

The Representative Relationship of Local Government Councillors' to the  
European Union

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## **Abstract**

The creation of a policy-making body, with legal powers to override the decisions of the member states, has profound implications for local politics. The thesis explores how a group of councillors in England have responded to and relate to the impact of the European Union on local government in order to enhance their and their councils influence in European wide policy development towards local government. The importance and power of the EU and the implications of its influence on local government and the councillor is a significant issue for local democracy. Regions and local authorities and the councillors within them have an important role to play in the European policy-making system. The thesis explores how and to what effect councillors are creating or utilising opportunities to engage with EU activity. The thesis addresses the question of how councillors view their role in relation to the EU and contributes towards the current knowledge of councillor role theory. The thesis provides an examination of those councillors who actively engage in EU affairs and of what that small elite group of local actors that engage in European affairs seek to achieve. Those councillors that are actively engaged with the EU are reshaping their roles and are outward facing, looking for opportunities to enhance their and their councils influence with policy decision makers at EU level. The study explores the implications, for their representative role, for those councillors who do not engage with EU activity and considers how they might if possible and to what extent, be involved. The thesis provides deep and rich research material illustrating for the first time how the various influences on councillors with regard to their level of involvement with the EU determines their role and behaviour and subsequently their decision to engage or not at differing levels with EU activity. The findings show that councillors adopt one of four approaches towards the EU each of which, in different ways, have implications for their role as the elected representative of their communities.

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## **CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION**

The importance and power of the EU and the implications of its influence on local government and the councillor is a significant issue for local democracy. There are few areas of domestic policy for all member states that are not impacted on by EU policy-making (Blair, 2002). Decisions taken in Brussels can have significant impact for the member states (Kassim et al., 2001). Further, there has been an expansion of the impact of the EU into many areas of domestic policy that were formerly considered to be the responsibility of national decision-makers, or which were the subject of discussion in bodies that were distinct from the EU. The establishment of the Single European Act 1986, paved the way for the introduction of a number of measures that affected local and regional governments in respect of planning regimes, vocational and professional training, local transport, environment trading standards, health and safety and consumer protection (John, 2001).

Thus, as the breadth of the EU has steadily expanded, the reach of EU legislation has also increased over time. What this means is that governments of member states cannot ignore events taking place in Brussels and they have to consider the EU dimension in relation to setting national legislation and local policy, as well as considering the implications for domestic policy implementation. So, the 'authoritative status' of the EU and its reach, creates a powerful incentive for each government to ensure that its component parts act coherently in presenting national positions (Blair, 2002). The thesis originates from an interest in how councillors consider their relationship with European Union (EU) activity. It draws on the author's experience of over twenty years as a local government practitioner; this experience involved working with elected members through scrutiny and member development services. The involvement with councillors created an interest in understanding how the growing influence of the EU on local government is impacting on them in terms of their role as democratically elected representatives, and how they perceive their relationship with the EU.

The issue of constitutional reform of the EU has however been the subject of much debate, with powerful and principled arguments for and against the way in which the EU operates. On a return to power at the 2015 election the Conservative Government then led by Prime Minister David Cameron, was determined to change the relationship between the UK and the EU, however, the British government's negotiations for change at this time were largely unsuccessful. Consequently, a referendum followed in June 2016 asking the British population to choose whether the UK should continue to be a member of the EU. The vote to leave marked a watershed moment in the history of the United Kingdom, indeed in the history of the EU, given that no other member state has ever opted to break away from this institution. 'Brexit', the term coined to describe Britain leaving the EU, has yet to be completed and is proving to be a challenging and complex exercise, and is therefore likely to take some time. However the research was conducted before the referendum took place in 2016 and for that reason Brexit does not feature as a consideration within the thesis.

The opening chapter introduces and establishes the context of the research and gives an indication of the deep and rich material presented in the following chapters and introduces the main themes of the research. Critically, this research is a study of the councillor role in relation to their view of political and governance related activities undertaken within the context of the EU. This is distinct from other research on the councillor role, which focuses primarily on the domestic environments within which councillors operate across Europe. The particular focus of this thesis is councillors within the UK, specifically councillors in England. The research aims to provide an insight into how a particular group of councillors interact or otherwise with the EU in order to more fully understand the role of the councillor and make a contribution to councillor role theory. The research is essentially concerned with English councillors in the north of England rather than other European Union local government representatives. However a small number of German and Romanian councillors were interviewed with a view to informing the discussion and to illuminate further some of the debate in respect of councillors' views about their relationship with the EU. The chapter is organised into five sections.

Section one introduces the research question by considering the place councillors occupy within the wider political arena and why the question is relevant to them. Section two offers a brief overview of the establishment of the EU followed by a description of the structure of the EU, with a view to assisting the thesis through providing the background to the development of the EU. Section three considers the political and social and economic background against which the research is carried out highlighting the implications of that background for councillors and local government. The philosophical approach is briefly presented in section four, followed by the final section which introduces each chapter with a brief summary of its focus and main theme.

### **The Research Question**

There has been a prolonged interest in the role of councillors; (Bäck et al., 2006; Barnett, 2013; Barron et al., 1991; Copus, 2015a; Denters and Klok, 2013, 2013; Groot et al., 2010). However the specific aspects of their role considered here has not been given much attention. The subject how the EU has affected and influenced our understanding of the work of councillors and the consequences it has for their various roles is, in comparison to other influences on the work of the councillor, under researched. The aim of the study is to discover whether a group of councillors in England, specifically the North of England, believe that as part of their role, they should engage actively with the EU and its organisations and activities or not and why. The thesis displays and explores the research undertaken to investigate how councillors with different backgrounds, political ideologies and demographic profiles, consider their role in the context of their engagement with the activities of the EU. Of particular interest in respect of the thesis, was whether councillors were using the opportunities offered by involvement with the EU to improve the quality of life for their constituents through improving their environment, strengthening the legitimacy and accountability of the council and enhancing their own status. The thesis documents research undertaken to investigate how a group of councillors consider their role in the context of their engagement with the activities of the EU.

