer works with group to overcome problem

Pathway 2: Contact direct with Head Office
Active Retirement Association's member → Administration
Weak tie, initiating contact with regard to a problem at a local level
Administration → Development officer or President
Strong ties, discussing problem and best way to deal with same
Development officer → Active Retirement Association's member or group
Weak tie initially, but can grow to strong ties with more face-to-face contact. Development officer works with group to overcome problem

Pathway 3: Where a problem may have a wider organisational impact
Active Retirement Association's member → Development officer
Could be both a weak or strong tie depending on the amount of previous engagement. Initiating contact with regard to a problem at a local level
Development officer → Administrator
Strong ties, discussing problem and best way to deal with same
Administrator and development officer → Association's member or group
Weak tie initially, but can grow to strong tie with more face-to-face contact. Development Officer and Administrator work with group to overcome problem

Figure 13: Pathways identified in dealing with conflict within the organisation

Ensuring effective communication structures

Communications within the Federation are core to increased and speedier access to information. The levels and types of contact between the different organisational components of the Federation (members, local associations, staff and board), impact on the ties that support its communication's network and its ability to mobilise these ties to attain desirable organisational outcomes. In addition to this, some propose (Edwards, 2004; Granovetter, 1983) that communication provides individuals with social support mechanisms and that increased communication leads to an increased number of strong ties which are useful in pursuit of particular aims and objectives.

The Federation's existing internal communication modes and structures are initially examined with emphasis on proximity, need of interaction, methods of communications used and how they relate to the different types of social capital. This is followed by an exploration of the use of information technology to support existing associations and creating virtual communities. Finally, an investigation is conducted into how the Federation's external relationships are mobilised to achieve the communicational-based objectives of:

A. Promoting a more positive attitude to ageing and retirement

B. Ensuring a corporate voice for its associations and

C. Increasing the awareness of the contribution of older people.

Existing internal communication modes and structures

All interviewees agreed that the main mode of communication between the individual members of local associations is face-to-face in nature. Such communications or interactions reduce an individual's sense of isolation through social contact and reinforces the development of strong ties because, as members' motivation to communicate between each other increases so too does tie strength. This supports Onyx's (2001) position that face-to-face communications occur in more localised (parish) networks and are important in the development of closer interactions, communication, sociability and social supports. From my observations at the Midland Regional and National Council meetings, face-to-face encounters are promoted and encouraged with the President and officer introducing delegates from different associations to each other. Indeed, it was also observed that participants were eager to talk to each other:

> Oh, you're from Virginia. My next door neighbour comes originally from Ballyjamesduff. Their surname is… (Source: Delegate from Portlaoise at the Regional Council meeting)

Such interaction, with the purpose of finding common ground, reinforces the initial ties which may prove useful in the future. An examination of whether these ties did indeed develop was beyond the scope of this thesis.

Information gathered from interviews indicated that:

There is little 'from ground up' information between local associations and Head Office...particularly in relation to activities and advocacy issues. (Source: Interviewee, E)

This can be viewed as a lack of motivation or need on the part of local associations to communicate with the national structure.

The localised nature of the individual associations, the geographical spread of the network nationally and the needs of the organisation's internal interactions influence the methods of communication in the Federation. Data gathered from the questionnaire responses identified the modes of communication used by the Federation's national structures to communicate with local associations and vice-versa. A picture emerges where very traditional forms of communication are used in the organisation namely, letter and telephone as shown in figure 14 below. The Federation's newsletters are 90% circulated by post (Source: Interviewee, B). While emails are a minor mode of communications between the local associations and Head Office, an examination of the impact of information technology within the Federation in achieving organisational efficiencies and widening its communication capacity was conducted.
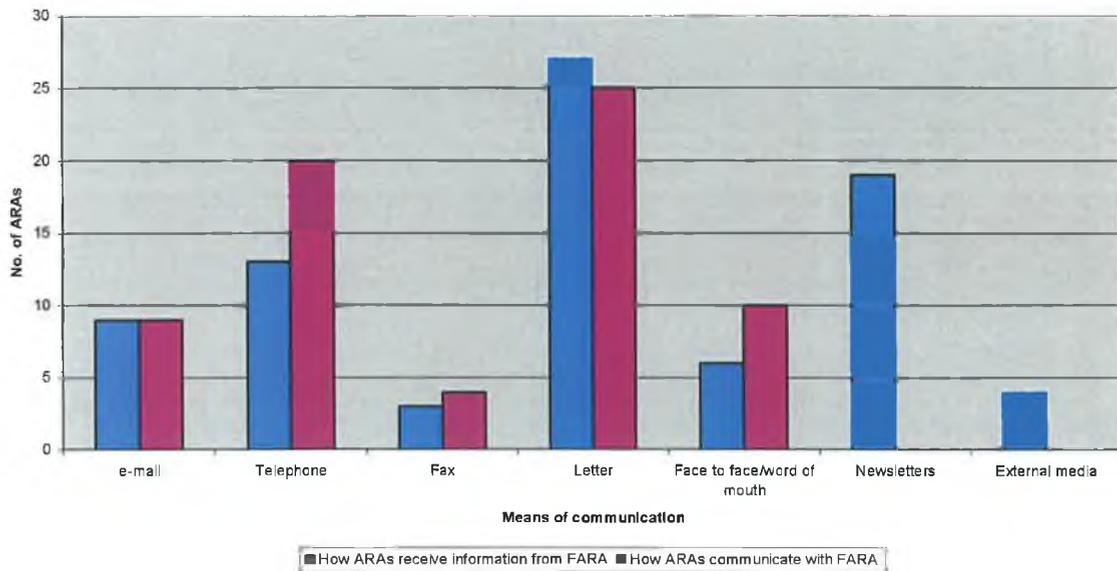

Figure 14: Modes of communication between the Federation's national structure and the local associations

The use of Information technology

Following interviews with the President and Administrator, the wider use of Information Technology within the Federation has coincided with the appointment of a new Administrator and secretarial assistant in 2000, who brought with them considerable Information Technology (IT) skills (Source: Archive, Past newsletters). The increased use of IT within the Federation has brought about a number of efficiencies. Firstly, all membership and affiliation records since 2003 are in "Access" and "Excel" format (Source: Interviewee, H) which has increased efficiency in terms of the management of the Federation's information which enables a more focused approach to communicating with local associations:

> We are now able to ascertain quickly what groups have paid membership, how many members it has and what are the contact details for the group. (Source: Interviewee, H)

A high speed internet connection has recently been introduced in Head Office. According to interviewee B and H, this has had a number of positive benefits including:

- Much quicker website searching
- Downloading Government documents faster
- More efficient use of staff time
- That the combined Broadband and telephone fee is significantly less than the single telephone fee.

The Federation operates a 'working' website, as opposed to one with only brochure content, where forms can be downloaded and all of the Federation's newsletters are available on-line. These and items like the issues/comment board and notice board are updated regularly by the staff in Head Office. A brief history of the organisation is available as well as explanatory notes on the organisation's Public Liability Insurance that it arranges for its membership. There are some items that need updating such as the list of Active Retirement Associations' names on the site. However, staff in Head Office believe that:

> It is hard to keep an up-to-date list of all the ARAs because the organisation has grown so fast. (Source: Interviewee, B)

There is evidence that the site is receiving an increased number of hits from over 60 per week at the beginning of 2005 to over 100 per week in May 2005. Figure 15 below graphically displays the data transfer in Mb from 7th August 2004 to the last week in

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July 2005, obtained from the Federation's internet server and indicates a growth in internet traffic within the site. One interpretation may be that it is a reflection of the changing profile of the individual members (as discussed previously) and that there has been anecdotal evidence that older people who are not IT literate are booking travel insurance over the internet with the help of a relative (Nealon, 2002a). Unfortunately, the internet traffic monitoring software on the server only recorded the number of hits and the data transfer. As such it is not possible to examine what forms and information were downloaded or who accessed the site.
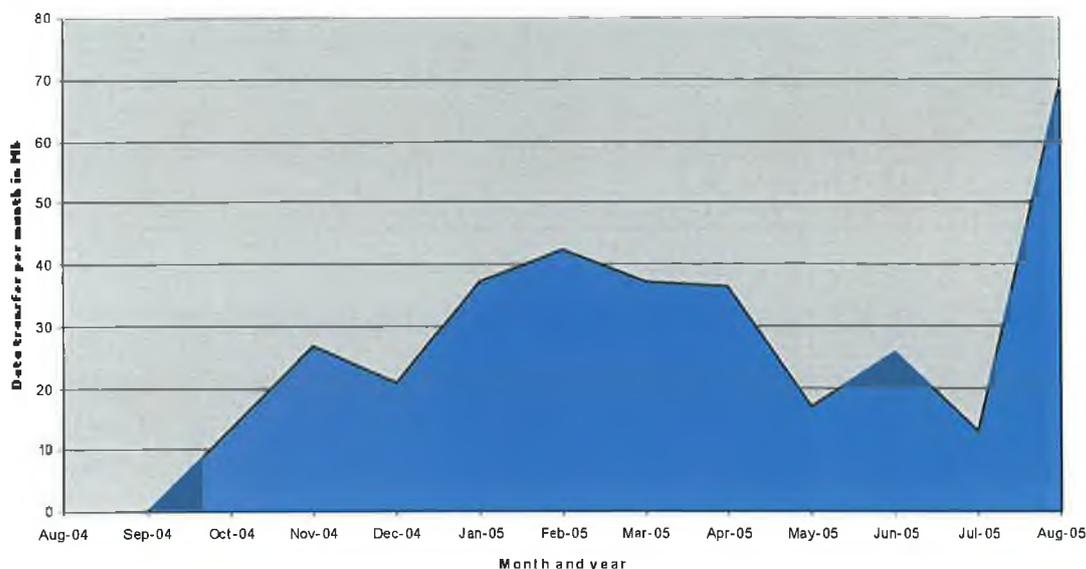

Figure 15: Mb transfer on the Federation's website over a twelve month period

However, with a membership of 21,000, a hundred hits per week indicates a very low level of information technology literacy and supports previous findings that this population segment has a high number of "late adopters" (O'Donnell, McQuillan & Malina, 2003; Nealon, 2002a). Indeed, one of the interviewees felt that:

> While computerisation within the Federation was beneficial, there was only a small number of members who had the competence to avail of the service. (Source: Interviewee, A)

Head Office now receives 3-4 quality emails (not spam) per day (Source: Interviewee, H). Indeed, there also seems to be increased used of emails amongst the Executive Council members:

> Half of the Executive Committee now receives their monthly minutes and agendas by email. It is very handy and efficient. (Source: Interviewee, B)

However, their own-branded email system (another@fara.ie) is available but not widely used. With the projected increase in membership, email may well be a useful tool in

keeping open the greatest possible flow of communication within the network, which as previously stated will assist in attaining desirable organisational outcomes. However, such a lack of communication between the national body and local associations inhibits the dissemination of information and restricts the development of weak ties in the Federation. Thus, the existing bonded social capital at a local level is not being effectively mobilised vis-à-vis providing negotiable leverage at a national level or disseminating information from the national structures to the local associations.

Individual Active Retirement Associations have their own websites such as www.virtualdublin15.ie, which is operated by the Blanchardstown Active Retirement Association, and are simply linked to the Federation's home website. The Federation's home website has the facility for the individual Active Retirement Associations to set-up their own websites. However, issues such as supervision of content have inhibited this facility becoming widespread (Source: Interviewee, B; J; H). This might indicate a lack of trust in local associations or that there is not enough administration resources within Head Office to manage the project. However, the Federation is not alone in this regard as the Gaelic Athletic Association is also struggling to engage its clubs in submitting membership details on line (Nealon, 2006).

There was an opinion that lower levels of technology, such as mobile phone texting, are modes of communications which are not being fully utilised. The use of IT within the individual Active Retirement Associations is limited but growing. The following are issues identified by interviewees that can benefit the wider spread of IT within the Federation's network and thus improve communication structure (Source: Interviewees, B; E):

- Every Active Retirement Association should try to have one person IT literate
- The National Executive can show example e.g. the National Secretary has recently undertaken a course in "Desk-top-Publishing"
- IT helps keep the members engaged with the organisation and
- The easiest way of learning an IT skill is by doing with another person

While Information Technology has made the organisation more efficient, it has not been fully utilised to assist in the mobilisation of the Federation's social capital to develop additional on-line virtual communities. As outlined in the literature review Active Retirement Associations can be considered as elective place-orientated communities.

Indeed throughout this thesis the term local association was applied. However, the Federation seems to have ignored the possibility of other forms of community. In this way, the Federation's IT infrastructure is not being utilised to promote social contact between people that are temporarily immobilised due to short term illness, when feelings of vulnerability may be extenuated, or who may not be physically capable of attending a meeting. What is suggested is not that one form of community may be better than any other, on the contrary, an on-line or virtual community of active retirement people could provide additional opportunities for social contact, support and assistance in reducing isolation.

The mobilisation of external relationship to achieve communicative objectives

The Federation also communicates to its membership and the wider public through the media. The interview data indicated that there is a debate within the Federation as to whether the organisation becomes more of a lobbyist group or keeps to their core activity of active participation. In this context an examination is conducted as to how the Federation's communication structures, information technology capacity and external relationships are mobilised to achieve the communicative objectives of:

    A. Promoting a more positive attitude to ageing and retirement

    B. Ensuring a corporate voice for its associations and

    C. Increasing the awareness of the contribution of older people.

As the data and information that address each of these objectives is overlapping, they are presented and discussed together.

One interviewee detailed that:

> The network of ARAs deal with retired people at the coal face. Indeed, we are one of the few organisations that provide actual services to older people...Most other groups only talk about what is needed. (Source: Interviewee, B).

During different interviews, a theme emerged as to the need for both locally based media coverage contributed by the local associations and nationally targeted media coverage supplied by Head Office (Source: Interviewee, E; O; A; B; J)

There appears to be an on-going debate within the Federation as to whether the organisation remains low-key in terms of media exposure and concentrates on providing

real services at the coalface, or increases its emphasis on media coverage at both a national and local level. A view was given that:

> There is no point in doing things if no one knows about it and that Federation of Active Retirement Associations needs to do more in the way of lobbying. (Source: Interviewee, A)

It was also felt that:

> The local ARAs have a greater level of exposure through the local press, provincial papers and radio. (Source: Interviewee, E)

It is felt that the organisation needs to move away from the idea that because they exist, they should be heard (Source: Interviewee, O; A). It is more the case that:

> The organisation needs to earn the right to be recognised...and become the first port of call for the media on issues affecting older people. (Source: Interviewee, J)

This view was also supported by interviewee B who indicated that, if local associations got onto the various County Development Boards and were seen wherever issues relating to older people were discussed, the Federation would be recognised as the media spokes-group for retired people. It was indicated in a separate interview that some of the executive members felt that it is beneficial to be able to express a view as a national organisation, in a sense, legitimising the right to speak on behalf of active retirement. One interviewee summarised the coverage of the Active Retirement movement with the following statement:

> The Federation has a great product. A lot of the time the message of the Federation is spread by word of mouth and it is reasonably active in the local papers. There is no coverage at a national level. (Source: Interviewee, E)

Such positions would indicate that while the Federation may have a strategy to increase media exposure, it is the officers of the local associations that actually get the views and notices of activities into the media. The Federation seems retarded in taking a more active media presence because of perceived budgetary, personal and expertise concerns (Source: Interviewees B; E; J). Consequently, it is evident that the individual mobilisation of social capital at a local level has more impact than the corresponding deployment at national level. The issue of the lack of confidence, which relates it to the generation gaps of the 50s and 60s as opposed to those of the 80s and 90s, to get involved in the media and advocacy arena was raised in the interviews (Source: Interviewees, E; J). Indeed one interviewee proposed that:

> The younger, newer people coming into the movement have demands, want more from life and have expectations that are growing. (Source: Interviewee, A)

The Administrator also outlined that at the national level there is debate as to:

- Why do we have to be in the national press?
- Can we afford it?
- Where is the money going to come from?
- Who is going to co-ordinate it?

This seems to indicate that there is a lack of strategy and collective ability within the Federation to address their communicative objectives. Indeed the potential of the Federation's wide membership is not being realised.

