ARE HOUSING PROFESSIONALS BORN OR MADE? THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND IDENTITY AMONGST SOCIAL HOUSING PROFESSIONALS IN IRELAND

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GLOSSARY

ASBOs	Anti Social Behaviour Orders
BLG	Better Local Government
CDP	Community Development Project
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
CSC	Civil Service Commission
DoE	Department of the Environment and Local Government
DoEHLG	Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (the Department of the Environment and Local Government ***changed title to*** Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government with effect from 10th June, 2003)
EdD	Doctor of Education
HRM	Human Resource Management
LGMSB	Local Government Management Services Board
NABCO	National Association of Building Co-operatives
NESC	National Economic and Social Council
NDP	National Development Plan
NPM	New Public Management
NUIM	National University of Ireland Maynooth
PMDS	Performance Management Development Systems
RAS	Rental Accommodation Scheme
SEO	Senior Executive Officer
SPC	Strategic Policy Committee
VHA	Voluntary Housing Association

ABSTRACT

The concept of a housing professional is a new and often disputed term. Qualitative research into the culture and identity of occupational groups involved in social housing provision and management has been relatively scarce. Research has concentrated, almost exclusively, on the individual involved in the housing construction and output side of housing provision. This neglect is surprising given the importance of housing in people's lives. The thesis examines the identities, experiences and education of those working in the Irish social housing field. It explores how individuals utilise various forms of identity work to sustain credible occupational identities, often in the face of considerable challenge from their academically qualified colleagues (in the area of architecture and surveying and so on). It focuses on the importance of communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation in allowing a coherent professional identity to emerge. The centrality of caring and cared-for citizen is highlighted and the importance of flexibility and responsiveness is noted, as social housing professionals struggle to care for their clients within the highly bureaucratic system of local authority structures.

The nature of education and training that professionals in public sectors (such as social housing) need, to gain capacity and professionalism in this specialised field is explored. The role of academic qualifications is analysed in terms of career progression, experiences and recognition of housing professionals. Key actors in the field give a structural and cultural context for reflecting and considering future possibilities for education provision in this area (through interviews). A new understanding of professionalism in housing emerges which involves challenging the nature of 'expert' knowledge, a greater recognition of the importance of the caring 'self', and the personal qualities and responsiveness of the professional.

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When I began this Doctorate programme, I had no idea what I had undertaken. I thought I was completing a degree programme which would smoothly take me from point (a) to point (b) in a set timeframe. Instead it has been a journey from both a personal and professional point of view, with a significant number of ups and downs along the way. I had no idea that I would develop a passion for the word 'identity' and that it would become a mantra affecting how I viewed almost everything. Nor did I realise the role relationships in my life would play in supporting me as well as shaping my thinking and understanding of the meaning of home and the importance of education.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The original focus of this research was to look at the identities and career pathways of housing professionals in Ireland and to examine if there is a need for specific Higher Education qualifications. The research was to try to establish who the housing professionals were and why they see themselves, or indeed, are seen by their peers as such. While a housing professional can be involved in the private or public market, the research was to concentrate on the public sphere. The study would continue by focusing on the nature of education and training that professionals in public sectors (such as social housing) undergo to gain capacity and professionalism in this specialised field. The means of carrying out this examination was to adopt mixed research methods, survey those involved in the field, analyse key policy documents and job criteria, and complete in-depth interviews with housing practitioners and key senior personnel within the sector.

Initial research highlighted the limitations of the original research question as participants identified the important tensions in the field that lie beneath the accreditation debate. As a consequence, the focus widened to examine the structures, culture and values of professional housing identities. It was hoped to gain an understanding of how professional identity has developed in the housing sector in the Republic of Ireland as this single area has not previously been researched. From a preliminary review of literature in the area, it appeared that housing has not been seen as a career pathway for the individual within the Republic. Increased professionalism and democratic participation on the one hand had been mixed with the reality of working in the culture and structures of the local authority system. This thesis explores the reasons and the educational implications of this. General research on professional identity and other related issues was used to contextualise this inquiry into the Irish housing professionals' identity.

The preliminary findings from the research highlight a clear lack of definition of what a housing professional is and a number of questions began to emerge. Given the importance of housing in people's lives, how do those working in this area define and

shape their role? Do they see themselves as a specific group of professionals? How do they define themselves and the work they carry out? What role does training and education that professional in public sectors undergo play in their development as social housing practitioners? Are there external validating features such as Departmental recognition, qualifications or professional institutes which help and support the development of this profession? This research explores how those working in the area of housing within local authorities, housing associations, and the university sector understand and respond to these factors.

1.2 Why study housing professions in Ireland?

Research into housing professionals in Ireland, their identities and cultures within the local authority and other organisations involved in social housing provision and management has been relatively scarce. While some work on housing managers, housing occupations and the professional project of self in the UK has been carried out by Casey (2008) and Casey and Allen (2004), this is not the case with housing managers in Ireland. The aim of this Doctoral thesis is to seek to address this lacuna by examining the professional identity and education of this under-researched group, namely, social housing workers within the sector of Irish social housing.

This thesis explores the collective endeavours of housing workers in Ireland, their work as a profession and how they create and present self-identities. Professional fields vary in the sense of profession and community of practice that is presented, articulated and communicated to employees. The traditional professions like architecture, construction and surveying are clearly defined in terms of the requirements to obtain the profession (such as membership of particular accrediting bodies, qualifications and training structures). Most professional fields clearly identify pedagogies and learning that they consider as the inherent requirements for that field. As the field of housing professionalism is rather new, there is a vagueness in defining and understanding its structures, values and ways of working.

The initial question guiding this research was to explore what gives a person a professional housing identity as a ‘credible/professional worker’. What are the enabling factors to establish such an identity and what role, if any, do education and

qualifications play in this. This thesis investigates the ways in which individuals develop a sense of identity with their profession, how the nature of the profession impacts on their identity formation, how people engage with learning based on their professional expectations, and how their pedagogic experiences lead towards their professional formation. Like many other terms in this thesis, each of these terms and words (such as professional, identity, housing worker etc.) will require in-depth clarification and exploration, with chapter titles centring around this exploration.

Interviews with key persons in the social housing area provide a structure in which this exploration took place. As can be seen in chapters five, six and seven, the interviewees show that a clear housing identity is not evident and the interviews provide a means of exploring workers' development of a professional identity. The thesis also investigates their levels of engagement with educational training and qualifications structures in order to develop a clearer professional housing identity. The content of the educational training and the recognition of qualifications are signalled as being two important aspects of the identity formation of a professional.

Finally, with the apparent absence of a cohort of clearly definable housing professionals, the thesis attempts to carry out an analysis of career identities in general. It examines and asks what forms of identity work are used by local authority workers to sustain credible housing occupational identities, often in the face of considerable challenge from their academically qualified colleagues in the area of architecture and surveying, etc.

1.3 Thesis Outline

In carrying out the research, there have been a number of changes in what I intended to do and actually did, what I thought I would discover and what I actually did, and the learning that occurred. If I was to undertake this task again I would carry it out and think myself in a very different way. This section gives a brief overview of each chapter and highlights these learning transitions and discoveries during this research process.

Housing studies is clearly about housing. In its simplest and crudest sense, it is the bricks and mortar or other building materials that comprise the constructions within which people live. But as a field of study, housing also involves the examination of the social, economic, political and other relationships that centre on housing. In the introductory chapter, the context is given for this research and chapter two begins by discussing the choice of topic and issues arising in choosing a sample of people for this research. It goes on to discuss what methods were proposed to be used and actually used, what methodology governed the choice and use of methods, what theoretical perspective was behind the methodology in question and what epistemology informed this theoretical perspective. Triangulation is examined as a method of attempting to ensure validity throughout the thesis and the paradigm of social constructionism to understand the world in which the housing worker operates is chosen as the most appropriate theory to understand the world in which the housing worker operates. The research involved conducting nineteen in-depth interviews. Thirteen interviews were carried out with housing managers and housing officers within two types of organisations in the Republic of Ireland, and six interviews were carried out with academics (see Appendix A for details).

In order to understand the relevance of this research or in short the 'so what' question about this work, it was deemed necessary to explain and give a short overview of myself, the researcher. In doing so I intended to make clear my epistemology of how I have come to have the knowledge I do of the external world, my theoretical perspective and philosophical stance which gives a context to the work and the methodology chosen as a basis to the work. Some of my own core values are stated in this chapter, and this technique of personal reflection is continued in subsequent chapters when defining identity, professionalism and in particular, what housing means. This personal involvement was seen as being central to the process as it enabled a level of reflection and reflection-in-action to ensure the validity and representativeness of participants' experiences.

Through the use of coding and mind maps, emergent themes were identified from the interviews which were developed into chapter headings. It is usual practice in a thesis to have an entire chapter devoted to a literature review, but the alternate method of incorporating this literature in a thematic structure was chosen. In each chapter the

relevant literature is woven into the material being discussed to facilitate a sharper focus on the main issues. The blending of literature with the response of those interviewed in this thematic structure enables a general picture to emerge about what constitutes a professional housing worker. Given the focus on professional education, chapter two ends by reflecting on whether this work warrants a badge of being 'good enough' for the award of an EdD. In answering that question, a brief overview of what an EdD is given and ethical issues in carrying out person-centred research are noted.

Chapter three and four review the structure and work of voluntary housing association and local authority sectors. While much is known from an anecdotal point of view about these sectors, these reviews are used as a systemic building of knowledge from which discussions in later chapters emerge. The performativity and accountability drive of New Public Management (NPM) is examined in relation to key policy documents which have been written over the last twenty years and the successes and failures of moving to a new method of operation is teased out. The focus on strategic management and the monitoring and assessment systems which were put in place as a result of the various policy documents are seen as being progressive, however the lack of availability of people with managerial skills and in-depth knowledge of housing issues identified as a drawback. NPM gives a theoretical framework to critically examine and explore the tensions in these organisational reforms. While there is continual progress in the modernisation of the local authority sector, the slowness of change is examined and levels of bureaucracy are seen to have hampered the overall progression of reform. Some of the literature reviewing policy development reflects that the reforms were largely aspirational with scant consideration as to how proposed reforms were to be achieved.

This chapter concludes by examining some of the partial reasons for the inhibited emergence of a clear professional housing worker identity within the local authority structure. In particular, the possibility that since housing has not got the technicality of being grounded in a discrete domain of knowledge or the indeterminacy of being located in the exercise of professional judgement which other professions have, these factors have hindered the emergence of this professional housing identity.

Chapter five focuses on the meaning of housing and home in order to establish some sense of how housing practitioners define and understand these concepts. 'Housing' and 'homes' are seen as important to a person's well-being and this chapter discusses the level of the Irish nation's preoccupation with home ownership. It highlights that, mainly due to market situations, a large number of individuals are currently or will need housing to be provided by the state in the form of social housing. However, as a home can be so important to the individual, it is posited that the people working in the area of social housing provision should be rewarded with a badge of recognition and the identity of a housing professional. This notion is explored during the interviews and the various opinions on this matter are noted in the relevant chapters.

While much of the former part of chapter five is devoted to personal and everyday meaning of home, the latter section explores the meaning of home which is found in the literature. An overview is given on the theoretical perspectives and basic concepts on home, housing and the field of housing studies, including understandings of space and ontological security and the meaning which the State in the shape of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) gives to housing. The responses of those interviewed are discussed, and emergent issues are identified. The exploration of the findings demonstrates that firstly, workers also find it difficult to put their housing work into a definable box. Secondly, there is a distinction in terms of what it means to workers who specifically chose to work in the area and workers who had 'fallen' into the job as a result of the grade system of promotion which operates within the local authority system. However, despite this difference in entry to the role, the emergence of some form of professional housing identity within the system, emerges from the research and is explored further in the following chapter.

In examining the existence (or not) of a professional housing identity another question was, what is the meaning of the word "professional". Chapter six shows that there is a vast array of literature on this area and the literature chosen to support the responses of those interviewed highlights that professional identities, motivations and values are rooted in individuals' personal biographies and develop as professionals reflect on their changing experiences over time. There was reluctance among those interviewed to be called a housing professional and the chapter looks at what it means to have a

professional working identity and what has helped or hindered its development within the housing sector.

This chapter sets out to examine the reasons for a lack of professional identity and explored issues such as professional recognition, educational qualifications and levels of knowledge. Firstly, the implications of not having a professional body in Ireland to recognise the housing profession, is explored. Secondly, the impact of the lack of qualifications in housing until recently is reviewed and the lack of recognition by the DoEHLG for the purpose of promotion is discussed. Thirdly, as housing has such a wide remit in operational terms, was this a reason for the lack of a professional identity? The absence of a unique body of knowledge in the housing field is explored as a potential reason for the lack of development and recognition of a professional housing identity. This highlights how fields specify and delimit bodies of knowledge through professionalism (i.e. medicine, law and architecture). This thesis examines the implications of this for the emergent professionalism in the social housing field.

Yet, despite these blocks to the development of a professional identity, chapter six discusses how the respondents felt that there was some form of emergent professional identity. This led to other questions, such as, if this identity was evident, who had it and what facilitated this identity to emerge? How was it facilitated by structural factors, policy processes, the availability of academic qualifications, the existence of professional bodies or other factors? This exploration is very open ended, with many of the research findings and conclusions drawn in the final chapter. The chapter concludes by discussing identity as being a dynamic process experienced by the individual throughout each life stage. The identity which the housing workers were expressing was based on the attitudes of workers and their own understanding of the job, their own personality and life experiences and the image which they projected when they were engaging with the customer of housing on the estates.

In chapter seven, the focus turns to the third element of the term professional housing identity. It looks at what it is to have a personal identity and begins with a personal reflection on the meaning of identity which I hold. The supporting literature gives a multitude of ideas of concern when trying to understand identity. It highlights the fact that the meaning of identity, like the meaning of home and professionalism, can

change over time. Those interviewed were reluctant to give themselves an identity as a housing professional, even though their peers had attributed them with the badge, but they did demonstrate how they established some form of identity within the workplace. In this the work of Lave and Wenger (1998) is helpful as housing worker identity was found to emerge through legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice. Identity work and even the clothes they wore added to this identity development, as identity talk and the use of housing language gave them a tangible difference to their co-workers. It highlights how learning the processes of this job occur through informal, tacit and experiential knowledge. Hence our approach to the education of housing professionals should enhance this type of knowledge and learning.

In the previous chapters three broad issues are examined in some detail. Firstly, why is it that there is a lack of clear definition of what a professional housing identity is among housing workers in the Republic of Ireland? Secondly, how is it that the individuals working in the area have some form of emergent identity which is related to working in housing, although this may not be a professional identity for a variety of reasons? Thirdly, why are those working in the voluntary housing area more likely to have the mechanism to develop a professional housing identity in comparison with their counterparts employed in the local authority sector and what were the reasons for this. Chapter eight sets these factors within the wider analytical framework and literature on organisational theory about the rigidity in the structures of bureaucratic organisation which local authority organisations face. The more flexible structures and ways of working in housing associations are explored as giving greater scope for adaptability and responsiveness that local authority structures struggle with. Equally so, this flexibility is questioned as an attributing factor in a more clearly identifiable and established professional housing identity within the housing association sector.

Finally, in chapter nine, the main findings from the research are summarised and possible future developments and areas of research are noted. It is concluded that a combination of personal, institutional and structural factors may result in an unclear professional housing identity. The implications for education and training of housing professionals are explored and discussed. The thesis concludes that the role of the

worker in the area of social housing is significant and worthy of future research in light of the important part which they play in society.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

Given the breadth of knowledge about the topic of housing as a whole, establishing the particular clear focus of the research for this thesis was important. Of all the possible choices of study for research on this topic, which elements were to be chosen to examine in more detail, and why? Equally, the question emerged as to why certain aspects were not being studied and why not? Furthermore, from this research what sort of findings and recommendations for practice will this research hope to produce and how will it improve our deeper understanding of the field of housing and education.

At an ontological level, it was decided to examine social housing providers and how the housing professional (if this group exists as a single entity) has the security, order and regularity that people experience in a stable set of personal identity over time. And if they do, how was this achieved? By identity work or by training and obtaining a formal qualification? And what is a housing professional? How do they get their job identity? Hence, via a symbolic interactionist lens, the thesis aims to question the area of career professionalism and identity. In short, is someone a housing professional by obtaining a housing qualification or do their career identities come via some other mechanism, for example, identity work, which is normally practiced within community of practices? The thesis explores the complexities of current sociological debates on 'identity' and 'self' (Callero, 2003), and ensure that they are congruent with Jenkins's formulation (1996:29) where self is 'each individual's reflexive sense of her or his own particular identity, constituted *vis à vis* of others in terms of similarity and difference'. Symbolic interactionist perspectives on identity vary greatly along a continuum between more processual and more structural orientations. As Howard (2000:371) notes, more structural approaches focus on the concepts of role identities and social positions, linking social structures to persons, whereas other approaches lay greater emphasis upon the processual, interactional elements of identity construction. This thesis aims to examine the responses of those interviewed along the continuum of these perspectives on identity.

In developing the preliminary thesis proposal, the two initial practical issues which emerged were the methodologies and methods that would be employed in the research process once the focus of the research was defined. The answer to the latter lies within the purpose of the research, and the specific research questions that the piece of inquiry is seeking to answer. This chapter examines the process of fulfilling these purposes. Justification of the choice and particular use of methodology and methods is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality which I bring to the work and interrogates the theoretical assumptions upon which the justification is based. It also reaches into the understanding which I have of human knowledge and the status ascribed to it. In short, what kind of knowledge do I believe will be attained by the research, what characteristics will the knowledge have and how will observers and readers of the thesis regard the outcomes?

This chapter will explore the research process, and the role and assumptions of researcher in the research process. This is grounded in the way the researcher sees the world, their view of human agency, their identities and their values. Aspects such as gender, nationality, race/ethnicity, professional life, cultural background and political affiliations all influence the approaches to what is researched. And in examining this context, it is hoped to produce a worthwhile answer to the question, 'So what?' and demonstrate why the research is meaningful. In particular, what novel theoretical and social-scientific insights might be gained from the research and what other avenues of research may need to be explored in the future?

In summary this chapter will answer four questions in detail. What methods were proposed to be used and actually used, what methodology governed the choice and use of methods, what theoretical perspective underpinned the methodology and what epistemology informed this theoretical perspective.

2.2 Research

The research design that shaped the choice and use of particular methods for this thesis was linked to the desired outcome of attempting to establish if there was a professional housing identity among workers in social housing in the Republic of Ireland. Secondary questions focused on the holders of this identity and the factors

that facilitated this identity to emerge. How was it facilitated by structural issues, policy documents, the availability of academic qualifications, the existence of professional bodies or other factors? From the outset and following informal discussions with colleagues, it became clear that this exploration could be very open ended, with many of the research findings dependent on the implicit meanings used by the researcher and others involved in the research process, - particularly the key concepts such as 'professional', 'housing' and 'identity'. It was also decided that undertaking more ethnographic and observational strategies, which would seem more attuned to the symbolic interactionism tradition, could become problematic because of my own position as someone known in the housing field. Hence I decided to carry out in-depth interviews, and to establish clearly at the interviews, that my own role during the interview process was solely that of a researcher.

Initially it was intended to interview the Directors of Services in the area of housing in a random sample of approximately twenty local authorities. The rationale for this choice was an assumption that the Director of Services for Housing, would have a professional housing identity. By carrying out an in-depth interview with them, answers to the core questions of how identity was formed and the enabling factors could be ascertained. However following initial discussions with people in the field of housing provision, it soon became apparent that very few people could actually name these Directors of Services, and that these Directors had not got a perceived professional housing worker identity distinct from those working in the general field of housing. The reasons for this could be in itself an entire other research question and a refocusing on who was to be interviewed was required. What did emerge during the initial discussions with key stakeholders in the field was a common a list of who people thought were the housing professionals. Individuals could identify who they 'perceived' to be the professional housing worker in Ireland, although the reasons why they had this perception varied.

Hence it was decided to alter the initial aim of interviewing the Directors of Services for Housing and to focus the interviews on this list of names which was emerging. To support this initial focus on the interviews with the Directors of Services for Housing, a review of their job descriptions and HR requirements to ascertain the remit of the job within the various local authorities was planned. However, such documentation

was not found as the post was awarded through a 'grade' system within the local government structure, and was not area specific. This in itself raised questions as to why this was so, given that the brief for housing is so vast, and the focus of the research was altered to include a review of this grade system within the local authorities rather than a discussion of job descriptions.

2.3 Research Methods and Validity

Initial research design and reflection upon my knowledge construction made me aware of how my training in Economics influenced my thinking. In particular the idea of making positive statements or statements of facts in comparison to making normative statements and personal value judgements was to the fore front of my mind. In the economist tradition, one is encouraged to adhere to research which results in giving largely positive statements which can be proved or disproved (Begg, Fischer, Dornbusch (2007), Lipsey and Chrystal (2006), Sloman (2006)). However, while I had accepted this reasoning and the literature rationalising this approach, I was also a little uneasy with the use in Economics of the catch-all phrase of *ceterius paribus* (all things being equal) used in making these statements. It was as if positive statements and statements of facts were being made in an ideally functioning world which does not exist in the specifics of the human experience and the personal interpretation of the meaning of life. Therefore, as this thesis involved the experiences of real people in an imperfect world, I was hugely attracted to the idea that qualitative data takes on board the richness and variety of perceived information from the participant in the research. In-depth interviews are one method within qualitative research and while there is a richness to carrying out in-depth interviews with people in the field of inquiry, the limitations of interviews must be also acknowledged.

> Interviews are one method by which the human world may be explored, although it is the world of beliefs and meanings, not of actions, that is classified by interview research. Since what people claim to think, feel or do does not necessarily align with their actions, it is important to be clear that interviews get at what people say, however sincerely, rather than at what they do. (Arksey and Knight, 1999:15)

Therefore, a reliance solely on qualitative data alone did not sit well with my own beliefs so a triangulation of methods was the most attractive option for this piece of

research and this choice is in turn supported by a range of literature in the area. Increased use of mixed methods in educational research is reflected in research journals like the *Educational Researcher* and the *British Educational Research Journal* which represent a celebration of 'some of the best recent educational research' (Gorard and Taylor, 2004: 619). Johnston and Onwuegbuzie identify the value of mixed methods in their

> narrowing the divide between quantitative and qualitative researchers, mixed methods research has a great potential to promote a shared responsibility in the quest for attaining accountability for educational quality. (2004: 24)

Others within the educational community also highlight the relevance of mixed methods, especially as it seeks to transcend the paradigmatic divide that it has been claimed exists between the two approaches (Bryman, 2006; Dicks, 2006; Dixon-Woods *et al*.; 2006; Mason, 1993; Moran-Ellis *et al*., 2006).

The mixed methods approach accepts that quantitative and qualitative research have different epistemic and ontological bases. However, if both are focused on the same research problem and similar conclusions are evident, then the researcher can have a greater degree of confidence in their findings. This is what might be called the warranty through triangulation argument. The principle of triangulation rests on the assumption that particular events are being investigated and that if they can be investigated in a number of different ways and those different ways concur, then the researcher may then believe that their account is a truer description of those events (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). This is an adaptation of the scientific use of the term in trigonometry and elementary geometry where the distance to a point can be calculated by working out the length of one side of a triangle and measuring the angles and sides of the triangle formed by that point and two other reference points. Here, an unknown is calculated from measurements taken from different points to the object. There is an actual relationship (this is an ontological matter), but for reasons connected with the observer's embeddedness in the world (an epistemological issue), those observers have to use a number of indirect methods and then infer from their coincidence or otherwise what the actual relationship is. Triangulation then in educational research is frequently used to plot a path to an unknown (the state of being in the world, namely the existence or not of a professional housing identity) through the use of two or more

indirect strategies which may or may not coincide (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). If this can be achieved, then the investigator can be more certain that their description is accurate. The underpinning principle is that the different types of activity are equally valuable especially if they reach similar conclusions.

The initial plan for this research on housing identities proposed to use triangulation by combining quantitative methods and qualitative methods in conducting surveys and in-depth interviews with a random sample of people, and to support and verify the findings by analysing policy documents and job descriptions relating to the people involved. To obtain the contextual information, an email questionnaire was to be circulated to a scientifically selected random sample (Gorard and Taylor, 2004). The questionnaire was to seek basic information such as: age, gender, qualifications, length of time in current job research administration, principal areas of responsibility etc. However, the value of conducting this exercise and the possibility of a poor response to the email questionnaire, deemed this action as being not suitable for the purpose of the research. Instead, the thesis aimed to produce findings on the research question by a triangulation of interviews with people in the field who named those that they perceived as having a professional housing identity, interviews with those named people and a review of government policy documentation on the area of housing policy. Triangulation is seen here as an important factor to ensure congruency between what the author thinks, what the workers say and what the employers perceive (Gorard and Taylor, 2004).

In summary, the research for this thesis involved conducting nineteen in-depth interviews. Thirteen interviews were carried out with housing managers and housing officers within two types of organizations in the Republic of Ireland, and six interviews were carried out with academics. The two organization types were the local authorities (city and county, urban and regional) and three housing associations (the largest in Ireland, a specialist organisation and an organisation with a high profile).

Within the thirteen interviews a purposive snowball sample was drawn from all levels of management, (from directors to front-line housing staff) and from a wide spectrum, (estate managers to community development officers). The diversity of the sample

was guided by Friedson's insight (1994) into the different understandings of professionalism, as held by practitioners, managers and academics. The information was collected by means of semi-structured interviews conducted by the author (a white, middle-class woman who both identifies as, and is predominantly positioned by others as, a "professional" worker in the area of housing and currently in a dual role as researcher). The interview normally took place in their work environment located across the Republic of Ireland. Respondents were snowballed through contacts from a range of housing providers and included those employed in local authorities, housing associations and universities. An initial email was sent out requesting an interview to discuss in a general manner as to who people perceived to be the housing professionals in the Republic of Ireland and why this was the case.

The interviewees were also chosen on the basis of accessibility, cognition and motivation (May, 2001). The question of accessibility centred on whether or not the person answering the questions has access to the information which the interviewer seeks. In terms of cognition, the person being interviewed needs to have an understanding of what is required of them in the role of interviewee.

> Interviews are social encounters and not simply passive means of gaining information. As with all social encounters they are rule-guided and the parties bring with them expectations of their content and the role they may adopt as a result. It is important, therefore, that the interviewees not only know the information that is required, but also understand what is expected of them. (May, 2001: 45)

Thirdly, and related to above, the issue of motivation requires the interviewer to make the subjects feel that their participation and answers are valued, for their cooperation is fundamental to the conduct of the research. These three principles were used as guiding features in the interview process and the further emphasis on anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed to all involved. The function of the interview was explained in the initial email and an assurance given that their responses would be treated in a confidential manner. The direct quotes and findings reported in the thesis are assigned random names and the details of the actual people's names and personal details are held by the interviewer. The respondents are divided into four groups: people in the local authority, people working in the housing association sector, people working as academics in a university setting and a general group of "others" which is

used for those working in other forms of housing related services e.g. The Centre for Housing Research. Further details of those interviewed are given in Appendix A.

From the outset the author has reflected on her own position in connection with what it is to have the identity of a professional worker and what it is to be a housing academic. This is explored in more detail in chapters four, five and six. Therefore, the tension between subjectivity and objectivity in the interviewing process was noted. On the one hand, interviews are said by many to elicit knowledge free of prejudice or bias; on the other, a self conscious awareness must be maintained in order to let the interview 'flow'. As Miller and Glassner, in their reflections on the 'inside' and 'outside' in interviews, write;

> Those of us who aim to understand and document others' understandings choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality. (1997:100).

According to Brannick and Coghlan (2007) there are a number of significant challenges for those considering research in their own organization, which includes the areas of access, pre-understanding, role duality, and organizational politics. In considering insider-research projects, potential researchers, through a process of reflexivity, need to be aware of the strengths and limits of their pre-understanding so that they can use their experiential and theoretical knowledge to reframe their understanding of situations to which they are close. They need to attend to the demands that both roles-organizational roles and the researcher role-make on them. Furthermore, Brannick and Coghlan argue that

> researchers engage in a dialogue of ideas (theory) and evidence (data) when they construct representations or theories of organizational and management activities. (2007:61).

Although I was not conducting research within my own organisation, I was carrying out the research within the field of housing and the number of individuals directly involved in this area is relatively small. Therefore there was the assumption that I as a person, (working in the area of housing and education) and the organisation for which I work for would be known to the person being interviewed. By stating my position as a researcher from the outset of each interview it was hoped that in naming my role duality and being reflexive on this issue, I could give a true record of what those

interviewed were saying. I was also aware that in carrying out this research, the interviewer and the interviewee needed to establish an intersubjective understanding. Having studied for a Master in Arts in Economics and Finance and a Professional Diploma in Counselling and Psychotherapy, the tension between academic and professional qualifications is very clear in my own mind. Furthermore, given my role in the delivery of the only degree in the Republic of Ireland which gives a qualification in housing and community studies, there were certain assumptions and expectations expected, on my behalf from the research. One expected finding was that an academic qualification supported by the establishment of a recognised professional housing body was required to create a professional housing career and give people a professional housing identity in the Republic of Ireland.

I had through my training in counselling, and my work with mature adults returning to education, come across the concept of reflection and reflection-in-action. By using the methodology of reflective practice and reflection-in-action (Redmond, 2006) it was hoped that my own insider knowledge, subjectivity, strong passions and personal experience could be noted and bracketed. Hence this thesis aimed to fulfil the requirements for an EdD by providing information on the location and habitus of the housing worker in the Republic of Ireland, reflecting on the perceptions of this position within a career structure.

Furthermore it was recognised that whilst care was taken to ensure diversity within the sample, existing relationships between the interviewer and interviewees inevitably shaped the research process and have ethical implications (it would be too simplistic to suggest that these factors operated in any unitary or straight forward ways, but some interviewees might have been more ‘open’ and potentially less guarded in their responses where we already knew one another quite well). Generalised details about those interviewed are provided in Appendix A, although for the purpose of protecting anonymity, their personal details have been disguised by assigning them a random name and other work-related information has been generalised.