The thesis examines the reasons why councillors may or may not choose to concern themselves with EU activity. It explores the effect their choices have on their potential to influence or mitigate the impact of policy decisions of the EU on local government. It may be that only a small number of councillors engage with EU activity, raising questions around the potential implications for those councillors who do not engage. Leading councillors are more likely to be involved in EU activity as part of their portfolio than back bench councillors. Level of involvement relates to the relative nature of a councillor's activities and responsibilities. But do some leading councillors engage more with EU activity than councillors with a lower profile? In reality, we know little about why some councillors choose to participate in EU activity and others do not.

The study explores how councillors themselves define their experience and involvement in respect of the EU. In order to offer considered contribution to councillor role theory the work draws on the everyday meanings and experiences of the councillor role in the context of the EU, as described and explained by councillors. To do this the following key research question was established:

How have councillors responded to the impact of the European Union on local government?

There are a series of sub-questions that flow from the main research question and which the thesis will address:

How do councillors perceive their role in respect of the European Union?

What strategies have councillors employed to enhance their own and their councils influence in European Union policy development?

Which councillors are more likely to be engaged in European Union activity and how do they utilise the opportunities this presents?

The policies and decisions taken by the EU are of relevance at all levels of government within the member states. The reality being that approximately half of all the new laws implemented within the members states originate from



decisions taken by the EU, thus having implications for local government and councillors, particularly in relation to the role of local government in the implementation of EU policies and directives. Thus the creation of a policy making body, with legal powers to override the decisions of the member states, has profound implications for local politics (John, 2001). Therefore regions and local authorities and the councillors within them, have an important role to play in the European policy making system (Loughlin et al., 2006).

The relationship of the EU with its member states and the consequent implications for national, regional and local government forms the context for this research, with a particular emphasis on the role of locally elected political actors in relation to their level of interest, activity and involvement in the EU. The thesis is not a comparative study across the member states of the EU. The study focuses in the main on councillors in the North of England with a small sample of councillors from Germany and Romania taking part in the research. The study seeks to discover how a small group of councillors view their role in respect of the EU. In order to understand how councillors view their relationship with the EU we need to explore how councillors understand, interpret and experience their relationship with the EU within the context of their various councillor roles. As local elected members, what do councillors think about the EU and their relationship with it? Do councillors see engagement with EU activity as part of their role? Interest in the EU and its impact at local level has been reflected within academic literature that variously addresses; Local Government in Europe; debates about the impact of EU integration on local government; Europeanisation and local government and whether the engagement of local government with EU policies is constrained by political resistance from national executives (Bäck et al., 2006; Egner et al., 2013; Goldsmith, 1993; Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997; Guderjan and Miles, 2016; Guderjan, 2012b; Heinelt, 2013a). The literature sheds light on the debates regarding the role of local government in respect of the EU. The thesis seeks to contribute to the discussion with a particular focus on the level of knowledge, interest and involvement local councillors in the English context have in respect of EU activity in relation to their role. The thesis explores how interaction with

the EU creates the potential for councillors to reinvent their role. In presenting this research, the thesis will make a contribution to the growing body of knowledge about councillors and their role with a specific focus on the councillor role in relation to the EU. Research suggests that the representative role is central to the councillor (Egner et al., 2013). Thus, we might assume that councillors representing those in their locality are mindful of the issues confronting citizens arising from membership of the EU. However, is the central aspect of the councillors' representative role paradoxically at odds with non-engagement in the EU debate and activity? There is no right answer in respect of which groups or interests a representative is supposed to prioritise. Rather, it is for each representative to interpret his or her mandate (Egner et al., 2013). Moreover, while democratic theory makes it clear that the representative, the councillor, should take into account the 'interest and wellbeing of those he or she represents', this says little about how they should act and how they define the interests of those represented (Newton, 1976: pp.115-116 in Copus, 2015).

Many citizens within the EU member states perceive EU decisions to have been taken by unaccountable bodies in an unintelligible and secret manner, (Schmitter, 2004) over which they and those that represent them at local and national level have little control or influence. Many European citizens consider that local and regional authorities are not sufficiently taken into account in the European process, but, that local and regional elected representatives are best placed to explain how European policies impact on their daily lives (IFRC, 2013). A more recent survey concludes that European Union citizens themselves are increasingly aware that decision making taken by EU institutions affect them and touch their daily lives ("European Citizenship," 2018). Thus regional and local governments across the EU countries have a vital role to play in influencing and shaping EU strategies, not least because they implement nearly 70% of EU legislation.

A number of studies have examined the implications of adherence to EU laws on local authorities within individual member states from the perspective of the European integration process (Dinan, 2010; Goldsmith, 1993; Guderjan, 2012a;

Loughlin et al., 2006; Marks et al., 1996; Rosamond, 2000). Moreover, in order to qualify for EU funding, local governments have to meet certain eligibility criteria, follow particular strategies or aim for specific objectives. For example the European Social Fund (ESF) is the main instrument for supporting jobs within the EU member states with a focus on youth employment. Those eligible for funding support must show that youth unemployment is higher than 25% in 2012 (Vasillis Margaras, 2017). Over 76% of the EU budget is managed in partnership with the national and regional authorities. There are strict rules and tight controls over how funds are used. Grants for specific projects in relation to EU policies often require co-operation and partnership working between countries. In the English context, one such example is the Interreg (inter regional) Programme which Local Government Yorkshire and the Humber (LGYH, disestablished as a body in March 2015) were involved with thirteen regions/ local authorities within the European Union. LGYH was a partnership of local authorities across Yorkshire and the Humber region. Being part of the Interreg project provided the opportunity to share good practice and information in respect of environmental issues. Moreover the sharing of information and good practice has the potential to impact on how a particular region and or local authority act. Thus involvement in the programme resulted in LGYH organising a conference in Yorkshire focusing on electric cars which was a particular project in Portugal, one of the partners in the Interreg programme. The requirements for co-operation and partnership working however mean that decision making in relation to policy in local government across the EU member states is impacted on. Thus the role of the councillor needs to be considered in the context of local government engagement with the EU and in respect of the impact of the EU on local government including the opportunities for funding to improve the lives of those in their communities.

The EU member states have, over time, raised concerns about sovereignty, democracy, control of borders, and the perceived obstructions and restrictions of a huge regulatory burden imposed on them. Many politicians and citizens within the member states acknowledge the benefits of free trade with access to circa 500 million consumers, global military influence, peace between previously

warring nations, raised standards and expectations and giving Europe a stronger voice globally. There is the view that individuals and groups within the EU are becoming more aware of how its regulations, policy decisions and legislation are affecting their daily lives. Other commentators suggest that Europeans do not understand how the EU works and cannot see how it affects their daily lives (McCormick, 2013). The euro-sceptics strongly resent the perceived intrusion of the EU into what a British government minister in the early 1990s described as impacting on all aspects of daily life (Dinan, 2010).