Utilising local media is already in place with interviewee A, W, O and E all indicating that the use of parish newsletters, local papers and the 'what is on' columns is encouraged by Development Officers. However, it was felt by one of the interviewees that the Development Officers are not proactive enough in terms of the local media:

> The Development Officers should try to get a dedicated FARA news column in the local paper and promote this with their local associations in the area by getting them to submit articles. This seems to be happening in the West but a more universal approach is needed. (Source: Interviewee, J)

Another opinion with regard to role of PRO is that:

> Every member of an ARA is a PRO - I am a member of an ARA and I want to tell you about it. (Source: Interviewee, K)

Interviewee J also felt that "The local ARA officers need to promote local interest through the media." However, the respondents to the questionnaires indicate that 25% of local associations do not have a PRO (Source: Questionnaires). Indeed, such a lack of an appointment of a PRO is not dependent on group size with 24% and 27% of larger and smaller groups respectively not having such an officer. This has an impact on the local associations ability to access the media as discussed previously.

The Federation seems concerned with the issue of Ageism in bureaucratic government regulations. In meetings with Government officials, the Federation has questioned regulations such as, a person on reaching the age of seventy needing a doctor's certificate to obtain a driving licence, "why not sixty-nine or seventy-one?" (Source: Interviewee, E). These regulations can impact upon the older person with thoughts of, "maybe I shouldn't be driving" (Interviewee, E). On their part, government officials refuse to give statistical information upon which this decision is based (Source:

Interviewee, B). Ageism can also be observed in relation to the regulations of car hire companies (which regularly precludes drivers over sixty five) and travel insurance (where some companies won't quote to people over sixty five) (Source: Interviewee, B). However, there is no evidence of an organisational campaign to address these issues. Indeed in the past the Executive Committee have left the lobbying to bodies such as the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament. As such it can be said that the Federation has not mobilised its social capital to promote a more positive attitude to ageing and retirement.

The Federation is an organisation which, whilst it is a single distinct network in its own right, it involves itself in civic participation in two respects: internally - the solidarity that the affiliate member groups have with the national organisation (and indeed visa versa); and externally - the solidarity that the national organisation itself has with other groups and networks outside of the organisation. Both aspects contribute to a measure of the level of social capital built by the Federation through the mixture of bonding ties at the local level; bridging ties between both the regional and National Councils and the local associations; and linking ties between the organisation as a whole and the government. This works to allow the Federation to amass a greater pool of social capital to draw on -through manipulation of the civic partnership process - in pursuit of its aims and objectives.

For instance the nursing home subvention issue was raised at executive council level in 2001 (Source Archives, minutes of Executive Committee meetings). Indeed many of the views raised at this Executive Council meeting were supported following the publication of "Nursing Home Subvention Report" (Office of the Ombudsman, 2001). However at that time there was a lack of confidence in the Executive Committee to pursue an advocacy agenda regarding this matter. Recently the Government's failed attempt to retrospectively legalise nursing home charges to medical card holders was raised in the national media (Beesley, 2005). After consultation with the Executive Council and the Administrator, three sample letters were drafted – all addressed to Minister Mary Harney. These samples were sent out to the chairpersons of the affiliated Active Retirement Associations and they were asked to send one to the minister. While the impact of this campaign could not be quantified, "We don't know how many letters were sent" (Source: Interviewee, B), on foot of these submissions a representative of the Federation was appointed to the National Committee on Older People. In this instance the extent to which the network was mobilised to obtain this representation is unknown.

Interview data was gathered focusing on the Federation's capacity to develop relationships with external bodies and accessing these external resources for its own benefit. Executive Committee members are active in accessing external expertise for the benefit of the Federation:

> I met *[name of lecturer]* one day at a conference and we got talking about FARA. I told him that I felt that the Federation had a problem with marketing itself – that's when the idea of getting a student to look at the organisation was considered. (Source: Interviewee, J)

Together this Executive Committee member and university lecturer organised a marketing student to conduct a public relation needs analysis within the organisation. The marketing student conducted the analysis as part of her thesis, thus negating the cost implications and developing closer ties between the Federation and the university which "may prove beneficial in the future for the Federation" (Source: Interviewee, J). This can be viewed as bridging capital between two individuals being mobilised to access external resources to achieve a certain goal. The mobilisation of such bridging social capital may benefit an organisation by means of increased levels of innovation with an opening up and appreciation of new ideas and solutions, which are now discussed.

Developing relationships with external bodies

Promoting innovation

Networks of strong ties tend to be less successfully innovative:

> Since membership *[within these networks of strong ties]* in movements or goal orientated organisations typically results from being recruited by friends... teams of individuals with weak ties' relationships are generally more innovative. (Granovetter, 1983. p.202)

Therefore innovation is closely linked to the diversity of membership and the balance between strong and weak ties. This position was explored in the context of an innovative initiative linking the Federation with NUI Maynooth Computer Science Department through an Information and Communication Technology project. This project is interesting as it brings together a number of overlapping considerations including: aspects of innovation, examples of bridging social capital being mobilised,

the interplay between social and human capital and how external personal ties (bridging linkages) can benefit the Federation.

In 2002, NUI Maynooth Computer Science students were commissioned, as part of the Muintir na Tire/Department of Social and Family Affairs ICT project, to build a website for the Federation (www.fara.ie). The genesis of the idea came from an Executive Committee member who had a weak tie to a government official. This weak tie led to a meeting between the executive member, the government official and the co-ordinator of the Muintir na Tire and the Department of Family Affairs Information Technology Project:

> When I met with Brendan *[Name of Government official]* and said that FARA needed to get more IT literate he indicated that he was involved with Muintir na Tire in a project. He then simply organised a meeting and the next thing I know I was talking to three students in Maynooth regarding websites and emails. (Source: Interviewee, J)

As such the project involved a sister community and voluntary organisation (Muintir na Tire), a government department and a university giving assistance to the Federation. The project was a success in terms of achieving the project objectives of building a website that was easily updateable, a branded email system and a compilation of manuals which was done between the students and the Federation's Administrator (Source: Interviewee, B). However, the point is that it was only possible through the mobilisation of bridging social capital between individuals in each institution and because there was a certain level of trust between these individuals. In addition to the above there is also evidence that the Federation in pursuit of matters of concern, influences central government, local authorities and other relevant bodies.

Linkages with Government and sister organisations

Following the establishment of the new Health Service Executive, the Federation campaigned on the basis that older people should have a greater say on the operation of services for older people. According to one interviewee:

> The campaign entailed a request from Head Office to all local associations to write a letter to the Minister of Health, sample letters were also sent out and there were meetings at national level with Government officials...It is understood that over 70 associations sent letters to the minister's office. (Source: Interviewee, B)

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This interviewee detailed that while the strategy employed did not include a local media promotion element or more active publicity:

> This number represented over a third of the total number of groups at the time and at the end of the day the campaign was successful with a representative of the Federation appointed onto the Health Service Executive Committee for Older People. (Source: Interviewee, B)

This was a situation where the Federation's bridging social capital and ties, together with its linking social capital at a national level, was mobilised to pursue the objectives of the Federation.

The Federation also tries to build relationships with other sister organisations. Indeed a relationship with one association has lead to ties with another as the Administrator detailed in his interview:

> The Federation's membership of the National Council on Ageing and Older People brought about contact with the Retirement Planning Council of Ireland. This linkage in turn has led a number of joint seminars on retirement between ourselves and the Retirement Planning Council. (Source: Interviewee, B)

This indicates how linking social capital brought about communication through weak ties and subsequently assisted the achievement of the Federation's objectives through the use of seminars. The Federation also attempts to influence outcomes in the partnership programme talks through using their linkages with the National Social and Economic Council, Age Action Ireland and the Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament. Through these linkages:

> The Federation has an input into making budgetary and other submissions via the voluntary pillar in the partnership programme. (Source: Interviewee, B)

However, another interviewee questioned the relevance of the voluntary pillar:

> The partnership programme is simply a wage deal, with the national cake shared out first and then the voluntary strand is consulted. An example is the refusal of some of the trade union officials putting pensions at the top of the agenda. (Source: Interviewee: J)

Being part of a national organisation has enabled greater access to Government officials and state bodies, often in reciprocal relationships. There is evidence for this position in terms of its dealing with the National Sports Council and the Health Boards. According to one interviewee:

> The Federation has representation on the National Sports Councils and helps to communicate to the local associations, information regarding grants available from this body. (Source: Interviewee, B)

At the same time the Sports Council does not have to try and contact the local organisations individually. Another interviewee outlined that the Health Boards are willing partners:

> They *[the Health Boards]* seem to want to help the Active Retirement movement. I suppose they like the idea of older people being organised...it is easier to deal with a group than an individual. (Source: Interviewee, S)

Indeed while development officers are employed by the Federation, the Southern Regional Council employs a development officer with a subvention from the Southern Regional Health Board (Source: Archive minutes of Executive Council meetings). This linkage with the Southern Region Health Board has developed and discussions are now under way for further provision of office space and additional development officers (Source: Interviewee, S). As such the Southern Regional Council is able to access additional resources. Indeed the Western Regional Council has been successful in developing linking social capital as evidenced by the publication with the Western Health board of the report 'Attitudes to Ageing and Older people' (Hodgins & Greve 2004). What is relevant here is that the linking social capital developed between the Regional Council and an external statutory body resulted in funding being received to carry out a study, which furthered the aims and objectives of both bodies. The above instances outline the Federation's success in building relationships with external bodies such as the government. These relationships and external ties have led to accessing increased funding and resources, which has assisted the operation of the Head Office and employment of the development officers.

Sources of finance

This linking of people and institutions of power and influence is very important to obtaining funds for the Federation in achieving desirable aims and objectives. Through discussions and interviews with the Administrator and National President there seems to be astute management of political ties between the members/officers of the Federation and their local politicians:

> Some of the Executive Committee fortunately have junior ministers in their constituencies in areas relevant to the Federation's work such as in Health and Education. It seems to be much easier to approach these ministers if you have a constituent with you. (Source: Interviewee, B)

This management of the political ties, together with a more professional approach in terms of submission presentations (Source: Archives, Funding applications), reporting

and analysis, has led to a massive increase in government support to the organisation from the various departments, in particular Department of Health and Children from nothing in 1998 to over €140,000 in 2004. Indeed the Department of Gaeltacht and Rural Affairs has allocated €30,000 per year for three years under the National Federations' Fund. The Federation's accounts are audited on an annual basis and presented to the AGM, a review of these accounts indicated that the income of the Federation remained reasonably static from 1992-1999 at around €22,000 per annum. However, since then there has been a sharp rise to over €150,000 per year as shown in figure 16 below.
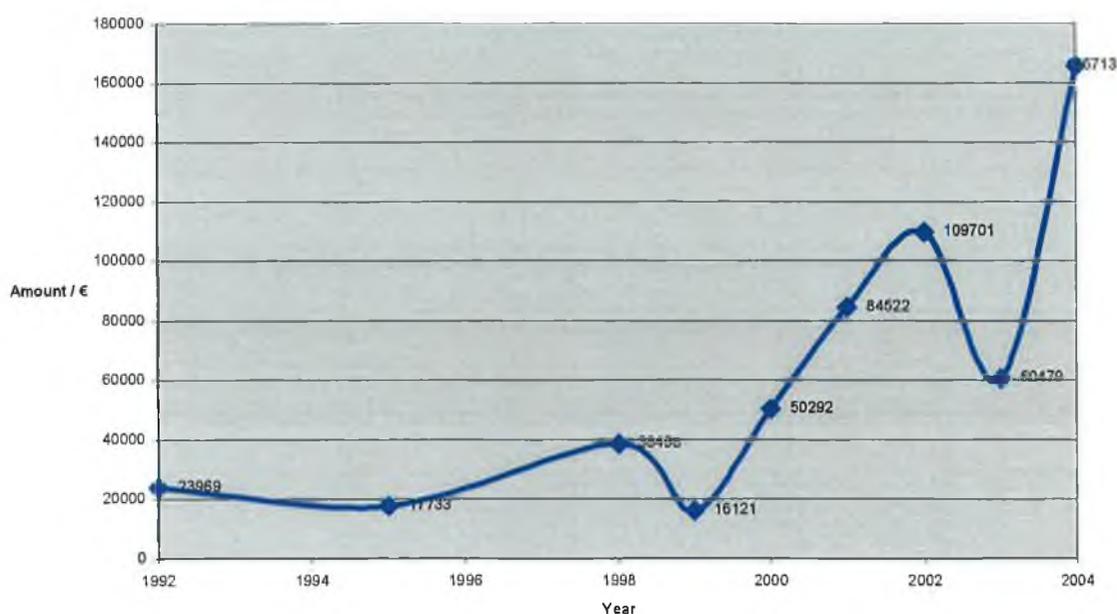

Figure 16: Total income of the Federation 1992-2004

These grants have enabled the Federation to appoint Regional Development Officers, which addresses the key organisational aim of expanding the network of local associations and supporting their activities on the ground. Thus the mobilisation of the mix of the Federation's linking social capital together with the Federation's human capital (more professional submissions for funding by Head Office staff) have been successful in obtaining funds for the organisation.

Funding emanating from self-help activities can be an indication of strong bonding ties within an organisation, whilst attracting large amounts of Governmental aid could indicate a successful mobilisation of linking social capital. However, over dependence on this form of funding can result in the Federation being open to external manipulation through attached conditions. Figure 17 below, compares the organisation's self

generated funds, to the income obtained from grants. This figure outlines that since 1985, there has been no increase in monies from self-funding initiatives. It can be said that social capital was mobilised in terms of accessing politicians and has assisted the Federation in appointing of Regional Development Officers. For the moment the Federation's aims and objectives complement current government policy. However, such levels of Government money may influence the Federation's advocacy agenda and render them tarnished in terms of pursuing the interests of older people. For the future the Federation will need to deepen these, often-reciprocal linkages with state institutions, to try and influence government policy. Such influence could keep the Federation's and government's aims and objectives complementary and thus avoid possible external manipulation.
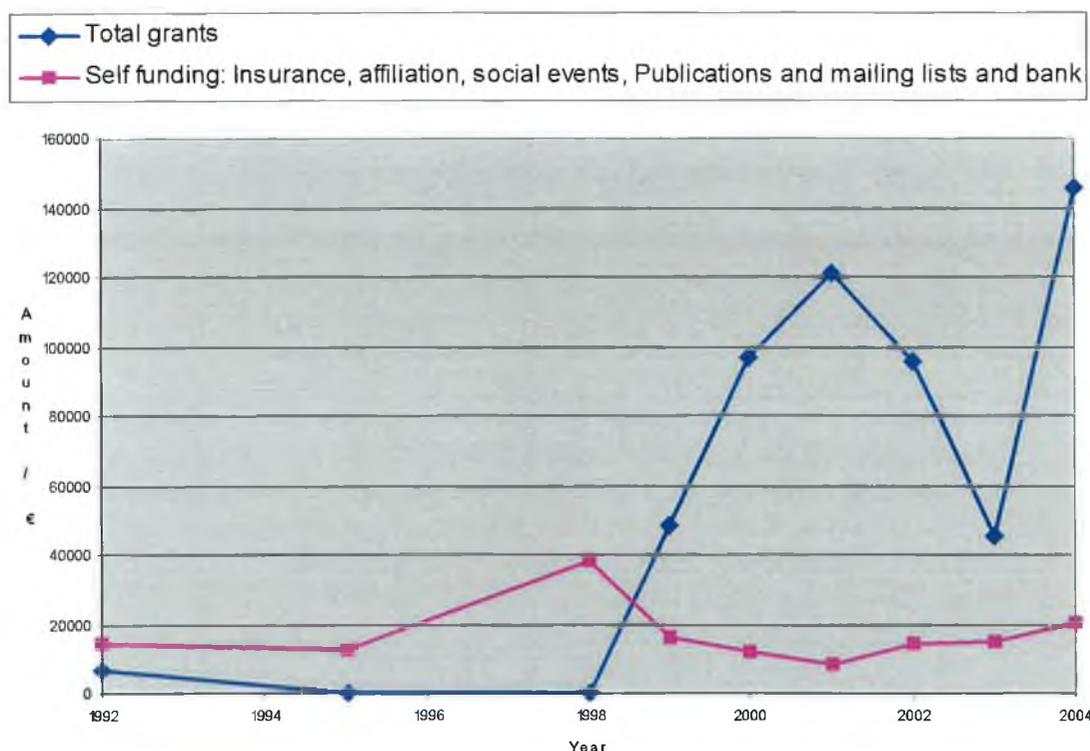
Figure 17: Self-generated and other income 1992-2004

The fact that there has been no significant increase in the levels of funding derived from their own activities would initially indicate that the Federation at a national level does not live up to its self-help ethos (Federation of Active Retirement Associations, 2000); that it is too reliant on external funding and that such a lack of self-generated funds could indicate a lack of bonding social capital and solidarity across the various levels of the Federation, or a lack of effort or enterprise on behalf of the national body.