The interviews took between 20 minutes and 80 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed. They covered the following topics in a semi-structured order: understanding of housing; motivation (or lack of it) for going into housing work; the

status of the occupational role of working in housing; housing knowledge and skills; the boundaries of working within housing; the role of qualifications and education; perceptions of professionalism and housing workers in relation to other professions. The interviewing strategy involved avoiding the use of professional terminology, until specific questions were asked about professionalism. Thus, it was left up to interviewees to categorize housing as a career, a job, an occupation or a profession, so allowing an assessment as whether or not the term 'professional' had any relevance to housing workers. It was hoped that the role of unstructured interviews and non-directive questions would be a mechanism whereby the individual can discuss, reflect and analyze their position (both actual and perceived) within their work environment (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). It was therefore an attempt to allow them to be "real" and "genuine". In doing so it was hoped that they were able to estimate and evaluate the role of identity work and/or the role of enabling factors such as qualifications and eduaction, in giving them a career identity.

2.4 Theoretical Perspective and Epistemology

The philosophical stance that lies behind the choice of methodology attempts to explain how it provides a logic, criteria and context for the research process. Inevitability there are a number of assumptions about the chosen methodology and these assumptions need to be stated by elaborating on my theoretical and epistemology perspective.

Epistemology deals with 'the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis'(Hamlyn, 1995:242). The relevance of epistemology can also be explained as being 'concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate' (Maynard, 1994:10). The epistemological perspective I choose to work from in researching and defining housing is one of social constructionism. In constructionism there is no objective truth to discover how truth or meaning comes into existence in the engagement with the realities of the world. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed and different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. I thought that this is the most appropriate paradigm given my own views that housing is a concept which is difficult

to define and this was reinforced by the information gathered during the interviews for this work.

Developing on from this, a paradigm has an appropriate ontology which defines the nature of 'reality'. It has an epistemology which defines the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the world studied, and finally a methodology, which lays out the methods for finding out about the world. Guba and Lincoln describe a paradigm as a;

> basic set of beliefs that deals with ultimates or first principles. It is a *worldview* that defines for its holder, the nature of the 'world', the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts… (1992: 2000)

The paradigm of social constructionism has a core of basic tenets which emphasize the way in which the social world is continually produced by individuals, rather than as something which confronts them as an objective reality (Sikes, Nixon and Carr, 2003). It is therefore linked to phenomenological approaches in sociology. The strength of constructionism for me is its focus on broader social processes and its emphasis on the importance of social, political and economic context. It offers a dynamic and process-orientated approach which seemed to be suitable to comprehend the shifting nature of an understanding of professional housing identity. I as a researcher did not want to confront those interviewed with the fait accompli that they were a housing professional. Rather my role as a researcher was to find out about the world of the housing worker and in finding out, try to establish what mechanism, if any, give them an identity within the world of career and jobs. What would give them a recognisable face? Had they already got a professional housing identity? What was this professional housing identity? Was there a demand for a professional housing identity and how could was this achieved? What role did education and accreditation play in developing this sense of professional identity? What type of education was needed and who was best placed to offer this education?

This approach was chosen as a mechanism for understanding and explaining society and the human world, particularly the society of the local authority, university, housing associations, and the human world of the "housing worker" within this

society. It would allow me to use reflexivity myself as well as allowing those interviewed to do the same as a means of understanding our roles within society (Mead, 1938).

2.5 Interdisciplinary research and the academic-professional dilemma.

The degree of a Doctor of Education (EdD) is relatively new in the Republic of Ireland, although research in the area of education has been carried out by all the main universities for some time.
Silkes, Nixon and Carr highlight that

> What distinguishes educational research, is its 'usefulness' and 'relevance' to those working in educational settings. Educational research is not just *about* education, but research with an educational purpose. (2003:4)

The EdD differs from a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Education in that it allows the study of a greater variety of education-related subjects in the first stages of study, focusing on a single topic only at the end. It could therefore be argued that an EdD could be designated as a structured PhD. However, both the EdD and PhD are research based degrees demanding the same level of academic rigour. Research by Scott, Lunt, Browne and Thorne (2002) has found that the difference between an EdD and a PhD can be somewhat overstated as students of both tend to follow similar courses of study and to research similar topics. The EdD is generally presented as an opportunity to prepare for academic, administrative or specialised positions in education, favourably placing the graduates for promotion and leadership responsibilities, or high-level professional positions in a range of locations in the broad Education industry. In the UK and Ireland both the EdD and PhD are recognised for the purposes of appointment as a lecturer or professor in universities. In carrying out research for a post graduate degree, Hitchcock reflects that 'research and its products should facilitate reflection, criticism, and a more informed view of the educational process which will in turn help to improve professional practice'(1989:12). Corey signals that 'the worth of all educational research is judged by its contributions to the improvement of educational practice' (1969:33) and that an informing concept for the delivery of most of these courses is the concept of 'praxis'. This is interpreted as the use of theory to interrogate practice, together with the use of

practice to extend and develop one's theoretical positioning. For me, this interrogation of my own practice to develop my theoretical position was key to why I chose an EdD route of study. Upon personal reflection in recent years I began to understand that I am in the position of delivering educational programmes and developing academic qualifications to give housing workers a badge of professionalism. However, increasingly there is doubt in my mind as to whether my reasoning and functioning are correct. Core to this is the question (and my own intuition) that getting an academic qualification does not ensure that one is recognised and perceived as a professional housing worker. The learning that occurs in becoming a housing professional is not straightforward. In carrying out the research for this EdD I therefore had the aim for it to meet the criteria for the award at this level but I also had an ulterior motive in trying to establish whether my own career and job in delivering an academic qualification to give people a professional housing identity, was grounded in reality or a fanciful and unrealistic aspiration.

According to the publicity material from NUIM, the emphasis of this professional doctorate is on the production of academic professionals, i.e. professionals whose practice is informed by academic study at the highest level and whose study is informed by practice. I felt that my own interdisciplinary focus across economics and education gave me a unique insight into the housing sector and secondly, my experience as an 'insider researcher' brings professional and academic knowledge together to give experiential and reflective knowledge on this issue. However the 'issue' of defining housing, housing identity and professional housing identity was complex and how it sat with the requirements of an EdD was considered. Indeed as different terms and concepts e.g. identity theory and professionalism were explored, new avenues in the proposed research were revealed. This in part was due to different conceptual and disciplinary understandings as to what even such basic words such as "housing" means. Is it about bricks and mortar or is it about the provision of a dwelling which houses people and enables them to create a home? Can housing be recognised as a fundamental human right with priority accorded to those in greatest housing need? When we talk about housing output are we merely talking about the production of a number of units or commodities or are we talking about the creation of homes which are economically and environmentally sustainable for those who dwell within them?

2.6 Analysis of data collected

A key question in the production of this thesis was how to analyze and present the wealth of research data collected. Core to this was to what extent the reader will be able to make their own interpretation of the data that is presented and the need to have sufficient data for the reader to challenge the analysis. I had interviewed nineteen individuals and had over three hundred pages of transcribed conversations. However, I could only include a fraction of this information in the body of the thesis. Furthermore, it was recognised that the work needs to have a good 'aesthetic' in the gathering, presentation and analysis of data in the research and that the work be both functional and elegant. (Williams, 2003). Including large chunks of the transcribed conversations might be informative but not very user friendly if these sections were not analysed and integrated into the emergent themes.

The stages in data analysis included immersion, reflection, deconstructing and analysing the data, recombining or synthesizing the data, relating and locating the data and presenting the data (Wellington, 2000:134-135). The taped interviews from the informal interviews were transcribed by myself and this in turn lead to a decision as to what method of analysis would be most appropriate. Scholars in content analysis began using computers in the 1950s to do statistical analysis of text (Pool, 1959), but advances in technologies since then have made the process far more user friendly. Optical scanning and voice recognition software make the entire process easier although as Tesch (1990) highlights, this can cause some of the treatment of the text as a window into human experience to be lost.

The method I used in the immersion stage involved the carrying out of nineteen interviews and the writing of the transcriptions myself. Although it may have been more objective and quicker to employ someone to carry out this initial element of the research, my own passion for the work and personality trait of needing to be fully in control, led me to conduct the work. It gave me familiarity with the voices of the interviewees and with the written transcription of their words. In carrying out this process, the initial issues of what seems to be going on and how I can make sense of what is going on began to emerge. I noted emergent themes and times when the respondents seemed to have a lot to say in relation to a prompt question which I

asked. Likewise, I noted when their responses were monosyllabic. The second stage of reflecting required me to consider what is all this telling me about housing workers, and how can I organise the information. Are the findings matching my assumptions and are the issues similar to the literature. Furthermore, is critical pedagogy relevant or meaningful here? I already had a core assumption which was based on my own work and life experience, that an academic qualification was an essential requirement to provide someone with a professional housing identity. Other ideas, such as the lack of an accepted definition for housing and how people develop a working identity, were also in the back of my mind. From the first two interviews conducted, these ideas and assumptions began to be challenged and tested. In particular, the futility of academic qualifications within the local authority structure emerged as an issue for animated response by those interviewed. This in turn awoke a fear in my own mind that people might tell me that a housing qualification is NOT required to establish a professional housing identity. If this was the case then my own job could be redundant! Again by using personal reflection, I attempted to bracket these personal and emotional responses and attempted to truly listen to what the respondents were actually saying.

The third phase of analysis required the use of issues raised to identify themes, find the narrative and note emergent conclusions. The fourth phase of recombining and synthesising saw the identification of categories and themes from the data which were: personal experience of housing, working within structures such as the local authority, housing associations and the university sector, perceptions of the underlying issues, communities of practice, preferred identity, idealised professional identities and realised professional identities, and working within the dominant discourses of the local authority and housing association contexts.

I had a range of techniques available to carry out this third and fourth phase of the analysis. The techniques for the manual analysis of words and phrases and a systematic elicitation to identify lists of items and themes have been reviewed by a variety of authors (Bernard, 1994; Fleisher and Harrington, 1998; Borgatti, 1998). These techniques cover methods such as free lists, paired comparisons, pile sorts, triad tests, frame substitution, componential analysis, taxonomies etc. One method is the use of cognitive maps or mind maps. It was decided to use the technique of mind

maps to identify themes as a user friendly tool suitable for the small number of persons interviewed. This matched the need to ensure that the data presented in the thesis offered an authentic representation and empathic analysis of the participants' intentions, actions and experiences, acknowledging that

> In social research, knowledge is concerned not with generalisation, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination. (Usher 2001: 18)

Mind maps as a tool also can be used to carry out brain-storming exercises among groups of participants during certain workshops and was a tool which I frequently used in my work setting. An example of this is given in Appendix B when a mind map was used with a group of participants to help arrive at a definition of what housing and home means. Mind maps are a visual display of the similarities among items and whether or not the items can be ordered in a hierarchical way. One popular method for making these maps is by collecting data about the cognitive similarity or dissimilarity among a set of objects and then applying multidimensional scaling, or MDS, to the similarities (Kruskai and Wish, 1978).

For this thesis, the use of the visual tool of mind maps was a central method to how the data collected was explored and interpreted. Having transcribed each interview, a single mind map was created on a large sheet of blank paper, with key words being marked in different colours. These mind maps were then placed on the walls around my office. Once the nineteen interviews had been transferred to the visual mind maps, a larger sheet of paper, placed on the centre of the wall, was used to pull together the common themes and issues which had emerged. It soon became evident that there were core, frequent issues emerging, with an emphasis on the lack of clear definitions of terms and words such as housing, professionalism and identity. Stemming from these issues were some personal answers, from those interviewed, as to why this was so, when was the difference most evident, how did the difference manifested itself and what might be done to arrive at a common workable definition of the words and terms.

This large mind map combining the emergent themes was then refined and the names of possible authors and other literature sources was noted on the page. Initially this

was carried out to ensure that the original literature review, which had been conducted for the thesis proposal, had covered the main themes. It was at this stage that it was decided that it would be more beneficial to the reader and to the thesis as a whole if the literature was incorporated directly into the different chapters rather than having a stand alone section dealing with a literature review. This would allow for a comparison to directly take place between what the "experts" said (those who had work published in the area) and what the "practitioners" (those who had been interviewed) had to say. It was noted that this integration was a departure from the standard thesis format of having a separate chapter which focuses on the key literature in the area and a deliberate effort was made to balance the direct quotes from those interviewed with quotes from the literature.

From this process the themes were then structured into chapter headings and hence each of the core chapters in this thesis are a combined consideration of findings from those interviewed and the literature on the theme. This is in line with Willms and Sui-Chu (1996) suggestion that researchers start with some general themes derived from their own readings and add more themes and subthemes as they go. Hence a conscious effort was exercised through personal reflection, to allow the respondents to speak for themselves, followed by critical and theoretical reflection to allow this work to be a true representation of the findings.

2.7 Values

A key feature in recent social and educational research has been a concern with the nature of knowledge and its link with the practices of researchers (Scott and Usher, 1996; Sikes, Nixon and Carr, 2003; Stronach and Mac Lure, 1997). The debates have been configured variously in terms of, for example, the epistemological crisis (Scott and Usher, 1996), the problem of representation (Denzin, 1997) and moral foundations (Silkes *et al.* 2003). Values are an important underpinning issue in these debates in terms of motivation and rationale to engage in research. Similarly, values become significant in shaping the consequences of the research for policy and practice. Increasingly the 'value turn' in research debates has focused on the difficulty of generating and analysing data in 'value free' ways, or finding ways to acknowledge the impact of values on the research process.

Following from the work of Weber (1949) in particular, a division exists between normative political philosophy and 'objective' social scientific research (Sayer, 2005). Having a training and background in the discipline of Economics, I am very clear about why social scientists wanted to separate the normative from absolute scientific truths. It is about separating facts which can be proved or disproved from personal value judgements. However, values influence what we choose to study, the methods we employ and the interpretive paradigms we invoke. Values are implicated in both our theories and our purely empirical claims (Lynch, 2001). Values are defined as being tied to emotions and devoid of reason. While emotions are seen as partial, subjective, irrational and feminine, reason in contrast, is defined as detached, objective, independent and masculine (Nussbaum, 1995). As Lynch *et al*. (2009) work on affective equality describes, academic research has tended to privilege the rational economic view of an individual, devoid from its caring and interdependent life.

In reflecting on my own values and reasons for carrying out this research, three areas of significance emerged. Firstly, I rate education very highly and have recognised the opportunities and life chances with which a good education has provided me. Hence it is a personal goal and commitment to help others reach their own potential through the medium of formal education. Secondly, I understand the importance and value there is in having a place to call home. For many, this place called home can offer security, shelter and improve their well being. It can create an environment which is conducive to self development and one element of this can be a furthering of educational attainment. And thirdly, I am involved in the running of the only formal educational qualification in housing which was developed to create a career pathway in housing for those working in the area of social housing. Hence implicit in this fact is that I value educational qualifications in giving people a badge of recognition and some degree of professionalism.

This thesis set out to be an exploration the value of educational qualifications and how they might be a factor in developing a professional housing identity among those who work in social housing. However, because the scholarly understanding of work has been equated with economic self preservation and self-actualisation as rational economic actors, education is seen as preparation for this type of work (Lynch, 2006b). Education is indifferent to other-centred work arising from our

interdependencies and dependencies as affective, relational beings. In particular it has tended to ignore the centrality of nurturing for the preservation and self-actualisation of the human species (Lynch, 2006b). Not only is education itself more and more focused on education for paid work and consumption, the focus of education for professionals, even those with a strong care remit such as teachers and social workers, has become increasingly regulatory. How then would an education in housing encompass the required personal care remit, given the traditional regulatory environment which governs academic qualifications.

I had also placed a value on the recognition of academic qualifications within the world of work and made the assumption that others, namely those within the local authority and voluntary housing association sector would equally value academic qualifications. While my personal values felt that a formal university qualification could prepare people to working more effectively in the area of housing, I had not factored in the complexity of what it means to work in housing when housing and home are such complex concepts to define. Therefore, part of what is discussed in the following chapters is that this value on education which I had, was not echoed, by those interviewed, and the implications of this are considered. In particular, the concluding chapters of this thesis highlight the need for a possible change in some formal education qualifications to recognise the centrality of the caring and cared-for citizen and the development of the individual who can respond to peoples need within an often highly bureaucratic system, such as the local authority system.

These personal values and feelings are more fully explored and reflected on as they become relevant to the findings in this thesis. Again by using a learning log or diary to reflect on their impact (if any) on my writing, it was hoped that my thoughts would be bracketed to a discussion of the findings of this research. And in using the learning log, the ethical implications of my work were also documented and reflected upon.

2.8 Research ethics

There is a wealth of material on research ethics in general, in the specialisms of bio-ethics, social sciences, psychology and education research. (Gorard and Taylor, 2004; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; May, 2001). Research ethics involves the application of

fundamental ethical principles to a variety of topics and most academic specialities and professions have codes of ethics (such as BERA code of ethics for educational research). Burgess (1989) outlines that ethics in educational research has been neglected in debate even though ethical, moral and political questions abound. As Bogdan and Biklen highlight;

> Some codes are thoughtful and help sensitize members to dilemmas and moral issues they must face; others are narrowly conceived and do more to protect the professional group from attack than to set forth a moral position (1992: 49)

Two issues have dominated the recent guidelines of ethics in research with human subjects which are informed consent, and the protection of subjects from harm. In addressing these issues, I requested an interview with each participant by means of an email and arranged a time and place which was suitable for them to carry out the interview. The ethical issue of protecting those interviewed was seen as particularly relevant given that I knew and in some cases, had taught, some of the individuals who were interviewed and I acknowledged this relationship at all times. Furthermore, the number of individuals working in the area is relatively small and the chosen group represented a research elite. People could be easily identified and in an initial draft of this thesis, a colleague was able to give the actual names of twelve of those interviewed based on the direct quote used in the body of the material. This led me to change the recorded titles of the interviewees (Appendix A), to more abstract headings. All academics were given the badge of "lecturer" rather than senior or junior lecturer. References to Dublin, Cork, Leitrim etc. were changed to urban and rural local authorities. Each direct quote mentioned is now merely assigned a pseudonym and the type of housing organisation for which they work. Hence in carrying out these small changes a further level of anonymity was assured and only essential details are supplied.

Here Bogdan and Biklen discuss that;

> Doing qualitative research with subjects is more like having a friendship than a contract. The subjects have a say in regulating the relationship and they continuously make decisions about their participation. In submitting a research proposal to human subject committees for example, only a 'bare bones' description of what will occur can generally be included (1992:50)

In summary, I was confident that ethical guidelines were being adhered to as the subjects entered the research process voluntarily and had an understanding of the nature of the study involved. They were informed as to how their comments and feedback would be used and assured of the confidentiality of the documentation employed during the interview process. Furthermore, it was explained to them as to why I had selected them to be interviewed and the possible recommendations which might come out of a piece of research such at this one being undertaken. The ethical issues around researching those who are representing their own personal views and the State department/organisation that they work for, was noted. In making statements about what worked and what did not work in these organisations, general points were made rather than giving specific details.

At the same time, I attempted to exhibit integrity in the methods I used, and the full recorded interviews are transcribed verbatim. Particularly sections of what respondents said are directly used in the body of this thesis and the analysis of their words is offered as an interpretation of what they were saying rather than an assumption of fact. The use of a series of full stops (…….) indicates the time when interviewees paused before they continued to speak. Constant personal reflection is used as a mechanism to ensure that I was being true to what the interviewees were saying and that I am behaving in an ethical manner.

2.9 Limitations of the research

The limitations of this research are also worth noting. Firstly, there is a concentration on one particular group involved in housing provision, namely those involved in social housing. There is obvious scope for further research to expand the issue of professional housing identity to include workers in the private market provision of housing. Secondly, within those involved in social housing provision, only a small sample of people were interviewed. While it was endeavoured to be as open, transparent and object in selecting the sample to be interviewed, there is the possibility that different individuals may yield different findings. Thirdly, given that one discovery of this research is that structures are important in the facilitation of emergent identities, a broadening of the categories of people interviewed, to include those involved at a Departmental level could result in a more rounded analysis of the

issues. While these three areas suggest that there is further scope for this research, chapter nine also notes other areas for future research and the possibility of conducting this research is being actively pursued by the Senior Management Team of the organisation in which I work.

2.10 Conclusion

This methodology chapter has set out in detail, the various steps involved in undertaking the research, from the motivation underpinning the research topic, changes which occurred in the focus of the research, through to ideas for possible further research. The chapter has outlined the underlying methodological framework, along with detailed insights into the methodological choices made along the way and has presented a discussion of the challenges facing researchers who are working in the field in which they are carrying out the research.

Particular attention is drawn to my own values and life history as it is seen as a shaping influence on the research question as a whole and the importance which academic qualifications are attributed. However, by employing a level of reflexivity to all levels of the work it is expected that the work will adhere to the principles guiding validity and ethical research.

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL AND CURRENT SITUATION OF SOCIAL HOUSING PROVISION IN IRELAND

3.1 Introduction

This chapter commences by giving a context to voluntary housing associations from a historical point of view and then goes on to give a brief overview of housing associations in the Republic of Ireland. The following chapter discusses the role of the local authority in the provision of social housing, highlights the similarities and differences between the two types of housing providers and gives a context to understand the structures which allowed different working environments to emerge. A point which is developed in this thesis is that housing associations in the Republic of Ireland offer an opportunity for the individual working in housing to develop a clearer professional housing identity in comparison to their counterparts employed in the local authority sector. The factors why this occurs are examined in later chapters and it is acknowledged that the local authority and voluntary housing sectors are constantly evolving and changing. This is even more noticeable in the financial context which the Irish economy presently experiences in 2009. Hence this chapter provides a historical overview and discusses the defining features of the voluntary housing association sector in particular.

3.2 Historical Overview

Voluntary activity has always had a prominent role in the delivery of social services in Ireland. This was evident in the housing sector where at the turn of the twentieth century there were a number of organisations providing philanthropic housing services. One of the most prominent of these was established in 1890 when Sir Edward Cecil Guinness, Earl of Iveagh, set up a major philanthropic trust to provide housing and related amenities for working class people in Dublin. Today, the Iveagh Trust is one of the larger housing associations providing rental dwellings for families and single people on low incomes, the older person as well as accommodation for homeless men.

Generally, voluntary housing associations are formed to relieve a local housing need. Many are established by existing caring or voluntary associations who provide services to vulnerable groups such as the older people, the homeless or people with

disabilities. A marked feature of the voluntary housing sector is that many associations offer non-housing and related services such as group meals, social activities, educational opportunities and welfare advice. The small and local nature of most voluntary housing associations means that they are in a position to respond quickly to the service needs of their tenants as they arise. According to Mullins, Rhodes and Williamson there are no official count of dwellings currently managed by housing associations and rental co-operatives and they estimate based on their own research that;

> at the end of 2001, there were approximately 330 active non-profit housing organisations that together managed between 12,000 and 13,000 (10% of the social housing in the Republic) (2003:64).

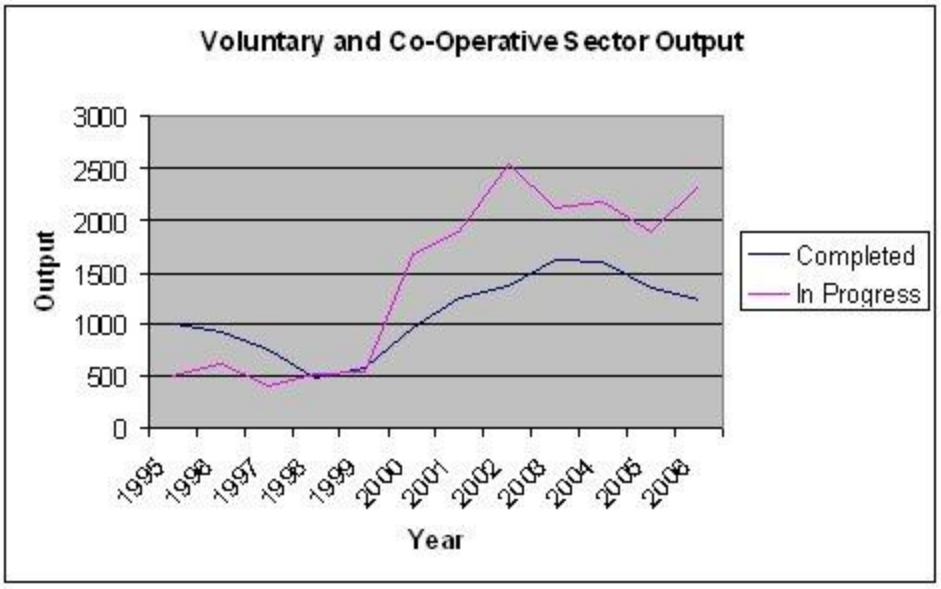
There were 115 new bodies gaining approved status in the period 1995-2005 and the Irish Council for Social Housing has over 600 registered housing organisations. However, as Mullins *et al* (2003) highlight, there are a much smaller number who are actually active. More recently Grant Thornton (2009) carried out a survey of the sector and of the 728 housing surveys distributed, only 128 were returned. They highlight that

> We do not have any basis from the survey for determining how many of the non-respondents are inactive, defunct or have wound down, or indeed if there were organisations which were granted approval status, but did not build or acquire any housing units at all. Furthermore, we have no basis for identifying any bodies that were registered and never became active, or ones where contact details may have changes and the Department/local authority had not been notified. It is not possible to define what the number of potential respondents actually is. (2009:27)

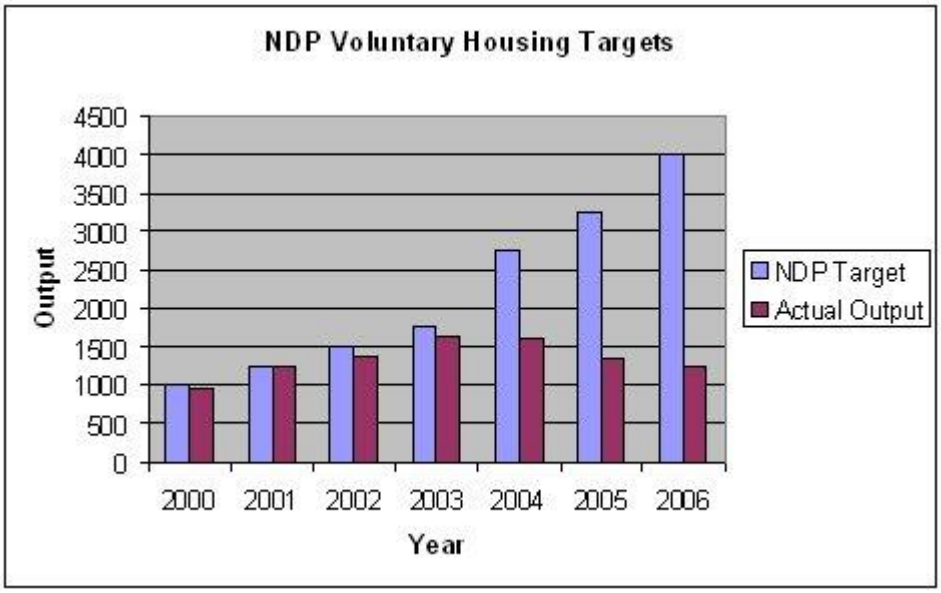
While the development of the sector was rather ad hoc at first, the state began to take a more defined role in the latter part of the twentieth century. Since the 1980s, social housing has been largely aided by the availability of capital funding schemes from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) (1984) provides assistance to housing associations, through the local authorities towards capital costs for accommodation, generally for one or two bed-roomed units, to meet special housing needs such as those of the older people, person with disabilities, homeless or smaller families. The Capital Loan and Subsidy Scheme (CLSS) (1991), (which is currently financed by the Housing Finance Agency through the local authorities), provides funding for housing associations through the local

authorities to provide housing, particularly to meet the needs of low-income families. Both these schemes are aided by the low cost site scheme administered by local authorities.

During the period 1995-1998 growth in the voluntary housing sector tapered off as the government failed to increase the funding limits under the CAS and CLSS schemes. This, in conjunction with rapidly escalating land and building costs, made it impossible for housing associations to build on the level of grant that was available. The increasing lack of affordability in the Irish housing market at this time meant that the demand for social housing was growing. The effect of the slowdown in voluntary housing was therefore even more acute. There was some improvement in the terms of the schemes at the end of 1997 and this led to a renewed increase in the building of voluntary housing throughout the country. The *National Development Plan* which ran from 2000 to 2006 announced that there would be a move to increase the output of the voluntary housing sector to 4000 units per annum by 2006 although as one can see from the graphs below, this target was not met.



Source: 'Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin', 2007, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.



Source: 'Annual Housing Statistics Bulletin', 2007, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The most up to date government policy documents have recognised and acknowledged the role that the voluntary housing sector plays in maintaining a healthy level of social housing choice for people in housing need. *Towards 2016*, the *National Development Plan 2007-2013: Transforming Ireland* and the government housing policy statement, *Delivering Homes Sustaining Communities* all recognise the value of a voluntary housing sector and set out defined targets for future voluntary housing provision. However, the recent economic downturn is not helpful in supporting the need for social housing.

There are a number of challenges to the growth of the voluntary and co-operative housing sector which are reflected in the graphs above. These have been identified as a lack of available sites from local authorities for development; the increasing cost of private land; the complex process of accessing funding and the lack of defined revenue funding for the ongoing care costs associated with sheltered or supported housing projects; the implementation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and the implications of Part V of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* with the subsequent amendments (Brooke, 2006).

In April 2009, the Minister for the Environment John Gormley revised estimates for his Department's spending which include a €300 million cut in funds for social and

affordable housing. The Department of Finance subsequently published its revised Book of Estimates for 2009, detailing the public spending cuts and increases outlined in the April Budget. Overall, the Department of the Environment sustained a net decrease of 16 per cent or just under €500 million. However, housing for the poor and low-waged and funding for local authorities was most effected with funding for social housing construction and regeneration is being cut by 16 per cent or €250 million, affordable housing and other housing support schemes is being cut by €44 million or 33 per cent. The Local Government Fund, which makes up a large proportion of funding for local authorities, was also cut by 24 per cent, or just under €132 million.

3.3 The Role of Housing Organisations

The vast majority of social housing in the Republic of Ireland is controlled by the local authorities with a stock of 1,934,000 units at December 2008, and currently there are around 23,000 units of accommodation owned and managed by the voluntary and co-operative housing sector (DoEHLG, 2008). Of the approximately 330 active non profit housing associations, the movement has a very varied membership. Some housing associations are well known and have a high public profile, such as the Simon Community, although they, due to their work with the homeless sector, are not often thought about as a housing organisation. Other housing associations have housing schemes throughout the country and provide a variety of other community services.