Councillors may enter the EU debate with pre-formed views as to what, if any, their role should be; on the other hand they may have an open mind as to the issues and their level of involvement with the EU. Councillors may have a range of different ideas about the workings of the EU, arguably influenced by any number of factors including their political party stance, their experience of the benefit of EU funding in their area, or the perceived negative impact of EU policy decisions, on both national and local governments. Councillors may also be influenced by their own view as to whether local government has any influence on EU policy decisions which impact their communities. As Marshall, (2008 p. 115 in Guderjan, 2012) shows some local actors are involved in EU activity, through involvement with EU funding programmes, cultural exchanges and symbolically through twinning arrangements with other local authorities and municipalities.

Those local actors that engage in European affairs form a proactive group (Guderjan, 2012) and those councillors, in their representative role, may be viewed as better able to represent the communities they serve, through their ability and willingness to engage with the EU. Councillors are close to their electorate, rooted in a place, a locality, a community that is expressed and defined through a geographic area in a way that is not expected of other politicians (Copus, 2015). Thus councillors might be more influenced than other politicians, by the expectations of citizens with regard to the EU, and citizens might be influenced at the ballot box, in respect of councillor engagement with the EU. Moreover, the relationship the councillor has with his or her political

party is a powerful determinant in councillor activity thus the party stance on the EU might also play a large part in determining the councillor's interest and involvement in the EU (Copus, 2015).

The research for this thesis indicates that the various influences on councillors with regard to their level of involvement with the EU determines their perception, behaviour and subsequently, their decision to engage at differing levels with EU activity. This research argues that the councillors taking part in the study adopt one of four approaches:

- (1) To be active and involved in terms of the EU
- (2) To be anti EU
- (3) To be ambivalent, having mixed feelings about the EU, unsure about whether they would wish to be involved or not
- (4) To abdicate from any responsibility or involvement with EU activity.

The trends that have influenced the shape and direction of local government as a whole have also altered what we expect from councillors (Copus, 2015b). These changes mean the role and the functions of the councillor have become less clear and current councillor role theory is insufficiently robust. The trends described have been acute in for example, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland (Baldersheim et al., 1996; Rao and Berg, 2005; Paweł Swianiewicz, 2010).

The office of the councillor does not exist or develop in isolation from external factors, it is not just the outcome of what individual councillors do, rather it is an office subject to differing political and ideological interpretations of its importance, role and place, not just in the government of localities but also in the governing fabric of the nation (Copus, 2015). Thus the councillor's role across the political spectrum is subject to a variety of influences which impact on their position as the democratically elected representative in their local area. Moreover, while councillors are expected to respond quickly to each social, political, economic and contextual change that occurs around local government with implications for their role as elected members, the priorities they must address are not theirs to decide. Also, the forces of urbanisation, globalisation

and Europeanisation recast the contexts within which localities, local government and councillors operate (Copus, 2015; Denters, 2005; Rao and Berg, 2005). Therefore addressing the research question involves understanding how councillors have been coming to terms with the impact of the EU on local government, local democracy and specifically on their role as the local political representative. It is clear, that the aim of the architects of post war European integration was to achieve some form of political unity among states on the European continent (Rosamond, 2000). Or at least a settlement to provide for the integration of Western Germany into the West European mainstream thus was preventing a return to Franco-German conflict. The six founders were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. This original group of six states concluded that their common problems would be more effectively addressed through working together rather than independently. Undoubtedly the notion of European integration was a serious consideration by like-minded states looking to address the particular economic and political challenges in the aftermath of World War II. Europe since 1945 has been transformed into a place where political barriers have been lowered, economic opportunities have been expanded and social priorities have been redefined (McCormick, 2013).

In seeking a clearer understanding of the councillors' engagement or otherwise with the EU, it is important to acknowledge that the UK's attitude towards the European integration process has long been characterised by a reluctance to commit to Europe. Under both Labour and Conservative governments serious questions have been raised by other member states about Britain's commitment to the European Union (Forster and Blair, 2001). Successive governments in Britain have sought to be part of the integration process but always on British terms. There is a school of thought that suggests that had Britain taken more interest early on in the European project there would have been a greater opportunity to shape the new institutions of the EU, whose powers and influence have grown over time. In the immediate post war period, however, Britain's policy makers were of the view that its interests were best served through relationships with the Commonwealth and the United States. The policy

change in respect of involvement in Europe was prompted by the Suez crisis of 1956 when policy makers recognised that Britain was no longer the force it had been previously in world affairs. Moreover, the United States also supported closer British involvement in the European Community. It is evident that EU membership has had a significant impact on Britain not least in economic terms. Trade with other member states forms the majority of all British exports with millions of British jobs dependent on trade with the other member states. In practice, a number of changes over the last thirty years or so have included an increase in the number of political actors involved in EU affairs, which includes some local political actors, impacting at local level (Forster and Blair, 2001). Moreover there are now few areas of national concern that do not have European implications for the member states and it is difficult to make a distinction between domestic policy and European policy. The EU institutions are at the centre of the EU system. The powers and responsibilities of the institutions are laid down in the Treaties, which are the bedrock of everything the EU does. The following section briefly describes the role of the major EU institutions.

The major institutions of the EU are the European Commission, the Council of the European Union the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice. The European Parliament (EP) is the only directly and democratically elected EU institution, representing the citizens of the EU. The role of the EP has developed over time and includes having a key role in confirming the appointment of the Commission, appoints an Ombudsman who investigates complaints from EU citizens and is able to establish committees of enquiry on a temporary basis. Moreover it has the power to amend and adopt legislation. Nonetheless it is only one of the four major actors within the EU policy making process. Its elections however, are decentralised, apathetic events involving relatively small numbers of voters who select among national parties on the basis of national issues and there is little discussion on European issues (Moravcsik, 2002).