However, upon further reflection sourcing more funding from the affiliate groups may actually negatively impact on the activities and participation on the ground by reducing available funding at the local level. Indeed, too much emphasis of sourcing finances from the local associations may lead to a situation that the local Active Retirement Associations exist for the Federation rather than the other way round. So, what is key here is that the Federation at a national level, accesses resources through the mobilisation of linkages with government institutions, in pursuit of aims and objectives relevant at this national level i.e. employing development officers.

Meso level - the Regional Councils

Introduction – Regional Councils as 'strongholds of change'

Introduced in 2000, the establishment of Regional Councils coincides with the recent growth in affiliations. They form an interface between the national structures and local associations. In a more general sense Regional Councils were identified as "strongholds of change" (Source: Interviewee, E & B), where new 'talent' is first noticed and progressed. One chairperson of a Regional Council outlined that:

> There was constant screening of local associations and at regional meetings to identify officers/members who could do a job or officership for the Federation at national level e.g. managers, accountants, architects. These are nurtured for sub-committees or for Executive Committee membership. (Source: Interviewee, K)

Indeed, in the current Executive Committee 83% of officers are nominated from the Regional Councils (Source: Archives, election results at AGMs). At the National Council meeting, I observed that delegates from the various regions were determined to get 'one of their own' into officerships at a national level. Indeed in the coffee break before the elections I observed canvassing between the delegates. I also observed what appeared block voting on the part of some regions, however no quantifiable data could be sourced to support this observation. However, this determination amongst Regional Councils to get their person on the Executive Committee is an example of both bridging social capital at a regional level and how such capital can be mobilised to allow new people to experience the work at this national level.

However, the recruitment of officers at the regional and local level can be problematic. During the Midland Regional Council meeting, I observed the National President reiterate that the national body and the Regional Councils are unable to operate without individuals coming forward and being prepared to act as officers. She stated that:

> No officers, means no Regional Council - which in turn ladies and gentlemen will mean less interaction and support between groups. (Source: Statement by the President during a Regional Council meeting)

However from the interviews, it was generally felt that there is no great rush of members wanting to get involved at a national or Regional Council level. This reluctance amongst members taking on officerships means that few ordinary members have any linkage with the Federation at a national level. In one interviewee's own experience:

> Billy Pope *[who established the first Active Retirement Association and Regional Council in the West of Ireland]* was a great motivator and encouraged me to accept the chair of the Regional Council when it was first established...There are a limited number of members interested in the positions of authority or responsibility at a regional or national level, with many just interested in the activities being provided at a local level. (Source: Interviewee, P)

Another interviewee continued that:

> It is important for grass roots members to get involved at a Regional Council level and in the sub-committees of the Federation. Otherwise the chair and secretary heading off for another meeting is seen as some kind of junket. (Source: Interviewee, A)

These indications of problems in the uptake of officerships are supported in the questionnaire responses. The respondents outlined that at a local level there is a significant number of groups that did not have a vice-chair (17%) or public relations officer (25%) (Source: Questionnaires).

The Regional Council specifically aims to promote the establishment of new associations an assist in the development of existing associations. In this section we examine, in the context of promoting the establishment of new associations, the statistical information available regarding the level of affiliations since 1985, the role of the Development Officer in terms of building relationships and mobilising or invigorating groups and the key impetus behind their establishment. This is followed by a review of how the structures at this meso level assist and develop existing associations.

Promoting the establishment of new associations

The number of members in an organisation can:

- Be a reflection of the amount of effort and investment put into relationships and ties (Edwards, 2004)
- Influence the range and quality of resources accessible (Putnam, 2000) and
- Affect the stock of social capital that exists within that community (Szabo, 1999).

In an organisational framework, the size of a network can indicate levels of bonded social capital within the organisation (Keating, Swindle &Foster, 2005), while a growth in membership has been linked to an increase in an organisation's stock of social capital and an increase in the opportunity for the formation of social capital (Healy & Côtés, 2001; Edwards, 2004) which is subsequently available for mobilisation in the pursuit of desirable organisational objectives.

The Federation has an expanding membership in the 26 counties, growing from 25 groups in 1985, to over 360 affiliated Active Retirement Associations in 2005 (Source: Membership archives). Indeed, the Federation witnessed a doubling of affiliations in the last four years as shown in figure 18 below. This rise in affiliations coincides with a lot of institutional activity at a meso level, particularly

- The introduction of the Regional Council structure as a bridge or interface between the national structure and local associations
- The devolution of power and support to Regional Councils, and
- The engagement of the Regional Development Officers.
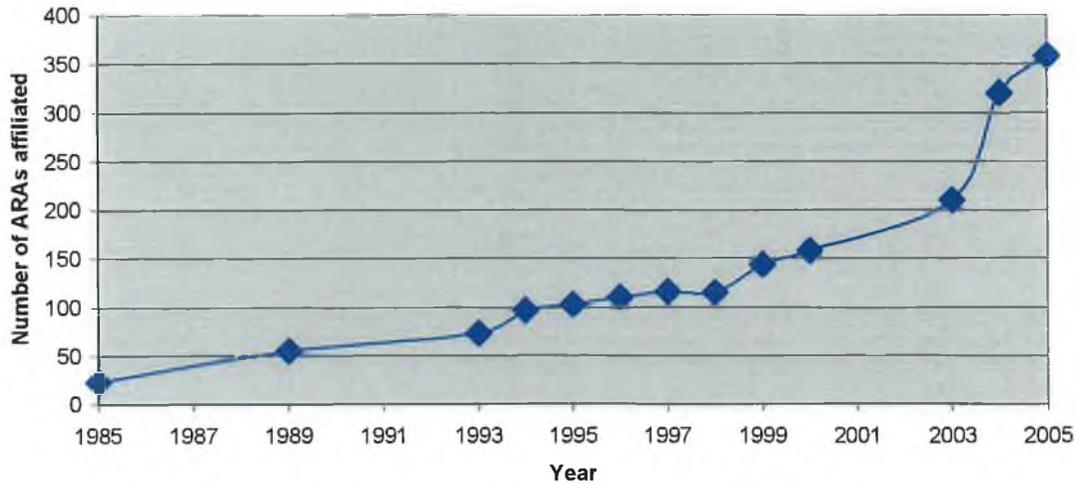
Figure 18: Affiliated Active Retirement Associations 1985-2005

This increase in the affiliation of local groups has seen a corresponding increase in the individual membership base growing from 2,500 in 1985 to over 20,000 members presently. This is a significant increase in membership not attributable to the general population increase at this age group (Central Statistics Office, 2006). Indeed by using a polynomial mathematical regression based on the last 20 years' data, the projection is that the membership will rise from 21,000 to 40,000 by 2015, with an r-squared coefficient[4] of 0.9773 as shown in figure 19 below. Such mathematical projections are only useful in the context of indicating current trends under the current set of circumstances. Indeed, the recent expansion is due to the mobilisation of the bonded social capital at the local level that enables participative activities. Were these activities not continued or expanded, the Federation's membership base may cease to grow or indeed recede. However, if such a rise in membership did occur within the Federation a greater reservoir of social capital could be developed, which could be mobilised to achieve desired outcomes such as combat isolation and loneliness amongst retired people. Such a projected membership would pose challenges for the Federation in terms of harnessing this expanded social capital resource. These challenges include communication issues, innovation, resources and support mechanisms and a need for more Federation-wide co-operative action programmes.

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[4] The r-squared coefficient is the square of the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient through data points in this case known years and known membership levels. The closer to 1 the higher the statistical probability of truthfulness.

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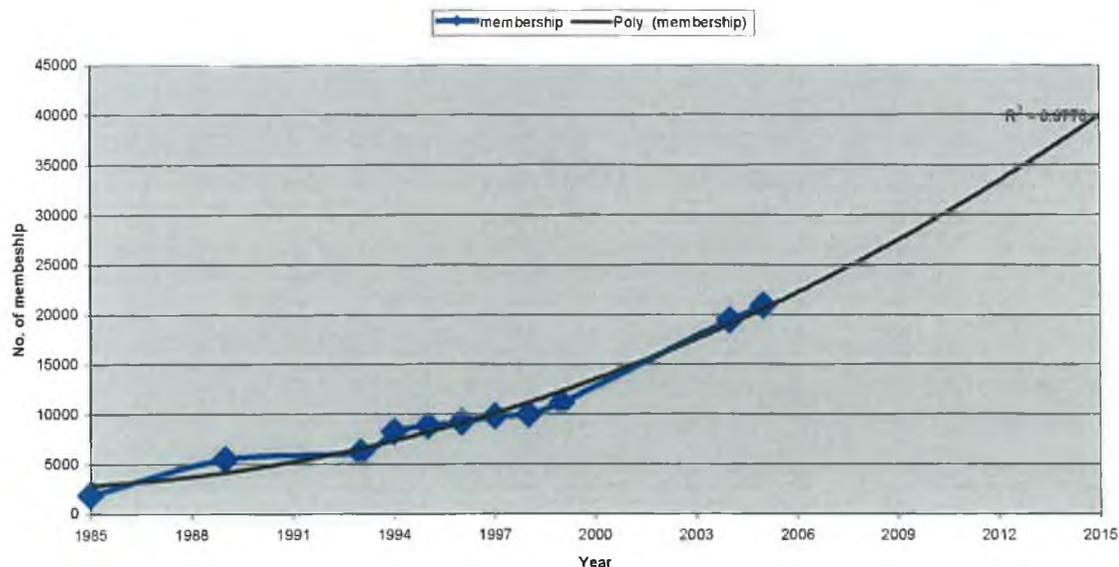
Figure 19: Projected membership to 2015

It is worthy to note that these membership figures pales when compared with a current over 65's population of 436, 000 and a projected figure of 480,000 by 2015 (Central Statistics Office, 2006). The Federation only targets those who are still active and there may be a large cohort of people who are quite happy with their existing social involvement. However, taking into account changing societal factors, it would seem that there could be a large number of isolated individuals not involved within the Federation. This suggests that there may be entire segments of the community from which the Federation is not sourcing new members. This in turn may suggest a closed network of members, which may as Leonard (2004) proposes, act against the broader development of that community and be a source of intolerance. Indeed, a recent article in the Galway Advertiser was discussed at the Western Regional Council meeting (Source: Archives, Minute of Regional Council meeting) and was found objectionable. By way of rebuttal one interviewee outlined:

> An editorial in the Galway Advertiser detailed that the Active Retirement Associations locally were primarily teachers, middle class and not inclusive. Since then we got the paper to correct itself and print a full page article on the activities of Galway Active Retirement Associations. (Source: Interviews, E).

However the point is that there was a perception within the Galway Advertiser that the Federation was middle income and middle class. While this incident is far too vague for definitive commentary it could allude to the Federation not targeting particular segments of society. The relationships and ties built up within communities by the Regional Development Officer is key to linking across differing local associations,

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countering sources of intolerance and combating perceptions that the Federation is middle income and middle class.

The Regional Development Officer

A part-time Development Officer supports the work of the Regional Council. The function of these Development Officers is the formation and revisiting of new associations and the support and encouragement of existing groups (Federation of Active Retirement, 2002b). The interview responses outlined that prior to the appointment of these Development Officers:

> The development of new groups was sporadic and relied on goodwill and the voluntary hard work of 'unofficial' Development Officers. (Source: Interviewee, W)

The interview responses from Development Officers determined that, generally their approach is fresh and enthusiastic, with the motto being:

> Have car, will travel...preferably with someone for company. (Source: Interviewee, A)

While the work of the Development officer is supported at national level with the production of literature materials and information packs (Source: Archives, The development officer's handbook; Promotional literature) most communication occurs between the development officer and the Regional Council, with limited communication and information flow between development officers and Head Office. One interviewee outlined:

> There generally would be little communication between Head Office and the Development Officer...the odd phone call seeking particular information...Exceptions to this can occur when a newspaper article on active retirement does not mention the activities of the Federation or the local ARAs. (Source: Interviewee, B)

Such a situation indicates a lack of bonded or even bridging social capital between the Regional Development Officers and Head Office. This has resulted in an attempt to establish formal reporting mechanisms, initially agreed with the development officers, not being followed through. One of the reasons given for this situation is that:

> The development officers are paid such a small fee - that we cannot push them too much for meetings and reports. (Source: Interviewee, B)

Similarly, the President appears to have little linkage and few ties with the Development Officers:

Most communications between the Executive Committee and Development Officers are left to the Administrator. (Source: Interviewee, E)

Despite the fact that the Regional Development Officers are funded nationally (Source: Archive, Funding applications), the Regional Councils exercise:

A high degree of control over the Development Officer's targets for the establishment of new local associations. (Source: Interviewee, K)

This is further evidence of the devolution of power form the national structures to the Regional Councils and of the strong ties and interactions between the officers of the Regional Council and the Development Officers. As mentioned earlier, one of the two primary functions of these Development Officers is the formation and revisiting of new associations, and consequently I have examined that the key impetus in the establishment of new associations.

The key impetus for the establishment of new groups

The researcher asked the question:

'How was your Active Retirement Association established (e.g. with the aid of a Development Officer)?'

The responses indicated that the role of the Development Officer is crucial in establishing local associations. Indeed, 44% of respondents stated that the Development Officer was active in their establishment, while 26% indicated that assistance came from the representatives of other Active Retirement Associations. 19% of respondents indicated that their group was self-established and 11% indicated a variety of third party sources of assistance including the local Health Board and priest. However, no local group viewed the Head Office as having any role in their establishment. These results are shown in figure 20 below.

□ Other
11%

□ Self established
19%

■ Development Officer
44%

■ Help from another local
active retirement
association
26%
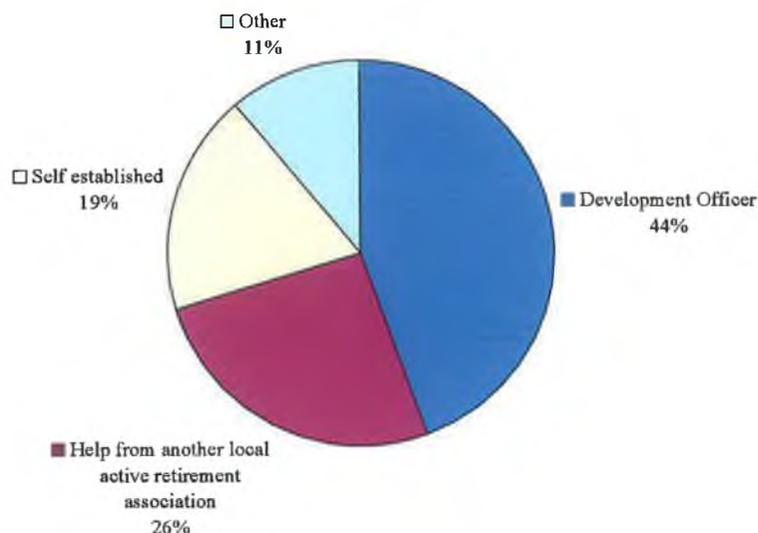
Figure 20: The key impetus in the establishment of local associations

The interview responses supplement the above information, and the main path-ways by which new Active Retirement Associations are established were identified as:

    A. Associations established in areas targeted by a Development Officer

    B. Assistance from other local associations

    C. Introductions from third parties, and

    D. The role of individual members of the Executive Committee.

A. Associations established in areas targeted by a development officer

The development officers have been key in establishing new associations and thus developing the Federation's stock of bonded social capital. One interviewee outlined their belief that:

> Two or three part-time development officers rather than one full-time officer, is more beneficial...[and that] the lack of a Development Officer would be a great loss to the starting of local associations. (Source: Interviewee, S)

One Chairperson of a Regional Council outlined that:

> The Development Officers have a target of one new group per month (Source: Interviewee, K)

Such a programme has a lot of ramifications for the organisation. At the above rate there would be 12 new groups a year in each region, which would equate to 80-100 new

groups every year, which have implications for the Federation. In particular the capacity of the Regional Councils to support a greater number of local associations and source funding for additional Development Officers needs to be examined. This funding has also been outlined by the Administrator as the primary reason why all areas do not have a Regional Council and why some Regional Councils are quite big in size, e.g. Midland Regional Council comprises of the counties of Meath, Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath. This is a key restriction in the fulfilment of the potential of Regional Councils, with many of the regions manifestly too large and physically impossible for a single Development Officer to cover.