Housing Completions over a selection of years *(numbers of dwellings)*

Year	*Local authority*	*Private*	*Housing Association*
1993	**1,200**	**19,301**	**890**
1996	**2,676**	**30,132**	**917**
1999	**2,909**	**43,024**	**579**
2001	**3,622**	**47,727**	**1,253**
2004	**3,539**	**71,808**	**1,607**
2006	**3,968**	**88,211**	**1,240**
2007	**4,986**	**71,356**	**1,685**
2008	**4,905**	**44,923**	**1,896**

Source : 'DoEHLG Annual Statistics Bulletin' 2008

Respond! Housing Association, with a head office in Waterford, manages over 2500 houses throughout the country, on 97 estates and has 54 community buildings. Other housing associations are smaller, with three or four properties in a rural location to provide housing for local elderly members of the community.

A commonality among housing associations is that they have been set up by individuals or groups who were concerned about housing shortages, especially insofar as they affected particular groups (such as low income or disabled). General social housing is for those who appear on the local authority housing lists and have no specialised needs. Special housing needs refers to housing for the homeless or for people with reduced mobility such as wheelchair users. Special needs applicants often require adaptations to be made to the physical structure of the dwelling. They may need special resources, for instance counselling in the case of those escaping domestic violence. Because of this work with marginalised groups, the state has recognized the value of housing associations and funds them out of public money, which the housing associations supplement through fundraising and other ventures. Housing associations acquire their development sites from a number of sources including donations from charitable trusts or religious orders while others fundraise and purchase land or property. However by far the most usual route is land provided by the local authority who are reimbursed by central government. The funds to carry out the development are provided, in the main, by central government and administered through the local authority. This allows the development of schemes from an approved body to be monitored by the local housing authority in order to be eligible for funding.

3.4 The Main Players

In order to give a sense of the structures and role of housing associations in Ireland, this section gives a brief overview of a representative sample of six organisations in the Republic of Ireland. A common feature of these housing associations is that they all have very detailed and informative websites which discuss their aims, objectives and future plans. Some provide virtual tours of their estates and sound bites form residents who they have housed on these websites.

3.4.1 Clúid Housing Association

Clúid housing association in Ireland was set up in the 1980s on foot of government policy promoting the development of housing associations in Ireland. For its first seven years it was called Saint Pancreas Housing Association (Ireland) after the London-based housing association of the same name, which has been providing social housing since the 1920s. During the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a new funding scheme established aimed at assisting housing associations to provide general needs housing. This was a significant departure in housing provision as since before this time housing associations had been primarily providers of special needs housing as Clúid does.

Clúid is an Irish word meaning 'the seat beside the fire' or the corner seat that was vacated for the guest, or reserved for the venerable elderly member of the family and the concept of neighbourliness and home is central to Clúid's work. Clúid works in partnership with housing authorities in Dublin, Cork, Sligo and Waterford. to implement their housing strategies and their dwellings are occupied by applicants nominated by the housing authority.

The association aims to create mixed, sustainable communities where each household feels at home and part of the community. Clúid is also contracted by local authorities to undertake property management and estate management services. Clúid plays an active role in the Irish Council for Social Housing, the representative body for the housing association sector, as well as participating in government working groups and research studies. They actively encourage expertise and specialisation in housing and are keen to share experience and learn from other housing organisations to build a strong housing association sector in Ireland.

3.4.2 Focus Ireland

Focus Ireland was founded by Sr Stanislaus Kennedy as a result of the findings of research into the needs of homeless women in Dublin. In 1985, Focus Point (now Focus Ireland) opened its doors in Eustace St, Dublin and the agency provided

streetwork services to young people, advice, advocacy, information, help with finding a home and a warm and welcoming place to meet and have a low-cost meal.

Since 1985, Focus Ireland has continued to grow and expand its services. In 1988, the organisation opened its first development of low rent, good quality long-term and short-term housing in Dublin. Focus Ireland now has additional housing and service projects in Dublin as well as housing developments in both Limerick and Waterford. Focus Ireland aims to advance the right of people-out-of-home to live in a place they call home through quality services, research, and advocacy. In particular they respond to the needs of people out-of-home and those at risk of becoming homeless, through a range of appropriate high quality services. In addition they provide emergency transitional and long-term accommodation for people out-of-home. Their ability to campaign and lobby for the rights of people out-of-home and the prevention of homelessness has create a high level of public awareness around the issues of homelessness and the work they do.

3.4.3 Respond!

Established in 1982, Respond! is Ireland's largest non-profit Housing Association. They have built more than 4000 homes nationwide with a further 1500 under construction. Respond! provide homes for traditional families, lone-parent families, the elderly, the homeless and disabled people. Its main aims are to establish and maintain vibrant, socially integrated communities rather than simply providing just shelter or accommodation and to advance education among residents of its estates. They promote other charitable purposes beneficial to the community and prevent and relieve hardship and distress amongst those who are homeless and living in adverse housing conditions.

One of the key beliefs which Respond! has is to provide housing for social investment rather than financial profit. Therefore, they provide housing for some of the most vulnerable groups in society including those who have lived for long periods in hostels, temporary and insecure accommodation. Education provision is seen as a mechanism in their aim to alleviate poverty and Respond! has provided accredited education and training in partnership with a range of organisations since 1997. These

qualifications are aimed at establishing a housing career pathway for those working in the provision of social housing. The courses include:

- University College Dublin-Partnership agreement with Respond! for the delivery of a Bachelor of Social Science Degree (Hons.) in Housing and Community Studies (from 2003 to current day)
- University of Northumbria-accreditation to deliver a Certificate/Diploma in Housing Studies (from 1997-2004)
- Dublin Institute of Technology-accreditation to deliver a Certificate in Housing and Community Studies (from 1998-2004)
- Chartered Institute of Housing-accreditation to deliver a Certificate in Housing and Community Studies (from 1997-2004)

Respond! are in the process of becoming a registered provider of further education and training programmes with FETAC and HETAC and aim to expand their portfolio of housing related qualifications.

3.4.4 NABCO

National Association of Building Co-operatives represents, promotes and develops the Co-operative Housing Movement in Ireland. They support well organized co-operative housing societies to provide good quality housing, at a cost and in a tenure suited to the needs of members and contribute to the building of better communities. They wish to ensure that the development of co-operative housing is a good accommodation option for people who are willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.

NACBO has partnerships with numerous local authorities and other agencies in the public, community and private sectors, to expand the contribution of co-operative housing, They provide a range of other services to support the successful organization and good performance of housing co-operatives, including information, advice and training, guidance about legal, corporate and financial duties, leadership and management skills, and facilitating co-operation between co-operatives for mutual support and shared services.

A key characteristic of Co-operatives is that they are member/user organizations. The members are represented on the management committees or boards of directors which

conduct their co-operatives' business affairs and are involved in monitoring the performance of the housing projects and services, including the upkeep of estates or apartment buildings.

The operation of district/area co-operative housing societies, comprising networks of the member/residents in local co-operative housing developments, provides the means to avoid duplication of organisational and overhead costs, pools resources for engagement of staff and facilitates good performance standards for estate management and maintenance.

3.4.5 Simon

Simon and the Simon Community are best known for their work with the homeless sector working with 3,346 service users in 2006 and their mission is embodied in a National Strategy titled *Ending Homelessness - Creating Homes (2006).* The first Simon Community in Ireland was set up by students from Trinity College and University College Dublin in 1969, after a talk by Wallich-Clifford on the Irish homeless in Britain. The Simon Communities of Ireland is based on an affiliation agreement between the eight independent Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West, and the South East.

They work on developing and testing effective ways of reducing the number of people becoming homeless and carry out campaigning on effecting changes in economic and social policy in Ireland that will contribute to the elimination of homelessness and its causes. Another aspect to their work is in enabling the people who come in contact with their services and projects to move as soon as possible to an appropriate place they can call home.

3.4.6 The Iveagh Trust

The Iveagh Trust is a provider of affordable housing in and around Dublin, Ireland. It was initially a component of the Guinness Trust, founded in 1890 by Edward Guinness, 1st Earl of Iveagh, great-grandson of the founder of the Guinness Brewery, to help

homeless people in Dublin and London. It is not otherwise related to the brewery company.

The Guinness Trust extended its objectives outside London in 1962 and today operates in all parts of England as a member of the Guinness Partnership, a group of housing associations. However, the Iveagh Trust became a separate organisation in 1903 with responsibility for activities in Ireland. It was given a statutory legal basis by the "Dublin Improvement (Bull Alley Area) Act" of 1903. Today it is run as a charity under Irish law and liaises with such bodies as Dublin City Council and the Homeless Agency.

In more recent times new estates have been acquired by the Trust in Swords and Finglas, and a home for the elderly at Mount Anthony in south Dublin. Unlike Dublin City Council's housing list based on need, the trust has aimed to create mixed communities with smaller numbers. Each estate has a resident caretaker and a formal system of elected tenants' councils to advise of complaints or problems. The Trust also runs the Iveagh Hostel in central Dublin for homeless men, providing basic accommodation, meals and such facilities as a gym and a computer room. The original 508 cubicles have been converted to 195 bedrooms.

3.5 Conclusion

Home ownership is still strongly pursued as one of the main components of government policy and there are specific actions and targeted interventions to increase access to housing for first-time buyers. In this regard, the government has approved the sale of local authority flats to their tenants as well as schemes to allow tenants of voluntary housing association accommodation to purchase their homes and social housing tenants to purchase a portion of their house at the allocation stage and to increase this portion over time.

The Irish housing association sector has a long history of providing accommodation for people unable to procure suitable private sector accommodation for themselves. As examined in this chapter, the modern housing association movement emerged mainly from philanthropic housing organizations, which pioneered new ways of

addressing the housing problems of Ireland's mainly working class. More modern housing associations primarily focus on the niche of providing housing and other services for people with particular needs and older people. These newer housing associations are divided into two groupings, with one being a very small number of large housing associations and the other being a large number of very small housing associations.

The Irish Council for Social Housing, which is the umbrella group representing voluntary housing associations, advocate an increase in housing association activity and their website releases press statements on almost a monthly basis as to how this might benefit the economy as a whole. National policy changes from the late 1980s onwards have aimed to encourage growth of housing associations, however market conditions, lack of land opportunities, and the state of the public finances are all significant features to factor into any equation to project where housing associations may go over the coming years. Nevertheless, as housing associations currently develop their role as providers of housing for special needs groups, expand their provision of general needs housing, work closely with the local authorities, they can make an increasingly significant contribution to the provision of social housing in the Republic of Ireland.

CHAPTER 4: NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITYSECTOR

4.1 Introduction

An initial assumption for this thesis was that if a professional housing identity existed in the Republic of Ireland, the individuals who exhibited this identity would be in the main, located within the local authority sector. This assumption was based on the premise that the local authorities are the main providers of social housing and hence employers of housing professionals. Reinforcing this view is the fact that there is now a specific job title of Director of Services for Housing (and Community, in some local authorities).

In order to understand the responses of individuals when questioned about the existence of a housing profession it is helpful to understand and contextualise the location where the majority of them worked, namely the local authority. These local authorities are organisations which fall under the remit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG), who are in turn charged with implementing government policy. The Irish system of governmental department structures also differs from many other EU countries and this chapter is prefaced by a short discussion of the key features of the DoEHLG in the Republic.

The chapter gives an overview of the local authority structure in Ireland and how it operates, particularly in light of the developments around New Public Management (NPM) and the influence of neoliberalism. It goes on to identify the main barriers which have impeded local authorities from developing a "professional" housing management service and in turn a professional housing identity among housing workers and considers how the obstacles to reform might be overcome. In doing so, the bureaucratic nature of the local authority system is highlighted and offered as a main reason for the lack of development of a career pathway in housing. The role of the housing manager (or lack of), within the local authority is raised and the emergence of a professional housing identity is seen as a tangible possibility which is stifled by the difficulty within the local authority in moving to a new way of working, culture and ethos.

4.2 The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the context for housing workers

Throughout the 20th Century, the state, both local and central, has played an important role in addressing social need through the provision of public services and infrastructure such as planning, social housing, waste services, transport etc. (Kirby 1982). However, the role of the state has changed considerably over the last three decades in both the United States and Western Europe. During the 1980s and 1990s, the role and form of the state and public services underwent a considerable transformation under neoliberalism. Brenner and Theodore (2002) argue that many public services and state enterprises were privatised as governments and state agencies concentrated on enabling and promoting the private sector to the detriment of state services. In the last two decades, these neoliberal policies have been pursued to greater or lesser degrees in cities across the world depending on the extent to which the local state has embraced the new order.

The history of state intervention in the area of social housing is tied to issues such as poverty and public health problems, which coincided with poor housing conditions. In Ireland, social unrest was another factor, particularly in the case of rural housing provision. Fahey (2001) argues that the origins of local authority housing in Ireland were a side effect of agrarian agitation and land reform in the late nineteenth century. In addition to this he argues that concern with public health was a factor in providing rural housing and inspections of the living conditions of agricultural labourers revealed poor living conditions which contributed to ill health.

Currently in the Republic of Ireland the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government delivers the vast majority of housing services and maintains links with a number of other Government Departments in relation to housing matters. At an operational level, many of the areas of responsibility and provision of services are delivered through the local authority structure with the local authority having its own layers of bureaucratic administration. However, policy decisions and funding for most of these services are centrally determined in the DoEHLG, leaving relatively little freedom of action to local authority management. As a result, local government has evolved into a highly bureaucratic mechanism for the delivery of a narrow range of

centrally directed services, with little role in policy formation or integrated, locally determined responses to local issues.

Social housing in Ireland is provided by the voluntary housing association sector (as outlined in a previous chapter) and by the local authorities. The local authorities have provided social housing in Ireland since the late 1880s and in that time have built approximately 300,000 dwellings. It is mainly since the early 1990s local authority output has been supplemented by additional providers from voluntary bodies, housing cooperatives and housing associations who in turn manage some 10,000 social rented dwellings (Brooke, 2001). The mechanism and relationship between the local authority and the voluntary housing associations is discussed in the previous chapter.

4.3 The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government – Functions and responsibilities

According to the mission statement of 2007, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) has responsibility for the quality of the environment in which we live, for housing and other infrastructure, for physical and spatial planning, and for local government. Their mission is to promote sustainable development and improve the quality of life through protection of the environment and heritage, infrastructure provision, balanced regional development and good local government. Within this brief the area of housing is also covered although a point raised by some interviewed was that housing is not named specifically in the title of the Department and hence possible inferences at the level of importance might be drawn from this.

The DoEHLG delivers the vast majority of housing services through the local authority structure and a limited range of services are provided directly to the public including grants towards the renovation and repair of thatched roofs. In terms of measuring the performance of the DOEHLG, the objectives, strategies and the indicators used to measure performance are aligned to policy statements and documents such as the *Programme for Government,* the *National Development Plan 2007–2013, Towards 2016* and other national strategies, which cut across the whole Government. The Department has lead responsibility for ensuring the implementation

of a number of key national strategies, such as, the housing policy statement *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* , a renewed *National Sustainable Development Strategy* and *National Biodiversity Plan, the National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2012, the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020.*

Coupled with this the Department maintains links with a number of other Government Departments in relation to housing matters, particularly with the Department of Finance as regards taxation treatment of housing, e.g. mortgage interest relief, stamp duty on housing etc.; Central Bank on mortgage finance; Department of Social and Family Affairs on income supports for housing through the Supplementary Welfare Allowances Scheme; Department of Health and Children on the care and support for special category needs such as elderly or disabled people; and Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform on general issues regarding Travellers, landlord and tenant matters, property services and programme refugees.

Finally, the DoEHLG also oversees the operation of the local government system and implements policy in relation to local government structures, functions, human resources and financing. This remit covers a range of institutions with local government in Ireland consisting of a number of local and regional authorities at three levels. There are:

- at county/city level: 29 County Councils, five City Councils, five Borough Councils and 75 Town Councils
- at regional level: eight Regional Authorities co-ordinate some of the county/city and sub-county activities; they play a monitoring role in relation to the use of EU structural funds;
- two regional authorities, known as Regional assemblies were established in July 1999 under new structures for regionalisation.

Clearly there are a high number of institutions and authorities involved in the operation of local government. Consequently, the professionalizing of the local authority housing service, by requiring all staff to possess specialist qualifications may appear impractical. This view can be seen as particularly unfeasible in view of the small size and dispersed nature of the housing stock. It would also create a precedent for other areas to demand similar professionalism and training and therefore

lead to increasing demands and diffusion of the centralised system. County councils own 1,500 dwellings on average, which some could argue, indicates their housing departments are too small to provide a viable career path for specialist housing managers. However, the modest Irish housing association sector seems to have overcome this issue and offers specific employment opportunities for housing professionals.

Within the local authority sector there are further layers of bureaucratic administration. The elected council is the policy-making arm of the local authority, who act by what are termed 'reserved functions'. Reserved functions are defined by law and specified across a whole range of enactments. These comprise mainly decisions on important matters of policy and finance (e.g. adoption of annual budget, development plan, bye-laws). The day-to-day management of the local authority, including staffing matters, is vested in a full time chief executive, known as the county or city manager. The manager and/or staff to whom functions are delegated discharge what are termed 'executive functions'. In effect these involve the day-to-day running of the authority within the policy parameters as determined by the council. They have responsibility for a narrow range of services, relating principally to physical infrastructure (roads, water and sanitation, public lighting and housing). They have no role in policing, public transport or personal social services, and very little in health and education (in contrast with local authorities in most other countries). In fulfilling their mandate the DoEHLG outlines core values which they expect the local authority to adhere to and these include: integrity and professionalism, openness and transparency, flexibility, responsiveness and pursuit of efficiency, value for money and consultation and partnership (DoEHLG, 2009). However, as most policy decisions and funding for these services are centrally determined, there is relatively little freedom of action to local authority management. As a result, local government has evolved into a highly bureaucratic mechanism for the delivery of a narrow range of centrally directed services, with little role in policy formation or integrated, community-based responses to local issues.

In terms of housing, the DoEHLG has provided social housing through the local authorities in Ireland for upwards of 100 years with approximately 300,000 dwellings built. Since the early 1990s local authority output has been supplemented by that of

additional providers from voluntary bodies, housing cooperatives and housing associations. Social housing in Ireland exhibits a number of distinctive historical and contemporary characteristics, which distinguish it within the wider Irish housing system and from social housing in other EU member states. Domestically, it has always been a minority tenure and it currently represents fewer than ten per cent of the total housing stock in an overall housing system dominated by owner-occupation. The underdevelopment of social housing as a fully fledged tenure is in part a function of the contribution it has made to expanding owner occupation rates in Ireland. In Ireland, social housing has always been targeted at the poorest households and was never understood as fulfilling a broadly-based mass housing role. According to Fraser (1996) even before the country seceded from the United Kingdom in 1922, Irish local authorities tended to charge much lower rents than their British counterparts. This tradition of low rents was copper fastened by the 1966 Housing Act, which obliges local authorities to levy rents on the basis of tenants' ability to pay. This arrangement also means that, once their incomes rise, many households take the decision to purchase their homes once their incomes rise. Since the mid-1980s this emphasis on selecting only the poorest households has been compounded by the effects of the tenant purchase policy of schemes to encourage tenants to surrender their dwellings and move to the private sector. More recently there has been some attempt at encouraging tenants to remain living on estates on a long term basis and Part V of the Planning Act 2000 was a direct attempt to create integrated estates encompassing private and social residents. The success of this initiative is still being evaluated.

4.4 Understanding New Public Management

The 1980s witnessed a renewal of emphasis on reforming the management structures and processes of most Western states. These reforms are said to be part of a revolutionary change in public administration that involves a 'paradigm shift' from the Weberian model of bureaucracy, dominant for the most of the century to the "new public management" or the "new managerialism"(Saint-Martin 1998:319). The reasons behind the shift are many and centre on the criticism of administrative bureaucracies internationally, poor working methods, lack of in-house professional and managerial skills, and low efficiency and effectiveness (Power, 1997). The reforms took part within the wider context of changes associated with neoliberalism.

The term refers to economic policies based on neoclassical theories of economics that minimizes the role of the state and maximizes the private business sector. The term is often used to criticise the policies of modern governments and international economic agencies like the OECD. Neoliberalism encompasses social, cultural, and political practices and policies that use the language of performativity, efficiency, consumerism and individuality to shift risk from governments and transnational corporations onto individuals.

Harvey`s work (2005) describes neoliberalism as a system that benefits the few at the expense of many. It has resulted in what Harvey (2005) calls "accumulation by dispossession" or the upward redistribution of wealth by dispossessing those at lower income levels. Harvey (2005) outlines how these class distinctions and socio-economic divisions are developed through four practices. These are privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions. An understanding of each of these practices gives an underpinning to the changes which have occurred in housing provision in Ireland over recent years but it is also useful to incorporate the role of New Public Management (NPM) when exploring the functioning and operations of the local authorities.

New Public Management can be defined briefly as the assumption that 'better management will provide an effective solvent to a wide range of social and economic ills' (Pollitt, 1993:1). NPM culture gave greater accountability for results and responsiveness of administrative actors (agents) to political principals. NPM offered an alternative service delivery mechanisms, including quasimarkets with public and private service providers competing for public resources and was seen to have as its core assumptions the "running of government like a business", using the market, or approximations as the ideal mechanism for allocation and seeing citizens as consumers (Pollitt, 1993:40).

NPM, compared to other public management theories, was more oriented towards outcomes and efficiency through better management of public budget. It addressed beneficiaries of public services much like customers, and conversely citizens as shareholders and this was a major shift for local authorities in particular, a point which is developed later in this chapter.

Power saw NPM as being

> Cost control, financial transparency, the atomization of organisational sub units, the decentralisation of management autonomy, the creation of market and quasi-market mechanisms separating purchasing and providing functions of their linkage via contracts and enhancement of accountability to customers for the quality of service via creation of performance indicators (1997:43)

In understanding the impact of NPM on government administration more fully, the work of Pollitt and Bouckaert (1992) is helpful as they surveyed the measures adopted by 12 government administrations and examined the particular combination of measures adopted by each. They found that NPM led to a tightening of traditional controls with restricted expenditures, a freeze on new hiring, and campaigns against waste and corruption. The administrative system was modernised and saw the adoption of faster, more flexible ways of budgeting, managing, accounting, and delivering services to their users. The system was also marketized so that public sector organisations had to compete with each other, in order to increase efficiency and user responsiveness. This represented a penetration of the administrative system by the culture, values and practices of the market. Some writers have called this the 'hollowing-out' of the state machine as public administration has itself been 'hollowed-out' with the locus of bureaucracy taken away from the middle layers and pushed to the top and the bottom (Farrell and Morris, 1993:31).

4.5 Where is NPM now?

Until recently, NPM was largely seen as a developed country, particularly Anglo-Saxon, phenomenon. The 1990s particularly saw applications of variants of NPM techniques and practices in some developing and transitional economies. Elements included management decentralization within public services, downsizing, performance contracting, contracting out and user charges.

NPM reforms have been driven by a combination of economic, social-political and technological factors. A common feature of countries going down the NPM route has been the experience of economic and fiscal crises, which triggered the quest for efficiency and for ways to cut the cost of delivering public services. The crisis of the welfare state led to questions about the role and institutional character of the state. In

the case of most developing countries, reforms in public administration and management have been driven more by external pressures and have taken place in the context of structural adjustment programmes. Other drivers of NPM-type reforms include the ascendancy of neoliberal ideas from the late 1970s, the development of information technology, and the growth and use of international management consultants as advisors on reforms. Additional factors, in the case of developing countries, include lending conditionalities and the increasing emphasis on good governance (Larbi, 1999).

While the adoption of these NPM practices seems to have been beneficial in some cases (e.g., cost savings in contracting out road maintenance in some African countries and in Brazil), there are both potential for and real limitations to applying some elements in crisis states. The limited experience of NPM in such states suggests that there are institutional and other problems whose persistence may be binding constraints on implementation. The capacity concerns include the ability to manage a network of contracts, the development of monitoring and reporting systems, and the difficult governance and institutional environment which may constrain implementation. There are similar critiques of NPM in capitalist societies like Ireland and the UK which highlight similar institutional and structural issues. (Exworthy and Halford, 1999; Laffin and Entwistle, 2000).

Some authors say NPM has peaked and is now in decline (Hughes, 2003). Critics like Dunleavy (2006) now proclaim that NPM is 'dead' and argue that the cutting edge of change has moved on to digital era governance focusing on reintegrating concerns into government control, holistic (or joined-up) government and digitalization (exploiting the Web and digital storage and communication within government). Others call this a new version of globalisation with NPM. In the UK and US, NPM has been challenged since the turn of the century by a range of related critiques such as Third Way thinking (Giddens, 2005) and particularly the rise of ideas associated with Public Value Theory, which was developed by the Kennedy Business School and the Warwick Business School. This theory has re-asserted a focus on citizenship, networked governance and the role of public agencies in working with citizens to co-create public value, generate democratic authorisation, legitimacy and trust, and stress the domains within which public managers are working as complex adaptive systems

with characteristics which are qualitatively different from simple market forms, or private sector business principles. Whether the NPM phase has fully passed or not, it still had a significant impact on how local government in Ireland operated and its legacy is helpful in understanding some of the constraints within which housing workers operate.

4.6 Reviewing the Performance of the DoEHLG

Performance of the local authority sector received little if any attention until the 1990s when it attracted attention for a variety of reasons (Norris, 2001). There was a shortfall in funding (mainly from rental incomes) to fund an increasing demand for the maintenance of housing, coupled with growing problems of anti-social behaviour and an air of dissatisfaction among tenants (Fahey, 1999). Anecdotal evidence suggests that there was a high level of turnover in housing departments, with personal stress being a major factor and a period in housing was normally rather short in duration. For many however, this period was seen as a stepping stone to promotion to a sector other than housing.

The introduction of NPM was particularly evident in documentation such as *Delivering Better Government* (1996) as it was written by seven departmental secretaries and two other senior civil servants who had been influenced by the experiences of New Zealand and Australia and by international organizations such as the OECD and World Bank (Pollitt, 2003:376). Higher levels of accountability were introduced as seen when the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) which was launched in 1994, and brought in systems such as Quality Customer Service, Customer Service Charters, Regulatory Impact Analysis (RIA), a Management Information Framework (MIF), a Performance Management Development System (PMDS), Value for Money Evaluations and Output Statements, to name but a few.

Literature on this area (O Connell 2001, Galligan 2001, Norris 2003, Kirby and O Brion 2006), is helpful in understanding the need for a new way of operating the system as they discuss the problems and challenges which the system has experienced. The literature highlights other significant policy documents, such as *A Plan for Social Housing* (1991) and *Better Local Government* (1996) which attempt to

reform how the DoEHLG and local authorities operate. O Connell (1998) discusses the targeted reform, which emphasises the need to change the traditional relationship between central and local government, with less emphasis on auditing the activities of local authorities and more emphasis on providing in-depth guidance for housing departments on operational issues. Although the housing legislation had clearly vested responsibility for the management of the public rented stock with local authorities themselves, traditionally the Department had played a strong, but narrow, supervisory role over local government (Daly 1997). Hence on paper there was a clear aspiration to have a more defined strategic management system in place. The attention to detail was welcomed at some levels and as Boyle (2004) states:

> What has been, termed 'the new public management' is sweeping the globe…In some ways, *Delivering Better Government* brings Ireland into line with such developments. However, the Irish programme of change can also be seen as an advance on international practice…In particular, strategic management is an issue with which many other countries are only beginning to come to terms. (2004:4)

Others like the OECD were less complimentary and stated that:

> The reforms…have not been effective enough…Public Service has created the necessary building blocks to *manage* performance, but they have not…ensured that the indicators and measures produced within these frameworks *meaningfully reflect outputs*. While it is true that the reforms are still relatively new, the next set of reforms should renew focus on certain aspects of capacity, performance and governance which include 1) **coherence**: making reforms more mutually supportive and consistent…; 2) **implementation**: moving the focus from process to content; and 3) **agility**: ensuring that the Public Service is more responsive and efficient. The result is that reform efforts are increasingly *ad hoc* and in danger of incoherence. (2008, unpublished draft, emphasis original).

Another feature of policy documents (in particular *BLG*) stressed the need for extra funding to be provided for staff training and education, and for research within local authority housing departments to enable them to perform their traditional and new housing functions more effectively. This in turn would require a longer spell in a particular section, in this case housing, and less mobility between sections overall. The extent of mobility within and between Departments depends on the value placed on such initiatives by senior management in each organisation and the extent to which a pro-active approach is adopted. Nevertheless and on balance mobility is actively encouraged and the DoE point out:

> It should however, be noted that job changes, whether permanent or temporary, are seen to be highly beneficial both from a management and staff perspective, provided that mobility takes place within the context of an overall system of career planning associated with performance management. (DoE Guidance Document, 2001:21)

Feedback from those interviewed highlighted the difficulties which this mobility can pose in the day-to-day operation of a section. When the loss of on-the-job knowledge and sustained customer relationships was raised within some local authorities, the feeling was that people had to live with the situation as mobility is what the organisational structure and the DoE encouraged. It is surprising therefore to find the following commentary in the guidance document mentioned above:

> In general, while an active mobility policy does raise a number of difficulties, in particular in relation to specialist posts and structures, it should not be the case that because of the nature or area of their work, that staff lose out on opportunities to gain a broader range of experience, thereby enhancing their promotion prospects. Departments have to plan for the replacement of such specialist staff as part of their overall career-planning strategy and a more extensive use of overlap periods may be desirable. (DoE Guidance Document 2001:21)

In summary, through the impact of NPM and the resulting policy documentation, it was hoped that a change in relationship between central and local government and staff training would lead to services which had been delivered through highly bureaucratized procedures, which placed an emphasis on punctilious administration, being delivered in a more effective manner. As one author notes,

> The ethos [within the local authority] has been facilitated and reinforced by a staffing system that values non-specialization and generalist administrative skills over professionalisation and technical specialization. The generalist nature of the wider public service staffing system at the local level creates mobility between strands of the public sector such as health boards, vocational educational committees and local authorities in pursuit of wider experience and promotional opportunities. Though it is difficult to assess the impact of such movement and non specialization on housing management practices, many staff feel that it has stifled the emergence of a professional approach to housing management, especially in larger urban local authorities. (O Connell, 2001: 68)

4.7 Neglected Management Issues

While the issues of the relationship between central and local government including staff training issues have been addressed in terms of policy documents, the question of management has until recently been a largely neglected aspect of the local authority policy and practice in the housing sector. For most of the period since its establishment in the late nineteenth century, the issue of the management of the local authority housing service, which accommodates some 90 per cent of social renting households in the Republic of Ireland, has been almost entirely ignored (Brooke, 2001). Before the 1990s, the concept of housing management was largely absent from the local authority repertoire. This is in sharp contrast with the situation in Northern Ireland, where housing management was a core concern since the early 1970s. However, recent trends and some departmental policy documents have brought this deficiency into sharper focus and central government expectations of better value for money and improved management performance within the public sector more generally have further spurred critical commentary and interest in this issue.