The research was conducted as the EU is experiencing an unprecedented economic and financial crisis arising from the global financial crisis of 2007. The impact of the global economic downturn and the subsequent austerity measures carried out by both the EU and national governments has resulted in major financial and social challenges for local governments across the EU member states. At local government level, political leaders are experiencing an unprecedented period of austerity through which they must navigate and at the same time, develop the strength and resilience of their communities (Copus, 2015). A key focus for local politicians in local government across the member states of the EU will be to identify new, innovative and different ways to provide services, access funding and work effectively in partnership with others in the public, private and voluntary sectors to begin to address the challenges presented by austerity pressures.

Against this background of the global economic crisis, an unprecedented immigration influx is taking place. The complexity of these migration flows is challenging current frameworks and Europe is struggling to develop a comprehensive response that balances efforts to help people in need with efforts to secure its borders. Responses to the current migration crisis being played out across the countries of Europe is mixed, with some countries welcoming those seeking entry to European countries whilst others look for ways to restrict the flow of migrants. Politicians at all levels of government are already raising concerns as to how best they will be able to ensure support for people arriving in their countries. Councillors within the EU member states, within their particular political contexts, are being called upon to play their part, with others, in managing both the implications arising from the austerity measures and the impact of the migration crisis. The following quotes from councillors taking part in the research interviews highlight the issues and tensions, within communities, with regard to immigration that councillors have to navigate. One Labour Councillor stated:

*We get a lot of immigrants who want to live in and around the town centre. So, people from other communities are very visible. There*



*are issues around housing and education. Sadly many of my council colleagues don't always understand the issues to do with immigration and only see the numbers, which they think are very high. But I have to say knowing the people in my area very well when newcomers arrive local people may be a bit wary to start with but once they get to know people they will make them their own.*

A Councillor from the Green Party commented:

*In some of our areas there is a large concentration of people coming from the Eastern Block through the expansion programme. Councillors are asked 'what are you doing about this problem'. We don't always have an answer.*

A Labour Councillor pointed out that:

*Immigration is a big issue on the doorstep, it is nothing to do with the EU anyway but the white working class are frightened, don't really understand what is going on but saying they know all the immigrants are taking their jobs. Be helpful to have greater clarity about what is going on with the EU and if we have the debate nationally we will be expected to campaign.*

This particular quote reflected by a Conservative Councillor echoes the views of many of the councillors taking part in the research:

*What we need is free trade; free movement of goods and services, trouble is there is also free movement of people. Whether it's having the effect people claim remains to be seen. But the free movement of people creates a situation where is as a shortage of jobs because immigrants will take them. There is too much benefit given out to immigrants, they can't get benefit in their own country but they can here.*

The quotes above highlight the findings of the research, across party, that for local communities the issues of immigration and in particular its relationship to EU policy and the role of the EU, focuses councillors' representative attention on the specific reactions and needs of those they represent. Thus creating tensions for their broader policy making role.

An additional burden on councillors is that which requires them to engage with and exert influence over complex multi-layered networks within which they confront higher-level players, increasingly in governance networks which operate on different spatial levels (Copus, 2015). Questions abound as to the role and purpose of councillors, variously exploring their powers and responsibilities, their ability to truly represent their electorate amidst concerns about political accountability, democratic governance, citizen engagement and the impact on them of changes and trends in local government (Barron et al., 1991; Copus, 2015; Denters, 2005). The role of the councillor and their place in government and governing is widely debated. It became clear early on in the design of the investigation that questions that place primacy on the lived experience of councillors are methodologically and philosophically important. In addition questions are intended to take account of research that considers the councillors perspectives and experiences. To best understand the world occupied by councillors, one must listen to them and engage with them in an analysis of how they experience and interpret the world they occupy as councillors.

### **Philosophical Approach**

Having spent many years as a local government officer, working closely with councillors, there is subscription throughout the thesis to certain professional and personal values and beliefs about the place and contribution of councillors within the political and social arena. The thesis comes from a starting position that accepts the need to prioritise meaning and experience, to better understand the broad discipline of political science, specifically with a focus on councillors, within the context of the EU. In the past, strong independent and sovereign states contained and regulated local political behaviour, now

however; local political actors engage more with their counterparts' elsewhere in Europe and seek to influence the decisions of supranational organisations. Moreover, propositions for European integration are almost as old as the idea of Europe as a distinct political and cultural entity and much older than the conception of a Europe of nation states (Bideleux and Taylor, 1996). What the thesis explores is the impact of a supranational institution – the EU, on the role, activities, work and perspectives of the councillor and the various ways open to them to respond to the EU. The challenge was one of developing and shaping a research question which would capture and address the relationship that councillors have with the EU amid the increasingly complex environment within which councillors operate. That councillors' interaction with the EU represented an under researched area of exploration and led initially to an open question.

*How do councillors interact with the EU?* The research question was later developed into a more focussed enquiry, '*How have councillors responded to the impact of the EU on local government?*'

## **Structure of the Thesis**

The following section provides short summaries of the content of each chapter, including a brief review of each chapter of the thesis, providing an introduction to the main issues that were the subject of the research and which are explored further within the main body of the thesis.

Chapter Two goes into some detail on the methodological approaches and the choices available in order to carry out this particular piece of research.

Chapter three is presented in three parts considering the particular context within which local government and councillors operate. The thesis locates the research firmly in local government and councillors. The place local government and councillors occupy within the political space is considered through the concept of policy narratives with a particular focus on the UK. Explicit and systematic attention to the stories, described as policy narratives, on which policies are based, is helpful when considering the political, and social environment within which local government and councillors operate (Roe,

1994). Policy narratives are stories (scenarios and arguments) which support the assumptions for policy making in situations that continue with many unknowns, and little if any agreement. The thesis focuses on narratives that dominate in respect of the EU, local government and councillors. The chapter is the first of two review chapters whereby the scene is set with an account of the structures of local governments in Europe with a view to illustrating how differing local government systems influence the way in which local actors address the economic, political and social issues within their particular national context. The chapter then moves on to a consideration of the literature on the impact on local government and councillors of trends and developments across the EU.

Although there are few formal opportunities for local government actors to engage with the EU the chapter highlights one of the ways in which councillors might be able to influence policy development at EU level through consideration of the opportunity afforded by the Committee of the Regions. The final section of the chapter explores how the modernisation of citizens impact on local government. This section explores the concept of citizenship in the context of the developing differing levels of citizenship within the multi-level government environment within which councillors operate.