The modus operandi of the Development Officers was examined during the interviews. The establishment of a group in a 'cold call' area usually began with making an appointment to meet the parish priest. One interviewee outlined that:

> The priest is able to outline some of the main people involved in the community in the over 55-age bracket. (Source: Interviewee, A)

It is through this network of ties (a mixture of strong and weak) that the nucleus of a new association is formed. As such bridging social capital between the priest and members of the community was mobilised to get people together for a cup of tea in order to create an interest and discuss the active retirement idea. When the idea took root a public meeting was suggested and organised. The Development Officer advertised the meeting in local papers and bulletins. The group is given an officer manual (Prenderville, 2003), a sample constitution and training manual. Officers are then elected. The Development Officer leaves a contact telephone number for the purposes of giving advice and sends out regular correspondence. While there is no direct evidence that the Federation is sectarian, the fact that the Development Officer identifies the local catholic priest as the primary initial access point may exclude some older people. The Federation needs to acknowledge this and be aware that by using a local catholic priest, other denominations may be excluded.

The Development Officers outlined in the interviews that in some places it is very hard to get an Active Retirement Association established:

> Getting an association established in Naas was difficult and I really don't know why. (Source: Interviewee, W)

And:

> Sometimes a priest is not responsive to assisting in establishing a group, they may feel that they might lose some of their power. (Source: Interview, B)

While:

> The setting up of a new group may need a number of meetings. For example Ashford Active Retirement Associations needed three to four visits to get it on its way. (Source: Interviewee, W)

It could be said that in relation to Naas it is an expanding large town. As such the mix of strong community ties may be reduced. The fact that a priest or local person may feel insecure in facilitating a new local association may indicate a lack of mobilisation of personal social capital. Because a number of meetings may be required to establish a group could indicate a set of weak ties present in that community. However the very fact that a group develops these weak ties may contribute to the wider communities stock of ties.

B. Assistance from other local associations

One of the interviewees proposed that:

> New groups can emerge when members of an existing group go back to their own neighbourhoods and set up their own local associations. (Source: Interviewee, E)

This response and the data that 26% of groups were assisted by other local associations was explored further with the Administrator and Development Officers. The Cavan experience of local associations assisting in the establishment of new groups in their county is interesting (Source: Interviewees, B, W). In this case an individual from Virginia made contact with Head Office. As there was no Development Officer in the area, the Administrator and Eastern Development Officer travelled to Cavan and met with some retired people from the Virginia area, following which the Active Virginians Retirement Association was established. A decision was then made to advertise the Active Virginians as the 300th group established by the Federation. The Federation's PRO helped organise a small function to advertise the event and it got a lot of publicity in the local media. On the back of this event:

> Individuals in four other areas wanted to establish their own local ARA and affiliate to the Federation...It seemed like a situation where 'well if those boys up the road can set up an ARA so can we'. (Source: Interviewee, W)

There is now a vibrant network of seven associations in the Cavan area. This scenario seems to indicate the local community do not want to be 'shown-up' by a neighbouring parish or community. Indeed the use of the local media seems significant in galvanising local communities of retired people to come together.

C. Introductions from third parties

Encouragement to become a member of an Active Retirement Association sometimes comes from outside the organisation, where a member of the public becomes aware of the Federation's work and makes the first contact or enquiry. These enquiries can be made to the Head Office, to Development Officers or to members of the Executive Committee. One interviewee described these people as facilitators, who might try and set up an Active Retirement Association and then pull back. Interviewee B outlined:

> A priest based in Omeath rang Head Office seeking information. We sent on literature and advised the nearest Development Officer of the interest. The Development Officer held three or four meetings in Omeath, established a group, at which the priest was present. The priest started to pull back when committee was formed. (Source: Interviewee, B)

A local Health Board sometimes conveys information to a Development Officer or Regional Chairperson where they have identified a location where a local association may take root. Indeed, they often assist in making 'introductions' in these areas (Source: Interviewee, A). Other people involved in the medical field have encouraged active retirement in their area:

> A local doctor, whose mother got involved with an ARA and subsequently could not be stopped going on trips, outings and activities, would now recommend joining an ARA, to any widow or widower who comes into the surgery. (Source: Interviewee, S)

D. The role of individual members of the Executive Committee

One interviewee outlined that sometimes the Executive Committee members assist in establishing a new Active Retirement Association and outlined his own experience in Buttevant:

> What actually happened was that the parish priest of Buttevant heard that there was an ARA in Doneraile and contacted his counterpart there. Together they made contact with Head Office. As I was the member of the executive living closest to Buttevant, the Administrator put me in touch with the priest in Buttevant who in turn put me in touch with an interested retired person. (Source: Interviewee, S)

The executive member, together with the retired member of the public helped to set up an Active Retirement Association in Buttevant, with the Regional Development Officer coming to a subsequent meeting. Such interaction can be seen as a combination of weak and strong ties, leading to a reciprocal arrangement assisting the establishment of a new group and this group then affiliating to the Federation. The pathway is summarised in figure 21 below. As such bridging social capital within the Federation

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was utilised to establish a new Active Retirement Association.

Retired member of public → Administrator
Weak tie, initiating contact

Administrator → Executive member
Strong tie, information giving

Executive member → retired member of the public
Weak tie, reciprocal arrangement

Executive member and member of public → together establish the Buttevant Active Retirement Association
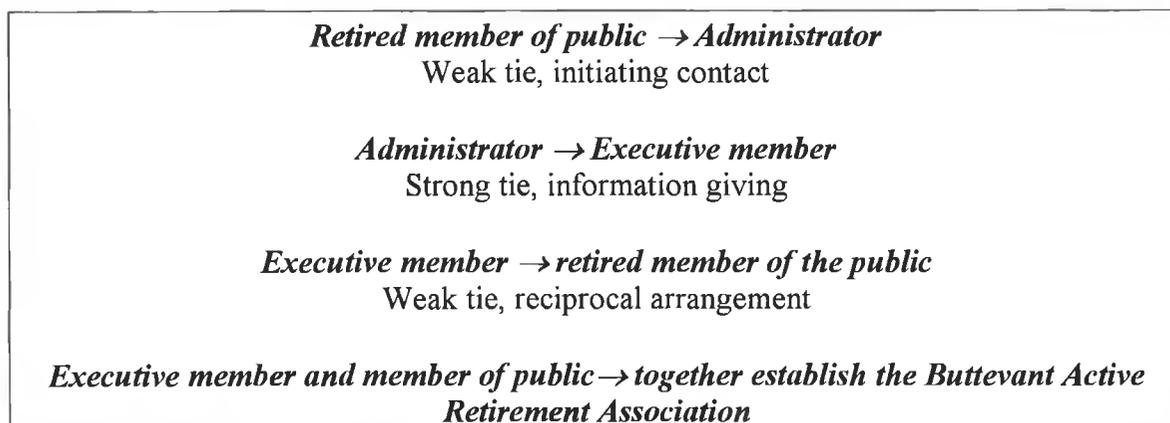

Figure 21: The communication pathways involved in the establishment of the Buttevant Active Retirement Association

Assisting and developing existing local associations

The sustainability and stability of a community and voluntary organisation in a given period can be a reflection that it has developed and adapted over time (Szabo, 1999). At the individual level, the length of involvement in a local association can depend upon the purpose and relevance of the Active Retirement Association to its membership and how welcome people are made to feel. The greater the period of contact with a specific group, the greater the potential to develop ties and therefore bonding social capital as proposed by Edwards (2004) and Szabo (1999).

The questionnaires sought information from respondents of the associations:

'How long is your group established?'

It was found that while the majority of groups were established in the last 7 years, over a quarter have been established for greater than 11 years, as shown in figure 22 below. However, more interesting was the review of the Federation's archival affiliations' records for the period 1985-1990. It was determined that 89% of the groups that were established in this period are still in existence today. This gives an indication of a sustainability of groups over time and possibly a certain level of stability. Such stability can assist in retaining and recruiting members. Because the Development Officer's job description includes the support and encouragement of existing local associations in relation to such issues as membership retention and expansion (Source: Interviewee, B),

one might be tempted to associate such stability to the Regional Development Officers. However this is not the case.
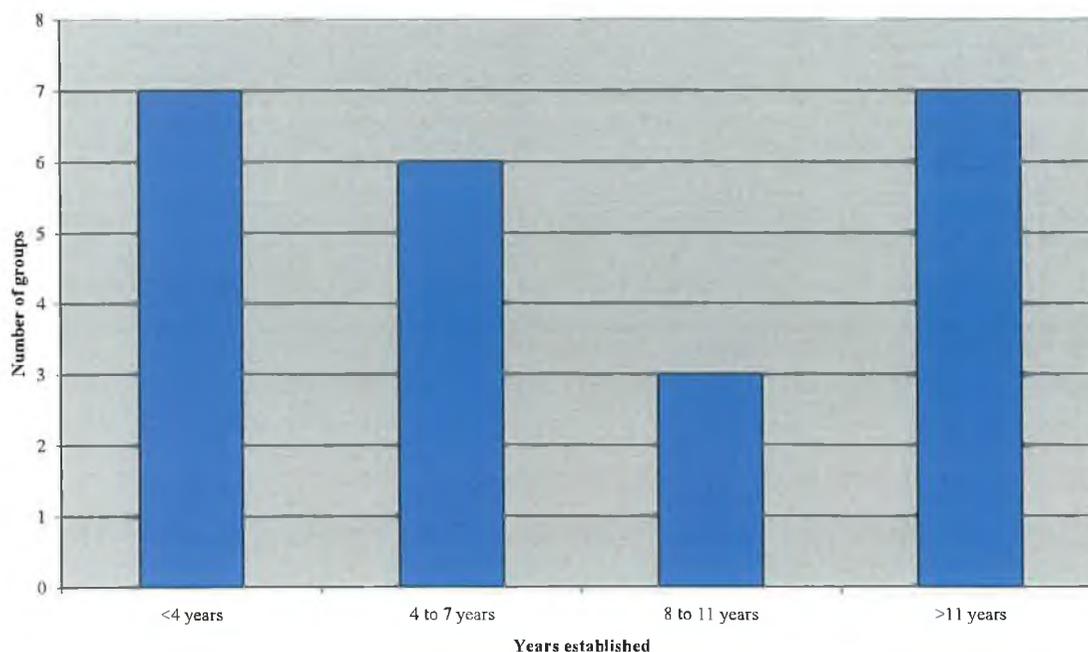

Figure 22: Length of time local associations were established

Firstly the Regional Development Officers were only appointed from 2000 and in reply to the questionnaire:

'How have the Development Officers assisted your ARA to date'?

- 32% of respondents indicated that the Regional Development Officer gave no assistance to them.

The fact that the existing associations see little benefit from the availability of a Development Officer would support the theme through the interview responses that the Development Officers are more involved in establishing new associations, rather than providing assistance to existing associations. One interviewee identified that:

> The work involved in establishing new groups takes up so much time that there is little time for proactive developmental work with established groups. This is where more effort *[by development officers]* is needed in years to come. (Source: Interviewee, K)

A main reason for a return visit by a Development Officer to a local association is when that group had a problem such as a need to elect or change the chair. One Development Officer believed that:

> A Development Officer going into an ARA where there is a problem is beneficial, because even though we are a member of FARA we are seen as outsiders. (Source: Interviewee, A)

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From the interviews, two of the main concerns in the area of maintaining an existing Active Retirement Association are the lack of rotating officerships and lack of new members. In relation to the recruitment of new members, lessons need to be learnt from the experience of other groups, in particular:

> The Roscommon Active Age Groups and some existing ARAs have made no attempt to recruit new members over the years. As a result they're more 'old age groups' than Active Retirement Associations. (Source: Interviewee, A)

This interviewee continued that:

> There was now a crisis with some groups, as no new members were recruited in recent years. Indeed some of the older ARAs are stagnant, avoiding the three-year rotation rule and are not recruiting new members. And this is a vicious circle because as the profile of the groups gets older, it becomes less attractive to younger people. Some groups are borderline senior citizens groups rather than Active Retirement Associations. (Source: Interviewee, A)

From the interviews particularly B, E, A, S and O, the primary means by which existing local associations source new members are by:

- The encouragement of existing members through their weak or strong ties with other people:

  > It is very common that a member might get a sister or neighbour to firstly come to a particular activity and then to a meeting. (Source: Interviewee, O)

- The local media and parish newsletters can be important in a local association's recruitment process:

  > Sometimes people just walk in from the street into an ARA meeting, after being informed in the local paper or parish bulletin regarding dates and times. (Source: Interviewee, A)

- Word of mouth between people (including families, neighbour and friends) (Source: Interviewee, E, B, O)

- Local people of prominence, such as the doctors, Health Board officials and priests, who might encourage people to join their local Active Retirement Association (Source: Interviewee, E, S)

One initiative mentioned regularly during the interviews in relation to the recruitment of new members was the idea that every local association should have a Friendship officer. The idea emanated from the Arklow seminar, "The Future Starts Now", which was a three-day event held in the town of Arklow, from the 18th to the 20th October 2004. The interviewees viewed the role of the Friendship Officer:

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- As the first contact between perspective new members
- Being of assistance to new members
- Ensuring that new members are welcomed into the local association and
- Encouraging new members into activities as quickly as possible.

However, even though there was a campaign for local associations to appoint a Friendship Officer (Source: Interviewee, B), only 37% of respondent associations had such an officer. Indeed, the larger groups (>50) are less likely to have a Friendship officer, with only 20% indicating such an officer. This would seem to support the proposition that smaller local groups build stronger ties that provide greater support and cherishment of friendship. This seems to support Keating, Swindle and Fosters (2005) proposition that smaller networks are more likely to create bonding social capital and build closer friendships.

The issue of the importance of the role of the chair and secretary at the local level was raised a number of times in terms of addressing the meeting, welcoming new members and having a warm encouraging demeanour. One Board member outlined:

> Sometimes the people at the door collecting the tea money will say hello, get a name and tell the Chairman. It is then essential that they are make them feel welcome by the Chairman. (Source: Interviewee, O)

A Development Officer supports this:

> People go to local association meetings for social interaction; they come looking for something. But if at the first meeting they don't get stimulated to contribute you are at risk of losing them. Therefore a key importance is that there are good chairs for local groups. (Source: Interviewee, A)

So even though the issue of proactively supporting existing associations and assisting in the recruitment of new members was raised a number of times during the interview and questionnaire process, no overall plan or blueprint to address these issues is evident. The need for a fundamental organisational plan with aspects including more Regional Councils, coupled with part-time Development Officers, does not seem to be given the prominence that they may deserve. This indicates unexploited opportunities to develop the Federation's bridging social capital between the Head Office, Regional Councils and the Development Officers in order to assist and develop existing local associations. Indeed, the lack of communication between these components corresponds with these unexploited opportunities.

Micro level – the local associations countering loneliness and isolation

A question posed during the interviews was:

> 'Why do people in general, and in particular you, join the Active Retirement movement?'