> The sector in the Republic was administered rather than managed, with far greater energy devoted to matters of routine administration and the implementation of central government policies than to reflection on best practice. (O Connell, 2001:153)

From the perspective of central government, housing production and output rather than management, has traditionally been the overriding concern. The agencies responsible for the provision of social housing have devoted scant attention to its management partly due to historical factors. For the local authorities, the introduction of schemes to allow tenants to purchase their dwellings following the 1936 Labourers Act in rural areas and the 1966 Housing Act in urban areas rendered management a virtual non-issue (Fahey, 1998). The high rate of privatization required only limited management capacity from housing departments, whose responsibilities have historically not gone far beyond allocating new dwellings and collecting the rent for the couple of years before tenants exercise their right to buy. Over the past three decades, this situation has changed and local authorities and central government have begun to devote more attention to housing management. To a significant extent their changing emphasis in this regard is reflective of the factors that have predicated a similar growth in interest in social housing management among policy-makers across

Western Europe (Clapham, 1997). In the Republic of Ireland the growth of social problems associated with the residualization of the local authority rented tenure has added impetus to the drive for the reform of housing management (Nolan and Whelan, 1999). In addition, a range of programmes for the reform of public services more broadly have been instituted since the mid-1990s with the impact of policies related to NPM and under the auspices of the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI). As a result, Department of the Environment and Local Government (DoEHLG) policy statements on housing, beginning with *A Plan for Social Housing* (1991), have repeatedly called on local authorities to change their traditional practices so that they can meet the new challenges of housing management and keep in step with this wider reform process.

A key attempted reform in housing management was the requirement that local authorities produce statements of policy on housing management in the 1992 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act. The publication of the associated DoE (1993) memorandum on the preparation of these statements, was the first indication that the extent of strategic management within the housing service had become an issue of concern for central government. The introductory section of the memorandum sets out a range of weaknesses, which the Department considered were then common in strategic management practice in housing departments. The memorandum, which had a brief section headed 'Areas of Concern', highlighted that there was too much focus on day-to-day operations and insufficient long and medium-term planning and management activity was uncoordinated and paid too little attention to the combined impact of activities on estates. The local authority tended to focus solely on reducing expenditure rather than on getting better value for money.

> Overall there are indications that resources are not being put to best use in the management of local authority housing, the stock is not adequately managed, tenants are often dissatisfied or alienated, dwellings are being allowed to run down through poor maintenance and demands are growing for Exchequer funding for the refurbishment of rundown and problem estates. (Department of Environment, 1993:7)

In order to rectify these problems the memorandum required local authorities to produce housing management policy statements which were to include a description of the authority's rented stock and details of its objectives for the management of

these dwellings, the general strategies and specific techniques to be employed in the attainment of these objectives and the arrangements for monitoring and assessment of performance in this regard. While the production of these statements was required, the availability of the necessary people with managerial skills and in-depth knowledge of housing issues was not addressed.

> The underlying adherence to a bureaucratic model of service delivery militated against the development of specialist skills and functions in areas such as housing management (O Connell, 2001:158)

Many of the statements were compiled by people with little housing or management training but the response by local authorities to the demand for strategic policy statements went a good way towards fulfilling the Department's poor view of their management capabilities. However, Redmond and Walker's (1995) analysis of these statements concludes that they failed to meet the aims and objectives demanded of them on a range of grounds. They point out that the documents are largely descriptive rather than analytical in that they summarize the key features of the service rather than identify their shortcomings and the plans they propose for improving service quality are lacking in detail, and are largely aspirational, with scant consideration as to how the proposed reforms are to be achieved. The agenda for reform of strategic management in housing departments was broadened by the establishment of the Housing Management Group by the DoE in 1996. Its two reports (1996, 1998) clearly set out the key steps which should be implemented in order to improve the practical aspects of housing management. These include: better coordination of the different housing management functions; a stronger focus on estates; stricter enforcement of tenancy agreements; better maintenance service; better monitoring of rent collection and arrears; and more communication with tenants. Key to this improvement was also the need for training and professional development of staff with recommendations including performance indicators and inter-agency co-operation for staff training. In common with most other official reports on public administration in Ireland, the Housing Management Group reports are not supported by any research on practice. The reports themselves were short (only 38 and 24 pages) so that topics were outlined rather than analysed in depth. However, the reports are supported by the small amount of empirical research on local authority housing in Ireland which has been carried out to date, by Fahey, who concludes that

> No major aspect of good practice in housing management was identified in the present study that was not covered in some way or other in the guidelines [of the Housing Management Group], and no major element of the guidelines was found to be irrelevant to the circumstances in the study(1999: 225).

The above overview has suggested that a progressive agenda for the reform of the strategic management of the local authority housing service has been clearly set out in the DoE's 1993 Memorandum on the Statements of Policy on housing management and in the reports of the Housing Management Group. This progressive agenda for reform was further emphasised in *Better Local Government* (1996). Whether the reform has been successful or not is still a matter of opinion as discussed at the start of this chapter.

However, the views of those interviewed and the available anecdotal evidence from the field indicates that these recommendations have had only a limited impact on practice. While there have been detailed documents on the measurement of performance, such as PMDS, there also has been a dearth of detailed guidelines on the implementation of housing management reform, a lack of funding and a lack of change to the structure of local authorities. These factors combined with the relationship between central and local government and staff training issues, can be suggested as elements in understanding why a clear professional housing identity has not emerged (an issue that is explored further in later chapters). One example which highlight this is that PMDS requires three per cent of the local authority budget to be spent on staff development. However it does not specify the type of training and according to the Local Government Management Services Board (LGMSB), a significant part of this budget is targeted at legal training for staff who are involved in tenant court cases (LGMSB, 2006).

When looking at housing management, other housing researchers have claimed that the reforms were not successful due to the nature of housing management itself. Housing management is only a minor player within the hierarchy of the professions and falls short in two areas. First, it is not regarded as having either the 'technicality' (grounded in a discrete domain of knowledge) or the 'indeterminacy' (located in the exercise of professional judgement) levels of other more established professions

(Jamous and Peloille, 1970). Rather, as Williams and Provan (1991) have pointed out, the term 'housing management' describes an administrative process that involves the application of rules and procedures to allocate dwellings and collect rents rather a unique 'stock of knowledge' which requires a degree of specialism (Berger and Luckmann, 1967).

If this is the case, and housing workers are more likely to be seen as administrators, their status should have been enhanced by the change towards a more standardized structure. In this respect, some progress on creating this more uniformed structure within the local authority system was made in the commonly known area of "admin/technical divide". Here it was attempted to abolish the division between administrative and technical grades in the policy detailed in *Better Local Government* (1996) but some would say with limited success. Interviewees were, for the most part, adamant that this segregation still exists and this has been echoed in the literature on this reform.

> It is only very recently that these differentials between administrative officers and the professional grades have been addressed and housing management is still constrained by an overall lack of recognition as a specialist activity within the local authority system. (O Connell, 2001: 158)

The nature of housing management work is thus perceived as generic (Furbey *et al.*, 2001) and the know-how that is 'required' to 'do the job' has been described as 'common sense' rather than 'specialist' (Clapham, Franklin and Saugeres, 1997; Furbey *et al.*, 2001). This echoes much of what those interviewed had to say in terms of the need to be actually carrying out the functions of housing rather than just having the knowledge of the area. They highlighted how housing has not got a clear professional status definition or knowledge base. This lack of an exclusive and definable knowledge base, and therefore a clear idea of where its boundaries lie, has undermined 'the professional project' of housing management because it has also inhibited the emergence of a collective identity (Clapham, 1997). O Connell (2001: 158) suggests that

> one of the consequences of the precedence accorded to architects and engineers in local authority housing has been an excessive focus on the bricks and mortar aspects of local authority housing and a neglect of estate management and community development strategies.

In comparison with the Republic of Ireland, even though the situation regarding the status of housing workers in the UK has improved substantially since the 1980s, the same lack of an exclusive knowledge base historically resulted in the absence of 'housing departments' within UK local authorities. This in turn, left housing management without an institutional base from which it could establish itself as a profession with associated education and training programmes based on a distinctive knowledge base (Williams and Provan, 1991). Furthermore, the low levels of membership of the 'professional body' in the UK, the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), reflect the fact that the possession of membership is not necessary to gain employment in housing. Similarly, it could be argued that a lack of clearly defined guidelines for housing departments within Irish local authorities and a disregard for the accumulation of knowledge through a promotional system has encouraged career advancement based on a grade structure rather than one of a specialist knowledge accumulation. This aspect however needs a more detailed examination of staff development within the local authority structure to fully understand the impact on the lack of development of a professional housing identity.

4.8 Staff Development

A possible structural constraint in the development of a professional housing identity is the role of human resource management policy in the improvement of housing management practice. Redmond and Walker's (1995) analysis of the housing management statements attribute poor practice in this area primarily to the lack of professionalism in housing departments, which results from the staffing structure which operates in local authorities. This staffing structure historically is founded on a grade system whereby one joins the system at a particular grade, which is usually assigned a numerical value, and through a system of interviews on general local government issues and length of service in the job, are promoted up the ladder of grades.

Under the Civil Service Commissioners Act, 1956, the vast majority of recruitment to the Civil Service is generic and is carried out by the Civil Service Commission (CSC). Their guidelines are generic to the Civil Service with little attention being paid to the

specifics of the job which the grade will be involved with. In very general terms the ethos of the grade system is to provide the individual with a range of experiences in different functional areas of the service, while not taking full cognisance that the individual may want to be promoted and gain more in depth knowledge within just one area of the service. *Delivering Better Government* (1996), recommended some changes to the grade system by having improved planning mechanisms and more co-ordination between Departments and the CSC to ensure a more efficient service. In particular *Delivering Better Government* highlighted that consideration should also be given to a candidate's skills, experience and preferred location in making placements. While this is what the recommendation states, in practice the onus is largely on individual departments to optimise their relationship with the Commission in order to ensure that as much information as possible is provided in relation to vacancies.

While there are different opinions (some of which are discussed in the later chapter on housing) on the value of specialising as opposed to having general experience across the grade system, the policy of the DoEHLG clearly comes down on the side of the latter. Mobility is actively encouraged and is deemed more significant than being a specialist. Mobility within government departmental structure implies lateral mobility, as mobility by way of promotion is considered separately. The issue of staff mobility is multi-faceted and encompasses movement:

- within the Department or Office;
- across the Civil Service;
- within the wider Public Service;
- between the Civil Service and the private sector;
- between the Civil Service and other national administrations.

To illustrate this point, one example of how human resource management and the grade system may have functioned differently is that of the case of tenant participation on local authority estates which required significant manpower on estates which was not supported by adequate training and funding (Fahey, 1999).

Historically, the system of income-related rents, established by the 1966 Housing Act, meant that rental income for local authorities often fell below management and maintenance costs and local authorities were reliant on central government to fund many core housing services such as refurbishment. Consequently their potential for

creativity or innovation in management was historically constrained (Lord Mayor's Commission on Housing, 1993). As already discussed, the policy and financial aspects of local authority housing have been highly centralised in the Department of the Environment and Local Government and their monitoring and inspection are detailed and rigorous. In dealing with problem estates, local management often found it easier to negotiate relatively large capital sums for physical refurbishment, because they adhered to the traditional departmental guidelines, rather than securing smaller sums to fund innovative management approaches to solving problems on estates or improving services through experimental pilot projects.

During the 1990s, as the facilitation of tenant participation in the management of estates became fashionable, several authorities expanded their tenant participation services through the redeployment of staff whose former positions (for the most part rent collectors) had become redundant. The redeployment of staff was a numerical exercise as it was seen that a particular number of rent collectors were no longer needed but a similar number of people were required for the new initiative in tenant participation. Hence this decision for re deployment of staff who were surplus to requirement in a particular area raises the issue of whether these officials were always suitable for the many challenges of, in this case, working with tenant groups. Furthermore, the staff themselves, who was moved into this area, may have seen themselves as moving out of the mainstream staffing structure and possible routes to promotion. Without the supporting training and funding for external courses, many of the individuals experienced high levels of burn out and stress. In 2002, Respond! Housing Association ran a series of workshops to address the needs of housing staff in local authorities and the main focus of these workshops was to give the participants the skills and training to conduct public meetings.

> Holding the tenant participation meetings was like throwing the lambs to the wolves. One day I was sitting there behind my desk dealing with planning requests for extension to properties and sorting out rent calculations ….the next day I was being screamed at by 100 angry residents in a community building because they felt let down by the council ….and now I was the face of that council. *(Matthew-Local authority)*

While there are best practice guidelines available on housing management, estate based work and housing professionalism, they are of limited value when there are

fundamental impediments to the adoption of these good practice guidelines. Fahey (1999: 256) highlights possible impediments as being

> inadequate mechanisms for staff training, career structures and promotion systems which inhibit the development of professionalism in housing management, industrial relations difficulties and lack of co-operation with other agencies. Little by way of searching examination of these factors has been undertaken and, to the extent that they amount to real obstacles to change, little systematic guidance has been provided on how they might be overcome. (1999: 256)

He goes to say that:

> Further work on good practice in local authority housing management, therefore, as well as elaborating the details of good practice, should devote extensive attention to the structures and operations of local authorities (including their relations to central government), the impediments to change in management practices which these give rise to, and the reforms which might be adopted to overcome these impediments. (Fahey, 1999: 256)

Hence while it might be seen as very harsh on individuals who are redeployed into areas which are outside their comfort zone, if the structure for staff development and education is not in place then wider questions need be asked about the impediments to reform and how might these be addressed (Fahey, 1999).

In tandem with the increased focus on tenant participation in the 1990s, *BLG* saw the appointment of a new level of senior managers (known as Directors of Service) in local authorities with responsibility for managing a specific local government function, and developing and implementing a local policy on this area in conjunction with a Strategic Policy Committee (SPC). In the housing service the appointment of these Directors, together with the introduction of the other new middle management grades also announced in this policy statement, gave the impression that strategic management issues could be resolved by providing staff who wish to specialize in housing management with a career path, while retaining the option of working in other departments if they wish. A new HR Strategy was commenced and there was a strong commitment to staff learning and maximisation of individual capability. The DoEHLG recognised that, given their extensive policy and legislative functions and their need for specialist scientific and technological expertise, staff had to be supported in their ongoing development and learning. In line with this, a continuing strong focus on consultation through the formal staff/management structures and

internal communications was hoped to ensure that the Department remained a well-connected and dynamic organisation.

Again, while the aspirations for specialist staff might have been evident, the practical changes to support this aspiration lagged behind. Departments were asked to produce Training Strategies in April 2001 as part of the monitoring of performance (PMDS). Commitments in the area of training and development agreed at Civil Service level were to be translated into Department specific performance indicators and included in the Strategy. In devising training strategies, an emphasis was to be placed on ensuring that the skill requirements of the Department were being met. While, this required carrying out a training needs-analysis to determine the specific requirements of each organisation, the DoEHLG noted that a substantial training input would be required in all Departments to ensure the effective implementation key initiatives (DoEHLG, 2002). This training was targeted at particular skill attainment in the area of IT, PMDS, and financial management but little if any mention was given to a wider holistic package of academic and applied education. Particular skill attainment could be measured and included in reports on performance indicators, whereas the "softer" skills like personal development, communications and teaching staff how to be reflective, were not included.

However, in the absence of comprehensive research on the quality of local authority Human Resources (HR) policy in Ireland it is difficult to authoritatively assess the impact that these initiatives have had on housing management practice. However, anecdotal evidence indicates that local authorities have made significant strides in reforming some aspects of housing management (Norris and O` Connell, 2002) and the Housing Policy Review positively states that

> concerns about the quality of local authority housing management on the part of the then Department of the Environment and Local Government inspired the introduction of a range of ameliorative measures during the late 1990s. Some of these measures had an enabling orientation, insofar as they aimed to assist local authorities to improve their housing management performance through the provision of guidance, training and targeted grant aid, while others can be categorised as enforcement tools, which set benchmarks of required standards and established systems to monitor local authority housing management performance. (Housing Policy Review, 1990-2002:76)

Whether changes to HRM and wider institutional changes will have an impact on developing a career pathway for the housing profession within the local authority structure, is still open to discussion. The development of this pathway however is not solely dependent on factors such as skill training and education and in reflecting on the responses of those interviewed, a clearer and more detailed picture may emerge of what is needed for this career path to exist or whether it is appropriate.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the DoEHLG and local authority in terms of structure, operational and staffing issues charting reforms across these areas. The reforms focused on the improvements of local authority housing management performance and focused almost entirely on desired practice for the future. Little attention is paid to the constraints or organisational weaknesses which led local authorities into a path of managerial weakness in the first place. The guidelines and recommendations issued by the Housing Management Group (in 1996), for example, were comprehensive and sensible, but they lacked discussion on the source of management problems within local authorities and gave little guidance on the constraints which had to be overcome before good management could flourish. (O`Connell, 2001:158)

Housing policy statements from the DoEHLG have traditionally examined the sector from the perspective of its role in the broader housing system, its contribution to addressing housing need and possible alternatives to local authority provision of social housing. Although the policy statements published since 1990 have addressed housing management, they have done so in a largely cursory fashion and more importantly, aspects of their critique of local authorities' performance in this regard are sometimes contradictory.

The publication of the DoE policy statement, *Better Local Government* in 1996 and the appointment of senior managers, (Directors of Service), envisaged that there would be an opportunity for staff who wish to specialize in housing management to have a career path, while retaining the option of working in other departments if they wish. However, with a grade system of promotion is still in place, the advancement to the level of Director of Service seems to be viewed as just that- a promotion rather

that an advancement in a particular career pathway. When the question for this thesis was asked as to who had the specific local government function for housing, very few people working in housing could name the individual. The reasons for this may be numerous but might also be related to the fact that these new positions have experienced a high level of turnover in staff as many attempt to rise up along the ladder of grades within the civil service.

Other recommendations on good housing practice and the development of housing as a profession are also highlighted in this chapter. There have been guidelines written on different housing related areas and include better co-ordination between sections involved in housing provision, stronger focus on estates, better implementation of tenancy agreements and training for those in tenant participation. Again, the constraints on the functioning of this good practice are also noted and the fact that the good practice guidelines are being hampered by the structural nature of the problems being outside direct control of housing departments. Interviewees highlighted that there is still a high focus on local administration which is desk bound and rule driven and the dual system is still in operation with the stronger influence of technical grades and their "bricks and mortar" view prevailing. Industrial relations with rigid work practices, inefficiencies and resistance to change are still evident and the overemphasis on physical aspects of estates, refurbishment and rehabilitation to cure all problems, is still a feature for the staff interviewed who were working in the local authorities.

It could be argued that strong strategic leadership from DoEHLG could move the tradition of centralisation in a positive direction but the relationship of the local authority with DoEHLG, which is based on narrow auditing culture, would also have to be changed. Without this organisational and structural change there will be a continued reliance on innovative officers to deliver a housing service which gives them job satisfaction and a personal career identity, without the full recognition from their employer of having this professional housing worker badge.

CHAPTER 5: *'THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME'*

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home;
A charm from the sky seems to hallow us there,
Which, seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere.
Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home, oh, there's no place like home!

An exile from home, splendor dazzles in vain;
Oh, give me my lowly thatched cottage again!
The birds singing gayly, that come at my call --
Give me them -- and the peace of mind, dearer than all!
Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home, oh, there's no place like home!
John Howard Payne, Poet, (1791-1852)

5.1 Introduction

Housing is a broad and sometimes confusing concept. This became apparent during the interviews conducted and the literature reviewed for this work. There has been considerable debate in the literature on the meaning of housing and home to the individual and to society in general. The emphasis in literature has been on what constitutes 'home' with little attention paid to the differences between people in their understanding of the meaning of home and its relationship to other lifestyle factors. As mentioned in the chapters on methodology and on identity, the choice and formation of the research question had much to do with a conscious experiencing of myself as both inquirer and respondent. This reflexivity forced me to come to terms not only with my choice of research problem and with those whom I engage in the research process, but with myself and the multiple identities that I hold in the research setting. Hence my views on housing have been shaped historically, socially, professionally and personally. Reflexivity demands that I interrogate each of these views regarding the ways in which the research efforts are shaped. In this section I start by examining my own understanding of house and home, and the situation in Ireland with respect to home ownership and governance before reviewing the applied literature on housing. Drawing on what is explored here, the responses of those interviewed are examined to develop emerging understandings of housing and professionalism. Certain similarities in definitions emerge and this gives a context for attempting to understand how individuals view a professional housing identity.

5.2 Insider perspectives and formation of research question

While writing is a solitary process, the performance of the task can be made more enjoyable by the location in which it is performed. Hence I am fortunate to be writing this thesis in my own "home". In the words of Collin (1997: 2-3) 'our perception of the material world is affected by the way we *think* or *talk* about it, by our *consensus* about its nature, by the way we *explain* it to each other, and by the concepts we use to grasp it'. Policies about our homes or more correctly, housing policy, is a contested public discourse involving political choices and administrative decisions about the appropriate division between public and private responsibility for the provision of adequate housing. Government housing policies are about production and consumption – a material conception of housing. It has little to say about use, about what we do once the front door is closed. Yet it is the use and value of our dwellings that concerns us most and for most of the time. Punch furthers this point when he states:

> A home is not just a material entity or commodity, but a source of security, identity, belonging and 'rootedness'. There is something essential about having a place in the world where we can feel at home-where we are valued and enabled to flourish and to enter into a wider set of relationships and activities. Being at home in the world means we also feel encouraged to develop as a person and live fully, contributing in turn to our neighbours and the wider society with our unique capabilities and gifts. Very often, looking back, the places we call home prove to have been central reference points in the definition of a life. (2009: 53)

Housing can represent many different things to various people –a form of investment or a fundamental human right, a place of security, promoting sustainability and a very visible marker of status and wealth. What I consider to be most important about housing is that, when it works well, it is the precise opposite of flux and contingency. Housing brings stability to our lives, by locating us and by giving us a place. What is more this place is something we can take for granted as it becomes the background to our lives. In reflecting on the value of housing for me I am reminded that I grew up in a large Council built flat complex which established itself as having a name synonymous with all the social ills attributed (rightly or wrongly) to social housing. In my own case the name of these flats were thought to be so detrimental that my parents gave a false address to my application to a primary school outside the area to ensure

that I would be granted a place. The high rise flats were built on the perimeter of the Irish capital from a sub standard concrete which led to substantial cracks appearing on the outer walls over time, and had poor infrastructure in terms of schools, community resources and other local services such as shops. The tenant mix became focused on lone parents many of whom were reliant on state benefits and the flats were given minimum support from the local authority in terms of overall complex maintenance, with the lifts in the tower blocks frequently being out of order for many months. The evaluations carried out as to the success and failings of this social experiment of high rise dwellings for Irish people and the more general research carried out by Page (1997) and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, along with my personal experience shaped how I began to define home and housing. Housing definitely goes far beyond bricks and mortar. At the most basic of levels it needs to be a location which is supported by relevant community infrastructure, the material used in the build needs to be of high quality, the unit needs to be able to provide the occupant with a sense of place and safety and that there should be a mix of private owner occupiers with social housing tenants who in turn are supported by the social housing provider (Page, 1997).

In my current job working with a housing association in the Republic of Ireland, the meaning of home and housing has been further influenced by my professional experience of witnessing the impact of getting a new home can have for individuals and families. It can be seen as a very rewarding and satisfying situation and for many, a life changing experience as the pre-tenancy course reveals. While these courses have been standard practice in most housing associations, it is only since the start of 2000 that they have become part of the local authority allocations procedures. The main function of this course is to provide the prospective resident with the opportunity to meet their new neighbours, to examine the possibilities for community involvement on the estate and to understand the 'deal' and duties which are implicit in accepting a house under this scheme. One of the sessions in the course requires the prospective residents in small groups to carry out a brain storming exercise on what 'home' and 'having a house' means to them and while it is a useful exercise in team building and communication it also tends to highlight a variety of responses. (A copy of one of these exercises and the responses is included in a mind map diagram in Appendix B). Over the last ten years while working in my current job, I have carried

out this exercise many times and while certain similarities and differences emerge among the responses depending on the group there has been a common thread of the importance of housing and the need to see housing in a holistic way.

This pre-tenancy work by the housing association where I am employed was seen as ground-breaking in Ireland in the early 1990s. This led to the initiative of providing training for individuals who were employed by the local authorities in the area of housing, yet who had received no formal training in housing studies. One of the main aims of the training was to encourage tenant participation and break the traditional client-customer model. The training was to provide the local authority workers with the tools to engage with tenants around areas such as allocations, use of communal spaces, estate maintenance and to break the traditional view of seeing residents as being customers who were given the product of a house and were seen as clients to be kept satisfied by the local authority. While this training provision is still on going, one of the main outcomes was to encourage those involved in housing to see the benefits of conceptualising housing in the broadest of terms.

Building from this, one aim of this thesis is an exploration of the professionalism and education of those involved in social housing. Given the importance of housing in people's lives, how do those working in this area define and shape their role? One would expect to find this cohort of people (if they exist) within the local authority and housing associations. Do they understand the importance of housing and what having a home can mean? Are these people clear about their functions and do they see themselves as a specific group of professionals? How do they define themselves and the work they carry out? Are there external validating features such as Departmental recognition, qualifications or professional institutes which help and support the development of this profession? How do they learn the skills and values of their job? This research explores how those working in the area of housing within housing associations, local authorities and the university sector understand and respond to these factors.

5.3 Current housing crisis in Ireland and impact for Social Housing

Housing in the broadest of terms is rarely out of the media and public discourse and this is even more the case in the time period from 2007-2009 when house prices and house completion numbers have fallen dramatically, financial markets stalled and construction industry collapsed. The prior ten years in Ireland from 1997-2007 saw tremendous changes in housing in Ireland. Most apparent during this decade has been the remarkable increase in average house prices, which have increased by over 350% over the period 1995-2004 (DAFT, 2009). By 1998, the term 'housing crisis' was already being used to describe the situation as prices had nearly doubled from the end of 1994 to the end of 1998 and again between 2000 and 2004.

For many individuals the prospect of private home ownership is not a financial option and this was exacerbated by the current crisis. The demand for social housing is rising and the current figure stands at 56,000 households in need of social housing in March 2009. While there has always been an element of Irish society which has been housed through various government schemes, the detail and mechanism by which these same schemes operated have their own specific history particularly when compared to the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe.

Social housing in the Republic of Ireland is provided by both local authorities and voluntary housing associations (with funding by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government). The historical development of each of these groupings is reviewed in two other chapters of this thesis. Here however, it is helpful to make a clear distinction between the two groups to provide a further insight into where the respondents for this thesis are located. In the group involving housing associations, some organisations span several agent types. Non-profit housing organisations tend to include three fundamental agents – i.e., developers, housing managers and estate agents (for social renters). In the case of local authorities, these organisations encompass a large number of different types of agents including developers, builders, housing managers, planners, estate agents (again for social renters), renter/landlord transfers, finance providers, professional service suppliers and occasionally product/material suppliers. This stands in comparison to the private sector where it is far more likely that an agent will be of a single type (though that

agent will also participate in consumption / exchange agents as a matter of course). This tendency for organisations to incorporate more agent types as they become more 'public' is an interesting one and has implications for modelling the dynamics of the housing system. This point is analysed when reviewing the implications of New Professional Management in chapter four. In contrast, the United Kingdom's social housing stock is considerably larger than that of the Republic of Ireland and annual expenditure is in the region of stg£1.3 billion. The major provider of capital finance is the UK Government's Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions with a budget of stg£659 million for 2007/8; this funding is generally matched by the housing associations through private borrowing. The funding is allocated on a competitive basis to the housing associations in the form of social housing grants.

While the different meaning of home and how people interpret it is significant in relation to the focus of this thesis, the power of the media in shaping this understanding is also important. The private market provision of housing has been a constant in terms of media coverage and analysis while the public or social housing market has not succeeded in a similar treatment. Two reasons sometimes discussed in relation to this is that because firstly, social housing is only availed of by a small sector of the population. Public housing in Ireland is less than 3% of total housing while in Greece, Austria, Spain and Luxembourg it is in excess of 20% and in the UK, Denmark and Sweden it is over 35% (Norris and Redmond, 2005). Secondly, the Irish population are primarily focused on home ownership and commentators cite a variety of historical, cultural and structural reasons for this. Pfretzschner (1965) argues that historical factors such as the campaign for the transfer of land from landlords to tenant farmers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not only increased home ownership levels particularly in rural areas, they contributed to a culture in which owning one's home is a key aspiration of Irish people. Fahey and Maitre (2004) make the point that home loans, which became easier to obtain after the liberalisation of the mortgage market in the 1980s and many rural Irish households reduced costs of home ownership by building on land inherited or donated by relatives. Other commentators argue that lack of security of tenure in the private rented marker was a significant factor particularly as this aspect recalled in people, historical memories of the Tenants League battle to have the 3Fs – fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure. However there is little doubt that our high rates of owner

occupation could not have been achieved in practice without significant and long standing support form government. Norris and Winston (2004) detail Irish housing legislation and other fiscal measures which have been put in place and conclude that the measures:

> have facilitated and encouraged the transfer of dwellings from the private rented tenures into the owner occupied tenure…….as owner occupation is a key secondary aim of housing policy in Ireland and is viewed as the form of tenure preferred by most people. (39:2004)

The affordability of housing for first-time buyers was of great concern and several reports by the economist Peter Bacon (1998, 1999, 2000) were commissioned on how to address this 'crisis'. Of the plethora of recommendations made by Bacon and Associates, the ones that were eventually adopted focused on increasing supply. Measures included financial incentives for development, additional funds for infrastructure, planning reform (albeit relatively conservative) and changes in tax incentives for first-time buyers and investors. The results of these measures are now perceived very differently by various sectors of society. On the one hand, the increase in private house construction resulted in output growing 180% from 1998-2004. Ireland in 2004 had the highest rate of housing output in Europe when measured in terms of output per capita (DoEHLG, 2005). However, prices continued to rise over the period, with new houses doubling in price from 1998-2004. Even more surprising (perhaps not, in retrospect), was the unanticipated explosion in the second homes and 'one-off' housing in rural areas, while at the same time numbers of homeless people and families on social housing waiting lists in the urban centres doubled.