Chapter 4 considers the relationship between local government and European integration and introduces the literature on Europeanisation in respect of local government. The chapter is divided into two sections. The chapter begins with consideration of the development of European integration and explores the potential opportunities presented to subnational governments to influence policy development at EU level. The last section of this chapter introduces the model of local government's Europeanisation put forward by a number of writers, whereby there may be the potential for local policy making to become an aspect of EU politics (Goldsmith, 1993; Guderjan, 2012b; Howell, 2002; John, 2001; John, 1996; Knill, 2001; Marshall, 2005).

Having interpreted and made sense of the data, capturing the underlying ideas and assumptions relating to the research question four overarching themes

were identified. Chapter five is the first of the four thematic chapters. The themes of democracy and sovereignty captured many of the councillors' feelings and expressions of discontent with the way in which they believe decisions impacting on the nation state and on local government are being made by unaccountable, unelected civil servants within the institutions of the EU. The chapter outlines the main features of the origins and evolution of the concept of democracy in Europe, with a consideration of the polarised debates about democracy in the EU. The chapter then considers the way in which different models of democracy sit alongside the more familiar form of representative democracy, impacting on local government and councillors. The chapter concludes with a discussion, prompted by the councillors taking part in the research, about whether membership of the EU impacts on the sovereignty of the member states

The theme of chapter six captures councillors' strongly held belief as to their most important role as councillors. The views expressed here are very much in line with previous research relating to councillors and their understanding of their role (Egner et al., 2013; Rao, 2000; Razin and Hazan, 2014; Sweeting and Copus, 2012). In essence many of the councillors involved in the research believe that their primary role is that of the mandated representative of their community. There are however differing views as to how that representative role should be carried out. There is no clearly expressed statement as to how councillors should carry out their role, though much has been proposed as to what that role might be. The three facets of council work are that of the committee member, which has changed in the English context with the introduction of the executive scrutiny split, the constituency representative and the party activist. Though possibly operating under different headings these roles are still very much in place for most councillors. Over time, however, more roles have been added to the councillor portfolio, examples include case worker and place shaper. The chapter provides the opportunity to consider the variety of roles suggested for the councillor and presents the views of the councillors who took part in the interviews for this thesis as to their view of their role in respect of the EU. Moreover, changes in context for local government, with

developing participatory democracy and the move towards governance networks have implications for the councillor role. The chapter begins with a consideration of the importance of the place councillors occupy within the political arena, followed by a consideration of the different approaches or styles councillors adopt in carrying out their representative role. Drawing on the work of a number of scholars, theories of representation are examined in the third section of the chapter (Pitkin, 1967; Rao, 2000; Rao, 1998; Judge, 1999; Mair and Thomassen, 2010). The final section arises from comments made by councillors during the interviews in relation to their community leadership role. Thus, the chapter considers the challenges confronting local government in developing its community leadership role. A crucial aspect of the chapter however is consideration of the stories told about councillors especially in respect of the 'deficiency narrative' portraying councillors as somehow being a 'problem' for local government (Barnett et al., 2019).

The theme of chapter seven stems from the discussion with councillors as to their frustration at the way in which, from the perspective of a number of the councillors taking part in the research, unelected individuals and groups, including from within the EU, have the power to make public policy decisions impacting at local government level. The chapter explores the implications for councillors arising from the need to operate within governance networks where unelected actors have policy making power. The chapter provides the opportunity to examine what this means for councillors from the standpoint of their legitimate and accountable democratic mandate. In order to best represent their electorate, the councillor now needs to be able to persuade, influence and negotiate with a host of public and private bodies, thus their skills in relation to getting things done need to be enhanced.

Stemming from comments from councillors taking part in the research, chapter eight considers the concepts of power and influence and examines the notion of political capital with a view to understanding how councillors might utilise this particular resource to achieve their aims.

The final chapter documents and analyses the findings from the research and draws out the lessons and conclusions

## **Conclusion**

The EU creates, for the member states, a different basis for the exercise of political power and authority to that of the nation state. The process of European integration through the EU, with its rights to make laws which can be imposed on member states raises tensions between the idea of a sovereign state and the nature of decision making at the international level. It is certainly the case that the activities of all member states have been constrained by EU membership. Moreover, the influence of international organisations is contributing towards the transition away from traditional local government. European integration however, has offered a great deal of opportunities to governments (Blair, 2006). By engaging with transnational decision makers localities contribute to a political world that is more complex, more changeable and interdependent than before (John, 2001). This chapter has set out the context within which the role of councillors is considered in the thesis. The research led to identification of a type or classification of councillor behaviour in relation to the EU, as outlined above. The research data gathered through the interviews with councillors highlighted four overarching themes or meta-themes. This is not to suggest that the key themes naturally presented themselves from within the data, rather themes were identified through interpretation, analysis, and experience of working with councillors.

The final classifications based on the research will be presented and discussed within the appropriate chapters. The classifications however do not fit neatly into a particular theme. Thus the chapters will draw these in as they are appropriate to other classifications and chapters and where there are emerging patterns and similarities between data sets.

## **CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

The aim of this thesis is to explore and analyse the councillor's role in respect of the EU, adding to the current knowledge of councillor role theory. This research project investigated how councillors view the EU and their relationship with it and whether they consider engagement, with EU activity as part of their role at any level. Because humans interpret their world within a social context, councillors' views are best drawn from their own interpretation on the meaning of their lived experience in respect of their councillor role, for this study, in the particular context of the EU. Seeking to elicit the views of councillors about such an immense and highly contested political body was confronted by the challenge of a shortage of previous research in respect of councillors and their role in relation to the EU and the complexity of the arguments as to the nature of the EU. The chapter describes how these challenges were addressed by utilising qualitative data focusing on councillors.

The first section of the chapter begins with a brief overview of the process, establishing the boundaries of the research question. The chapter then provides a justification for the research choices made in relation to methods chosen. The chapter moves on to consideration of the ethical questions around access and informed consent arising from the fieldwork. The section also addresses the particular ethical issues that stem from a close connection and involvement with the field. Finally the chapter provides a brief summary of the overall approach to the methodology, describing the themes that emerged from the findings.

Stemming from the primary discipline of political science, the research methodological approach follows a constructivist ontology utilising an interpretivist epistemology because in this approach the researcher enters the field with some prior knowledge and insight into the research context. Moreover the researcher is receptive to capturing meanings in human interaction and making sense of what is perceived to be reality.