A consistent theme from the responses was that individuals join an Active Retirement Association to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation, through participative activities. One of the Development Officers interviewed believed that:

> What's the point in having comfort in your later years if you're lonely? (Source: Interviewee, A)

A board member went further by stating:

> Were it not for the existence of Active Retirement Associations, many older people would have little or no social outlet or participation with their peers. (Source: Interviewee, O)

Literature (Walker, 2002; Berkman & Glass, 2000) proposes that strong ties are closely linked with bonded social capital, provide important health related benefits, emotional and personal support and can counter the effects of isolation and loneliness. In this regard local Active Retirement Associations provide, through bonded social capital, "contacts with other people, interaction and a sense of community" (Source: Interviewee, K). A number of the female interviewees discussed the isolation of women in general and retired housewives in particular. This could be due to the interviewees' own experiences, but it could also be a reflection of the high percentage of female members within the Federation. However, one of these female interviewees also detailed that:

> Even widowers who don't play golf, or have other social/sporting activities can feel very isolated. (Source: Interviewee, O)

Some interviewees felt that people are basically looking for company with their own age group and:

> In a sense the ARAs are replacing a diminished sense of locality, neighbourliness and family. (Source: Interviewee, O)

This data supports findings by Putnam (2000), the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) and Edwards (2004) who indicate that there is increasing loneliness amongst older people, which is linked with a changing society and diminished communication with the immediate family. Indeed it could be considered that the Federation has tapped into a changing societal profile to address isolation and loneliness through a process of participation in activities. Increased opportunities to form friendships may also be a

reflection of the changing membership numbers per local association within the Federation.

By taking a sample of three years, 1994, 1999 and 2005 (Source: Archives, Affiliation records), I took a comparative look at the number of members per Active Retirement Association. I found that the number of affiliated associations with over 100 members has dropped in percentage terms from 30% in 1994 to 14% in 2005. The major growth area has been with Active Retirement Associations with a membership of 25 and under – from 9% of total groups in 1994 to 27% in 2005. This can be seen in tabular format in figure 23 below.

	Year					
	1994	1999	2005	1994	1999	2005
Members per local association	Number of local associations			% of local associations		
0-25	9	20	96	9	14	27
26-50	26	42	107	27	29	30
51-75	24	31	78	25	21	22
76-100	8	14	26	8	10	7
100+	29	38	48	30	26	14
Total	96	145	355	100%	100%	100%

Figure 23: Comparison of percentage of groups per category in 1994, 1999 and 2005

This increase in the number of smaller associations reflects a changing geographical profile of the organisation, which has seen from 1994-2005 little change in the numbers of Active Retirement Associations in Dublin (from 60 to 78), whilst outside of Dublin the number of groups has increased from 31 to 278 (Source: Archives, Affiliation records), as shown in figure 24 below.
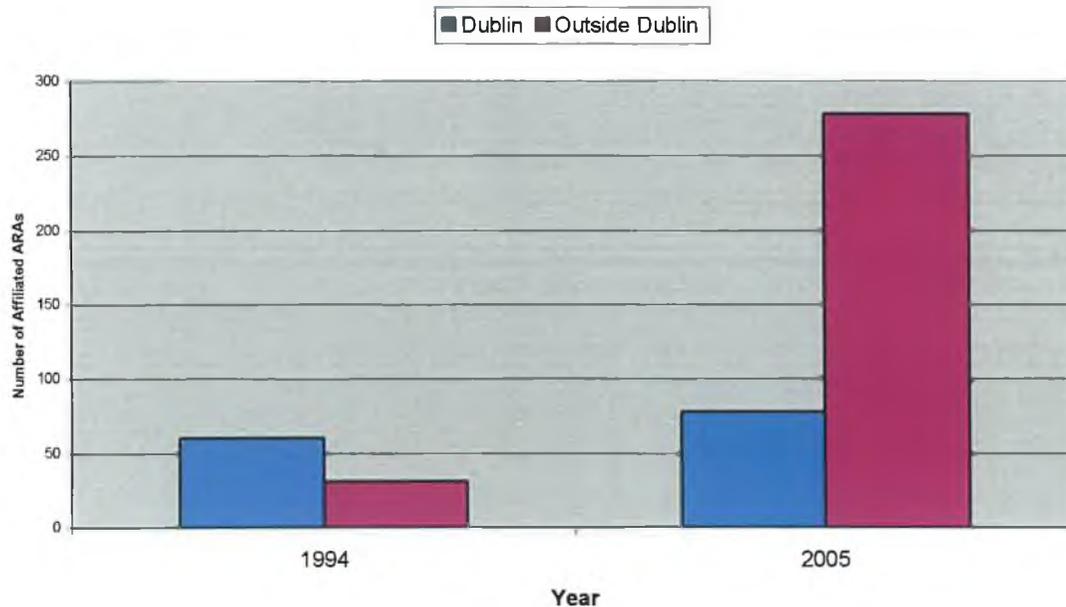
Figure 24: Comparison of number of Active Retirement Associations from 1994 to 2005 on a geographical basis

This increased proportion of smaller local associations in areas outside of the city of Dublin may indicate an increase of bonding social capital, as Leonard (2004) details that bonding social capital is often locally based. Interestingly one interviewee suggested that:

> The most successful local associations are the parish based ones. Indeed some ARAs for example Castleknock are seen as a parish organisation/activity. (Source: Interviewee, W)

This growth in smaller associations, based on the parish model, indicates a much closer-knit association, which is easier to operate, maintain and provide opportunities to develop friendship and thus counter feelings of isolation and loneliness. While this supports Granovetter's (1983) proposition that in small groups there is more frequent chances of interaction/communication between members, which increases tie strength and results in greater bonding social capital, it should also be noted that these smaller groups may also be associated with the more negative aspect of a closed networks, such as intolerance as detailed previously. However, with this increasing number of smaller local associations, it can be said that there are increasing potential reservoirs of bonding social capital in the Federation at local level that assists in developing friendships and countering loneliness. In this way local associations also play a role in promoting a spirit of self-help and independence.

Promoting a spirit of self-help and independence

As discussed in the context of the national structures, funding emanating from self-help activities can be an indication of strong bonding ties within an organisation, whilst attracting large amounts of Governmental aid could indicate a successful mobilisation of linking social capital (Ismawan, 2000). However, over dependence on the latter form of funding could leave an organisation open to external manipulation through attached conditions (Varley, 1991), so the question is one of balance. At local level, the self-help and independence objectives have a differing perspective to that of the national level.

There is evidence of an adherence to the self-help ethos by the local Active Retirement Associations. The questionnaire posed the question:

'How does your group fund its activities?'

87% of respondents detailed that a main source of income for the local association was annual membership, while 74% of the local associations collected fees for particular activities. The same percentage (74%) outlined that they had received grant assistance as indicated in figure 25 below.
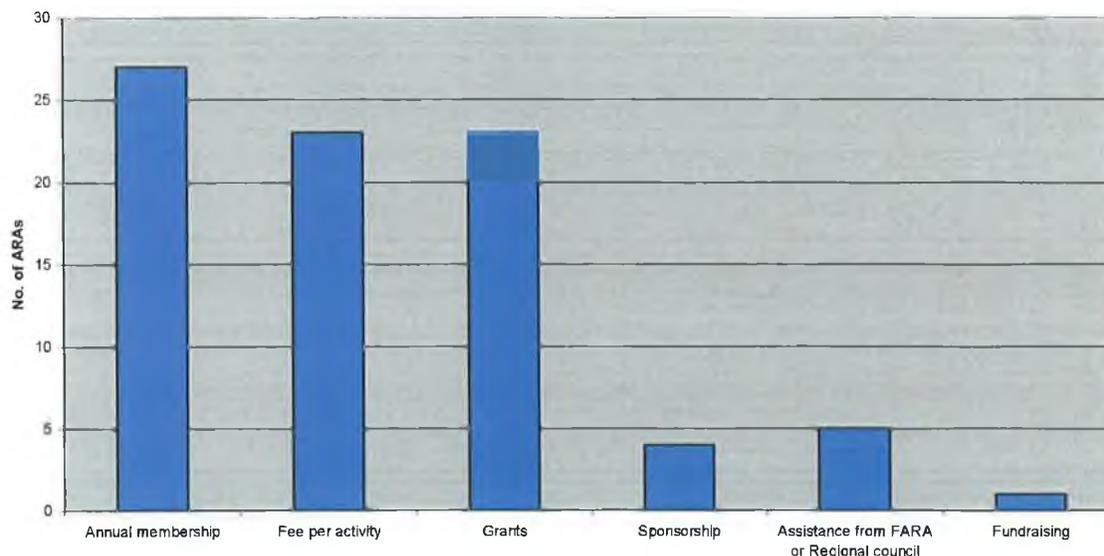

Figure 25: Sources of finance for local Active Retirement Associations

While specific information on the sources and amount of funding involved was not sought, local associations identified the VEC, County Councils and the County Fora as providing grant assistance. During the interviews indications were given as to what this grant aid as used for:

> In our ARA we got some money from the local Health Board to run swimming classes in a pool in Cork city. There was a great uptake in this and we hope to run something similar again this year. (Source: Interviewee, S)

In relation to funding activities, one interviewee outlined that:

> Older people are somewhat more affluent today than possibly in the past. They don't mind having to contribute to activities and the functioning of the local ARA – so long as the ARA provides activities that they want to participate in. (Source: Interviewee, K)

As such there appears to be a healthy mix in the sources of local association's finance and a good adherence to a self-help ethos which can be an indication of high levels of bonding social capital within the local associations and also that some bridging capital is being mobilised to obtain grants. These sources of funding aim to increase and develop participative activities within the local associations.

Active participation in educational, cultural, sporting and social activities

A high level of participation is important for the well-being of a community and an indication of the presence of social capital and evidence of it mobilisation (Putnam, 2000; Edwards, 2004; Healy & Cotes, 2001). Consequently, active participation levels within the Federation is indicative of the mobilisation of its social capital to achieve the objective of encouraging retired men and women to participate, through the active retirement movement, in social contacts and in self-help activities of an educational, cultural and sporting nature, aimed at enhancing their quality of life. The membership's level of participation is assessed by examining their participation in activities and at meetings within the Federation.

Participation in local activities

A primary aim of Active Retirement Associations is the promotion of participative activity. From the questionnaire responses, the activities pursued by the membership of the local associations include social outings and trips, art classes, training courses, sporting activities and music, which are illustrated in figure 26 below.
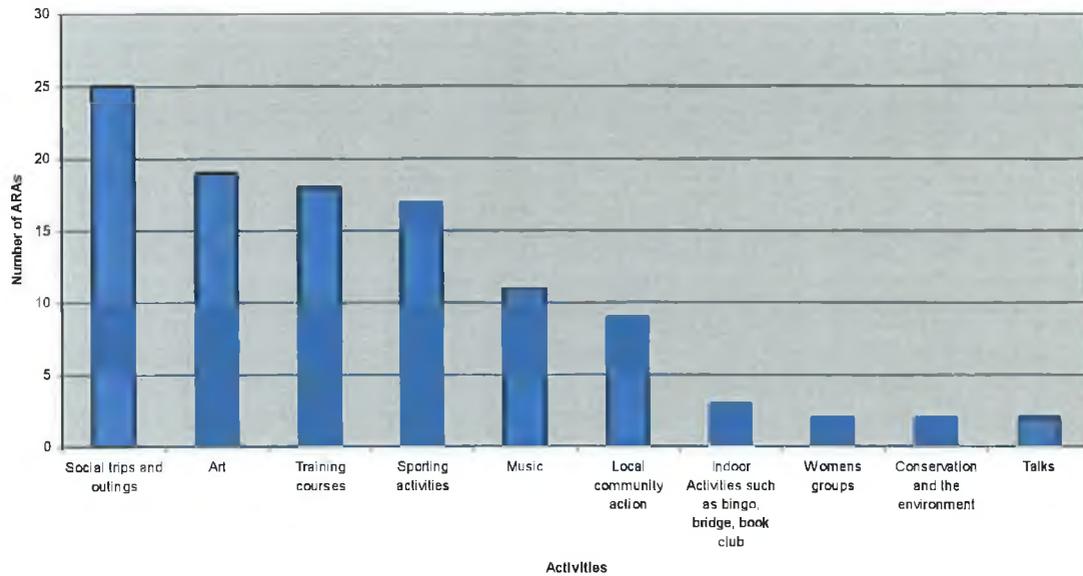
Figure 26: Activities undertaken by local Active Retirement Associations

Further information is obtained regarding the activities of the different Active Retirement Associations through the responses of interviewee E, O, A and K. These interviewees confirmed that in many cases Active Retirement Associations hold meetings and conduct activities every week, except through the two to three months of the summer. Many associations organise coffee mornings once a week and trips or outings on a monthly basis to the opera, Croke Park Museum or other places of interest. Interviewee A also outlined that card nights are organised during the winter months. Indeed:

> Local associations in the South East are moving away from the traditional weekly activities, towards a structure similar to the working week, with activities on a daily basis *[see appendix 4]*. For example, on a Wednesday there are activities in both the morning and afternoon and bowling on Thursday and Tuesday afternoons. (Source: Interviewee, K)

This interviewee went further that:

> Some activities are more popular than others... over the week most members would have participated in at least one activity, or at least come to the coffee morning. (Source: Interviewee, K)

Such participation levels, and the impact of more associations with a smaller membership, offer frequent occasions for interaction thus mobilising the bonded social capital at the local level reinforcing the strong ties to counter isolation and loneliness. Also, while people do not primarily join an Active Retirement Association for medical reasons such levels of active participation do facilitate the healthy living option as proposed by literature (Connections for Health, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Walker, 2002;

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Berkman and Glass, 2000).

It emerged from the questionnaires that development of additional activities would be welcomed. These included sewing, crochet, needle work and crafts, debating, book clubs and creative writing workshops as detailed in figure 27 below.

Activity	No. of groups that expressed an interest
Sewing, crochet, needle work and crafts	3
Reading/book clubs/educational	3
Local community activity	3
Social activities	3
Music/choral group	2
Drama	2
Local history project	2
Dancing	2
Debating	1
Creative writing	1
Irish lessons	1
Drop-in centre	1
Group holidays (off season)	1
Quiz nights with other ARAs	1
Botany field work	1
Snooker	1
Bowling	1
Pitch and putt	1
Indoor games	1
Tai-chi	1

Figure 27: Activities that local associations wish to pursue

Interestingly, many of these activities are gender slanted such as crochet and needlework. This seems to indicate that even when considering new activities local associations may well be excluding male members. This may be a contributing factor to the fact that the male to female ratio within the local associations is currently 32/100 (Source: Archive, Membership records; computer records). This figure also represents a significant imbalance when compared to Ireland's over 55 population where the male to female ratio of 78/100 (Central Statistics Office, 2006). Indeed, in response to the question:

'What activities are undertaken by your ARA?'

- activities such as sport (54%) came lagging behind social trips or outings (81%), art (61%) and training courses (58%). These figures indicate a lack of mobilisation of the local organisation's bonded social capital to provide a focal point for both sexes.

Indeed, the strong bonded nature of the local groups may itself be a contributory factor in not obtaining a better gender balance. Local associations appear to exclude men, whether intentionally or by not providing suitable activities. This failure to engage with men is significant because of the rising levels of suicide, depression and isolation amongst elderly men, particularly in rural areas (Ní Laoire, 2002). Local groups and particularly Active Retirement Associations are in a key position to assist these men by mobilising their bonded social capital to develop friendships and link into the local health services. Further research is required to ascertain the inhibiting factors in relation to increasing the male membership of the organisation and as a minimum the Federation needs to constantly monitor and gather information on the issue.