House data for January 2009 released by the Economic and Social Research Institute showed a fall in prices of 0.7%. HomeBond, a national insurance service which registers the number of new builds on an monthly basis, states that the number of new houses registered under guarantee schemes, for the first quarter of 2009 was 4,365 units. Final figures for 2008 further highlight the decline in the housing market. Housing completions dropped by nearly 29 per cent in the first half of 2008, according to figures from the Department of the Environment and figures to the end of June 2008 revealed that 27,736 housing units had been completed. This compares with 38,978 for the same period in 2007. This was the lowest number of house

completions for the first half of a year since 2002 - when 25,218 houses were completed in the first six months and was an indication of the slump in the construction industry. According to loan approval data returned by mortgage lending institutions, the average price of a new house in the first quarter of 2008 was €311,113, down 3.1 per cent on the average price in the same quarter in 2007. The average price for a second-hand home nationally in the first three months of 2008 was €359,277, a drop of 5.4 per cent from the same quarter in 2007. (DAFT, 2008). In summary, the public and private housing markets have developed and performed in different ways. While anecdotal evidence would still suggest that the tenure of choice for the majority of Irish people is private ownership, it is true that a significant number of individuals are housed and will be housed in social housing. Building on the argument of the importance of housing to the individual, irrespective of the tenure type, the hypothesis being explored in this thesis is that those dealing in the provision of this housing should be able to understand their important societal role and be rewarded and recognised by having a professional housing identity.

5.4 Government policies and role of Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

While there may be different schools of thought and different opinions as to what the word 'housing' covers from an individual point of view, the DoEHLG is somewhat clearer as to what housing covers. Firstly the DoEHLG formulates and develops policy relating to housing in Ireland across all tenures, monitoring and assessing developments in the housing market. It is responsible for implementing policy in relation to the Rental Accommodation Scheme, the procurement of accommodation and the provision of services by local authorities to meet social housing needs. Secondly, they manage and monitor the local authority housing construction programme and the regeneration of housing areas including Ballymun and Limerick. In order to keep up-to-date on the demand for housing the DoEHLG organizes tri-annual assessment of housing needs which is directly undertaken by local authorities.

The DoEHLG is also responsible for matters relating to the voluntary and cooperative housing sector. Here it administers a number of housing schemes, makes payments to local authorities in respect of other schemes and issues various certificates in respect

of tax schemes. Another policy area which it oversees is that of the provision and management, by local authorities, of Traveller accommodation and the necessary funding for such accommodation. A diagrammatical overview of all the functions of the DoEHLG in relation to housing is shown in Appendix C.

While the supply of housing can be measured in terms of output figures and construction completions, the policy documents which have emerged from the Department are more difficult to measure and evaluate. Later sections of this thesis explore the intersection between government policy and progressional practice in more detail. The housing policy statement *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities,* launched in 2007, outlined an ambitious but realisable vision to guide the development of the housing sector over the next decade. The key objective outlined in the statement was to build sustainable communities, integrated in terms of tenure-mix and cultural/ethnic diversity, and to meet individual accommodation needs in a manner that facilitates and empowers personal choice and autonomy. This approach was endorsed by the Social Partnership Agreement *Towards 2016,* which provided an important framework to transform the housing sector in Ireland over the next 10 years. Over this time it is expected to provide more people with access to home ownership through a variety of forms; and expand choice through a modernised private rented sector and the availability of good quality social housing options. The programme of investment and the policy priorities reflected in *Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities* underpinned the approach to increased housing investment set out in the *National Development Plan 2007-2013*.

In line with more recent housing developments the DoEHLG undertakes a range of supportive activities to support local authorities in assisting home ownership through a number of targeted schemes. This is commonly known as the affordable housing scheme. It liaises with the Affordable Homes Partnership in addressing a range of affordable housing issues nationwide and provides education and training to interested parties. Tied in to this the DoEHLG, through its remit on social inclusion, oversees and promotes the ongoing development and implementation of policies and programmes to address the housing related needs of vulnerable groups such as older people, people with disabilities and homeless persons.

5.5 Perspectives from previous research and theories

In most disciplines or fields of study there are basic concepts which underlie analysis. For example, in the field of Economics and Political Science, keys authors such as Keynes and Friedman define the term 'State' as meaning the apparatus of rule or government within a particular territory. In sociology the term 'social structure' is seen to mean the more or less enduring pattern of social arrangements within a particular society, group, or social organisation (Berrger and Luckman,1967; Smelser, 1988). Sometimes these concepts are subjected to analysis in order to attempt to arrive at a satisfactory definition but normally they are given an assumed certainty that we know what they mean, and second-order concepts are derived from these in order to build up theories and explanations of specific phenomena. Hence there are 'types' of States such as free market, command or fixed, and each have their own set of circumstances.

The question therefore arises as to if there is a similar discipline of field of study in housing and if so what is it. To answer this question, this section starts by exploring theoretical perspectives and basic concepts on home, housing and the field of housing studies, including key concepts such as home, understandings of space and ontological security. It then links these theories with perspectives from interviews with professionals in social housing field.

Gurney (1996) sees home as a kind of psychic warehouse in which memories are added in layers and stored. Meanings of the home can change over time as new experiences happen and memories re-emerge or fade. Somerville (1992) divides the meaning of home into six categories which are: shelter (or literally a roof over your head), hearth (feelings of cosiness and warmth), heart (involving loving and affectionate relationships), abode (or a place to call home), privacy (as it provides a place to exclude others) and roots (as the source of identity and meaningfulness). Similarly Gurney (1996) divided the meaning into 12 categories which also encompassed the idea that home is what you make it and a key to this work is that housing is viewed as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Building on this, King argues that home 'is concerned with the relative notion of fulfilment, and thus not with generalised standards' (1996:23) and housing 'is a means of fulfilment that allows other human activities to take place' (1996:35). Houses also provide a place for many social practices and family activities and 'if society has grown more family orientated the family itself has identified more and more squarely with its physical location, the home. "Home" and "family" are now virtually interchangeable terms' (Oakley, 1984:65). Giddens (1984) emphasises the home as the prime locale for the creation and sustenance of what he calls 'ontological security', which he defines as 'confidence or trust that the natural or social worlds are as they appear to be, including the basic existential parameters of self and social identity,' (1984:375). Similarly, King sees housing as 'a place of security and enabling for a household' (1996:22).

Just as there are many interpretations in the meaning of home and housing there is the added dimension that these interpretations are evolving and are not static. Hence housing might be seen as extension of the view expressed by Clapham (2005) that we should take a *pathways* approach to the meaning of housing. He argues that the pathways approach is 'defined as patterns of interaction (practices) concerning house and home, over time and space'. (Clapham, 2005: 27). In short the individual may have one view of housing before they acquire the physical property, another view why they are actually residing in the dwelling but do not own it due to having repayments on a mortgage to the bank and a final view when the title deals are actually in their possession when the mortgage has been repaid. This would lead to the question of the existence of different meanings of home between residents of different tenures and this too has been an issue in housing research.

Saunders (1990) argues that owner-occupation resulted in increased feelings of control, autonomy and ontological security. Research has shown that access to council housing is the result of a complex interaction between the housing organisation and the applicant (Clapham and Kintrea, 1986). Different allocation policies may result in the same outcome because of the nature of this interaction. While the housing pathways notion might be influenced by tenure type and individual purchasing power, Forrest and Kemeny (1984) present a more empowering model of housing careers where individuals have a strategy. People work out the type of housing they want and

over their life course adopt to changing circumstances both of their own making (increasing family size) and external factors (changing interest rates affecting the size of their mortgage repayments). Hence this may involve the choice of moving from different tenure types, although this perhaps could be seen as less likely with the Irish setting given the preoccupation with home ownership in the Republic of Ireland.

What is striking to me is that the literature often concentrates on the importance of the physical structure of the house, and the meanings that households have towards this is an important element of the feeling of home. The physical structure of the house is then assigned a monetary value which is negotiated on the market place. In short the meaning and value of a home becomes a quantifiable monetary unit. This notion is in contrast with how I perceive 'home' and has been influenced by my own life experience and working with prospective tenants who are getting their first home. From a literature point, this understanding of housing revolves around a body of work concerning the commodification of housing. Drudy and Punch (2005) similarly contend that

> the main contribution of housing as being then measured in quantitative terms (levels of profit, return on investment, capital gain), while its real qualitative essence (as shelter, home, place in community development) is a secondary consideration. (2005:30)

They see housing being treated and defined first and foremost as a good or commodity rather than a place in which to dwell, with safety and security. While for the majority of people, the latter may be at the heart of personal satisfaction and achievement, popular discourse has shifted to seeing the home in terms of monetary value. The attribute of quantifiable fiscal amounts is seen to supercede the more fluid and hazy attributes of what having a home actually means to a person. This understanding of housing is further explained when it is set in the wider theoretical field of neoliberalism. Harvey (2005) defines the neoliberal changes in many western nations, from the 1970s and to the present day, as being guided mainly by four practices. These are privatization, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions.

He argues that privatization and commodification of public assets have been among the most criticised and disputed aspects of neoliberalism. Summed up, they could be characterized by the process of transferring property from public ownership to private ownership. According to Harvey (2005), this serves the interests of the capitalist class, or bourgeoisie, as it moves power from the nation's governments to private parties. At the same time, privatization generates a means for profit for the capitalist class; after a transaction they can then sell or rent to the public what used to be commonly owned. Commodification takes place when economic value is assigned to something not previously considered in economic terms; for example, an idea, identity or gender. So commodification refers to the expansion of market trade to previously non-market areas, and to the treatment of things as if they were a tradable commodity.

To summarize this understanding of home and how it might be conceptualized, Drudy and Punch (2005) draw up the following table which sets out some noticeable differences which emerge depending on the lens from which we are viewing housing.

Housing as Commodity vs. Housing as Home

Housing as a Commodity ←----------	**Housing as a home** ----------→
Market Provision	Non-market provision
Commodity for sale	Housing as a right for shelter
Housing as a economic good	Housing as a merit good
Demand/ability to pay	Housing linked to needs
Developer/Speculator profits	Non profit or construction profit only
Personal investment/profit taking, wealth generation	Home, community, shelter etc.
Speculative acquisition of land & capital gains, monopolies	Public land banking for building and provision
Segregation	Integration

(Drudy and Punch, 2005:37)

This clarification on the meaning of home and housing, and in particular this idea of seeing housing as a commodity or housing as a home, is helpful in analysing similarities and differences in the responses given by those interviewed for this research. Housing as a home is the meaning and model which also aligns itself most

closely with the respondent's views in the interviews and hence will be referred to in other chapters. It echoes the sentiments and difficulties in trying to have a professional housing identity when so much of that identity revolves around the question being explored here, namely, do you see housing as a commodity or a home. And depending on the answer given by the individual, the corresponding identity of being a housing professional can be very different.

Broadening this exploration, if one was to study housing, with a view to becoming an expert or professional in the area one might want to take the module or course entitled *housing studies* in a particular university. Housing studies is clearly about housing and in its simplest and crudest sense, is the bricks and mortar or other building materials that comprise the constructions within which people live. Housing studies is hence a core module in many qualifications in construction and architecture but as a field of study, housing also involves the examination of the social, economical, political and other relationships that centre on housing. Kemeny states that 'we might, therefore, by way of a starting point, provisionally define housing studies as the study of the social, political, economic, cultural and other institutions and relationships that constitute the provision and utilisation of dwellings' (1992:8). He goes on to explain that housing studies is not just about dwellings, nor even just about the households that live in them. Nor is it limited to the interaction between households and dwellings in, for example, the home. It also includes the wider social implications of housing. 'A case could therefore be made out for reconceptulising housing in terms of "residence" to capture its broader social issues' (Kemeny, 1992: 10). And if this is the case, who are the people involved or comprise the residence – is it the nuclear family unit of mother, father and children or do we also include different housing occupancy profiles such as single occupants, the extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts etc who may be sleeping under the same roof.

Kemeny (1995, 2006) also distinguishes between systems which are primarily market-oriented and systems which are more concerned with access. He uses the typology of variations in the rental system in different countries and suggests that social renting and private renting should not be treated as two entirely distinct housing tenures. He identifies as an alternative, a dualist and an integrated rental system, with the former keeping private and social renting separate, which provides social rented

accommodation to those on low incomes through the state via the local authority. The integrated system allows for competition between social and private renting, with both private landlords and local authorities providing social rented accommodation. The effect here is to dampen market rental levels, as private landlords have competitors that are absent in the dualist system.

However, despite the barriers to home ownership, the drive to own one`s home has remained very strong in marker-oriented systems due to the lack of viable alternatives. As Kemeny (2006) notes:

> The choice for most households...is between profit-driven rental dwellings with high rents and weakened rights to retain their contract on the one hand, and home ownership on the other. Thus it is not strange that most households choose to own their own home and that in these countries we find large amounts of slum housing. (2006:13)

Kemeny concludes by ascertaining that housing has its own discipline and therefore requires reflexivity. He gives us the basic example of putting person X, with four children into house Y and asks us to consider what the outcome might be if we do so without reflecting on the implications of the choice. This need for reflexivity was acknowledged by a number of those interviewed for this thesis.

5.6 Perspectives from professionals in the Social Housing field

Given the breadth and diversity in interpretation of what the basic concepts of home, housing and housing studies are from the literature, it was not that surprising that the people interviewed also gave a diversity of views. The people interviewed were all directly involved in the provision of housing or carrying out housing research and lectures. They worked in the local authorities, housing associations and university departments. Among the nineteen interviewed, there was the consistent thread that housing needs to be seen as a holistic concept rather than just bricks and mortar and to see housing as a home and not just a commodity. While the traditional view of the local authorities and housing associations in Ireland may historically have been to supply the houses and collect the rent, there has been a marked shift in functions in which these organisations now see themselves involved. Therefore, just having one functional definition of the terms was not seen as appropriate and the diversity in

meaning was seen as one factor in the lack of having a clearly defined cohort of housing professionals in the Republic of Ireland.

In most professions there is a clearly understood basic professional role, such as being a teacher, doctor, nurse, architect (a review of the literature around this area is presented in chapter six on professionalism). By contrast, there is no clearly defined professional role in housing (Clapham *et al*. 2000) and the word housing is open to interpretation. The first commonality which emerged from the interviewees was the association with shelter and the cultural importance among Irish people in particular (similar to the findings of Gurney (1996) and Somerville (1992)). While it was seen as far more than bricks and mortar it was also noted that not everyone or indeed every institution (such as the Department of Environment) saw it as more than just bricks and mortar. The picture of home that emerged from the interviewees had many different meanings, from traditional connotations with shelter and sanctuary, as a commodity or a financial investment, while others highlighted the emotional and community aspects of housing.

> Housing is a place of shelter, security and sanctuary…we need to have an emotional connection with the house…….but this is tied into how we see the house….is it a commodity or a home. The capitalist system has diluted home into being just a commodity….and the credit crunch hurts so much because of the loss of profit in this commodity. *(Peter-Housing Association)*

> There is no clear definition of housing, is there?...I mean it is lots of different things, but nothing in great detail. Yes it is what it looks like….the physical stuff of having a roof over your head…but also where it is in the country……..are there shops and schools around……..you know…..the bigger picture stuff. *(Sean-Academic)*

While there was a clear emphasis that the physical build of a house had certain key undisputable aspects which deemed it to be a house or not, there was wide scope in defining what housing meant when the tenants who dwelled within the structures were added to the equation. Similarly to the work of King (1996), no one saw the house as solely being a shell or an empty product and posed questions such as:

> Is housing a product or a place which can be developed? *(Ben-Other)*

> Is housing the right word……is it not more about the full development of the individual? *(Gerard-Academic)*

These questions echoed the feelings expressed by others that the meaning of home does not stop at the front door. Feelings about the house will be influenced by the perceived physical and social environment outside the front door and the ability for those within the house to engage with this environment. Therefore, in defining a house there was a link to the idea of location and neighbourhood and how these might impact on satisfaction derived from dwelling in a particular house. Family relationships may span a number of homes and considerable distances, and the location of a house will influence the frequency and ease of contact. At the same time, social relationships are formed with friends and neighbours and may take place in a number of local settings such as shops, pubs and restaurants. Access to these facilities will be influenced by the location of the house and a possible belief that physical design has a direct and predictable impact on behaviour. Here the current thinking on creating safe environments by designing estates in a certain manner and the work on defensible spaces by Coleman (1985) is echoed by one respondent in particular:

> Take xxxxx Estate in West Dublin. Lovely houses and great finish both inside and outside ……but once you close your front door at the end of the day you do not want to go out again. They are plagued up there with kids using the alleys and lanes as drinking grounds and hang outs……so even nipping across to the shops for a pint of milk has become an ordeal. And the buses have even stopped going up there after 7pm because the kids were pelting them with stones and then disappearing into the lanes. *(David-Local authority)*

While Saunders (1990) and Clapham (2005) discuss tenure type as being important in defining housing the respondents were also cognisant of this aspect. In particular, those working in the local authority and Housing Association sector felt that the supply of the product of a house was the easiest part of their function. It was the issue of what happened to the house, household and the estate when the residents moved in, which they had to deal with on a day-to-day basis when working in the housing field.

> Easy to build houses…trick is to get right mix (of people) for the houses. So housing to me also incorporates what we now call estate management. Maybe the people who work in that section are the housing professionals as they are dealing with housing on a day to day basis. Sometimes we (the local authority) can loose sight of what we are about …… because you house someone you cannot forget about them….that is why having good estate management can lead to good housing. *(Tony-Local authority)*

While there have been active attempts by the government in recent years to create mixed tenure developments, through, for example, Part V of the Planning Act (2000), the length of time it has taken for these new estates to emerge has meant that the expected positive outcomes of the initiatives were too early to be evaluated by those interviewed. Instead, the issue of having large numbers of the same socio economic class housed was seen to be a significant factor in broadening the remit of the local authority into the area of housing management. Here allocations policy was singled out as a major tool in how some people felt that they were not just giving people houses but that they were involved in giving the 'right' houses to the 'right' people.

> It is not good putting an elderly single man into an apartment surrounded by a whole load of families with kids…….but that is what the points system would have us do. But I know that this could just cause all types of problems for the estate management people down the road. He could be really picked on by the kids…..so what we try to do is to give him a home where he will feel a bit more safe……in a more settled older part of the estate…….even though this could mean him getting a two bed instead of a one bed……*(Peter-Housing Association)*

5.7 How housing professionals shape understandings of 'home' and 'housing'

In developing how the particular definition impacted on their work environment, others highlighted that as housing was so fluid, they like this vagueness and choose to be in the job for that reason. Some of those interviewed felt that it was important to distinguish between those who had had 'fallen into' housing and those who wanted to be there. In the former category the feeling was that those who fell into the job were concerned with the more practical aspects of the job and the security that a permanent job within the local authority can bring.

> It was not a conscious decision to go into housing. I applied for a higher grade and this is where I ended up……..and I like it now……once you tick the right boxes and keep the boss happy the days go by quickly enough. *(Ryan-Local authority)*

The other category of worker *chose* to be in housing and remain in housing. This group can be distinguished by their motivation and commitment to social housing and their understanding of the importance which their role can play in people's lives. Here there was also a clear correlation in how this group defined housing in giving it a

wider socio-cultural definition than those who merely saw it as a job and hence in terms of physical build and provision of shelter.

A narrow definition of home and housing as bricks and mortar suited those who desired a job where targets could easily be met and boxes ticked. These individual felt that policies on how houses should be allocated according to the points system of allocations, had to be adhered to one hundred percent and got personal satisfaction from saying that X number of rent queries had been received with Y number of replies to these queries being returned. In contrast, those who wanted to gain something from their job in terms of personal fulfilment choose a broader definition. They saw their job as having the potential to improve personal life experiences, create better more sustainable communities and have a lasting, hopefully positive, impact on society. One academic saw her work in housing as a means to express her desire for political and social change. She had clear views on the centralised functions of local government and

> how this can lead to micro management of national schemes using criteria which just don't work in rural areas. Take the case of affordable housing….when that scheme came out first they (DOE) were expecting that the rules for Dublin could operate in the middle of Longford…….I have written a few pieces on this…but thankfully this has now changed *(Vicky-Academic)*

Others valued the diversity of housing as it presented them with opportunities and challenges on a daily basis. In particular they felt that their own skills and ability to think 'outside the box' could be drawn on and this resulted in a high level of personal satisfaction.

> If you take allocations as an example……if I had to stick totally to the points system I would have all the same young unmarried unemployed mothers living side by side….and that is no good for the social mix……so I have to be a bit more creative in how I write up the needs of groups like this …..and this lets me have a better mix on our estates…..sure isn't that what Part V is all about……but it is all down to the manager at the end of the day *(Tony-Local authority)*

This ability to be able to have an influence at the micro level of society while working within the constraints of macro policy gave the job in housing a sense of uniqueness and differences from other jobs within the local authority. Those who had worked in

other departments such as roads or waste management felt that they had little scope to have a people-centred approach to their work in these sections but that their work in housing was different. They had opportunities to make a difference and the lack of a definitive definition of housing enabled them to think more about the customer whom they were providing a service.

A final point which emerged in this section was an awareness that this vagueness in defining the terms can both work to a officer's disadvantage as well as advantage. On the negative side the fluidity of the word housing made their job and perception of being a housing professional difficult for others to grasp. As they were sometimes unsure as to the boundaries of where their housing job ceased and another section took, they sometimes stated to people outside the local authority that 'they just worked in the Department of the Environment' and did not get into any more specifics. On the positive side, some respondents pointed out if they stated they worked in housing, there was still a large amount of public perception which held the more traditional view. This perception was that the housing staff were just involved in 'giving out housing' and 'collecting the rents'. They were happy however to leave this view unchallenged as they felt that if they explained the wider brief that their job involved it might evoke a more negative response.

> If they (the public) know that you deal with anti social behaviour and evicting the troublesome tenants then you get bombarded with problems which they are having with their noisy neighbours on the estate……the less they know about your job the better. *(David-Local authority)*

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter revolves around the lack of clarity about the meanings of home, housing and housing studies. These concepts are seen to have particular meaning to individuals depending on life experiences and opportunities. By exploring the theoretical perspectives and basic concepts of home, housing, the field of housing studies, understandings of space and ontological security, a framework is given to reflect on the perspectives voiced in the interviews with professionals. It is acknowledged that home ownership and the ability to have a home for life through

social housing is an inherent desire of most people and that those providing such housing are playing an important role in society.

Some of these workers who were interviewed have made a conscious decision to work in housing and others have been assigned the job due to the culture and structure of their organisations. In both of these groupings it emerged that an element of professional identity was evident but clearly defining this identity and giving it depth and meaning would require further analysis and reflection. The attempt at defining home in this chapter is only one part of a three fold challenge in understanding what it is to have a professional housing identity.

CHAPTER 6: PROFESSIONALISM-TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH?

> Being a housing professional requires a person to be analytical, have problem solving skills and self awareness…..you need to be a rounded individual who can think on your feet but at the same time know when to quote chapter and verse. People respect that. *(Tony-Local authority)*

6.1 Introduction

In some disciplines, the profession and the nature of its work are well understood, while in other areas they remain more opaque. Urban sociologists posit that a collective identity is crucial to professional status, and hence have been sceptical of housing occupations which do not have that collective identity (Malin, 2008). The premise from the start of this research was that there was not a clear profession among housing workers in Ireland. At the same time, there are significant numbers of people employed in housing by local authorities, Housing Associations and other institutions in Ireland. Hence the question was asked in the interviews as to how these people employed in housing see themselves and how they are seen by others. In short, do they have a professional housing identity?

In reviewing and reflecting on the responses given to this question, it became clear that I had asked something which was very broad which was interpreted to mean a variety of things to different people. In dividing the responses into groups, four distinct areas are constructed. Firstly, there were housing workers who interpreted the word profession to define a job. This job needs training and a formal qualification which is recognised and is normally paid rather than being seen as an unpaid volunteer. Secondly, there were those who used the word to describe the manner and standard of work which they carried out. Thirdly, there were those who felt that the definition centred on having a professional attitude and set of personal criteria to which one should perform. Fourthly, there were those who felt that 'profession' was not appropriate terminology to use at all. It was pointed out that within the local authority structure the profession of a housing worker did not fit in with the administrative/professional division, which existed before *Better Local Government* (1996), and hence its use added a level of confusion to the understanding of housing identity.

This chapter starts by giving a brief overview of some of the literature pertaining to professionalism and highlights areas of thinking that are helpful to understand what it is to have a profession. The emergent ideas touch on the importance of defining attributes, knowledge, training, having a body to recognise the profession, the ability to be reflexive or a combination of all these factors and more. The chapter then explores the responses of participants to the issue of defining 'housing professionals' and examines the factors which enable and hinder this process of defining.

6.2 Professions and Professionalism-perspectives from previous research

In the most basic of terms one can define a profession as a job that needs training, knowledge and a formal qualification and is normally paid. Linked closely with having a profession is that of being 'professional'. There are two opposites that come to mind when the term 'professional' is used: that of 'professional' and 'amateur', and 'professional' and 'not professional'. In the business sphere, the professional person or activity is easily distinguished from the amateur, because the professional is paid and the amateur is not. An example here would be the voluntary, unpaid worker in a charity shop is an amateur, while the salaried shop worker is a professional.

Popular understandings of the professions in the literature encompass largely positive attributes or traits that were incorporated into early sociological interpretations on the subject (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933: Parsons, 1954, Goode, 1957). This gave rise to a definition of the professions in terms of a number of 'attributes'. These included task-complexity, a specialist body of knowledge, altruistic service, formal educational and entry requirements, a high indeterminacy/technicality ratio and a professional code of conduct (Goode, 1957). Anleu points out that writers in the early part of the century 'conceptually distinguished professions from non-professions by identifying their core defining characteristics' (1992:104) which most frequently included 'formal education and entry requirements; a monopoly over an esoteric body of knowledge and associated skills; autonomy over the terms and conditions of practice; collegial authority; a code of ethics; and, commitment to a service ideal'. Hence a base point in establishing if there is a housing profession in Ireland would be to ascertain the attributes which one might associate with it and if a person could tick all the boxes they would then have a professional housing identity.

In the literature, there is much discussion around how professions develop from a historical point of view, and the relative success or failure of each aspiring profession led to the categorization of intermediate forms, identified as 'semi-professions' or cases of 'incomplete professionalization' (Etzioni, 1968). Semi-professions (such as teachers, nurses and social workers) were characterized by shorter training, less legitimized status, a less specialized body of knowledge and less autonomy from supervision (Etzioni, 1968). As a result, the 'traits' approach was criticized on the grounds that it was uncritically complimentary to professionals and merely reproduced the professions' own ideological self-descriptions (Johnson, 1972). Studies of the professions then shifted towards the analysis of professions as 'centres of power' within the wider social and political contexts within which they operated (Johnson, 1972; Wilding, 1982). Here they considered the relationship of professions to state power, the location of professions within the upper class, and their ambivalent character as part of a class that carries out capital functions while they also carry out the functions of the collective labourer.

Elliott (1972) looked at the three traditional professions – medicine, law and the clergy which originated in the medieval universities of Europe. He termed them 'status professions' (and the clergy profession included university teaching in their profession). Similarly the work of Larson (1977) has a concentration on the professional field of expertise and on how occupational groups appropriate a field, but not on how the field itself came to be constituted in the first place. The existence of identifiable fields or disciplines is sometimes treated as a given but in most cases calls for explanation. In a later work, Larson argues that the one central function of professions in most advanced societies is that of 'organising the acquisition and certification of expertise in broad functional areas, on the basis of formal education qualifications held by individuals'(1990:83). Klegon (1978) focuses on the characteristics of professions as being 'inherently distinct from other occupations' (Klegon 1978:268). Others focus on the process in the conception of a profession and attempt to uncover the routes by which occupations are professionalised. Johnson (1972) and Turner and Hodge (1970) have pointed out that a focus on professionalism, such as the level experienced by medical doctors, rather than on the elements, traits or attributes of professions is helpful, because one cannot study the process of professionalisation without a definition of the structure as a guide.

Meiksins and Watson (1989: 561) state that 'there is no single theory on professions: rather there are competing theories, no one of which has become completely hegemonic.' Similarly, Colley and James' (2005) understanding of professional identities is one of disrupted processes which can involve not only 'becoming' but also 'unbecoming'. In other words, if one was to relate this to a professional housing identity, 'becoming' a housing professional is not smooth, straightforward, or automatic, but can also involve conflict and instances of feeling like a fraud, being marginalised or excluded. Colley and James thus challenge common-sense that a profession, once obtained, is for life. Furthermore in Colley and James' work (2005), within the context of further education, they draw important attention to the role of the (changing) field in constituting and shaping professional identities, and to the interlinking of professional identities with the personal;

> … professional identities and trajectories are inseparable from personal and political identities and trajectories. There is certainly no such thing as 'FE [Further Education] tutor' separate from the complex, wider lives that [professionals] have lived and are living. (2005:12)

This has echoes of how people define the words home and housing and the fact that their definitions of these words might change over their own life cycle. Thus as the field and understanding of housing is changing, the definition of a professional identity will also change and develop and lead to a possible increased acknowledgement of the interplay and interdependency between personal and professional elements.

Giddens (1991: 14-34) suggests that one of the basic characteristics of high modernity is that individuals no longer simply 'trust' expert systems. An emphasis on reflexivity encourages individuals to question and learn from their interaction with society, thereby altering knowledge. Some occupational groups challenge notions of professionalism and deliberately espouse a philosophy of client empowerment, including the use of shared identification as a resource to enhance client-practitioner relationship.

Some of the sociological literature on professions takes a structural approach when examining professionalism (MacDonald, 1995) and has largely treated the values associated with professionalism – altruism, personal detachment, public service – as

part of the rhetoric by which professionals support their claims to status. Developing from this, Kanter (1990) and Casey (1995) argue that the boundaries between different professional groups are being blurred, as professionals in organisations are being asked to work as part of multi-functional flexible teams. The unbounded nature of work involved in housing requires interaction with people in a variety of other disciplines such as finance, social work, law enforcement. In many cases, the housing officers are required to carry out a multitude of tasks and have knowledge of many diverse areas and hence their professional knowledge becomes

> ….. malleable and expandable. Professional knowledge is constitutive of its field of knowledge rather than being bound by, it may contain the possibility of being reconstituted to claim broader knowledge, newer expertise which map onto concerns of enterprise and the market. (Malin 2000:83).