## **Framing the Research Question and Study Focus**

The motivation of this study stems from the author's experience of working with councillors for over twenty years and a growing realisation of their attempts in trying to make sense of the growth of power and reach of the EU and its impact at local government level. Thus, questions are raised as to how much we know about councillor knowledge and understanding in respect of the EU. This area of interest is under researched, with little academic literature on councillors' interaction with the EU to draw upon.

Any investigation that focuses on individual councillors and their interaction with the EU which fails to take account of the institutional arrangements within which they operate, does not acknowledge the impact of local government structures and the central/local power relations. In the British context in comparison with other member states of the European Union, British local government has been increasingly centralised, it has never had full policy or political discretion to do as it pleases. Further, by comparison with other European countries, most British local governments' areas are large; both in population and area (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). Thus the UK has a far higher population per local authority than anywhere else. Moreover central-local relations in Britain have deteriorated over time, resulting in the undermining of the role of local government, whereas in the challenge of post-war reconstruction relations between central and local government were 'cordial and uncontroversial' (Leach, 2017). The impact the change from a positive relationship between central and local government to one where the central-local relationship has deteriorated will be further explored in the next chapter. As demonstrated in chapter three differing typologies of local government arrangements across Europe, impact on what local government and councillors can and cannot do. Moreover, the councillor's position within the council also affects the councillor's role. Thus, councillors' views and behaviours in relation to the EU are considered within an environment that shapes and constrains the behaviour of the elected representative. Thus, from an initial enquiry as to how councillors

interact with the EU, the question became: how have councillors responded to the impact of the European Union on local government?

Locating the thesis within the institutional framework of both local government and the EU raised the question of the most appropriate methodology. A quantitative approach would have been inadequate in gaining an understanding of how councillors view their role in respect of the EU. Though quantitative surveys could have been used asking carefully worded questions of councillors on whether they were involved in EU activity, the rich narratives and story-telling from councillors would have been missing. An interpretivist approach which explored councillors own interpretations of their role in relation to the EU was required. Initial thoughts were that a qualitative focus group approach would be the most appropriate method. This research approach was tested out with three focus groups and whilst the interactions demonstrated this method could help to shape the research question, the focus group setting subsequently (to be discussed later) proved not to be the best way forward.

Having established the main parameters of the research question and made some initial decisions about focus and size the next step was to select an organising or theoretical perspective for the enquiry. Thus the chapter moves to an examination of the fundamental philosophical questions relating to ontology and epistemology with their underpinning theoretical frameworks.

## **Choices**

All disciplines have a tendency to be chaotic in their development and political science is no exception (Marsh and Stoker, 2010). These authors suggest that something as complex, chaotic and contingent as politics can be, is likely to result in a variety of debates and differing approaches as to how the study of politics be carried out. We should, however be able to answer the question: 'what is the nature of the political that political scientists claim to study?' Politics can be considered from two broad approaches. In the first instance the study is carried out with reference to the way in which the political is organised. This approach focuses on the structure, role and function of the institutions around

which politics are conducted and the political influence of local government in relation to upper level governments.

The second approach sees the political as a social process that can be observed in a number of settings (Marsh and Stoker, 2010), and such an approach views politics as about more than what governments choose to do or not to do. There is a focus on the uneven distribution of power in society, the way in which the struggle over power is conducted and its impact on the creation and distribution of resources, life chances and wellbeing. Approaching the political in such a way is associated with particular approaches to politics including Marxism, Feminism and Constructivism.

Examination, analysis and research of any phenomena, including politics and politicians, needs to first explore how this might be carried out in order to, as far as is possible, ensure that a variety of approaches and methods have been considered with a view to utilising the most appropriate methods with which to carry out the research. (Kellstedt, 2013). There is no single pathway to good research (Denscombe, 2010) there are always choices and alternatives. At any stage of enquiry making an informed decision as to how the study would best be approached can only be achieved through careful consideration of the options and to some extent the risk assessment associated with a particular approach. The debates about how to approach a research project attempt to address the question of 'worthiness' of the research and the overriding issue of where the research study is located in terms of a paradigm.

A paradigm can be viewed as a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents 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 (Bryman, 2008; Cassell and Symon, 1998; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). These authors suggest that paradigms, as sets of basic beliefs, are not open to proof in any conventional sense; there is no way to elevate one over another on the basis of ultimate, foundational criteria. Their view is that any given paradigm,

presents simply, the most informed and sophisticated view that its proponents have been able to devise.

To be located in a particular paradigm is to view the world in a particular way (Burrell and Morgan, 2008). All social scientists approach their subject via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it may be investigated. The term 'paradigm' is intended to emphasise the commonality of perspective which binds the work of a group of theorists together, in a manner that they can be usefully regarded as approaching social theory within the bounds of the same problematic. This is not to suggest that there is complete unity of thought in sharing paradigms, given that within the context of any given paradigms there will be much debate between theorists who adopt different standpoints. A particular paradigm however, does have an underlying unity in terms of its basic and often 'taken for granted' assumptions, which separate groups of theorists in a very fundamental way from theorists located in other paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 2008). All students of political science must recognise and acknowledge their particular approach to the subject matter, given that the approach to theory and method is shaped by the way in which they view the world. Even if their particular positions are unacknowledged, these positions shape the approach, the theory and the methods which the social scientist uses. Drawing from Furlong and Marsh (2010 p.184, in Marsh and Stoker, 2010) our positions shape our approach, they are 'like a skin not a sweater' in that they cannot be put on and taken off at will. In order that there is an appreciation and understanding of alternative points of view alternative paradigms need to be considered (Burrell and Morgan, 2008). There is no single 'truth' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). These authors suggest that all truths are partial and incomplete. Moreover there can be no one paradigm to which all social scientists might ascribe.