However it is worth noting that the male to female ratio for officerships within the local Active Retirement Associations who responded to the questionnaires is 54/100 (61 female officers to 33 male officers). The ratio at a national Executive Committee level is more balanced with 7 males and 8 females on the Executive Committee – a ratio of 88/100. (Source: Archive, Minutes of AGM). These figures indicate that men take up a disproportionate number of officerships to their membership numbers. This is in line with previous Irish research (Downes, 2006) which outlines that men are three times more likely to be a volunteer in a community organisation than women. It could be the case that men are more active at promoting themselves, tending to get involved with the specifics of an organisation i.e. activities and outings rather then the social aspect as suggested by one of the interviewees:

> Men will get involved if there is a specific activity, such as indoor bowling and trips; and that at the local ARA meetings women predominate and tend to chat over a cup of tea a lot more. (Source: Interviewee, W)

It was also ascertained that money and resources together with the suitability of premises were the main constraints on groups to develop or expand their range of activities Source: Questionaires). The interviews also highlighted particular problems in developing activities in rural areas. Interviewee W, a development officer for the Federation identified rural groups as having a lack of access to the city facilities and a need for capacity building. Another interviewee outlined in relation to rural transport that:

The rural transport issue is very important in stopping women getting involved in ARAs. A lot of women never learnt to drive and are now dependent on close family to drop them into town. But these days their sons and daughters-in-law are both working... This is making going to local activities more difficult... The local transport initiative was a great help, but it could be widened out. (Source: Interviewee, A)

In general, the wide range and high level of sustained participative activities of local associations indicates a very real mobilisation of bonded social capital. Another aspect to the participation in organisations is the participation rates at group meetings.

Participation at meetings within the Federation

Participation in an organisation's meetings are a significant aspect of social and civic participation, which in turn is related to community support. Consequently an important component of this research was the examination of the participation levels of members attending meetings within the Federation. These meetings included:

    A. AGMs and National Council Meetings

    B. Regional Council meetings

    C. Local Active Retirement Associations meetings and

    D. Seminars.

The participation data pertaining to these meetings was obtained from an archival review of the minutes of the meetings, from the returned questionnaires and from data received during the interviews.

A. Participation levels at AGMs and National Council meetings

The number of Active Retirement Associations attending the Federation's National Council meetings (including Annual General Meetings) has fluctuated from 25 groups in 1996, to a high of over 200 groups in 2003, to numbers of around 100 groups in 2005. A spike in attendance in 2003 can be attributed to an important Executive Committee election held on that year. This data is presented graphically in figure 28 below.
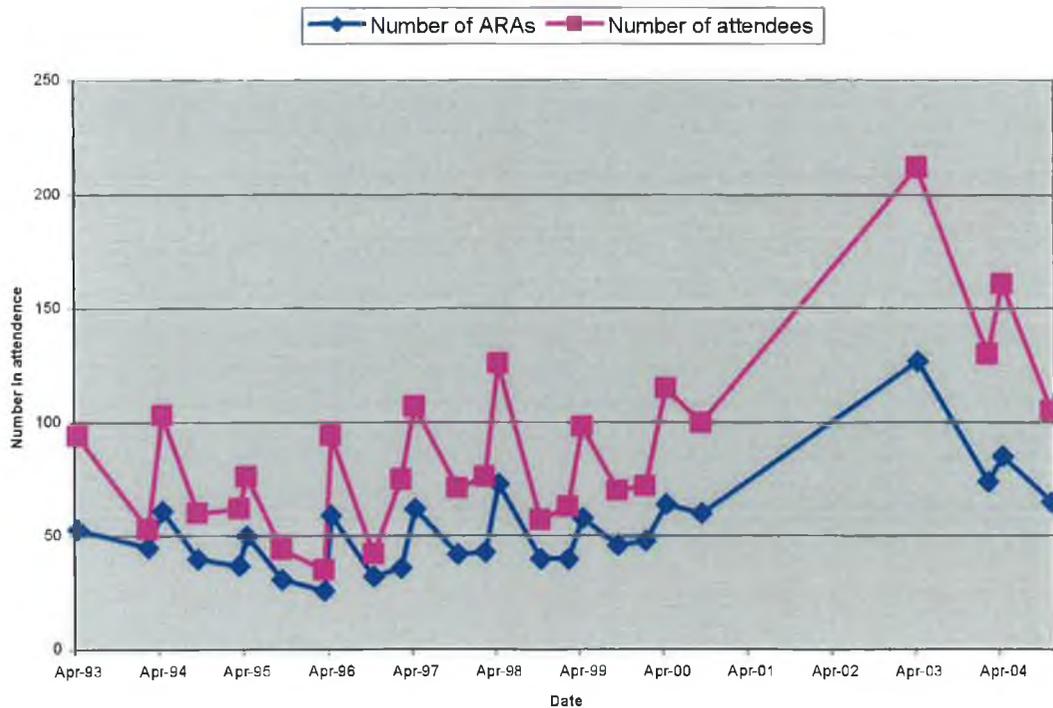
Figure 28: Attendance of Active Retirement Associations and membership at AGMs and National Council Meetings

While the Executive Committee makes policy and day-to-day decisions, some matters go to the National Council meetings for consideration e.g. the new constitution. One link between the individual Active Retirement Associations and the members of the Executive Committee is at the National Council meetings. Every Active Retirement Association can send delegates to these meetings. They are given the opportunity to have an item placed on the agenda and asked to contribute to debates and discussions. Data from the archival review indicates that, while the numbers of affiliated Active Retirement Associations sending delegates to attend National Council meetings increased, the overall percentage of affiliated groups attending has fallen from 55% to 32%. The fall is particularly noteworthy in terms of percentage attendance at National Council meetings, which has fallen from 47% in 1994 to 20% in 2004, as shown in figure 29 below. It is worth remembering that in 1993 the percentage of members attending these meetings was 1.6% and in 2004 was 0.7% of the total membership. As such, there has always been little opportunity for the vast bulk of the membership to participate directly at these meetings.
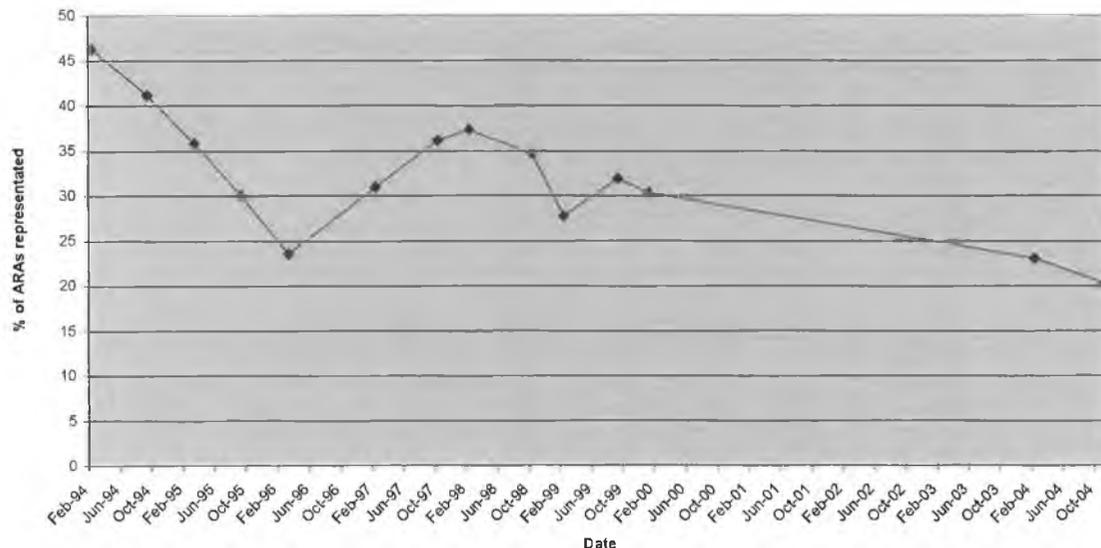
Figure 29: Percentage of Active Retirement Associations attending National Council meetings

Over the last number of years, the number of National Council meetings has been reduced from four or five meetings per year to one or two meetings per year. One of these meeting is the AGM and is compulsory. One perception from the interviews is that the National Council meetings are irksome, not of much value and not relevant:

> I don't know how relevant National Council meetings are any more...With the wider spread of ARAs around the country it is harder for groups to come together. (Source: Interviewee, P)

However, these meetings do contribute to the building of ties and relationships through face-to-face contact between local associations both within and outside of each other's regions. Such contact could be important in gaining information and resources outside a local association. Indeed, the continued fall in percentage terms of participation levels and the number of these National Council meetings indicates a diminishing level of bridging capital. This may have a negative impact in terms of mobilising the leverage power of local associations to obtain additional resources for the Federation.

B. Participation levels at Regional Council meetings

There is a wide geographical spread of Active Retirement Associations, so there is little opportunity for face-to-face meetings between the Executive Committee and local associations. In the past National Council meetings have fulfilled this role. However, the move away from National Council meetings is matched with increasing participation rates at Regional Council meetings (Source: Archives, Minutes of

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Regional Council meetings). The Regional Council attendance data is evidence of the importance of this intermediate level within the organisation in providing an interface between the local and national structures, with an average number of local associations attending Regional Council meetings being 43%.

As such Regional Councils assist the networking of the local groups, thus mobilising the groups into greater participation within the decision-making process of the Federation. This might indicate the mobilisation of bridging capital at the Regional Council level to achieve a common objective e.g. obtaining additional money for a Development Officer from the Southern Health Board (Source: Interviewee, S). Indeed, this networking could be a basis upon which the assistance and development of existing associations can proceed.

C. Participation levels at Local Active Retirement Association meetings

Responses from the questionnaires provide data as to the participation rates at a local level where the average percentage of individual members attending local Active Retirement Associations meetings is 60%. These participation rates at meetings reflect high levels of bonded social capital between the group members which should reinforce friendships and counter feelings of isolation and loneliness. This figure contrasts with the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) research that indicates that the percentage of adults over 55 but under 65, who in a twelve-month period, attended a public meeting was 23%. Indeed the participation rates at a local level is closer to the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) figure of 72% of over 55's who made a voluntary donation of money to charities, schools or church over the previous 12 months.

D. Participation levels at Seminars

From the interviews the Federation appears to be moving towards the more 'active' seminar based structure of meetings at a national level as evidenced by the Arklow seminar - "The Future Starts Now". This seminar was attended by 200 delegates, with over 250 for a Gala dinner (Source: Archives, Minutes of the seminar). The function of the seminar was to examine the direction of the Federation, review it's purpose and aims and explore mechanisms to achieve these desired outcomes. However, there were various opinions from the interviewees regarding the outcomes of the seminar

including:

> The Arklow seminar was beneficial in getting people together, but that the issues addressed may have lacked substance. (Source: Interviewee, B)

Some of the interviewees questioned whether the Federation could do anything about executing the issues raised. One interviewee outlined that:

> An annual, more focused seminar, based over a number of days, may be a way of increasing local group's participation with the national body. (Source: Interviewee, E)

While not a total success in reviewing the structures of the organisation and moving away from more parochial issues, the seminar was evidence of a stock of social capital being mobilised. This type of mobilisation of the Federation's bridging social capital will help achieve the objectivs of increasing participation, promoting co-operation between local associations and increasing participation in the Federation's decision-making processes.

Promoting co-operation

Internally between local associations

In response to the question:

> 'Does your ARA have any linkages with other ARAs?'

72% of respondents stated that they did have interactions with other Active Retirement Associations. Further questioning detailed that this interaction occurred by visiting neighbouring parish associations, competitions with other local associations, meeting for social nights and quizzes and through sports, bowling, dances, courses and other activities. This provides some evidence that local associations can develop and build links with other associations. However, this leads to the question as to whether such linking is institutionally based.

The responses from the interviews outlined difficulties with the internal linking up and interaction between associations. One interviewee outlined that:

> The Federation was partly a victim of its own success as the more groups that are established, the greater difficulty in organising competitions and activities, in terms of logistics. (Source: Interviewee, K)

Another interviewee outlined that local associational interaction is limited to national and Regional Council meetings (Source: Interviewee, O), while another stated that:

> There is little association-to-association linkage or involvement. (Source: Interviewee, J)

This position is supported by another response that argued:

> There is little involvement between the 46 local associations in our region. (Source: Interviewee, A)

Such a conflict of opinion between the questionnaire responses and the interviews raises a number of issues. Firstly, the data emanating from the questionnaires and interviews is shaped by the specific roles of the respondents, questionnaire respondents were primarily officers of local associations, while the interviewees were board members and Development Officers. The discrepancies might also indicate that local associations bypass regional and national Federation structures in establishing links with other local Active Retirement Associations. The third consideration is that the full import of the regional structure in providing an additional dimension of interaction is not recognised by the interviewees. This latter consideration is given credence by the fact that the Midland Regional Council, which was only established in July 2005, organised by the following November a tea dance in Mullingar, which was attended by over 400 retired older people from nearly all the associations in the region. Such a mobilisation of the region's bridging social capital in a short timeframe may indicate a willingness on behalf of local associations to link together. However, it would seem that such interaction can often by-pass the institutional framework.

External co-operation

At a local level, there is increased interaction between local Active Retirement Associations and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). Many of the interviewees outlined that many GAA clubs have fine new facilities and have courted Active Retirement Associations to use the facilities under specific local arrangements, as detailed by one interviewee:

> Some associations make arrangements with their local GAA club for facilities for meetings and premises for activities etc. and in return the local association agrees to sell a certain amount of club *[GAA]* lottos every week. (Source: Interviewee, W)

There are now GAA clubs looking to help establish local Active Retirement Associations, "Matoc Rangers GAA club has established its own local ARA" (Source:

Interviewee, W). Such a reciprocal arrangement shows a growing interdependence between locally based disparate groups. Indeed interaction between the local associations and sister organisations is not limited to the GAA.

A common theme from the interviews is that there is an overlap between the Active Retirement membership and those volunteering in the Alzheimer's Society or local charity shops. One interviewee indicated this when a time for the interview was being organised:

> I can't see you on Wednesday morning because I am collecting for Cancer Research in the Corrib shopping centre...and that evening I have to drive out to an ARA meeting with one of the Development Officers...Maybe we could meet on Tuesday. (Source: Interviewee, O)

At local association level, 42% of questionnaire respondents indicated an external linkage with other local sister organisations. These included resident associations, Irish Countrywoman Associations, local development associations, the scouts, hall committees and GAA clubs. The data from the questionnaires was supported by interview responses. One interviewee indicated that local associations:

> ...try to get other clubs to visit an ARA meeting, so that an understanding of the aims of each organisation is exchanged. (Source: Interviewees, A)

The literature review (Grootaert and Bastelaer, 2002; Edwards, 2004; Healy & Cote, 2001) outlines that the density of membership of an organisation can be viewed in terms of the external networks within which it is active. Such interaction with other networks potentially increases the knowledge and co-operation between organisations with regard to available resources. Density of membership is closely related to community efficacy and volunteering, which the National Economic and Social Forum (2003) have highlighted as key elements in social capital. Consequently, the membership density of an organisation can be an indication of the potential reservoir of an organisation's bridging and linking social capital that can be realised or mobilised to achieve desirable objectives.

What is important in the context of this thesis is that linkages with these other sister groups within the parish, and affiliation to the national body ensures that the bonded social capital at a local level does not become too inward looking and self-marginalizing. This affiliation to the Federation allows the local associations tap into a reservoir of bridging social capital, whilst simultaneously increasing the Federation's reservoir of bonding social capital. This mixture conveys the benefits of large and

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small-scale networks to the overall organisation whilst negating any possible drawbacks found in each type of network.

It was also ascertained that 44% of local groups surveyed had formal linkages to statutory organisations in the community and voluntary sector such as: the various county community fora (21%), the local Health Board, the local VEC and Leader groups and through the local council Arts Officers and housing officials. Such ties are established on the basis of interaction between formally structured organisations (usually between the officers) and are important forms of linking social capital as they can increase access to and knowledge of resources and influence local statutory decision-making. As indicated earlier, such interactions usually are in pursuit of additional financial resources for participative activities.

Summary of findings

At a national or macro level, while the majority of local associations perceives the Head Office and national structures as having little impact on either continuing or developing their activities, there is recognition that the Federation's group insurance scheme does facilitate the activities at a local level. This insurance scheme is successful in mobilising the leverage power of the membership base of the organisation and is a major attraction to affiliation. The training provided by the national structures is assisted by the mobilisation of human and social capital resources at this level. However, these courses are limited to officer training programmes and less than half of the respondents indicated that their group had participated in this training programme. Indeed, because these courses are by members and for members, they can be seen as fulfilment of the organisations self-help objective.