For Freidson (1994), 'professionalism' is the ideology and special set of institutions by which a profession is organised. His description of the ideology carries with it much of the traditional ethos of the profession as the altruistic servant of clients, appropriate for the medical profession which has been the subject of his work. For him the concept of professionalism entails commitment to a particular body of knowledge and skill, both for its own sake and for the use to which it is put. Coupled with this he feels that to do work well, and to behave in a professional manner, one must have the nominal freedom to exercise discretionary judgement. Building on this Turner (1996) sees the possession of 'special knowledge and skills', and the ability to convince the public that this is so, as being the core to the success of the professional project. This is particularly evident from those working in the field of housing as the term 'housing' can be interpreted in several ways. This point is developed more fully in chapter five.

Professionalism according to Putnam (2000) is the moral understanding among professionals that gives concrete reality to this social contract. It is based on mutual trust. In exchange for a grant of authority to control key aspects of their market and working conditions through licensing and credentialing, professionals are expected to maintain high standards of competence and moral responsibility. The work of the traditional learned professions has long been understood to require a significant domain of discretion in individual practice. It has therefore been thought to require a

stronger sense of moral dedication than most occupations. A professional is not required to ignore material considerations but is expected to subordinate financial gain to the higher values of responsibility to clients and to the public interest.

According to Spicker (2006), having professional knowledge and expertise are at the core of contemporary society and how such professional expertise is developed, how it is deployed, by whom it is deployed and for what ends are among the most pressing issues facing all modern nations. At the same time, many of the most distinctive features of the professions, especially their privileges of self-regulation and self-policing, are being curtailed. This issue regarding the impact of performativity and new managerialism on professions is explored in the chapter reviewing the local authority structure. This is true even in countries such as Britain, the United States and Canada, where professions have historically been most autonomous and enjoyed the greatest social prestige.

6.3 Recognition and identity of housing professionals

As discussed in chapters three and four on housing associations and the local authorities, and the impact of New Public Managerialism, the functions of the housing worker and housing manager are difficult to pinpoint exactly. Williams and Provan (1991) have pointed out, the term 'housing management' describes an administrative process that involves the application of rules and procedures to allocate dwellings and collect rents. Berger and Luckmann (1967) highlight that those involved in housing do not have a unique 'stock of knowledge'. However, it was the initial premise of this thesis that some form of identity as a housing worker did exist in the provision of social housing, and the difficulty was getting agreement in terms of the attributes, as to what would make this group into a clearer professional entity. Having discussed this dilemma with those interviewed, what did emerge was that those working in housing are, in their own ways, establishing themselves as having some form of identity, albeit a reluctant identity as housing professionals. They may not be fully recognised as having an identity by their places of work, and qualifications may or may not help in the process of recognition, but by having a level of knowledge, a particular attitude and projecting a professional face, the emergence of a worker with a professional housing identity was seen as being possible and desirable. This section

discusses how this process is evolving and the implications for future workers in the area of housing.

6.3.1 A Reluctant Professional: negotiating professional identity

From the start a number of those interviewed expressed an unwillingness to be called a housing professional as this term had connotations with management. This group displayed a marked reluctance towards using the title as they perceive themselves as lacking the resources to engage with higher management in order to get things done. They preferred to do what they could in a particular situation but when they were unable to manage or solve a problem, they felt that they could pass this issue further up the management line to the 'true' housing professional. This desire not to be called the housing professional echoes the work of Goffman (1959) on the management and negotiation of identities. One person interviewed stated that:

> I would not like to be a housing professional….that is a management position…I want to stay where I am …….to be the Indian and not the chief. In that way if you get a really nasty tenant complaining about why something has not been fixed in her house you can pass it on to the 'professional' to solve. *(Mary-Local authority)*

Related to having connotations with management, some felt that if one was to use the title housing professional, it was like adopting a certain status and superiority over others. Elliott (1972) used the term 'status profession' in a positive way but the housing workers interviewed felt that as a housing profession was not clearly defined, it would give words and titles a level of implied authority rather than any meaningful function.

> I think a lot of people have an aversion to feeling that they are professional because it has all these connotations of elitism, of exclusion, of being an expert, and of being patronising. *(Amy-Local authority)*

6.3.2 Workplace Dynamics and Institutional Recognition of a Housing Professional

Not having a body which gave professional recognition to the area of housing as a professional was also cited as a drawback in having a professional housing identity. For Freidson, professionalism is 'an occupation that controls its own work, organised

by a special set of institutions, sustained, in part, by a particular ideology of expertise and service' (1994:10). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, professional bodies are normally developed organically from within the sector – i.e. guild structure. Housing as a profession is unusual as it also regulated and organised in part from within the local authority structures of government.

In the UK and Northern Ireland the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the professional body for people who work in housing and is a registered charity and a non-profit making organization. It has over 20,000 members who work predominantly in local authorities, housing associations, arms length management organizations (ALMOs) and the private sector in the UK and Overseas.

Practitioner membership denotes that the individual has a housing related qualification recognized by the CIH. Housing Practitioners are entitled to use the designatory letters Cert CIH. This grade is seen as either an end in itself or as a transitionary grade to further qualifications. Hence it is seen by many in the UK and Northern Ireland as being the "professional" badge to have. Courses accredited by CIH are seen to bring learners to a standard of knowledge and reflective practice which is required of a corporate member of the CIH. Centres are asked to design an integrated learning experience which links core knowledge for housing, key themes in housing and skills for practice. In order to produce reflective practitioner's centres must ensure that learners have the opportunity to reflect on their working practice in the context of their studies.

The lack of similar training certification and reflective practice is evident in the Republic of Ireland. Indeed until recently there was no formal academic qualification in housing, until the setting up of a partnership qualification between Respond! Housing Association and University College Dublin, which is also recognised by the CIH. This point is developed in the next section.

> I think professionalism is something that's not been available…there is no badge out there to say you are a professional. The architects and the technicians all have their own associations and they saw it is damn hard to get into them. *(Tony-Local authority)*

A desirable quality that was seen as being important in gaining institutional recognition was that of experience and length of time in the job. As housing was seen to be such a vast area there was seen to be a need to spend some time working in it in order to experience all facets of the job. This was an important finding in that the individuals working in the area saw this need while the practice within the local authority system is to promote people out of the area to provide them with a more rounded training and experience. The ability to stay in the one area for your career was also a distinguishing factor between those working in the local authority and those working in the housing associations.

> I see myself as a housing professional because of the length of time I have been involved in housing……almost 17 years now.*(Noel-Housing Association)*

> To be a housing professional you need a passion, a belief in and a length of time in housing. *(David-Local authority)*

> It takes years to get familiar with all the bits to housing…..and just when you think you know it all someone comes in off the street and has a whole new problem for you to solve *(Mary-Local authority)*

Another clear factor in those who saw themselves as having a professional housing identity was whether or not they were employed by the local authority or by a Housing Association. In all cases there was the feeling that it was easier to have a professional housing identity within Housing Associations because of there particular function. Housing Associations had clearly defined ‘labels’ and ‘categories’ for jobs in Housing Associations and this had echoes of the work of Taylor (1999) on professional identity. The lack of these same labels within the local authority made it, in the view of those interviewed, more difficult to stake a claim to that title. It was also interesting to see that some felt that the Housing Associations had had an influence on local authorities in this area as some personnel within the local authority were using Housing Association job descriptions as a mechanism to define the work they were involved in on local authority estates.

> A Housing Professional develops a career path in developing a housing service in social housing or Voluntary Housing Association…….it is much easier to do it in a Voluntary Housing Association as the role is clearly defined and established. *(John-Academic)*

> Identity as a housing professional is easier within a Housing Association-they seem to know what they are about. They were set up with housing in mind…..like Cluid and Focus……and many have English origins. There is a clear remit in what they are about and a housing professional can progress through the ranks within the housing association. *(Ben-Other)*
>
> Large Housing Association are seen to be professional as they have paid staff and a commitment. *(Vicky-Academic)*

Again, this perceived opportunity to have a professional housing identity within the housing association sector opened up many other questions and issues. A more detailed examination of these issues is covered in chapter eight.

While the emergent themes on a professional housing identity were broadly similar among those working in the local authorities and the housing associations, those working in the academic field had an added dimension in that they saw themselves as not practitioners in the area. Hence there was much further discussion as to how the word professional was being interpreted but a thread of agreement among the academics was that to be a true housing professional you had to have some ability to work on the ground with people in the area. The attribute of being a practitioner in some shape or form became one of the defining features.

> I would see academics in the housing area as housing experts but not housing professionals. It is like operating with a knowledge of something without ever delivering the service. To me it is the same as a medical surgical expert who teaches about surgery and the person who actually goes into the theatre and carries out the surgery on the patient. *(Ryan-Local authority)*
>
> A Housing professional is someone who is a direct provider, works directly in the area, gives advice, is about advocacy….In ways I am lucky because as well as being an academic I am a member of the ENHR…….this tends to give my work a more hands on focus. *(Andrew-Academic)*
>
> No housing professionals in Ireland but we do have housing practitioners…….look at how successful the housing practitioners conference is……the one that was held in Sligo not too long ago *(Sean-Academic)*

6.3.3 Institutional certification of Housing Professionals

Training and education was seen as being important to this job but equally important was formal recognition of qualifications by the Department of the Environment to

create a professional pathway and career in housing. Many highlighted that the grade system within the local government system was still dominant in obtaining a promotion, and some gave examples of how accredited qualifications were overlooked during interviews in the local authorities. Recognition by the CIH was seen to be a secondary aspect in the interviews, due to their location in Northern Ireland and the UK, and the fact that the CIH were not widely known and recognised by people working in the Republic of Ireland.

> ….Take my own job in a large local authority…I loved being in housing and wanted to stay in housing…..I did the degree in Housing and Community Studies and because I want to progress within the system I have to move departments…..so someone in housing a long time is moved……and I am not saying anything bad about the person getting my job …but the person who is replacing me has no qualifications….it just that grades are more important …not knowledge. *(Amy-Local authority)*

> Take the example of Joe Blogs (name changed) and him not getting the job in housing ….even though he had the degree in housing…..and why….all because he had not done his leaving cert……it is mad….they (the DOE) are so stuck with their rules that they do not see a degree being higher than the leaving cert……he really should have appealed that decision. *(Matthew--Local authority)*

> I was moved from a grade 7 to a grade 8 when I got the qualification in housing…….from housing to infrastructure……now that makes real sense!.....but it is because the DOE do not recognise the qualification…….that is what UCD should do next……get recognition from the DOE for the qualification. *(Tony-Local authority)*

Until 1997 there was no formal certified qualification in housing in the Republic of Ireland and this led to the initiative of Respond! Housing Association obtaining accreditation from the University of Sheffield for a certificate and diploma in housing and community studies. This qualification proved to be fairly successful with over 200 people obtaining the award. However, there was some concern from the graduates that the qualification was an English qualification for an Irish market and following discussions between Respond! and University College Dublin, a four year honours part-time degree in housing and community studies was developed. On average, thirty students complete this course every second year. Even though some of those interviewed for this thesis had this qualification, recognition by the Department of the Environment was seen as more important than the qualification itself and returns to the fact that promotion within the local authority sector is largely based on the grade

system. The implications for any provider of housing qualifications is that they could be deemed as almost entirely useless in terms of career advancements unless they have DoEHLG recognition.

6.3.4 The need for specialist knowledge

Similar to the work of Turner (1996) and Larson (1977), special knowledge and skills within the local authority structure became a theme among those interviewed and the idea of becoming a professional by acquiring on-the-job knowledge was seen as important. Therefore being a professional has a set of implicit workplace practices, and modes of interacting with clients. There is a stress on the containment of subjective feelings in a similar way to how a doctor, teacher, social worker might operate. Gaining on-the-job knowledge is highly dependent on the willingness of your peers and co-workers to share their knowledge and expertise. Formal training towards a qualification in housing was not seen as an option by many; professional knowledge was to be acquired in a practical and hands-on manner. This in turn had its own risk if the co-workers were unwilling to participate in this exchange of knowledge.

> Professionalism is about knowing things, going by the rules, keeping within the boundaries…….take doctors and consultants….they are the professionals. We don`t go to college like them. We learn the hard way…..on the job. But that is if you are allowed to learn. I know of one guy who retired and the day before he went he shredded 90% of his files. The poor person who took over from him was really left out at sea. *(David-Local authority)*

This idea that knowledge is assimilated by doing and carrying out particular functions, requires a person to have particular skills and confidence in asking and discovering what is to be performed in their job. Equally important was knowing what is not required of them and keeping within the existing rules and boundaries of the local government culture. It was noted that age and length of time within the local authority were perceived as positive factors giving an individual more self confidence to ask questions. By understanding the wider dynamics of local government and how promotions were usually grade specific and not knowledge specific, people who had worked in other sections beforehand were familiar with the unwritten rules of how to find mechanisms of getting things done, rather than having a step-by-step manual which was to be followed line by line.

> I did a course on Local Government Studies with the IPA, but being honest I never used much of it. OK….it was good to know where I might find different acts and memos from the DOE……but at the end of the day a lot of the work is covering the same areas and once you are told hold to carry out the basics you can work out the rest yourself. *(Ryan-Local authority)*

6.3.5 Being a professional: attitudes and attributes of a Housing Professional

Earlier sections of this thesis outlined how professionals draw a distinction between whether a person perceives working in housing as a job or a chosen profession. Similarly, an interesting parallel can be drawn in this section between the attitudes people had to acquiring knowledge and their perceptions of their position. For those who saw housing as a job, new knowledge and ways of doing things was a chore and just something that had to be done. On the other hand, for those who choose to be in housing and saw themselves more closely linked to the badge of being a housing professional, knowledge was a multi-faceted thing that enhanced their role.

> Housing knowledge…. Well, I don't think there's anything you could call just purely housing knowledge, is there?.... I mean it's lots of different things, but nothing in great detail. Some bits of law … a bit of building tech, housing finance, those sorts of things. But the more you know the better you can function…..I suppose you could say that when you know what you are doing you are more professional. It is just how you see things. *(Ryan-Local authority)*

For another housing worker, being professional was encapsulated in her approach to training and how others saw her. This individual in particular reflected on her own situation, personal development and her own motivation. As her organisation changed, and became more modern, the acquisition of knowledge enabled her to keep pace or to have a transition of identity as Mead (1938) might suggest. Another stressed the importance of keeping up with the changes which were required from you.

> Being a housing professional means that I have a degree in the particular area, which is housing and community studies and that puts me in a certain category. I also go on training courses and attend conferences….budgets permitting……but I don't see these as just doss days like some of my colleagues. I think about what I can gain from these days? So I often come back with pages of notes……and the contacts you make with other Local Authorities at conferences and just to see what they are doing gives you a lot of knowledge too.' *(Amy-Local authority)*

While those interviewed may have been reluctant to assume the badge of being a housing professional, they were more certain as to what the required qualities were to be a housing professional. Parsons (1954) and Goode (1957) wrote about altruistic service, a high indeterminacy/technicality ratio and a professional code of conduct. The housing workers interviewed cited positive attributes and traits such as being analytical, a problem solver, personal awareness, having a passion and flexibility within the job.

> It takes a long time to gain the knowledge about how the housing system works. Sometimes it is even difficult when we have discussions with the DOE (about housing) as they are quoting memos and guideline documents when we are speaking from the experience of how things work on the ground. The Rental Accommodation Scheme is a good example of documents issued from the DOE and what happens on the ground……But you just have to be flexible and use your own cop-on when dealing with different situations. *(Ben-Other)*

> A Housing Professional should want to be in the field but in the local authority you are assigned to the area…..you may not have empathy, interest and understanding and you need these to work in housing…….a housing professional needs to be driven……you need to show people that you know what you are about or are willing to learn if you do not know. People want results when they ring the council and being professional to me is giving the client results and getting the job done. *(David-Local authority)*

Some of the workers identified more personal attributes which were related more closely to how they identified through their own individual biography, with their clients. The longstanding motivation to change things for the better, which was highlighted by some, had been derived from their experiences of growing up on local authority estates:

> I grew up on one of the first council estates in Dublin and I think I know first hand about how the Council can be viewed. It was all about hassling them to get the smallest job done even though you were paying your rent. So, I suppose somewhere in the back of my head I started to think that people should not be treated like that…….that the system could work in a different way. *(Matthew-Local authority)*

> I am a housing professional because I have a personal commitment to Social Housing and I have a political commitment to it. I grew up in a Council area and saw how my parents were treated…..but sometimes the workers were just doing their job. Through my articles now I can attempt to have a say in what people are doing in the field but it hard to get your views across sometimes. I feel like I am preaching to thin air when the actual work as being done by a different group of people.' *(Vicky-Academic)*

> You have to understand that most people want to pay their rent on time and in full, but that things happen in life. I remember when my Dad lost his job in the 70`s and my Mam had to look for a rent review, she felt like it being the end of the world. But working in the Council now I have a entirely different view and it is great when people are honest with you and tell you the truth about why their rent is not being paid……*(Mary-Local authority)*

Clearly these workers identify with the tenants and used life experience in defining how they worked. Consequently, the importance of individual biographical identity when attempting to define a professional identity, also needs to be remembered.

6.3.6 Projecting a professional image

Even though in-depth knowledge was not seen to be highly important to everyone, the need to be involved in the presentation of an image of professional competence was a unifying feature among although those interviewed. In ways there was resonance here with the work of Foucault (1978) and how workers had multiple identities and presentations of self. Interviewees described the identity which they had at their desk when doing the paper work and ticking the boxes. And then there was the identity and face-work which they assumed when dealing face to face with the public. Simple things such as clothes were used in some cases to radiate the different identities depending on the level of professionalism which it was deemed appropriate to demonstrate.

> There is no dress code…but there is an in-house level of acceptability. Smart casual is what I would call it……although the Directors and SEOs like the shirts and ties. *(Peter-Housing Association)*

> You need to look the part. You are an Official of the Council at the end of the day and you need to be seen like that. *(David-Local authority)*

Because housing workers were developing roles in a new occupational field they were to some extent caught up in a process of defining appropriate professional conduct. They usually had not received training into an agreed set of working practices when beginning to work, but through experience developed an understanding of what professional meant.

> The local authority is professional but not professionalised…..we look professional when we need to. *(John-Academic)*

> I am a housing professional because other people see me as a housing professional……in how I act, what I wear, what I say I am doing…..*(Noel-Housing Association)*

> When you are dealing with the public you have to dress in a smart and professional way. I always wear a shirt and trousers when I am doing the open meetings on the estate…..although I am not a tie man. *(Ryan-Local authority)*

However while presenting an image which gave them an air of authority and professionalism, those who ranked the community development side of housing as being a large defining factor, were also aware of the dangers involved in over emphasising an image of difference between themselves and their clients because this could alienate them. Hence some felt that there was a need to engage in a balancing act of presenting themselves as being knowledgeable, efficient and competent while also being approachable and not 'just another shirt and tie from the Council'. This idea of having a fragmented professional identity was something akin to what Kenny (2004) had to say when discussing identity.

> ……..Estate management is a good example …look at the area of anti social behaviour…if I did not dress down and in a casual manner, it would stop me getting the information from the tenants on the ground…..they would start to see me like a Community Garda….and even though they are in civilian clothes they really do not fit in…..Residents see me more approachable if I dress down. *(Matthew-Local authority)*

> A housing professional needs to have dual personality. On the one hand you have to be ok with the admin side of things. Then there is the need to have the ability to get on with tenants……..the need to have motivation/soft skills …..it is like being two people. You need your professional local authority voice and you need your tenants……"on the level" voice. *(Joe-Other)*

They also spoke about how they had developed and used body language and nonverbal behaviour (Goffman, 1959) that collapsed the barriers – and thus highlighted the similarities – between themselves and their clients. It was helpful to nod and laugh when appropriate rather then appearing rigid and authoritarian in stature.

6.4 Conclusion

Professionalism is a broad concept and this chapter examines the debate between how those working in the area recognise themselves and how they are recognised by others. What emerged was that although housing workers do not belong to a clear

definable profession, they are working and projecting a professional image in their own way. They might be reluctant to call themselves a professional but they are negotiating a professional identity. The impact of NPM requires them to understand the needs of a modern housing sector which among other things entails an understanding of how the market operates, good communication and planning skills and a recognition that the customer should be consulted and invited to participate in an open and transparent way. They are required to meet targets and implement policy on the ground with very little support or training and they are carrying out all these functions to a high standard. Added to this there is a level of knowledge required to operate within a bureaucratic system. While it is difficult to make an exhaustive list of requirements for this role, on the job experience and dealing with the public are key to the acquisition of this knowledge.

While most interviewees acknowledged that obtaining an educational qualification enhanced their professionalism, others noted a concern that formalised education in services such as housing would "professionalise the job out of existence". The DoEHLG might exclude people for lack of formal qualifications as their bureaucratic structures equate qualifications with ability and personal attributes. A number of the respondents were more concerned with the level of recognition of educational qualifications in general within the local authority structure. Due acknowledgement by the DoEHLG of the value of a qualification is necessary for the career advancement of the individual. This in turn would require a restructuring of the grade system and mechanism for promotion within the local authorities to acknowledge the status of education and qualifications.

What emerged from the interviews also was that the next generation of housing workers may be coming into this work with different expectations and criteria for evaluating their roles and values, depending on their differing formative experiences, their 'habitus' in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, or the unique combination of the interactions between the individual social actor and their social environment. However, this raises further questions about the extent to which the next generation of professionals is likely to develop the social capital that has been identified as so important for those working in housing. There may therefore be a new understanding of professionalism which involves the challenging of expert knowledge and a

recognition of the importance of the ‘self’ or personal qualities of the professional, most particularly their interpersonal skills and intuition (Williams, 2003).

The development of this new understanding of professionalism, in which the personal is seen to be a potential resource for professionals is echoed in how those interviewed projected their own professional image, relationships with customers and use of their own life experiences, to ensure that the their job was carried out effectively and efficiently. Hence the reliance on self may make the adoption of a professional identity more comfortable for many housing workers. On the other hand, it still raises issues about how many of the personal experiences, values and feelings of the worker should influence what is done in a work setting. Achieving boundaries and a balance between personal and professional elements of this new emergent professional identity is an area that warrants further investigation.

CHAPTER 7: UNDERSTANDING IDENTITIES

7.1 Introduction

When first deciding the methods for conducting this piece of research it was assumed that there was a professional housing identity in the Republic of Ireland similar to other European countries. Given that the local authority structure has the relatively new position (since *Better Local Government* 1996) of Director of Services for Housing, it was imagined that individuals with this title would be identified as housing professionals by practitioners in the field. However, following preliminary discussions with local authority personnel this was found not to be the case and the identity of housing professionals became difficult to establish. At the same time a list of names of people, who were not assigned as Director of Services for Housing, but were identified as housing professionals by their peers, began to emerge. I therefore decided to interview these professionals to see if they recognized themselves as housing professionals. In developing interview questions and in reflecting on the responses given, the notion of 'identity' and identity formation became significant. When this is combined with the word professionalism, the scope for diversity of definition widens even further.

This chapter commences with some personal reflections on my own identity in relation to this research before exploring the various meanings of identity in the literature. While a set of individuals with a clearly defined professional housing identity did not emerge from the interviews, what did emerge was that these same individuals were in the process of establishing a cohesive identity for themselves in housing. The fact that it was not a 'professional' housing identity was more to do with issues about clarity of definition and external factors such as lack of recognition for the Department of the Environment, lack of a professional body, constraints of local authority hierarchies and cultures and the impact of performativity and new managerialism rather than a lack of personal identity. This has important implications for the education and training of professionals and will be explored in the final chapter.

7.2 Personal reflections

In understanding what identity and professionalism mean in the literature to me it is helpful to carry out a process of reflecting critically on myself as researcher, 'the human as instrument' (Guba and Lincoln, 1981). As this thesis centres around a series of interviews with the key players in the area and an analysis of what they said the;

> interpretation requires reflexivity, a self-awareness and a realization of one's own position in relation to those being researched. What effect will my presence have upon those I research? This is both an ethical-political question and a methodological one.' (Williams, 2003:54)

In the chapter two on methodology, I explored the value of reflexivity in more depth, but here it is important to give the rationale and context for the interviews and the assumptions in asking those questions.

From the outset I have stated that I was interested in establishing if there was a professional housing identity among those working in housing in the Republic of Ireland and if such a group of people existed, how they acquired this identity. Having left school myself at the age of seventeen I aspired to be a teacher, to have a profession and a respectable job. The acquiring of a degree was seen as the mechanism to achieve this professional status and I commenced a degree in Economics. Due to the state of the economy at the time of my graduation, with high levels of unemployment and many people emigrating, I continued on to complete a Masters degree in Economics and Finance rather than the teaching qualification of a H. Dip. Hence by the age of 21, I had achieved two academic badges which portrayed a certain level of academic achievement but gave little sense of who I was or indeed, what profession I should endeavour to work in. In short, and using the term created by Bourdieu (1996), I had obtained a level of cultural capital and wealth in the form of knowledge, which legitimate the maintenance of status and power (Grenfell and Jones, 1989).

Historically those who obtained an Arts degree in Economics could find jobs in the area of finance or in the business sector but this normally required further specialist training. I on the other hand, was fortunate enough to apply for and be accepted to the

position of a Junior Lecturer in Economics and Finance in a private third level college. The academic qualifications had given me a professional identity as a lecturer. I was identifiable according to the levels of cultural and academic capital that I had acquired (Bourdieu, 1986). Continuing on in employment in that college for a further ten years, I gained a lot of experience and opportunities to work in a range of roles. However, it was my qualifications which were continually noted when I was being identified in submission documents to various accrediting bodies.

The emergent issue for me at the time, and which has become stronger through reflection over the years, was how had that piece of paper with a given academic qualification suddenly given me an identity? I was a *"lecturer"* in Economics and was employed and identified as such. None of the attributes or perceived traits of a lecturer, such as ability to teach, develop lesson plans, carry out various forms of assessment etc were considered in giving me the job as a lecturer. It was the academic qualification which gave me the initial badge. I was subsequently made redundant from that job but I was now 'seen' to be a lecturer and had functioned in this capacity for ten years. The only thing which had changed was that I was now an unemployed lecturer. I went on to work as a trainer in the An Garda Siochana and here the job was given to me not based on my knowledge of the legal system, but on the fact that I was a 'lecturer'. Now, even in my current job in housing association, I am still regarded as a lecturer while my duties are much more diverse and bare little resemblance to the traditional role of being a lecturer. In short, the acquisition of a qualification which gave me an identity as a lecturer always intrigued and baffled me. Hence this personal interest began to develop of trying to establish if there are other professions where people's sense of professional identity has been shaped in a non traditional way. Are there other professions which are perceived by the general public as having the status of a professional entity but have not acquired this badge of professionalism through the more normal routes of qualifications, institutional recognition, standard criteria etc?

Combined with these inner questions was the fact that as I am currently working in the housing sector, and had developed a sense of passion as to what housing and home can mean to people and how having 'good' housing can be transformative for some individuals. I witnessed and became involved with a number of families whereby the

acquisition of social housing had impacts on their health, finance and general well being. By reflecting on this, and the critique that is discussed in the chapter on the meaning of home and housing, the thought came to me that if housing can be so important, surely we must have people who aspire to work in this area, who want to become housing professionals in the same way that one aspires to have a profession as a teacher, doctor or lawyer. I was also aware that I was an insider in the area of housing research and that insider research typically is seen as problematic, and indeed, frequently is disqualified because it is perceived not to conform to standards and intellectual rigor because insider researchers have a personal stake and substantive emotional investment in the setting (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Hence I would also need to reflect on being an insider in the research process. Bringing these aspects together, and with a sense of personal experience and interests, I attempted to explore the existence and nature of professional housing identity in Ireland, with a concern for its educational implications.

7.3 Defining Identity

The concept of identity has been used by sociologists in a number of different contexts and an exploration of what is meant by the term is helpful in attempting to study professional housing 'identity'. Identity can be defined as a sense of who we are as individuals – a sense of self, of personhood, of what kind of person one is. Identities always involve both sameness and difference. Thus, if you are Irish you are similar to other Irish and different from non-Irish (Cheng, 2004). There is a tendency to see identities as being fixed but some argue that identities are fluid and changeable and that new identities can be acquired (Goffman, 1959). It is also the way that we project ourselves to others – the way that we want others to see us. This allows for the possibility of identity to become a feature of the imagination. Individuals imagine themselves as belonging to some wider entity, such as a local community. In doing so, they implicitly mark closure from other groups (Jenkins, 2006). In Ireland for example, public debate often trades on this sense of identity, in commentaries on the Irish national character.

Mead (1938) discusses the acquisition of identity and the perceived agreement that primary identities are acquired in childhood – gender or ethnicity – which are

relatively durable. Yet even these can be changed, as some transsexuals will attest but is not always the case as is demonstrated in the durable gender identity amongst the transsexual population. In later life, there may be important moments of transition in identity, as in the process of moving from childhood to adulthood. There are numerous, less profound transitions, such as changing occupations or even moving house. All these involve alterations in the individual's sense of what kind of person she or he is. They also involve a process of negotiation between the self and external agencies. Someone who is a Catholic, for instance, has that identity confirmed in a constant negotiation between his or her sense of being a Catholic and others' definition of what that means. Similarly, at different ages or points of your life, your identity may reflect your view on life at that age. So children see the world through particular lenses and have an identity as a child because of this. Here the early work on studies of identity development using a chronological approach (Erickson 1959, 1968) traces how identity is age appropriate.

Mead (1962) identified the general mechanism for the development of self is reflexivity, or the ability to put ourselves unconsciously into others' places and to act as they act. As a result, people are able to examine themselves as others would examine them.

> It is by means of reflexiveness – the turning-back of the experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it. (Mead, 1962: 134)

The work of Goffman (1961) focuses attention on how identities are managed. In his view, individuals present an image of themselves to others, who are free to accept or reject that image. Goffman describes in detail the mechanisms of this impression management and draws extensively on dramatic metaphors. Although standing broadly in the symbolic interactionist tradition and concentrating his attention on face-to-face phenomena, Goffman`s interests lay mostly in displaying how the most minute and apparently insignificant activities are socially structured and surrounded by ritual. Social constructionists argue that identity is forged through social

interaction with others. Jenkins (1996) terms this 'the internal-external dialectic of identification'. We constantly judge who we are by how we act towards others and their reaction to us.