### **Qualitative or Quantitative**

Research theorists seek to draw distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research to highlight differences in methodological approaches. Central to such debates lie questions of validity and bias. In essence however,

the questions around whether to take a quantitative or qualitative approach to the phenomena under investigation extend beyond choice of methods to much larger questions of our conceptions of reality and the value we place on what constitutes knowledge. There are assumptions of an ontological nature which raises questions as to whether the matter under investigation is external to the individual or the outcome of individual consciousness, in the mind. Associated with this ontological issue is a second set of assumptions of an epistemological nature. Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge, with what we can know about the world and how can we know it (Furlong and Marsh 2010 pp. 185-211 in (Marsh and Stoker, 2010). Finally for consideration, the investigative approach, the methodology most appropriate in adhering to those principles (Bryman, 2008; Denscombe, 2010; Guba and Lincoln, 1994)

There is an important decision to be made when carrying out a research project which concerns the choice of research strategy, described as a plan of action designed to achieve a specific goal (Denscombe, 2010). Research strategies are different from research methods, which in essence are the tools for data collection, including questionnaires, interviews, case studies and observations. It may be that certain methods tend to be associated with certain strategies. This is because the particular strategy and the method tend to work well together, however the choice of research strategy does not dictate the choice of any specific research method and essentially, social enquiry can use a range of methods with any given strategy. There is always an element of choice (Denscombe, 2010). In themselves, research strategies are neither good nor bad, nor are they right or wrong. In essence they can only be judged in relation to the purpose for which they are used and how useful and appropriate they are. In essence the research strategy or strategies, and the methods or techniques employed, must be appropriate for the questions to be addressed (Robson, 1993).

## **The Philosophical Questions**

### **Ontology**

Ontology is the study of things that exist and the study of what exists the ontological question relates to consideration of the nature of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Ontology is described as the world views and assumptions in which researchers function in their search for new knowledge. The key ontological question focuses on the form and nature of reality, stemming from this approach, a further question arises asking 'what is there that can be known about it'? There are two broad ontological positions, the first, objectivism, posits that a 'real' world exists independently of human knowledge or perception of it; the other, constructivism, sees the world as socially constructed by its participants.

In other words, is the reality investigated in this study, external to the individual, by imposing itself on the individual consciousness from without, or is this reality the product of individual cognition? (Burrell and Morgan, 2008). If the ontological position reflects the researchers view about the nature of the world, one's epistemological position reflects his or her approach to understanding, acquiring and gathering knowledge – indeed, this philosophical position asks how we know about the world, and how we understand and interpret it.

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology is therefore the process of knowing and thinking - the relationship between what we know and what we see. The truth we seek and analyse addresses the question in the context of the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?

There are two key questions in relation to epistemology, the first enquires as to whether an observer can identify real or objective relations between social phenomena and if so how? Whether it is possible to identify and communicate the nature of knowledge as being hard, real and capable of being communicated in a tangible form or whether knowledge is a softer more

subjective, spiritual kind based on experience and insight of a unique and essentially personal nature.

If the world is viewed as if it were a hard external objective reality, then the particular approach is likely to focus upon an analysis of relationships and regularities between the various elements which it comprises. This perspective seeks out universal laws which explain and govern the reality which is being observed.

The alternative view of social reality is one which stresses the importance of the subjective experience of individuals in the creation of their particular social experience. The principal concern is with understanding the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself.

### **The Debate**

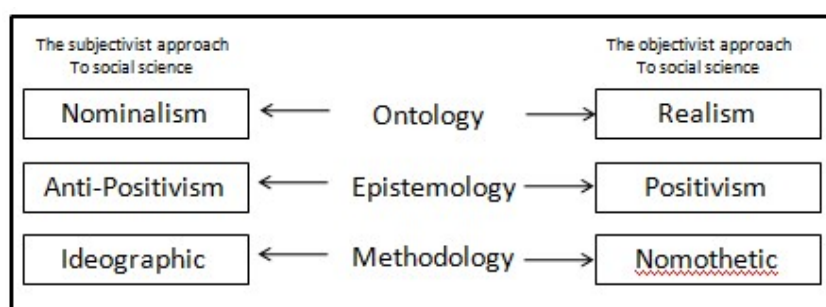
The nominalist position, one of an anti-foundationalism / constructivism / relativism perspective, centres on the assumption that the social world external to individual cognition, is made up of nothing more than concepts names and labels which are used to structure reality. The nominalist perspective rejects the notion of there being any real structure to the world which these concepts are used to describe. The names and labels used are regarded as tools for describing, making sense of and negotiating the external world. Such a particular approach entails an interpretivist theory of knowledge: it would be illogical to argue for our capacity for independent knowledge of an external world we do not believe exists (Marsh and Stoker, 2010).

At the same time, such a perspective would also suggest that no observer can be truly objective because he or she lives in the social world and is affected by the social construction of reality. This results in what is sometimes described as a double hermeneutic; the world is interpreted by the actors at one hermeneutic level and their interpretation is interpreted by the observer at a second. Hermeneutics is concerned with interpreting and understanding the products of the human mind which characterise the social and cultural world. The overall

approach to hermeneutics is clearly illustrated through the notion of the so-called 'hermeneutic circle' (Rickman, 2010). Thus the social whole cannot be understood independently of its parts, and vice versa. The desire to formulate methodical rules of interpretation, therefore, is accompanied by a recognition that there are no absolute starting points, no self-evident, self-contained certainties on which we can build, because we always find ourselves in the middle of complex situations which we try to disentangle by making, then revising, provisional assumptions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Thus the councillors taking part in the research for this thesis will interpret their world in their own way whilst the researcher will inevitably interpret and make sense of what they say based on her own experience and view of the world.

The particular ontological perspective adopted by the enquiry shapes the epistemological position, thus ontology and epistemology are inevitably related in that epistemology is concerned with how actors can enquire about and make sense of ontology (Marsh and Stoker, 2010). Therefore, foundationalist ontology leads to either a positivist or realist epistemology whilst an anti-foundationalist ontology leads to an interpretivist epistemology. It is important to stress here that one's epistemological position has clear methodological implications. In essence, positivists tend more towards quantitative methods, while interpretivists are more drawn to qualitative methods.

Figure1. The subjective objective dimension



(source: Guba and Lincoln, 1994 pp.97-128 in Denzin and Lincoln 2011)



The relationship between ontology and epistemology is however a contested issue. We cannot prove either the ontological position or the relationship between ontology and epistemology (Hay, 2010). We should rather adopt a position which makes sense to us and use it consistently. Whilst accepting that this is a contested issue, it is nonetheless essential that there is recognition of the consequence of adopting different ontological and epistemological positions and different views on the relationship between the two.