There are high levels of trust in the leadership at both the national and local level which permeates the entire organisation. Trust is also evidenced from the independence demanded from and given by the national structure to the local associations and regional councils. There are elements indicating bonding social capital at a national level particularly between the administrator and National President and bridging social capital between the members of the Executive Committee, the National President and administrator which has facilitated new ideas, initiatives and increased participation at sub-committee level and within the broader decision making process. There is greater

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belief in the administration of the Federation and the diversity amongst the Executive Committee members ensures that the social capital at a national level does not become closed in nature. The Federation has clear pathways for the resolving of conflict, primarily through the mobilisation of social capital at the regional level. Indeed, the ability of the Head Office to overcome difficulties in the Eastern region indicates trust within the Federation and a capacity to work towards a common set of norms and behaviours.

The Federation operates within a traditional communications framework with little evidence of information coming from the bottom up. While information technology has improved efficiencies within Head Office, there has not been any widespread usage of the Federations IT capacity amongst the local associations. Nor has there been effective mobilisation of the Federation's stock of social capital to pursue the key objectives of promoting a more positive attitude to aging and retirement, ensuring a corporate voice for its associations and working to increase awareness of the contribution of older people to society. The Federation has largely left the public relations to other sister organisations. The Federation ignored the nursing home issue, which was raised internally in 2002, until it re-emerged in the national media in 2005. It was only then that the Federation mobilised its social capital effectively through a letter campaign. At a local level, there is evidence that local associations are effective in getting there message across in the local media. However, the lack of PROs (25%) within the organisation suggests that any strategy to increase the profile of the Federation will involve increasing the number of PROs locally.

In relation to developing relationships with external bodies the evidence would indicate that the Federation reservoirs bridging and linking social capital is mobilised by encouraging and embracing innovative projects such as its Information Technology project, conducting training course with sister organisations and obtaining enhanced government funding. In this regard, the Federation accesses resources through the mobilisation of linkages with government institutions, in pursuit of aims and objectives relevant at this national level i.e. employing development officers. Indeed an increase in the Federation's reliance on funding from local organisation may negatively impact on activities on a local level.

At the meso level, the Regional Councils are 'strongholds of change' within the

organisation and they form an interface or bridging social capital between the local associations and the national bodies. The four key impetus identified in establishing new associations are:

- The Regional Development Officers
- The local associations
- Individual Executive Council members and
- Outside third parties

Also identified is the risk to the Federation of becoming exclusive if the existing pathways with regard to establishing new groups are continued.

In relation to assisting and developing existing local associations there are indications that groups are stable and sustainable over time, which should assist in retaining and recruiting new members. However the data would indicate little support or assistance to existing associations on the part of either the Regional Development Officers or the national structure.

A picture emerges at the local level of high levels of bonded social capital and strong interpersonal ties that encourages friendship which counter feeling of isolation and loneliness. This bonded social capital is facilitated by the high levels of trust within the organisation, the increasing proportion of smaller more rural parish based Active Retirement Associations and a stability in the existence of local association.

The healthy mix in the sources of local association's finance indicates an adherence by local associations in the self-help ethos of promoting a spirit of self-help and independence.

There is evidence that the bonded social capital of the membership is mobilised to achieve high rates of participation in organised activities and local meetings. Indeed, these high participation rates may indicate a virtuous cycle of mobilising bonded social capital, which increases interaction and friendship, which in turn facilitates even higher participation rates in activities. However, also identified is a severe imbalance between the male female ratio within the membership and that local associations fail to mobilise their social capital to provide a focal point for retired males. There seems to be a lack of any mobilisation of bridging social capital between the local associations and the Federation at a national level to increase participation in the decision making process

with a reduction in the number of National Council meetings. However there is evidence that the Regional Council structures are active in filling this void in the decision making process and that the use of seminars is now favoured amongst the leadership to attain greater participation in the planning of the Federation's future.

With regard to promoting internal co-operation, there is evidence that the Regional Councils can mobilise the bridging capital between local associations to achieve desirable outcomes such as the running of a regionally based dinner dance.

There is evidence of an overlap in the membership of Active Retirement Associations and other organisations. Indeed there is valuable bridging social capital with sister organisation and linking social capital with statutory bodies within some local associations. These interactions indicate strong levels of bridging social capital amongst some local associations that are involved with other groups. However, over half of questionnaire respondents indicated that their association had no external linkages. This indicates a valuable reservoir of bridging of social capital that remains untapped within the local associations and the wider Federation and which has not been activated or mobilised to achieve organisational objectives. The fact that the majority of local associations surveyed also do not have any formal links with statuary bodies indicates a lack of mobilisation of linking social capital, which can limit the achieving of organisational aims and objectives.

The above is but a brief summary of the findings as they arose within the context of the three levels of the organisation. The following final chapter draws upon these results to prompt consideration across the different levels and determine themes and issues that can illuminate the thesis' research questions.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter brings together the major themes and issues arising from this study and provides and opportunity to reflect upon the forms of social capital evident within the three different levels of the Federation and how they are mobilised to achieve organisational objectives. In addition, possible avenues of further research are proposed for both the Federation and the wider community sector on the development and mobilisation of social capital to achieve desired organisational outcomes.

The challenges to an organisation in change

The Federation has tapped into a changing societal context by building up a network to address isolation and loneliness through a process of participation in activities. In doing so, the Federation has experienced a doubling of affiliations from 152 to 350 of Active Retirement Associations over the past 4 years. Our data indicates that such an expansion has generated real benefits for retired people in the formation of friendships, facilitation of a healthy lifestyle and for many, the organisation brings purpose and a sense of belonging.

The findings determined that the Regional Development Officers play a key role in the establishment of these new associations. The use by the development officers of Roman Catholic priests as the main 'cut-points' (Kirke, 1995) and avenues into a new community may lead to exclusion. The exclusion of members of other denominations is an obvious possible consequence. However, such a 'cut-point' may also exclude individuals not engaged in parish activities or those of no religious affiliation. Using the local parish priest as a 'cut-point' is beneficial but, utilising the local doctor, local Heath Officials or even GAA clubs as possible 'cut-points' could access a wider spectrum of the community. This position is supported by our data in that doctors that are exposed to the Active Retirement Movement are now quite proactive in encouraging elderly patients to join; the Health Boards are active in promoting Active Retirement as a healthy lifestyle option; and the GAA was identified as a sister organisation where reciprocal relationships with local associations was evident.

The data indicates that the profile of the local associations has changed significantly over the past decade with smaller, more close-knit and parish based organisations

becoming more prevalent. These smaller locally based groups assists in the development of strong ties, social supports and friendships between members, all of which can counter feelings of isolation and loneliness. Indeed, these smaller associations seem to cherish these strong ties and bonds of friendship more than larger organisations, as nearly twice as many have appointed a Friendship Officer. There is also evidence of a virtuous circle of the bonded social capital at the local level being mobilised to increase interaction and friendship, which leads to high rates of participation at local activities, which further increases mobilisation of bonded social capital.

As an organisation comprising of small local associations, themselves rich in bonding social capital, the Federation benefits from a high degree of connections between them through the diversity of the individual membership in terms of educational attainments and life experience. Edwards (2004) suggests that such diversity would contribute to openness and inclusivity. However, whether intentionally or not local associations do appear to exclude men in terms of not providing suitable activities. Indeed, the services which local associations wish to pursue contains a gender bias in favour of females. This failure to engage with men is significant because of the rising levels of suicide, depression and isolation amongst elderly men, particularly in rural areas (Ní Laoire, 2002). Active Retirement Associations are in a key position to assist these men by mobilising their bonded social capital to develop friendships and link into the local health services. This finding is in line with Leonard's (2004) research, which indicates that the very factors that promote strong ties and bonds of friendship may also act against the Federation reaching its full potential.

While there is exclusion of males in the activities of local associations, within the national structure men are over-represented. This throws up some interesting questions about such issues as the confidence of women to seek and attain Executive Committee posts or the role of 'glass ceilings' in the promotion of women, which are outside the remit of this research.

The changing profile of the local associations reflects an expansion of the Federation's network into more rural areas. However such an expansion was not without difficulties and conflict. The Head Office has been particularly effective in resolving this conflict between the Dublin based associations and other associations. Indeed, the Federation

has clear pathways for resolving conflict throughout the organisation, primarily through the mobilisation of the ties at the regional level, the deployment of the Regional Development Officers and Head Office. In this role Head Office can bringing the national and local structures closer together, but as the organisation grows Head Office's capacity to maintain this service is questionable. A key point here is that these pathways can only be effective if there is sufficient levels of trust within the organisation as a whole.

The resolution of the conflict with the Dublin based associations, indicates a certain level of trust and a capacity to work towards a common set of norms and behaviours. The research shows that there are high levels of trust throughout the Federation in the leadership at both a national and local level. Indeed, the leadership style at a national level, coupled with these high levels of trust, lends itself to a more collegiate approach to the decision making process within the Federation. There are elements indicating trust at a national level particularly between the Administrator and National President which has led to an effective partnership in pursuit of the development of the Federation in terms of size of network and attaining additional funds. There is also evidence of trust and confidence between the members of the Executive Committee, the National President and Administrator. These factors have facilitated the thriving of new ideas, initiatives such as the Information Technology project and increased participation at sub-committee level. Institutional trust is also evident in the manner in which the national structure devolved power and independence to the local associations and Regional Councils. This idea that each local association and Regional Council as being independent seems to have importance amongst the members observed during this study. Such independence may not represent a lack of trust in the national bodies, but rather an active participation by the members to take ownership of the process.

This independence may also be a reflection of the services provided by the national body, where many local associations view Head Office as just a body that provides insurance. There is a high perception amongst the local associations that the Head Office and national structure provides little by way of advice or assistance. The data found little on-going collective participative activity provided for at the national level. The Federation's group insurance scheme is a good example of collective action and a major influence in the recent increase of affiliations. However, the Federation is far too dependent on the insurance package as an impetus for affiliation, especially as many

County Fora are now providing local groups with public liability insurance packages.

Such a lack of linkage between the national body and the individual members threatens the viability of the Federation at a national level. To increase these interactions and thus build bridging social capital, there needs to be greater linkage in terms of competitions at both national and regional levels e.g. a national/inter regional bowls, arts, debating or Pitch and Putt competitions. The different Regional Councils are best placed to organise these activities. However, this increased regional activity needs to be tied into a national framework of activities and competitions, to ensure the continued viability of Head Office. In this way the Federation can exploit and mobilise the reservoirs of social capital between the differing micro, meso and macro levels.

The Regional Councils have been identified as a key component in the development of bridging social capital within the organisation, as being 'strongholds of change' and effectively forming bridging ties between the grass roots and the national executive. Indeed the Regional Councils represent devolution of authority from the national level and a strengthening of contact with the local associations. There is evidence that the effort of individual regional councils in 'getting their own man' onto the Executive Committee has revitalised this aspect of the national structure.

The role of the development officer can be viewed as one of mobilising, developing and exploiting these ties with regard to the establishment of new associations. Interviewees place importance on the fact that the Development Officers are members of the Federation so that they can speak on the basis of experience. Obviously, depending on the commitment levels and within an overall organisational strategy, it was indicated that two or three part-time officer are more beneficial in mobilising bridging social capital for the establishment and support of associations, than one full time officer.

The bulk of the development officer's work is to establish new Associations, rather than the support and monitoring of existing groups. Indeed, there appears to be a feeling within the Federation that not enough proactive planning and support are given to existing associations. Such a lack of support has led to difficulties such as the recruitment of new members. Lessons need to be learnt from the Roscommon Active Age Groups and some existing Active Retirement Associations groups, in terms of the decline that can follow where there is not a constant attempt to recruit new 55-60 year

old members.

While 72% of respondents to the questionnaire given to local associations indicated that their association did have interaction with another Active Retirement Associations, the interviewees indicated that there was little association-to-association interaction. This seems to indicate that either local associations by-pass both the national and regional structures when interacting with other groups, or that the full import of the regional structure in providing an additional dimension of interaction is not recognised.

Indeed, the very composition of Regional Councils provides support for the enhancement of the local associations collective activities in bringing groups together for a meeting and reduce the feeling on the part of the group of being 'on their own'. There is evidence that the ties between local associations can be mobilised by the Regional Councils quickly to achieve desirable outcomes such as the running of a dinner dance. These activities are well supported, showing the mobilisation of existing social capital, the development of new bridging social capital and the promotion of co-operation between local associations.

What is suggested is that while the regional council may play a major role in promoting co-operation between associations, the Federation could look at supporting or facilitating linkages between neighbouring local associations outside of an institutional framework.

Amongst local associations, linkages to sister organisations and statuary bodies stand at between 42% and 44% with particular linkages with local GAA clubs. This indicates a large reservoir of social capital that has not been activated or mobilised to achieve desirable goals. The local associations have also used linking social capital to obtain funds for the continuation or development of their participative activities. Linking social capital is also evident amongst the more established Regional Councils and various statutory bodies, particularly the Health Boards. This may indicate a maturing phase of these councils where linking social capital is not only present but mobilised.

There is evidence of linking social capital between the Federation at a national level and educational institutions, ministerial bodies and the community pillar within the partnership talks. The evidence would indicate that the Federation has mobilised these

reservoirs of linking social capital to attain enhanced government funding. This has assisted the Federation in sourcing funds for its development and appointment of Regional Development Officers. For the moment, the Federation's aims and objectives complement current government policy. In the future the Federation will need to deepen these linkages to try and influence government policy. Such influence could keep both party's aims and objectives complementary and thus avoiding possible external manipulation.

However, the Federation has been ineffective in this regard of mobilising external linkages within an advocacy context. The evidence would indicate that the Federation was slow to react to the 'Nursing Home Subvention' issue. The data would also indicate that there is a lack of strategy and collective ability within the Federation to address their communication objectives. Such a strategy requires both a national and local perspective. The local associations social capital potential to address issues in the public arena could be mobilised by a programme of publicity training workshops and pursuing Development Officers to encourage existing associations to appoint PROs, something that 25% have not done.

Indeed, the Federations communication structure is a reflection of the lack of motivating factors between the national body and local associations, leaving little opportunity for face-to-face encounters. While the increased use of IT has benefited the efficiency of the Head Office, it has not filtered down to the local associations. Models for dealing with late adaptors include ensuring that every local association should ensure that one member is IT literate, promotion of internet venues such as libraries, the greater use of email and the greater use of low-end technology such as mobile phones – however there is no evidence that the Federation is actively engaged in these issues.

While the Federation is comprised of a large locally based network of groups, it seems to have ignored the possibility of other forms of community. There has been no usage of the Federation's IT infrastructure in providing opportunities for virtual on-line communities in cases where physical activity might not be possible. In this way, the Federation's IT infrastructure is not being utilised to promote social contact between people who may be temporarily immobilised due to short term illness, when feelings of vulnerability may be extenuated, or who may not be physically capable of attending a meeting or activity. What is suggested is not that one form of community may be better

than any other, on the contrary, an on-line or virtual community of retired people could provide additional opportunities for social contact, support and assistance in reducing isolation.

However, such a mobilisation of resources would require a training programme. The training currently offered by the Federation is limited to officer training programmes and less than half of the respondents indicated that their group had participated in this training programme. As such IT training would require an innovative strategic approach by the Federation assisted by the mobilisation of human and social capital resources within the organisation as a whole.

Based on current activity levels, there are indications that the Federation may be facing a period of sustained growth. This would have ramifications in terms of the financial burden on the national structures, health board funding and membership of executive council i.e. 600 groups would equal 20 regional chairpersons. However, there is little evidence of proactive planning and clear strategy within the Federation. Indeed, the Arklow seminar "The Future Starts Now", while beneficial as a social event, did not produce a clear blueprint for the future. Such a blueprint would set down clear strategies to develop required supports, strengthen partnerships with external bodies and address the aims and objectives of the differing levels of the Federation.

Within this context the Regional Councils need to be continually reviewed in terms of size and Development Officer support. Such changes should also ensure that development officers start to review, maintain and actively support existing associations, thus developing the local associations' bonded social capital that will facilitate an increase in participative activity.