> Individual identity – embroiled in selfhood – is not meaningful in isolation from the social world of other people. Individuals are unique and variable. But selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed socialisation, and in the ongoing processes of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives….An understanding emerges of the 'self' as an ongoing and, in practice simultaneous synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definition of oneself offered by others. (Jenkins, 1996: 20)

Snow and Anderson (1995:240) make a useful distinction between *social* identities, defined as those we attribute or impute to others, situating them as social objects, and *personal* identity attributed to the self by the actor her/himself. Hence identity can also be about differentiating ourselves from others by forging a sense of our own individuality. However, it is also about sharing distinctive features with others – a sense of belonging to a category defined by similarity. Taylor (1999) makes an important distinction between categorical and ontological identity. Categorical identity is concerned with the labels ascribed to us by ourselves and by society. An example would be our housing tenure, which brings with it a set of discourses that ascribe its relation to the wider society. This is evident in literature on the status of housing tenure (Saunders, 1990), where public opinion associates a higher status and belonging to a higher socio economic group if one has purchased their house as opposed to renting it from the local authority or Housing Association. This is in addition to the differentiation offered by the wider categories of class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and so on. Ontological identity encapsulates how these are forged into a coherent sense of self-identity.

Kenny (2004) claims that identities in contemporary society, (with increased globalisation and international travel) are becoming fragmented, with a problem arising 'from the difficulty of establishing any firm ground from which to distinguish identities that are chosen and those that are ascriptive and arbitrary' (2004: 36). In the past individuals would have had a number of central elements to the construction of their identity including family, locality, nation, social class, ethnicity and gender. However, modern, or postmodern societies introduce more sources of identity which

can cut across these, producing a more complex pattern of identity and belonging. For example, greater geographical mobility can result in the loss of ties to locality and family. Globalization, therefore, can undermine the sense of nationhood and identities as a consequence of the multiplicity of lifestyles that it facilitates.

Another way of looking at the fragmentation of identities is to recognise identities as becoming more fluid in contemporary societies, and accepting that people can reflect on and change identities over their lifetime. This fluidity allows people to choose who they want to be in a society where traditional loyalties are breaking down. Like Mead (1962), Giddens (1991), argues that one of the key features of modernity is 'the reflexive project of the self'. Individuals reflect on their own identity and continuously rework it. He uses the idea of reflexiveness to argue that it constitutes an 'opening out' of social life in which individuals are more able to make their own lives by actively making choices. This is encapsulated by the concern with 'lifestyle', or the desire to choose an individual identity which leads to self fulfilment:

> In modern social life, the notion of lifestyles takes on a particular significance. The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of options (Giddens, 1991: 5)

The French philosopher Michel Foucault (1977) took the idea of identity further through his work on discourse or discursive formations. Discourse, for Foucault, shaped ways of talking about, representing or knowing a particular object. In his work on the growth of the modern prison he argued that penal discourses produced a distinct set of ways of talking about and knowing the criminal and the criminal mind. These discourses furnished positions for agency and identity. Foucault rejected the view of a person having an inner and fixed 'essence' that is the person's identity. He identified the self as being defined by a continuing discourse in a shifting communication of oneself to others. He also rejected common notions of people having some form of implicit power, replacing this with the idea of power as a technique or action in which people engage. Foucault suggested that power is thus exercised but not possessed and an 'identity' is communicated to others in your interactions with them. This identity is not a fixed thing within a person and it can be seen as a shifting, temporary construction.

Foucault (1985) explored how individuals inhabit multiple identities. On the one hand different discourses generate particular and often divergent positions for agency and identity and on the other hand a range of social practices are themselves linked to larger structures of identity. Here he described *technologies of the self* as ways individuals act upon themselves to produce particular modes of identity and sexuality. These 'technologies' include methods of self-contemplation, self-disclosure and self-discipline. Foucault (1985) describes technologies of the self as the way in which individuals work their way into discourse, as evidenced by autobiographies, diaries and blogs.

7.4 The development of identity

The idea that identities are fluid and develop over time was helpful in reflecting on the responses of those interviewed who were working in housing. While the majority of people were reluctant to state that they had a clear identity and make the statement that *'I am a housing professional'*, they were more certain as to how an identity was developed (or not), and what identity they had or were developing. While clear parameters and definitions of what a housing worker were not evident among those interviewed, certain issues were noted as enabling identity to emerge, albeit a very eclectic identity. Here the common themes enabling identity formation included having a community of practice, being given legitimate peripheral participation within that community, identity talk and identity work.

7.4.1 Communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation

While there are many schools of thought on *what* constitutes 'identity', the literature associated with Wenger (1998) is particularly helpful when reflecting on what those interviewed had to say about their own identity. Here Wenger (1998) describes identity formation as taking place within a community of practice and is constituted through the mutuality in relations of participation and has a nexus of multi-membership. As such, an identity is not a coherent unity, nor is it simply fragmented. Wenger claims that identities are at the same time one and multiple. A central source of identity formation in the community of practice is participation and identity is

constituted through the recognition of mutuality in relations of participation. This sense of having multiple identities connects well with the work of Foucault (1977) and is explored in chapter six. Newcomers become part of a community of practice through the process of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991), where the sense of belonging is developed through the relationships between the newcomers and old-timers.

In studying how communities of practice work, Lave and Wenger (1991) examined situated learning in a variety of contexts, developing an understanding of 'learning by doing'. Learning as 'legitimate peripheral participation' in 'communities of practice', is a way of conceptualising the process of developing expertise in practice. They define a community of practice as:

> A set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. (Lave and Wenger, 2002:115)

They explain that the term community of practice implies:

> Participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (Lave and Wenger, 2002:115)

Lave and Wenger (2002) analyse the various roles that participants within a given community, as experienced 'old-timers' engage in the practice that defines the community and, at the same time, 'novices' hold a legitimate peripheral role, gradually moving into a more central position as they continue to participate in the community's activity. Economists expound a similar analogy in terms of how markets operate and use the terminology of "insider" and "outsider".

They examined five ethnographic studies of apprenticeship, looking at the learning processes involved in becoming a Yucatec midwife, a Vai tailor, a naval quartermaster, a supermarket meat cutter and a nondrinking alcoholic. They suggest that the forms of learning in these settings (or failure to learn, particularly in the case of the meat cutters) may account for the underlying relationships of legitimate peripheral participation in these communities. Whether its 'structuring resources' offer the novice possibilities for participating directly in the community's practice,

depends on the setting.

Wenger (1998) explores the concept of the 'community of practice' in more theoretical detail, defining it as a group of people who regularly engage in activity in pursuit of some jointly-negotiated enterprise, thereby developing a shared repertoire of ways of doing things that is constituted in the ongoing process of the community's practice. He refines the notion of learning as participation in practice, and underlines the central role of this participation in the constitution of individual and group identities. This work has been influential within management studies, with many large companies attempting to promote the development of communities of practice in the workplace.

For interviewees working in housing, the ability to become part of the section or community to which they were assigned was almost more important than the job itself. By this they referred to the tensions raised by local authorities' normal route to career advancement through the grade system. This leads to a person targeting a grade advancement rather than a professional advancement in a specific area. If I am working in roads and I am a grade four, the only means for me to advance, in terms of career, within the system, would be to apply for whatever grade five position which becomes available. It is seen as a bonus if it is in the same section but the reality is that if you were successful in obtaining the higher grade, you would have to move sections. Moving across sections continually for career progression also involves commencing work with a new group of people or, a new community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Most workers tend to have their own set of standards and communities of practice. They have internalised the normative way of carrying out the job and have a certain amount of individual pride in performing their job to the best of their ability. Being the "newbee" within an already established community of practice will then bring with it specific challenges and issues. Hence if one was to take the essence of an apprenticeship system as being to allow the pupils to participate in a community of professional workers, then the learning of knowledge and skills of a particular occupation forces and motivates them to participate more fully in the practices of that community.

> A person's intentions to learn and engage and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a

> sociocultural practice. This social process includes, indeed it subsumes, the learning of knowledgeable skills. (Wenger,1991:29)

So for the housing worker, who may not have the qualification in this new area, the opportunity to work with those more experienced in the section, was important. While the new person may have the knowledge of generic budgets and decision-making processes of the local authority or housing association, individual sections, such as housing, have their own particular way of performing certain functions.

> One thing I learnt very quickly is that people like to have their estates looking 'nice'…….but we have no money directly in housing for plants and green areas. So I learnt about tapping into the Parks section…….they have different grants and monies available for all that type of stuff…..*(Susan-Local authority)*

While learning about a trade/profession/section is akin to the beginning steps of membership of a particular occupational group, it appears that the recognition of the status of the apprentice, which is the legitimisation of their peripheral participation, by the adult professionals is more important than receiving education only (Wenger, 1998). If the person is allowed to participate peripherally they then become highly motivated to learn. This sets them on the road towards full participation and the status/identity associated with that, but also because it allows them gradually to develop their own understanding of 'what it is all about' and what they actually have to learn to become adequate professionals. Constructing an identity can be seen as a layered development process and in the case of the housing workers one variable in the process was one of commitment. Here commitment refers to the ability to care about the work they are doing and feel that one's behaviour can influence the outcomes. It is an ability to explore choices by questioning their own frame of reference and finally making a well-argued choice. Hence, the dedication to your job and the recognition from fellow housing workers was important as they needed to be seen to be able to do the job by the people who had carried out the function before them and that they were dedicated to the task at hand. However, whether or not it is possible to participate in work practices within the local authority depends on the transparency of those practices to the newcomer.

A number of those interviewed talked about the importance of being able to gain the respect and acceptance of tenants and at the same time retain their capacity as an

officer from the local authority or housing association. The example of hosting tenant participation meetings highlights this. Tenant participation asks the tenant to step outside the box of their letting conditions and take an active role in the management of their estate. While other sections, such as Community Work, have training and skills capacity to carry out these functions, housing workers have in the main, to rely heavily on peer support and on-the-job learning. The success or failure of an initial meeting with tenants on a new estate can set the tone of engagement between the social landlord and the tenants for the life-time of the estate as one housing worker outlines in his first experience of legitimate peripheral participation.

> I remember the first tenant participation meeting I attended…..I was so glad John was there and I was not on my own. John chaired it and I just sat beside him and listened…but being honest I was terrified. The tenants at the start just kept shouting and saying how they had been let down with things not being done on the estate……..and John just sat there and listened….and after a while people just calmed down and the meeting continued. John explained after that it was good for me to be there, in my official capacity as Housing Officer, and to hear the issues first hand as a lot of the work was about allowing people to vent their frustrations…..but you still need to keep your promises and get the work done…… Not just talk about the work but actually do it. Then the tenants would see you as the Housing Officer…..they would know who you are and you would know too. *(Matthew-Local authority)*

Having legitimate peripheral participation and a community of practice was also cited in establishing this professional identity as it enabled the individual to gain insider knowledge. The many changes in the housing environment have made the delineation of a clear housing domain more difficult. The key changes in the operating environment identified by the housing workers focused on the current policy agendas of regeneration, social inclusion, community care and sustainability. These are relatively new areas of work for many local authorities and hence have an element of being defined, as programmes of work are completed and evaluations carried out of what works and what does not work in these areas. Here an emphasis upon the malleability and flux of identities emerged from those interviewed reflecting the different areas of knowledge which was required from them. Some individuals found a personal identity in the field of knowledge relating to community development and wanted to use this knowledge to empower and support residents. Others identified with the idea of having the knowledge of how to get issues resolved within the constraints of the organisation in which they operated. For these

individuals, an identity of being the problem solver was acquired. However while individual preferences of identity were noted there was also the feeling that housing workers were required to wear several caps and to have malleable identity and that it was through work within your community of practice that you learned which cap to wear.

> I often am spotted in Brady's- (a local public house)- but I am clear that at nine on a Friday night I am there for a pint and not to fix a leaking loo…*(laughs)*..It is a good job because when you get on in the job ……and then…… when you go for a drink with the lads from the section you can let your barriers down and just be yourself rather than the guy from the council who can get you a house if you ply them with drink *(Ryan-Local authority)*

7.4.2 Identity work

As noted in other chapters, the established professions tend to use their exclusive access to a specialist stock of knowledge as a means to construct a collective identity that marks a clear boundary between professional and client. Conversely, in the absence of a professional housing worker identity, and given the need to respond efficiently to consumer needs and demands, implicit in NPM, the worker aims to present an image of professional competence. Throughout the interviews individuals were keen to highlight that they felt the manner in which they operated within the confines of their job gave them a certain classification or identity. Within the sociological and anthropological literature, the concept of identity work has been well utilised (Stewart and Strathern, 2000). Snow and Anderson explain:

> Identity work may involve a number of complementary activities: (a) procurement or arrangement of physical settings and props (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance (c) selective association with other individuals and groups (d) verbal construction and assertion of personal identities (1995:241)

The idea of personal appearance and the dressing up or down to display an air of professionalism was discussed by a number of people and this area is examined in more detail in the chapter dealing with professionalism (Goffman, 1959). Equally so, the idea of selective association and wanting to be part of a community of practice was highlighted as being important in gaining an identity. It further emerged from the

data collected that many individuals had arranged their workspace in a similar way. In many of the offices there were maps of the housing estates where they worked pinned to the noticeboards and leaflets were clipped on giving details of local community events. In one case, similar to what you would find in a solicitors or doctors office, an interviewee had hung framed copies of her degree in housing and professional membership of the Chartered Institute of Housing on the office wall. Another example was that particular prominent publications such as *Better Local Government (1996),* and the *Housing Unit Guidelines (2001)* were on view on bookshelves. This might be seen as standard practice among the academics who were interviewed but in the local authority offices shared with other non-housing staff, it was noted that their colleagues did not exhibit these props.

> Some of the road maintenance staff often come in here to look for a particular estate on that map. The names of the estates are normally changed after the tenants move in and the original plans just has the site name……I like to mark in the correct names and roads……it helps me when I am sending out flyers……but it shows people in the office all the areas I cover too. *(Mary-Local authority)*

In tandem with the discussion about the meaning of housing, one academic pointed out that some of his academic colleagues had made comments to the effect that housing was a small area of academic knowledge and hence did not require its own section and was merely seen as a sub section of the Department of Social Policy. However, by having a range of books available on housing, from an international perspective as well as an Irish stance, this academic had hoped to change this assumption. He had also lobbied to have a section on the college staff intranet to give information on housing from international housing research associations and mentioned five times during the interview that he was one of the few Irish members of an international association for housing researchers.

7.4.3 Identity talk and intuition

Howard (2000; 372) notes that 'people actively produce identity through their talk' and for interviewees this was undertaken in a variety of contexts and modes. Mead (1938) claims that language allows us to become self-conscious beings, aware of our own individuality, and able to see ourselves from the outside as others see us. Some

of those interviewed indicated their demonstration of housing expertise by the use of specialist terminology and phrases such as 'turn-key developments', 'part fives' and 'ASBOs'. There was also an accepted implicit definition of housing to the insiders and those who were working in the area which was not immediately obvious to the others. While most people found it difficult to articulate and clearly define what housing was, they were able to use similar words to capture the substance of what it was about.

> Housing…..well it is about the big picture ….it is the whole environment in which people live and dwell. *(Tony-Local authority)*

> It is hard to give a clear quotable definition of housing…..it can mean different things depending on the tenant that comes into you…..like it covers allocations, rents, maintenance, noisy neighbours, community buildings……a bit of everything really. *(Peter-Housing Association)*

Others indicated their enjoyment of engaging in discourse and debate about housing issues whenever the opportunity arose. For those who were also functioning in the community development sections of housing, these debates formed an intrinsic part of their work

> I am on the Housing SPC (Strategic Policy Committee) and it is great when we meet up with the other SPCs….we can discuss the ins and outs of what is going on in the local authority and it is a real chance to find out how they are fairing with PMIs (Performance Management Indicators) *(David-Local authority)*

This need for reflexivity was acknowledged by a number of people and the ability to articulate this was seen as a distinguishing feature for those working in housing. While technical staff had the ability to interpret and implement DoEHLG guidelines, those working in housing required an element of reflexivity. A basic example was to think about the consequences of putting person X, with four children into house Y, without reflecting on the implications of the choice.

> Housing practitioners need to be much more reflexive in their analysis. By this I mean that they need to think more about what they are doing and why, rather than simply doing it. *(Vicky-Academic)*

Some spoke of their capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice.

> It is like when you are at a TMB (Tenant Management Board) meeting……you know not to jump onto the next item on the agenda….just because it is on the agenda….when half the room is eating you alive about a burnt out car that has not been cleared from the green area. The agenda says items one, two and three…..but a lot needs to happen sometimes which you cannot put on an agenda. (Mary-Local authority)

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter explored the idea of identity and in line with the methodology of this thesis, the first section reflects on my own identity and career development. This gives some insight into my approach to housing and research and the value which I place on knowledge about identity formation.

The theoretical literature on identity, including Mead's work on identity development and reflection, Goffman's writings on identity management, Foucault's 'technologies of self' regulating identity, and social constructionists' arguments regarding social and personal identity formation, ontological security, fragmentation and fluidity, are used to give a wider context to the information obtained from those interviewed. In particular, Wenger and Lave's work on communities of practice links to interviewees' reflections on their own professional identity. Here the importance of belonging to a community in which they can practice their knowledge and skills in a meaningful way is highlighted as being all important. This in turn has educational implications for any type of educational programme which is put in place for housing workers. The acknowledgement which they get from their peers and the tenants gives them a sense of legitimisation of peripheral participation and in ways this is more important than any formal education and training. Hence questions of authenticity and legitimacy are central to the formation of an identity within the work setting and individuals and groups compete to ensure that their particular interests, characteristics and individuality are accorded recognition and value.

The chapter concludes by highlighting some of the personal attributes which the respondents felt enhanced their identity and these ranged from the capacity to speak the language of housing to the ability to reflect on their practice. Drawing on this, if there was found to be a need for a formal education qualification to develop the field of housing professionalism, an enhancement of these personal attributes could be seen as a core learning outcome from the syllabus. Traditional education would need to be augmented to focus on a wider range of learning outcomes including personal and community development, communication skills and social/political roles. The inclusion of some form of on the job training with support from peer workers would also allow the emerging housing professional the opportunity to gain knowledge by participating in a meaningful way.

CHAPTER 8: EMERGENT IDENTITIES OF HOUSING PROFESSIONALS -A QUESTION OF STRUCTURES?

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters three broad issues have been discussed in some detail. Firstly, there was a lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a professional housing identity among housing workers in the Republic of Ireland. Secondly, was the fact that individuals working in the area develop some form of emergent identity which is related to working in housing, (although this may not be a professional identity for a variety of reasons outlined in earlier chapters). Furthermore, those working in the voluntary housing area are more likely to have the mechanism to develop a professional housing identity in comparison with their counterparts employed in the local authority sector. Thirdly, there is a need for a broad understanding of education for these professionals that stretches beyond a narrow definition of accreditation or formal education courses. Wenger's concept of community of practice was used to illustrate this gradual process of learning from practice.

This chapter examines these conclusions in more detail, analysing the organisational and structural factors impinging on professionalism in the housing sector. It brings together the themes and issues identified in previous chapters reviewing the different structures and working cultures that are evident between the government structures of local authorities and the housing association structures. Comparisons between the operating mechanism of the voluntary and local authority housing providers are highlighted. The advantages that housing associations have in terms of management structures, size, job specifications, cost factors and a community development focus are discussed as key factors in a clearer professional housing identity among workers employed by the housing associations. The implications of these structures and cultures for the identity and education of housing professionalism is then examined and some possible future developments are highlighted.

8.2 The emergence of a professional housing identity within housing associations

When interviewees were asked to identify those who they thought were professionals in the housing sector in Ireland, a common response emerged. Firstly interviewees were not sure who these people were. Titles and structures would indicate that these professionals would be located in the local authority in the guise of the Director of Services for Housing. Conversely however, the gut feeling of the interviewees was that if such a category of people *actually* existed, they would more likely be found within the housing association sector. The ensuing discussion as to why this was so and perceptions of housing associations lead to several factors being identified as core features. They saw the distinguishing factors of housing associations as including the role of housing management, the size of the estates, clearly defined job descriptions which include skills in community development and finance to name but a few. An examination of the core functions and missions of housing associations, which are available on the respective websites and quoted in the literature, reinforced these key criteria associated with the profession of social housing provision by housing associations.

8.2.1 Housing Management and Specialisation

In recent years there is a surprising degree of convergence in goals across government policy fields including a growing emphasis on accountability, communications and performance management skills. New managerialism is closely linked to this project of measuring efficiency and neoliberal models of the political economy of welfare. Housing organisations are expected to demonstrate a high degree of expertise in management skills, innovation and creativity in pursuit of measurable efficiencies. This is often understood as the antithesis of regulation of traditional bureaucratic organisations.

However, one of the paradoxes of the technical discourse is that innovation does indeed exist, albeit with a high degree of regulation and centralised control. This leads to the myths of policy creating a housing system of integrated mixed tenure housing on social housing estates while also managing a planning and funding system which

requires high levels of bureaucracy and time delays. For example, if a housing estate was to comprise social rented accommodation (RSS), affordable housing, housing for the elderly (CLS), traveller accommodation etc, each constituent section requires a separate application process to the relevant section of the Department. Hence a policy to encourage integration and a more pluralistic housing sector among client groups has resulted in a bureaucratic practice with increased levels of monitoring and control.

These systems have driven debate in housing literature about how the housing stock is managed and the implications for tenants (Fahey 1998, Norris 2003, O Connell 2001, Norris and Winston 2004). Much of this has been critical of the operation of the local authority up until the early 1990s. Rarely did it appear that local authority housing departments considered their function as serving and contributing to the development of complex and vibrant communities with particular needs in economic and demographic terms. Much of this was due to

> the emphasis of housing policy in the Republic being much more on the state sponsorship of home ownership with council housing primary seen as a stepping stone towards home ownership or as housing of last resort for the poor. (Paris, 2001:15)

Problems on local authority estates and the inability of local authorities to manage their housing stock properly came to be seen as one of the biggest challenges for local authorities. Individual workers from the local authority were harassed and disrespected when they engaged with the tenants on the estates, but some saw this interface as a by product of poor management skills and an inability of the council to carry out basic repairs and maintenance (Fahey, 1999).

By the mid 1990s, many local authorities had begun to respond to criticism of their performance as landlords and had instituted efforts to improve their housing management performance. This was accompanied by a concentration on improving conditions in their existing housing stock through physical refurbishment and efforts at community development within estates. The 1990s were also marked by a broadening of the focus of the social housing agenda by the government, the advent of which was first signalled in *A Plan for Social Housing* (DoEHLG, 1991). One of the most significant features here was the widening of the traditional role of the local

authority housing service, beyond the construction of dwellings for rent. The Plan stated:

> While the wider remit will, of course, continue to include the traditional functions, it will also require of local authorities a new facilitating and promotional role aimed at improving and speeding up access to housing. (DoEHLG, 1991:30)

As discussed in previous chapters, there have been attempts to modernise the local authority system and legislation in 1992 imposed an obligation on local authorities to develop statements of policy on housing management. However, Redmond and Walker's (1995) review of these policies reveals that they did not meet their aims and objectives. This was due to the low level of professionalism within housing departments and over-ambitious expectations of rapid change in local authorities. This slowness of systemic change in the institutions like the local governments is also reflected in the abolition of the admin/technical grade structure although this structure still exists in practice. This point reflects the inflexibility and incapacity for change in the structures of bureaucratic structures (Weber, 1949) and the continual change demands of new managerialism and performativity (Halford and Leonard, (2001); Deem, (2006); Lynch, (2006); Thrupp and Willmott (2003).

Exhortations to local authority to improve their housing management performance continued with the Housing Management Group (1996; 1998) and the publication of 'Best Practice Guidelines'. Some local authorities grasped the opportunity to make changes in how they engaged with tenants and carried out their management functions but this was very much a piecemeal affair. Many of the improvements focused entirely on desired practice for the future, paying little attention to the constraints or organisational weaknesses which led local authorities onto this path of management weakness in the first place. O Connell categorises these weaknesses and draws attention to the fact that local authorities were traditionally engaged in local administration rather than local government. They had an underlying adherence to a bureaucratic model of service delivery which 'militated against the development of specialist skills and functions in areas such as housing management.' (O Connell, 2001:158) In particular the content, structure and mode of delivery of any qualification which was used to give recognition to the housing sector worker, would need a section reflecting on new ways of working, changing culture and ethos within

the system. Given the discussion on the meaning of housing identity and home in previous chapters, this leads to the question of whether these institutional structures can 'care' and be responsive in the way that is needed for social housing. If they are to develop in this way, then it leads to other questions regarding what are the professional and educational implications of this development for the future.

While many other factors could be discussed about the management of stock by the local authorities, two key points are worth noting. Firstly, housing associations provide a tailored housing service which in the majority of cases, has community development as a core function of their operation. This is particularly true of general needs associations. They are independent entities and not consumed into a larger section of a local authority which in turn is consumed into an even larger government department. Although they receive funding from central government through various schemes, they appear to be able to maintain their identity of housing providers, in the widest definition of the word. Secondly, those working in housing associations can distinguish themselves as working for a "housing association" and the implied connotations of this. In contrast, those working in housing within a department, within a local authority see themselves as being located within an even larger governmental department which has not even got housing mentioned in its official title. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government is the department which deals with housing directly. Hence the lack of clarity in title for a worker reflects the confusion over identity for these workers and hinders some form of identity to emerge. One person working in the local authority, who was interviewed noted

> Sure it says it all when housing is not even mentioned in the Departments title dealing with housing…..It is the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government…..no mention of housing. What we need to make a difference to the housing profession is a new Department of Housing. *(Ben-Other)*

In terms of housing management systems, the voluntary housing movement has been central in proactively using management systems that respond to the needs of tenants and provide a decent housing service. Mission statements of housing associations stress the need to retain their sense of identity as value-based, locally situated,

community organisations. Furthermore, and in line with the debate on the influence of new public management, the endeavour to place housing management in the hands of non-government organisations, where tenants supposedly have more influence, is an attempt to present social housing as a more democratically organised institution. It is also evidence of the adaptability and responsiveness of housing associations to alter their way of working to suit tenant needs. This is in contrast with the historical development of housing within the local authority where housing management systems are relatively new since the 1990s. This difference in evolution can, in part, be attributed to the historical connections that housing associations have with their counterparts in the UK. Housing associations in the UK and Northern Ireland developed with a

> high level of involvement by the representative body, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations in the formation of most Northern Ireland associations, and in a number of cases there was direct involvement of a partner English housing association. (Mullins *et al*, 2003:69)

In the Republic, Cluid has its origins in Saint Pancras housing association in the UK and of the 115 newer approved bodies between 1995-2000, over one third of them have connections with Northern Ireland or the UK (Mullins *et al*, 2003). Part of the advantage of having such ties is that management systems have already established and training to enhance the development of the sector, most notably by the Chartered Institute of Housing. It also highlights the key point that education and training has to be recognised and embedded in the governance and management of the system for it to be meaningful and effective. However, this still leaves the wider question of whether the unwieldy bureaucratic structures of government can ever have the responsiveness needed for social housing? Part of these management systems is that these housing organisations have clearly defined roles and job descriptions for positions such as the housing officer, Community Development worker, Estate Officer etc. which are published on websites and in recruitment profiles. While some of these posts are now emerging within the local authority sector, the notable difference is that the posts within the voluntary housing sector have been there, for the most part, since the inception of the voluntary housing association sector. Hence the posts have developed and grown a stronger identity over time. Individuals applying for jobs within the housing association sector know exactly what their remit will be

and specific housing qualifications are a direct requirement for most jobs and a clearer progression within the sector.

8.2.2 Staffing, Volunteers and scale of the operation

In the Republic of Ireland, the largest six housing associations, each with 300 or more dwellings, account for around 50% of all dwellings in the sector. In comparison with the situation in Northern Ireland, there are eight associations with 1000 or more dwellings and they account for two thirds of all dwellings. (Mullins *et al*, 2003). Hence by having a small stock and developing relatively small schemes, housing associations can be highly responsive to their resident communities. To provide a meaningful comparison, actual figures, between local authorities and housing associations for the number of dwellings per housing worker, are difficult to obtain (mainly due to differences in job descriptions and operational issues in terms of size).
The board members of the housing associations are normally comprised by volunteers. A general assumption would be that these volunteers presumably have a lot of commitment and passion for social housing and are from a greater diversity of backgrounds than those working in local authorities. The work of Putnam (2000) on social capital and the contribution of voluntary participation in communities provides an insight as to why this might be so. Mackay and Williamson (2001) also highlight the significant role that volunteers have in the strategic direction of their organisations and in the day-to-day running of the operation, particularly in the smaller organisations. In a survey of housing associations, Mullins *et al* identified over 7,500 people working in 175 organisations and found

> 41% of these people were working as volunteers, 14% were employed through FAS or CES employment schemes, 18% were part-timers and 26% were full-timers. However these figures should be used with care as the make-up of the sector is so varied as to make sector averages of limited use when talking about individual organisations. (2003:79)

The larger housing associations depend heavily on estate-based volunteers to open community centres, carry out basic estate maintenance such as grass cutting, and to run estate based committees which engage in fund raising and general management functions. Hence the housing associations are aware of the responsibility and

commitment that comes with belonging to the estate for these volunteers. The paid housing worker is seen as the representative of the housing association, the identifiable face of the organisation and has the job of encouraging and sustaining tenant involvement. In part, there is recognition by both the volunteers and the housing worker that if this partnership is not working, then they the residents themselves will endure any resulting negative consequences. Very often the housing worker will have an office on the estate and this enables them to engage in identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1995). The procurement of a physical space and the association with individuals who attribute them as being the face of the housing association, is a further enhancement to identity formation.

Although the larger housing associations have exhibited rapid growth and are found functioning at a national level, there is also a movement towards keeping operations at a regional level and many housing associations have put regional management structures in place. (e.g. Cluid, Respond!, Nabco, Focus, Simon). This arose from a development-led strategy and a desire to balance the housing management and community development priorities of the organisations. Respond! and Cluid have built on this by seeking to establish a federal structure in which tenants would have management control of local estates where community development and education resources would be available, while support services would be provided at the regional and national level.

8.2.3 Cost Factors

For an individual to have the heart or passion for housing it might be argued that their view of their employment would be all important. In other words, do they see working in housing as a career or a job. Here a "job" is taken to mean a paid position of regular employment and using the Chicago School thinking, the concept of 'career' can be seen to have an objective and a subjective dimension (Becker, 1963). On the one hand, it points to the existence of more or less identifiable positions, statuses and situations. It also highlights the individual's subjective experience, the meanings they attribute to their experiences, and their sense of becoming a certain person, as in Goffman's account of a 'moral career' (1961). In the job of a housing worker with a

housing association, the individual is given clear functions to carry out, such as budgetary functions and community development initiatives. These functions can contribute to an individual seeing the need for themselves to be in the position and the possibility of having a career in the area rather than just getting a job done.

Most associations are extremely cost-conscious and their operations tend to be lean and focused in an attempt to provide good value for money. The more recent high cost of building has made the building of housing expensive, and housing associations are tied to build to a unit cost limit by the DoEHLG. The majority of the larger housing associations are engaged in the provision of a range of additional services over and above providing and managing tenancies. These services include community centres, crèches, after schools clubs, parks, dining facilities, shops, laundry facilities, counselling etc. This partly reflects the availability of funding to cover the capital costs, based on a formula of a fixed amount for every unit of residential accommodation which was introduced in the *Plan for Social Housing (1991)*. While this funding does not cover the direct costs of these specific services, the housing associations can use the funding as the basis for their provision. One of the larger housing associations employs their own design team and architects which enables them to have direct cost savings in the housing build on an estate. They are able to reallocate these surplus monies available from the DoEHLG towards other services. This is further evidence of the flexibility, creativity and responsiveness of housing associations that the bureaucratic structures of the local authorities may not have. This has the additional requirement that people employed by the housing associations have significant financial expertise and creativity to devise mechanisms to enable this to happen.

Some housing associations have been proactive in fostering partnerships with other state organisations that provide funding for certain community services. Hence in the case of the provision of crèches, housing associations have linked with the Health Service Executive to avail of funding for childcare projects. Significant links have also been forged with FAS and the Community Employment initiative (CE) which enables people to avail of work training and experience on a variety of schemes which still receiving state payment or welfare equivalent. These individuals have gained year

long placements with housing associations as childcare workers, estate maintenance officers, community buildings caretakers etc. Housing associations, like other charitable organisations, avail of public grants (e.g. the Millennium fund from the Bank of Ireland) and other philanthropic monies to fund particular projects on the estates. However, as in the case of many voluntary organisations, the cutbacks in public sector financing of initiatives from 2008 onwards has had significant impacts on some of these services, with some services closing completely (Combat Poverty, 2008).

These same government cutbacks also had significant impact on the operation of public private partnerships in the area of housing regeneration. One example of this is given in the work of Bissett (2008). His insider account of Public Private Partnership regeneration in St Michael's Estate is used as a means of highlighting the tensions which those working in the local authority experience. Bissett (2008) chronicles how city council officials became more focused on economic rationale than social housing and became engaged in strategies to minimise the social housing content of the regenerated estate.

For workers employed in the area of housing with social housing associations, the need to be cost aware and financially conscious, has become part of their job remit. While they expressed serious reservations about aspects of the New Public Management, none rejected the importance of accountability per se. Indeed, a number explicitly recognised that there had been a need for more effective accountability in the past. In this, they were reflecting their commitment to ‘New Professionalism’ with greater accountability downwards via enhanced client/user participation (Banks, 2004).

Hence this tangible skill of being able to raise funding and finance particular projects gives the individual a particular target or achievable goal to establish that they are doing their job. This target can be seen to give their role a clearer identity. While the use of personal performance indicators to measure how an individual is carrying out their job, is not widely evident in the housing association sector, there is the observable measurement of activities on the estate, the physical appearance of the

area and the level of tenant satisfaction. There is an element of 'legitimate peripheral participation' within a defined 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991), which legitimises the identity of the housing workers.

8.2.4 Community Development

As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, a lack of clear definition of housing has in ways impeded the emergence of a professional housing identity. However, this is only a possible surface indicator of a structural misrecognition or incapacity of larger-scale organisations like local authorities are unable to work in the flexible, responsive and caring way needed by housing professionals. Questions emerge as to whether or not the social housing professional should be modelled along similar lines as the medical Hippocratic oath or educator's pastoral ethos of student care? Should the ethos to care be a core principal of the profession, in the same way that it is in public services such as in education and health, and the medical field?

However, this lack of role definition of a professional housing worker is not evident within the housing association structure as housing workers have clearly defined job descriptions. A key aspect of this work is community development. Here Banks (2004) has argued, that the changes and challenges posed in working towards 'a new professionalism' (2004: 123), implies that is more stress on social justice agendas, anti-discriminatory practice, client/user participation and working across professional boundaries to raise service provision in the most deprived areas up to national norms. The work in community development arises because, in addition to providing accommodation, housing associations prioritised the promotion of strong and vibrant community structures. Housing associations see the task of providing housing as two-fold: firstly to build good quality housing which is economic to maintain; secondly, to ensure that they create the conditions in which communities will thrive. The latter is one of the main responsibilities of the housing worker. Housing associations do not create communities but they can create circumstances where community structures are more likely to flourish.

Another distinctive features of housing associations, is the degree of tenant

involvement, which runs from a basic level of tenant participation to full tenant co-operatives, and tenant empowerment. Residents are made aware of their responsibility with regard to the future of the scheme. The creation of a community in which they wish to live and bring up their children is in their hands. There is no landlord to rescue them if, through apathy or lack of care, anti-social elements come to dominate. Central to housing association thinking is the principle that those who live in an area are best placed to manage it because they know the area and have a vested interest in defending those elements which foster its flourishing. The role of the housing worker in this regard is to skill residents groups and empower them to run things, rather than taking over.

8.3 Conclusion

In the previous chapters the term "professional housing identity" has been broken into three separate terms and explored from a number of different angles. In each corresponding chapter, a reflection on my own understanding of these words is given which is then followed by a review of literature in the area. Both of these explorations give a context to the opinions which the respondents gave during their interviews. This on-going reflection throughout the thesis attempts to identify possible learning and future recommendations for the housing sector as a whole. When examining the workings of the local authority and housing association sectors, the similarities and differences in how they operate were discussed. This chapter recaps and focuses in on what these factors are and the result is the proposed idea that it is more likely for the housing worker to have a professional identity within the housing associations sector rather than the within the local authority.

Evidence demonstrates that the more flexible structures and ways of working in housing associations give greater scope for adaptability and responsiveness that local authority structures struggle with. Housing associations have been set up to carry out only functions related to housing in terms of their structure, mission statement and culture. This degree of specialism allows for the worker to be clearer about their role and responsibilities. A job description can be given and what it means to be a housing worker can be defined. This is not to say that there are similar jobs described within

the local authority sector but the recruitment of staff directly for the job in housing within the housing associations gives the role of a housing worker a more definable position. In the case of the Local authority, a fact discussed in chapter four, the individual involved in housing may be moved from another section and specialism. Hence the grade system within the local authority does not necessarily take on board the past experience, level of skill and knowledge requirements for the job in the same way that the housing associations can.

This chapter also identifies three other possible advantages which the housing associations have over the local authority in terms of enabling a professional housing identity to emerge. These include the scale of the operation, costs factors and the level of personal engagement in community development work. Whether these factors will continue to be an enabling feature for the housing worker very much depends on how housing associations will develop in the future. This is still open for discussion but they do receive the bulk of their funding form central government and may be required to carry out more defined functions as the economy contracts. One possibility is that they may be increasingly be utilised to help in the regeneration of run-down areas and smaller communities around the country will also continue to use them to provide for their local needs. They also have a role in providing housing for communities which are in danger of becoming overrun with holiday homes and where local families, because of high prices paid for second homes, cannot obtain a stake in the community. Housing associations will also continue to be the main source of accommodation for the homeless and other special needs groups. This role is due to expand and will continue to adapt to new homeless groups such as possible asylum seekers. The full potential of the voluntary housing movement has yet to be realised but it is felt that it will survive and flourish as long as it retains its strong commitment to community and the worker on the ground.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This thesis explored the concept of a professional housing identity through four objectives: to analyse the nature of housing identity; to explore the failure to establish a clear professional housing identity in the Republic of Ireland; to review empirically the impact of policies and institutional reform on the emergence of this identity; and to identify possible mechanisms in achieving a clearer professional housing identity and educational processes in the future. A conclusion at the end of each of the chapters gives a detailed overview of the key ideas which emerged in this process and this final chapter commences with a brief synopsis of these findings. By incorporating the salient aspects from each chapter, possible future developments in the field are examined and the need for future research in the area is highlighted.

9.2 What was discovered?

The title to this subsection was written in a positive way and an alternative title could equally be "what was *not* discovered?". Hence it is important to recognise the limitations of this thesis, some of which were mentioned in chapter two. In common with much of the empirical research into work experience, this research is based on a relatively small group of people with particular characteristics: they were all involved in housing, were work based and were positively orientated to exploring the issue of professional identity. This makes generalisation difficult. However, studies based on depth rather than breadth do add to the sum total of our understanding of the diversity and complexity of identity formation and the importance of both context and structures as being two elements shaping the nature of professional identity. What was discovered was that housing is a large area, structural issues are important, an identity can emerge through communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation and further thought needs to be given to any formal housing qualification which is developed.

9.2.1 Housing-the need to understand the big picture

The first finding of this thesis shows how the lack of a unique 'stock of knowledge' and definition of the concept "housing" has undermined the creation of a professional housing identity. Kemeny states that

> The failure to develop an epistemology of housing lies at the root of the ambiguous position of housing worker and the neglect of housing as a dimension of social structure (1992:153).

Nevertheless, it is argued that this has not proved to be a barrier to the emergence of a group of people who are perceived as having the professional housing identity. By carrying out interviews with this group, an understanding began to emerge as to what they saw housing to be. In chapter four the notion of "home" was explored, and discussed how some individuals may have a narrow understanding of it in terms of simple bricks and mortar while others see it providing shelter, safety and a place to be oneself. The work by Drudy and Punch (2005) on the commodification of housing was helpful here as they distinguish housing measured in quantitative terms (levels of profit, return on investment, capital gain), from housing measured in its real qualitative essence (as shelter, home, place in community development).

While housing was seen as far more than bricks and mortar by those interviewed, it was also noted that not everyone or indeed every institution, saw it as more than just bricks and mortar. Government housing policies in general, are about production and consumption, and are based on a material conception of housing, which sees things rather than activities and meanings. Housing policy has very little to say about use, about what we do once the front door is closed. Yet it is the use of our dwellings that concerns us most and this is what the reality of housing was for those interviewed and not just the policy statements and strategies. Those interviewed felt that since housing was such an important facet to life, it was desirable if those working in housing ascribed to the broader definition of home and the idea that since housing is the background to our lives, the provision of housing and related services, is crucially important.

9.2.2 The importance of the operating environment

A second finding revolved around places of work and the structures which those interviewed felt were more conducive to establishing a professional housing identity. On one side, there is the voluntary housing association sector and chapter three reviewed its historical development. What emerged from both those working in this sector and those working in the local authority and university sectors, was that the voluntary housing associations had particular advantages, in terms of structure and operations, which enabled the emergence of a professional housing identity. Chapter eight discusses these possible advantages in terms of cost factors, scale of the operation and the element of organisational mission.

In contrast, it was felt that while the environment in which local government in Ireland operated had greatly altered, the mechanisms to ensure that change actually took place, were not always there. *Better Local Government* (1996) was discussed as a case in point in that the introduction of a new restructuring of organizations, making strategic plans, launching quality improvement initiatives, measuring, auditing, and evaluating the performance of others, were all components of a kind of 'metamanagement'. Practitioners had to achieve these new factors while in many cases, they had not got the resources to do so.

Furthermore those interviewed felt that PMDS and the impact of New Public Managerialism had given some form of mock or pseudo professionalism, when workers were so concerned to deliver outputs that they failed to use their initiative and creativity, avoided all possible risks, and were unable to learn from their own experiences. In ways this concentration on targets and numbers was seen to reinforce the meaning of housing as a commodity rather than a home. While the new managerial cultures may have been grafted on in a piecemeal fashion to existing structures, workers did see increased concerns for efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of public service, the use of market research, information technology and performance indicators to speed decisions and underpin policy, which were favourably acknowledged by those interviewed.

9.2.3 The importance of communities of practice

A third finding was that within the local authority sector, a professional housing identity was evident, although those interviewed were reluctant to acknowledge it with a clear cut title. Here the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) on communities of practice links to interviewees' reflections on their own professional identity within all sectors. Those interviewed signalled the importance of belonging to a community in which they can practice their knowledge and skills in a meaningful way. Individuals constructed social reality through their everyday interactions with others, with very different resources available to them. In relation to established practice, they struggle to impose their own beliefs, values and definitions. on the significant others with whom they interacted. The acknowledgement which they got from their peers and the tenants gave them a sense of legitimisation of peripheral participation and in ways this was more important than any formal education and training. Hence questions of authenticity and legitimacy were central to the formation of an identity within the work setting and individuals and groups competed to ensure that their particular interests, characteristics and individuality were accorded recognition and value.

Chapter seven further explores this finding and concludes by highlighting some of the personal attributes which the respondents felt enhanced their identity within the community of practice. These ranged from the capacity to speak the language of housing to the ability to be able to reflect on what they were doing in a meaningful way. Some spoke of their capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice. Respondents talked about the personal importance that they gave to being informed so that they knew what they were talking about during interactions with 'customers'. They also talked about the personal importance they gave to how they presented themselves to customers so that they portrayed a professional image but were, at the same time, approachable. They pointed out the personal importance that they gave to being the face of the local authority, but at the same time empathising with the person who was experiencing difficulties on their estate. Drawing on this, if there was found to be a need for a formal education qualification to develop the field of housing professionalism, an

enhancement of these personal attributes could be seen as a core learning outcome for the syllabus.

9.2.4 Recognised qualifications

A fourth finding was connected to the area of education and certification. An initial reason in carrying out this research was to establish if academic qualifications gave people a badge of professionalism. While this issue is discussed in chapter six, what emerges is the structural problem within the local authority of how individuals are promoted. Examples were given by the interviewees of how people who had relevant qualifications were overlooked, as a grade system for promotions was still operating within the local authority structures. Implicit from this is that individuals who wished to specialise in the area of housing, and who had attempted to further their own knowledge, skills and attributes by obtaining a qualification, were not rewarded for doing so. This led to the wider discussion as to what form housing education should take.

The ways in which the individual housing worker attempted to construct his or her identity and how these identities were constructed by others is significant for an understanding of motivations, barriers to learning and the support needs of adults in the work setting. The identities of those interviewed were fragmented and contradictory, and changed over time and change with context. They did not want to be called a professional housing worker for this research, yet were keen to demonstrate how they were operating from an identity of being a housing professional.

This in turn highlights the need to move away from ‘one size fits all’ education policies, where the acquisition of qualifications is all that is needed to progress within education and/or the workplace. The work of Lynch (2006) is helpful in understanding that the traditional focus of formal education is on educating for the future, mostly public, life of the student, especially her or his future economic life. The student is educated to perform and to define her or himself in terms of grades and rankings in a narrow range of cognitive skills. Housing knowledge, in contrast, is by its nature extremely broad and there are multiple factors which influence its learning.

There are good reasons, therefore, according to this research as to why on the job experience and personal reflection could emerge as a useful elements to include when devising an educational qualification in housing. Guidelines on what it means to be a housing professional could be developed through reflective practice and discussion among those already working in the field. This would allow for the centrality of the caring and cared-for citizen and the development of the individual who can respond to peoples need within an often highly bureaucratic system, such as the local authority system. However, it does not mean that this research is not without problems as it is only looking at the housing worker and it could be argued that this gives too much emphasis on individual agency at the expense of structural factors. Yet, it is an attempt to develop an understanding of the interactions between the influence of structural factors and individual agency.

9.3 The "so what" question

This thesis has explored one small area of identity formation and in exploring the issues mentioned in the previous section, it is hoped that interested parties may reflect on the ideas raised. It may be argued that strong strategic leadership from DoEHLG could move the tradition of not having a clearly valued professional housing identity. Part of this would centre on a change in the relationship between the local authority and the DoEHLG, which is currently based on narrow auditing culture and performance related ethos. Without this organisational and structural change there will be a continued reliance on innovative officers to deliver a housing service which gives them job satisfaction and a personal career identity, without the full recognition from their employer of having this professional housing worker badge. Drudy and Punch go further and suggest that

> In order to give housing the priority and status it deserves, there is a strong case for establishing a new National Housing Authority to oversee, co-ordinate and facilitate high quality housing provision" (2005:198)

Whatever the pace and direction of change in the future, the values at the heart of an independent housing workers remain relevant and, indeed, vital. In the context of the economic and fiscal challenges which now arise in Ireland, some of the features of the established institutions may be questioned. For example,

> the assumption of a career for life was previously an asset but can become a liability. An excessive sense of hierarchy means people move slowly up the organisation, being promoted when the organisation is ready rather than when they are ready to take on greater responsibility. There are issues of culture: speed of reaction and ability to innovate, a focus on process rather than outcome (Turnbull, 99: 2005).

All this may need change. The next generation of housing workers may be coming into housing work with different expectations and criteria for evaluating their roles and values, depending on their differing formative experiences.What shape this future professional housing worker will take, requires further research, analysis and discussion but given the findings in this thesis, they will not be characterized merely in terms of a functional list of traits. If they will need a qualification to ensure their existence as a profession is also open to further research but the development of a new understanding of qualifications, in which the personal is seen to be a potential resource for professionals, may make the adoption of a professional identity more comfortable for many housing workers.

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APPENDIX A: PROFILES OF RESPONDENTS

Summary

Seven people from the Local Authority Sector
Three people from the Housing Association Sector
Six Academics who are also directly/indirectly involved in housing
Three "others" involved in organisations connected to housing

1 BEN-OTHER

- 20 years working in the housing sector in Ireland and the UK
- General academic qualifications
- Currently head of a large organisation with responsibility for organising research relating to housing

2 MIKE-ACADEMIC

- 30 Years experience as a lecturer and in research
- Various publications to his name
- Several academic qualifications
- Currently working as a Lecturer

3 PATRICK-HOUSING ASSOCIATION

- 25 Years experience in the housing sector in Ireland and the UK
- Various publications to his name
- General academic qualifications
- Currently working in a Management position in a Housing Association

4 PETER-HOUSING ASSOCIATION

- 15 Years experience in the housing sector
- Technical qualifications and academic qualification in Housing
- Currently working in a hands on role in a Housing Association

5 GERARD-ACADEMIC

- 24 Years experience with Housing Associations and as a lecturer
- Several academic qualifications
- Member of the CIH
- Currently working as a Lecturer

6 SEAN-ACADEMIC

- 15 Years experience as a lecturer and in research
- Previously worked in a Local Authority
- Various publications to his name
- Several academic qualifications
- Currently working as a Lecturer

7 ANDREW -ACADEMIC

- 20 Years experience as a lecturer and in research
- Various publications to his name
- Several academic qualifications
- Currently working as a Lecturer

8 JOHN -ACADEMIC

- 15 Years experience as a lecturer and Housing Association sector
- Previously worked in a Local Authority
- Several academic qualifications
- Currently working as a Lecturer and Board member of a Housing Association

9 DAVID-LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 20 years working in the Local Authority sector
- Academic qualification in Housing
- Currently Grade 7 in a Community section in an urban Local Authority

10 AMY-LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 23 years working in the Local Authority sector. Was Senior Executive Officer with responsibility for Housing General Services
- Academic qualification in Housing
- Currently the Senior Executive Officer in a urban Local Authority in charge of Parks

11 MATTHEW-LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 18 years working in the Local Authority sector
- Academic qualification in Housing
- Currently working in a Housing/Community section in a urban Local Authority

12 TONY-LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 20 years working in the Local Authority sector. Was head of a Housing Section
- Academic qualification in Housing
- Currently the Senior Executive Officer in large rural Local Authority with responsibility for Roads

13 RYAN-LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 18 years working in the Local Authority sector
- Technical qualifications in Housing related areas
- Currently working in Planning in a rural Local Authority

14 JOE-OTHER

- 20 years working in the housing sector in Ireland and the UK
- General academic qualifications
- Currently head of a large organisation with responsibility for organising research relating to housing

15 VICKY-ACADEMIC

- 18 Years experience as a lecturer and Housing Association sector
- Previously worked in a Local Authority
- Several academic qualifications
- Currently working as a Lecturer and Board member of a Housing Association

16 NOEL-HOUSING ASSOCIATION

- 20 years working in the housing sector in Ireland and the UK
- General academic qualifications
- Currently head of a large Housing Association

17 SUSAN-LOCAL AUTHORITY

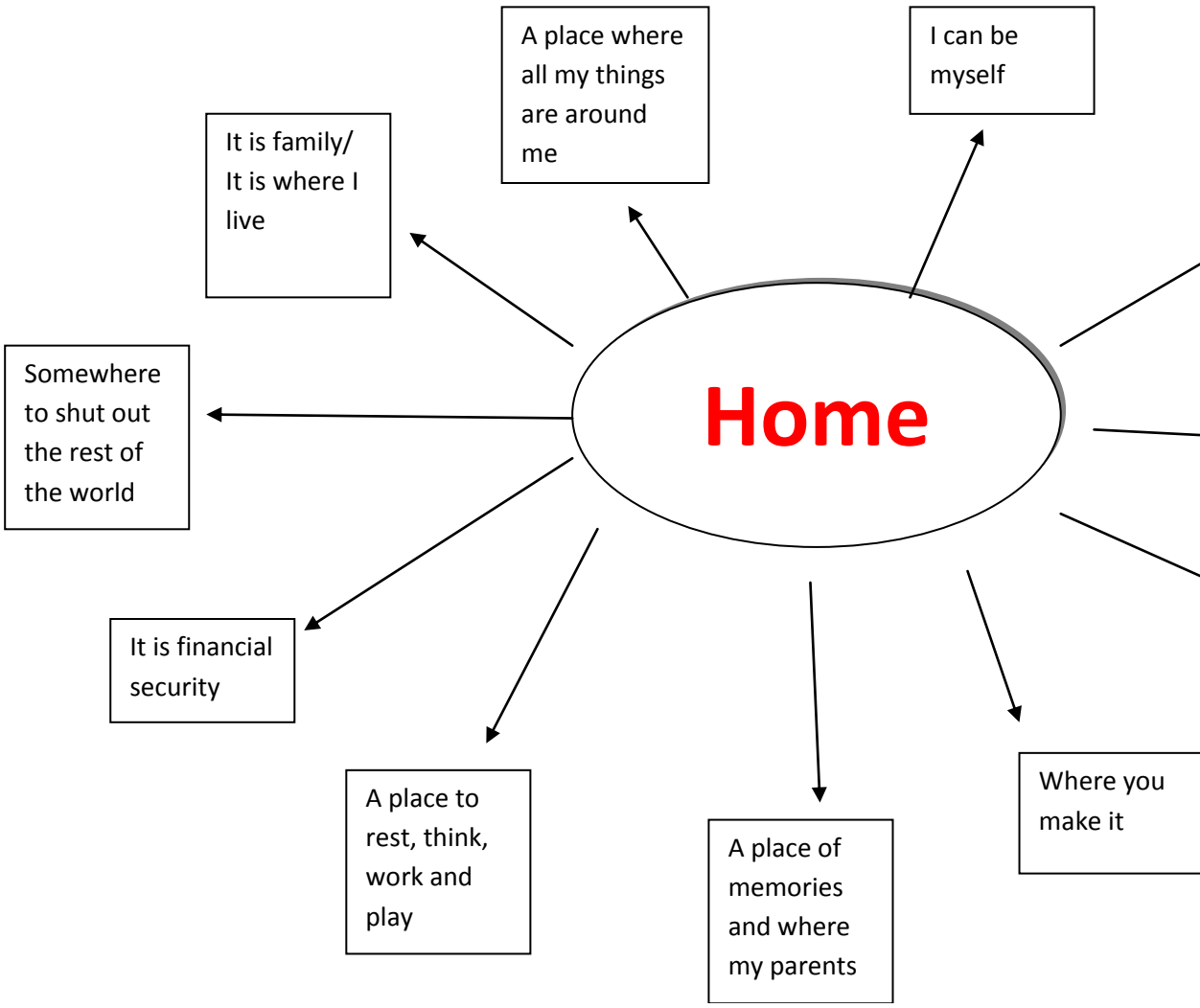
- 15 years working in the Local Authority sector
- Academic qualification in Housing
- Currently working in a Community section in a rural Local Authority

18 MARY-LOCAL AUTHORITY

- 10 years working in the Local Authority sector
- Academic qualifications
- Currently working in Housing section in a urban Local Authority

19 FRANK-OTHER

- 18 years working in the Local Government
- General academic qualifications
- Currently head of a section dealing with research associated with the Local Authority Sector


Home
A place where all my things are around me
I can be myself
It is family/ It is where I live
Somewhere to shut out the rest of the world
It is financial security
A place to rest, think, work and play
A place of memories and where my parents
Where you make it

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Director of Services (Housing)
Senior Executive Officer
Administrative Staff
Specialist staff e.g. tenant liaison officials
Local authority housing management
Local authority housing provision
Enabling housing provision by other sources
Applications for Housing
Maintenance and updating of waiting list
Allocation of dwellings
Transfers between existing tenants
Updating register of tenancies and dwellings
Rent Assessments
Rent Collection
Rent accounting
Rent arrears idnetification and recovery
Identification and re-letting of empty dwellings
Responding to maintenance requests from tenants
Periodic inspection, repair and upgrading of dwellings
Refurbishment of dwellings and estates
Provision of information to tenants
Periodic consulation with tenants
Ongoing tenant involvement in housing management
Housing estate management
Services for Travellers
Services for homeless people
Crisis case management e.g. fires in dwellings
Termination of tenancies
Returns to the Department of the Environment and Local Government
Acquisition and management of land
Construction of local authority estates
Construction of one-off dwellings in rural areas
Construction of Traveller accommodation e.g. halting sites
Purchasing existing dwellings
Extensions to overcrowded local authority dwellings
Returns to the Department of the Environment and Local Government
Enabling development of accommodati
Identifying tenants for this accommodat
Enabling development of voluntary and
Identifying tenants for this housing
Improvement works in lieu of local auth
Low-cost housing sites
Grants for improvement of disabled per
Sale of local authority dwellings to tena
Loans for reconstruction of dwellings
Local authority mortgage loans
Tenant Purchase loans
Shared ownership scheme
Affordable housing scheme
Mortgage allowance scheme
Registration and vetting of private rente
Returns to the Department of the Enviro

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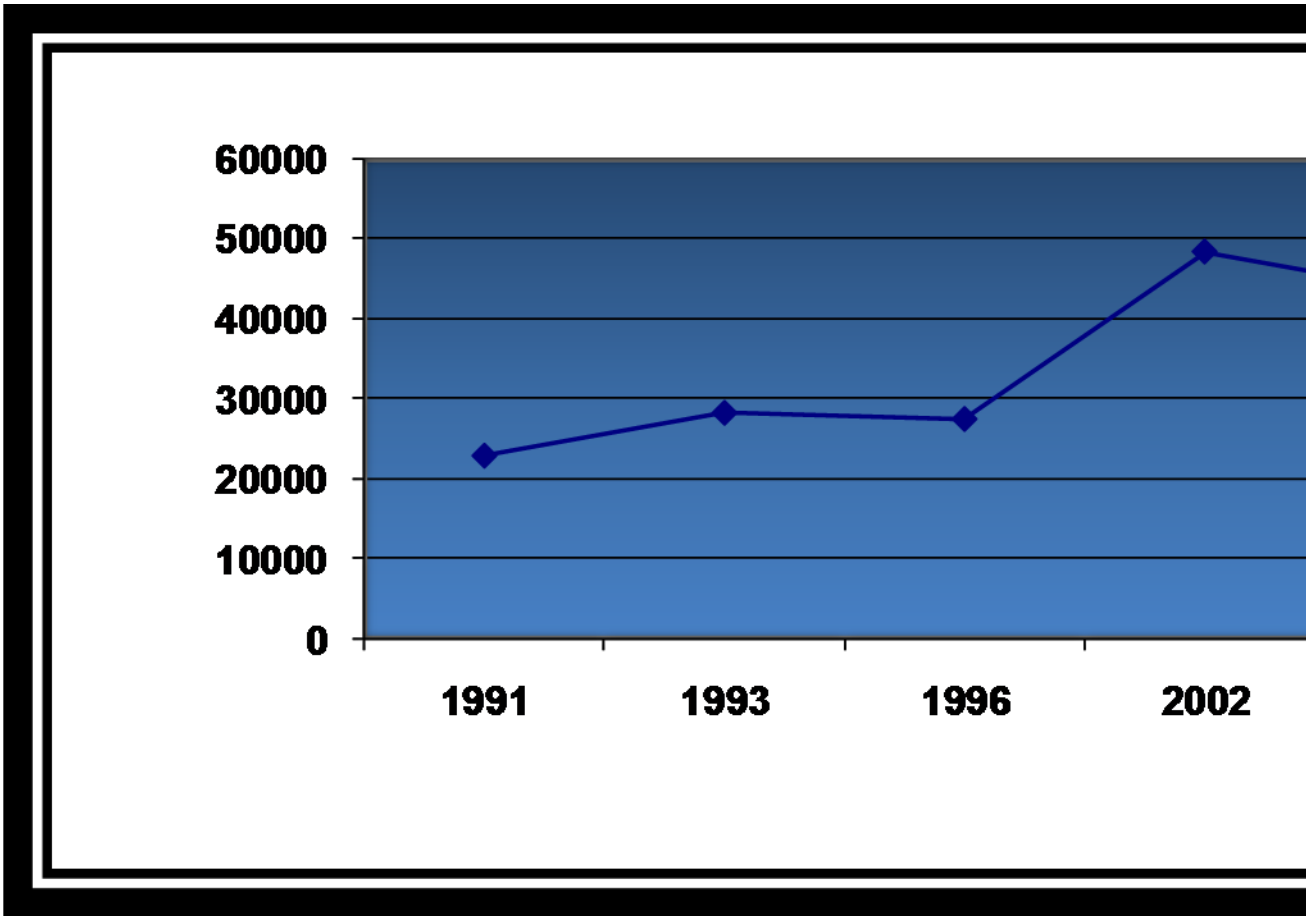
Numbers on Housing Waiting Lists Nationall



Source: Source: Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government website, 2009, availa
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