The research questions

Bonding, bridging and linking social capital is evident at all three level within the Federation to a greater or lesser extent. But what is important is that these forms of social capital are applicable to the functions, aims and objectives at the various levels.

So at the micro level, we see high levels of bonding social capital in the forms of increased interactions and friendship which counter feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Bridging capital is evident in an associations ties to other associations or sister groups such as the GAA, often in reciprocal relationships. Linking capital is evident at the local level between County Council and Health Board officials. These ties are pursued primarily to attain funding for the development or continuation of participative activities.

At the meso level, the Regional Councils form the interface between the local and national structures. As such it is a level rich in bridging social capital that assists in the flow of communication within the organisation, promotes co-operative actions such as dinner dances and facilitates greater participation in the decision making process. The bridging capital of the Regional Development Officers is mobilised in the formation of new associations. There seems to be a maturing of the linking social capital at this level with greater opportunities opening up in terms of funding and partnerships with the local Health Board.

Finally at the micro level, linking social capital has been effective in attaining funds for the employment of the Regional Development Officer. However, the national structures have failed to fully utilise the Federation's potential in pursuit of an advocacy agenda. While bridging social capital is evident with sister organisations and mobilised in the pursuit of innovative projects, the national structure do little to promote association-to-association linkage through national/regional competitions or events. Bonding social capital is evident in the strong professional relationship between the President and Administrator in pursuit of desired organisational goals.

These various degrees of the forms of social capital within the Federation's different organisational levels are diagrammatical shown in figure 30 below.

Macro   Meso   Micro

Bonding Social Capital

Bridging Social Capital

Linking Social Capital
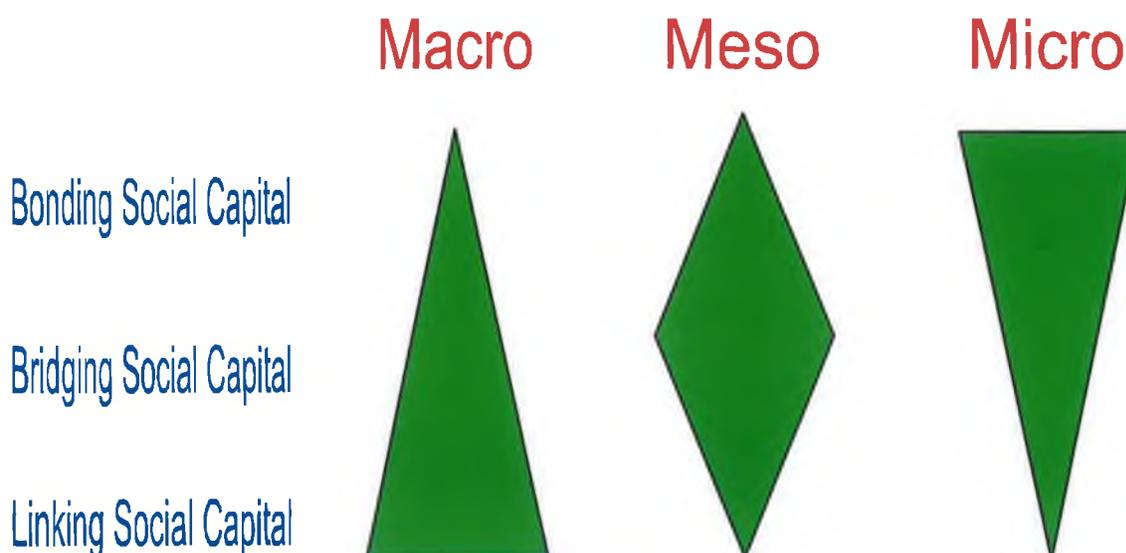
Figure 30: Summary degrees of the differing forms of social capital within the Federation's macro, meso and micro levels

Future research

Further research is required to ascertain the inhibiting factors in relation to increasing the male membership of the organisation. Such research could form the basis upon which strategies of action can be developed and activities that will encourage more male participation identified. As a minimum the Federation needs to constantly monitor and gather information on the issue

Research is also required into the viability of utilising the Federations IT infrastructure to develop additional forms of community within their network. This research could address the issue of resources, quantify the potential of such a project and enable greater levels of interaction between individuals who may not be able to attend activities.

The size and scope of this case study, limits the conclusions to those being specific to the Federation. However, the factors that have assisted the mobilisation of the Federation's social capital and expansion of its membership base are relevant to the broader development of civic life in Ireland. Other National Community and Voluntary Organisations play an active role in creating a sense of community, in developing social networks that reach out to many that feel lonely and isolated and mobilises social capital to achieve desirable goals such as advocacy and support for local groups or members. The views of these organisations are worthwhile to establish how their social

capital can be best created, developed and most importantly mobilised. A more comprehensive study amongst Ireland's National Community Organisations would establish these views, help stimulate debate in the sector and develop concrete strategies for the mobilisation of social capital to active desirable goals for the common good.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees and types of meetings involved

Label	Position	Meetings/interviews
E	President	Preliminary meeting Information gathering interview End of research briefing
J	Past executive council member	Preliminary meeting Information gathering Interview x2 End of research briefing
O	Executive council member	Information gathering interview
P	Executive Council member and Regional Council Officer	Information gathering interview
K	Executive Council member and Regional Council Officer	Information gathering interview
S	Executive Council member	Information gathering interview
	Full/Part-time staff	
Label	Position	Meetings/interviews
B	Administrator	Preliminary meeting Information gathering interview x 2 Data gathering in Head Office x 3 End of research briefing
H	Staff	Information gathering interview
W	Eastern Regional Development Officer	Information gathering interview
A	Western Development Officer	Information gathering interview

Appendix 2: Information gathering interviews – sample questions

ADMINISTRATION, LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

1. The importance of the President, Administrator and their relationship in the organisation

2. The importance of the relationship/ties of the Executive Committee members, how they operate and the structure of Federation of Active Retirement Associations

3. How would decisions, ideas and initiatives be progressed in the organisation?

COMMUNICATIONS

4. How was the IT structure put in place and what is your opinion about IT.

5. How should the media and PR structure be handled in Federation of Active Retirement Associations?

STAFF

6. How would you rate your relationship/ties with Staff including development officers?

THE AR MOVEMENT

7. Why do people and in particular you, join the AR movement

8. Apart from issues of insurance and development officers what are the benefits of having a National organisation representing the Active Retirement movement

9. Which comes first: activities that develop into a formal group, or a group forming and activities starting

LOCAL ACTIVE RETIREMENT ASSOCIATIONS

10. How would you rate the local Active Retirement Associations structure, leadership and linkage with Federation of Active Retirement Associations?

11. What interaction would you have with individual Active Retirement Associations or what are the Active Retirement Associations activities

12. How does local Active Retirement Associations facilitate or encourage new members

13. How do you see the development of the Active Retirement Associations network, or how are new groups established

14. How do you 1) ascertain the state 2) interact 3) find out about problems 4) resolve dispute with the individual Active Retirement Associations on the ground

15. What are the big issues facing Active Retirement Associations on the ground

REGIONAL ISSUES

16. The importance, operation and role of the Regional Councils and their officers

EXTERNAL LINKAGES

17. How do Active Retirement Associations link up with sister organisations locally?

18. In relation to your position in Federation of Active Retirement Associations, how would you rate you or Federation of Active Retirement Associations relationship/ties with other sister organisations

19. Would external expertise be brought into Federation of Active Retirement Associations for particular issues and if so how are their experts sourced? Does this include training?

Appendix 3: Copy of questionnaire for local associations (size reduced)

Your Active Retirement Association details

1. **What position do you currently hold within your ARA: Chairperson; Secretary; Delegate; other (specify)** _____

2. County in which your ARA is based: _____

3. How long is you group established: _____

4. Number of members in your ARA: _____

Your Active Retirement Association composition

5. Approximate number of members that have returned home from working abroad: _____

6. Of the following officer-ships please circle whether a male or female holds the position and whether the person has returned home from working abroad:

a.	Chairperson	M	F	Returned Home	No such office
b.	Vice-Chair	M	F	Returned Home	No such office
c.	Secretary	M	F	Returned Home	No such office
d.	Treasurer	M	F	Returned Home	No such office
e.	PRO	M	F	Returned Home	No such office
f.	Friendship Officer	M	F	Returned Home	No such office
g.	Other (specify): _____	M	F	Returned Home	No such office

7. Approx. number of women members in your group: _____

8. Approximate average age of your groups membership: _____

9. In relation to the membership of your ARA would you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=strongly agrees; 5 = strongly disagrees):

   a. Our group membership would from a similar background   1 2 3 4 5

   b. Our group membership would bring a variety of experiences to the Active Retirement Association   1 2 3 4 5

   c. Most members in our group would be around the same age   1 2 3 4 5

   d. There would be people with various of educational attainments in our group 1 2 3 4 5

10. Would your group like more men involved: YES   NO

    a. *If Yes, what actions has your group taken to get more men involved:*

    _____

    _____

11. How was your ARA established (E.g. with help from a development officer etc):

    _____

Your Active Retirement Association activities

12. What activities is your ARA involved in (circle more than one if required)
   a. Sporting activities
   b. Art
   c. Music
   d. Training courses
   e. Social trips or outings
   f. Local community Action
   g. Women's groups
   h. Conservation and the environment, ecology or animal rights

Other 1 (please specify): _____

Other 2 (please specify): _____

13. How does you group fund these activities (you may circle more than one):
   a. Annual membership
   b. Fee per activity
   c. Grants
   d. Sponsorship
   e. Assistance from FARA
   f. Other (please specify): _____

14. Where does most of your associations business take place (i.e. meetings, activities etc):
   a. Local parish hall
   b. Local club facilities
   c. A private house
   d. Other (please specify): _____

15. What other activities would your Active Retirement Association like to pursue:

_____

_____

16. What additional resources (money, premises etc) would you need to provide these activities within your Association: _____

_____

17. What role does FARA have in helping you provide these new activities:

_____

_____

18. *Is there an activity that your ARA does that would not be possible without being affiliated to FARA? Y e s / N o*
   a. *If Yes, what is this collective action:*

_____

_____

Services provided by FARA

19. Please circle the services/resources provided by FARA that you have used (you may circle more than one):
    a. Insurance scheme
    b. Development Officers
    c. Training for your ARA officers
    d. Advice and expertise
    e. National/Regional competitions
    f. Other (pleases specify): _____

20. What other services should FARA provide to its affiliate Active Retirement Associations:

    _____

21. What skills have you or your members obtained from being affiliated to a FARA
    a. Please specify _____ b. _____

22. How has the development Officers assisted your ARA to date:

    _____

23. How has the head-office staff assisted your ARA to date:

    _____

24. How has the executive council members assisted your ARA to date:

    _____

25. Has any member of your association attended a training course operated by FARA: YES   NO
    a. If yes, was your member notified by FARA about the course or did your member seek
       out   the   training

    _____

Communications in the organisation

26. Please indicate in order of importance (1,2,3 etc.) how your Active Retirement Association communicates with FARA:
    a. E-mail   ___
    b. Telephone   ___
    c. Fax   ___
    d. By Letter   ___
    e. Face-to-face meeting (word of mouth)   ___
    f. Other _____   ___

27. Please indicate in order of importance (1,2,3 etc.) how your association RECEIVES communications from FARA:
    a. E-mail   ___
    b. Telephone   ___
    c. Fax   ___
    d. By Letter   ___
    e. Face-to-face meeting (word of mouth)   ___
    f. Newsletters   ___
    g. External media, newspapers, radio etc   ___
    h. Other_____   ___

28. In your opinion does information flow well in the organisation: YES   NO
    a. Why: _____

    _____

The trust and linkages of your Active Retirement Association

29. How would you rate the level of mutual trust between (1=a lot of trust; 5 = little trust):

    a. FARA and local ARAs   1 2 3 4 5

    b. The Executive Council and the local ARAs   1 2 3 4 5

    c. Different Active Retirement Associations   1 2 3 4 5

30. Does your ARA have any linkages with other ARAs   YES   NO

    a. If yes please give details:_____

31. Is it important to set up a Regional Council for your area: YES   NO

    a. Please give a reason for you answer: _____

_____

32. Does your organisation have much linkages with other organisation NOT in your field of expertise   YES   NO

    a. If yes please give details:_____

33. Does your organisation have any formal linkages with County Community Fora and or encourage affiliate members/groups to get involved   YES   NO

    a. If yes please give details:_____

Participation and decision-making within FARA

34. Does your Active Retirement Association have:

    a. Rotating officer-ship   YES   NO

    b. A high level of participation amongst its members   YES   NO

          i. If yes how many members attend your association meetings _____

35. Do you feel that FARA does a good job at co-ordinating and planning at national level:

                                             YES   NO   Don't Know

36. Has a delegate of your ARA attended either the National Council or AGM of FARA:

                                           YES   NO

    a. If not, why not: _____

_____

37. Is *your* ARA led from basis of (please circle):

    a. The leadership decides and informs group

    b. The leadership asks group members for their views and then decides

    c. All the group members discuss and decide together

38. In your opinion is FARA led from basis of

    a. The leadership decides and informs group

    b. The leadership asks group members for their views and then decides

    c. Group members can contribute and decide on issues

Appendix 4: The "working week" of activities and internal questionnaire

The Regular Activities.

Monday: **Go for life:** Will start back on Monday 26th September at 2 p.m. in the Guide Hall, Esmonde St. Contact Angela Lynch 055-27605.

Tuesday: **Bowls:** Every Tuesday and Thursday in the Boxing Club 2 to 5 p.m. Contact Paul Thim 055-21857 or Eileen Coady 055-22746

Wednesday: **Morning Walks:** Meet at Forest Park, Ferrycarrig on Wednesdays at 11 a.m. Enjoy an hour's leisurely walk followed by a beverage! Contact Eileen Coady 055-22746 or Ann Stator 055-21404

Line Dancing: Line Dancing will resume on Wednesday 28th Sept. at 3 p.m. in the Boxing Club. Contact Eileen Collins 055-81864 or Phyllis Grange 055-21724 or Ann Harmon 054-83918.

Thursday: **Pitch & Putt:** At Middleton, Courtown every Thursday morning at 10 a.m. 18 Holes - €5.00. Contact Sean Cushen 055-30734 or Jean Day 055-80085

Aqua Aerobics: In Forest Park Swimming Pool Courtown every Thursday at 11 a.m. Reduced fee for members. These underwater exercises are very healthy and you don't need to swim. Contact Michael McManus 055-24501 or Eithne Kelly 055-21263

Bowls: See Tuesday

Friday: **The weekly Coffee Morning:** This has proved to be very popular. Drop up to The Loch Garman Arms any Friday morning, between 11 a.m. and 12 noon where you can enjoy a cup of tea or coffee and have a chat. This is where you will hear it all! Contact Eileen Coody 055-22746

Your Outings.
We now have 288 members and growing and our outings are getting booked out very early, so we must be doing something right. Of course, we could always do better and that is where we depend on you to pass on any observations, ideas, or suggestions for the benefit of our Association. You will get a good opportunity to do that by attending the next General Meeting on Tuesday 11th September in the Boxing Club at 2.30 p.m. So be there!!!

Kind regards,

Michael Doran PRO

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

NAME :

ADDRESS   TEL

QUESTIONNAIRE ON ACTIVITIES

Please put a tick in the box next to any activity that interests you.

Activity		Activity	
Aquafit class	☐	Keep fit class	☐
Art	☐	Language class	☐
Ballroom dancing	☐	Line dancing	☐
Board games	☐	Local History	☐
Bridge	☐	Mat Bowls	☐
Cards	☐	Music appreciation	☐
Ceili	☐	Pitch & Putt	☐
Chess	☐	Reading group	☐
Computers	☐	Scrabble	☐
Cooking for one	☐	Set dancing	☐
Creative writing	☐	Short breaks	☐
D I Y	☐	Singing group	☐
Day Trips	☐	Socials	☐
Decoupage class	☐	Swimming	☐
Discussions	☐	Table Quiz	☐
Drama group	☐	Table tennis	☐
Gardening class	☐	Walking group	☐
Holidays	☐	Yoga	☐