**Figure 2-Positivist Approaches to Research Investigation**

Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Reality is assumed to exist external to whether it is interpreted or otherwise, reflecting a 'natural order of things'. Such order is not affected by time, space or contextual differences. Research is focused on establishing the 'true' state of affairs.	The investigator is independent and objective is able to carry out the research without influencing or being influenced by the subject. The reduction of any values biases and influence is of primary concern. Findings are true and replicable.	Largely concerned with quantification. Often experimental. Emphasis on 'discovery' of social life. Use of triangulation and other multiple methods to falsify hypothesis.

(Guba and Lincoln, 1994 pp.97-128 in Denzin and Lincoln 2011)

In respect of epistemological positions possibly the most common classification distinguishes between the more scientific or positivist approach and one which is more of an interpretivist position. Further, how can the inquirer, the would-be knower, go about finding out whatever he or she seeks to know? The answer to this question is constrained by the position adopted in respect of the broad ontological and epistemological questions outlined above. Differences in paradigms assumptions cannot be dismissed as mere philosophical differences implicitly or explicitly, the particular position has important consequences for the practical conduct of enquiry, as well as for the interpretation of findings and policy choices. The methodological question cannot be reduced to a question of

methods; methods must be fitted to a predetermined methodology (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

In essence the constructivist paradigm is characterised by an emphasis upon the world being socially or discursively constructed. All interpretivist approaches are based on an anti-foundationalist ontology, which postulates that social phenomena cannot be understood independently of our interpretation of them; and that it is these interpretations/ understandings of social phenomena that directly affect outcomes.

The positivist approach to the research here was rejected in order to provide a richer, more descriptive account of how councillors viewed and interpreted their role in relation to the EU. This is best achieved through a more interpretivist approach, where our world is viewed as deeply socially constructed, and where research involves an interpretive search to understand meaning rather than a scientific search for causal relations. Interpretivism contrasts with positivism at its fundamental starting point, in its attention to the role of interpretation in human action. Essentially the perspective is predicated on the view that researchers should understand the subjective meaning of social action. Overall, reality is socially constructed. Nonetheless while it is the individual who constructs the world and reflects upon it, their views are shaped by social, political and cultural processes. In other words, everyday realities are actively constructed in and through forms of social action. This approach adopts a more interpretivist perspective. We inhabit a world of our making and action is structured by the meanings that particular groups of people develop to interpret and organise their identities, relationships, and environment, (Marsh and Stoker, 2010). The interpretive approach is and has to be much more flexible than other forms of research and this flexibility is an intentional strategy and requires the need to respond in the moment to things said by the respondents (Schwartz-Shea, 2012). Much of what you see therefore is dictated by what they do, and say. If something is important to them, it becomes important to you. 'Their view of the world is as important as your view of the world.....' (Richard Fenno 1986 p.54 in Schwartz-Shea, 2012).

Moreover interpretive researchers can and do draw on previously acquired knowledge thus enabling them to utilise local knowledge of the settings and their modes of action and interaction. Prior knowledge is seen as an integral part of the interpretivist approach. Many interpretive research projects involve a particular setting and a particular set of actors. In this case councillors in a local government setting. Thus, the author's long experience of working in a local government setting and more precisely working closely with councillors provides early sense making of the issues being explored whilst at the same time bringing new understandings and new knowledge about the area for consideration. Moreover, the interpretive focus on participants' local knowledge and on their worlds means that the researcher concedes control to them as experts in their own lives. Flexible interpretive approaches are essential because they focus a researcher's attention on possibilities and limitations that need to be anticipated.

Figure 3 - Constructivist Approaches to Research Issues

Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Reality is form of multiple, mental constructs, socially experienced and local in nature (though there are shared elements across cultures)	Findings are 'created' by the interaction between investigator and participant.	Individual constructions are elicited / refined through interaction. Distillation towards a consensus construction that is informed and sophisticated.

(Guba and Lincoln, 1994 pp.97-128 in Denzin and Lincoln 2011)

### Developing Qualitative Approaches

This investigation seeks to explore how councillors view, understand, interpret and experience in their everyday real world situations, their relationship with the EU in the context of their councillor role. The enquiry suggests an approach that is qualitative in nature and one that is underpinned by constructivism and interpretivism. Qualitative research utilises an open and flexible design, applicable to this research but stands at odds with the underpinning approaches of quantitative research. This is not to denigrate quantitative research, arguably

all researchers share curiosity about the world and a determination to find answers to questions that will improve the social condition or lead to social justice. However, qualitative researchers seek the opportunity to explore the inner experiences of participants and further, to explore how meanings are formed and transformed. The following section considers the methods of enquiry open to the more interpretivist approach to the study of social phenomena.

### **Focus Groups**

Political scientists increasingly use focus groups or group based discussion as specialised form of interviewing. The key feature of focus groups is 'the explicit use of the group's interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in the group.

The decision to employ interviews as the method of seeking the views of councillors about the EU stem from the learning from the focus groups which took place earlier in the research process. The focus group method proved not to be the most effective method for gaining insights into councillors' views experiences and behaviours in relation to the EU. On reflection, the focus group situation did not offer confidentiality which many of the councillors during the interviews were concerned to confirm. Nor did the focus groups provide the opportunity for reflective discussion. Nor were councillors able to share their views and experiences about their experience with other councillors, often those who are in leadership positions within their own council. Thus, the decision was taken to use the one to one interview method in order to address the research question.

### **One to One Interviews.**

The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research (Bryman, 2008). There are however a number of assumptions associated with interviewing. The first assumption is that they draw on a skill that many interviewers have, the ability to conduct a conversation. The reality however is not this simple. Rather, interviews involve a set of assumptions

which are not usually associated with casual conversation. What matters overall however are the intentions of the enquirer (Robson, 1993).

The research method involving interviews is not the easy option and can be fraught with hidden dangers. There is a need for planning, proper preparation and sensitivity to the complex nature of interaction during the interview itself. (Denscombe, 2010). Face-to-face interviews provide the opportunity for a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out. To make profitable use of this flexibility however calls for a degree of skill and experience from the interviewer. Tacit knowledge and overall experience, a history of working for many years in local government, much of that time specifically working with councillors, facilitated access and reduced the need to search out meaning with the councillors. Moreover, councillors did not have to explain much of what they were referring to during the interviews (e.g. the Executive Scrutiny split, CCGs', LEPs', Health and Wellbeing Boards, the party, the Executive, the Whip).

The notion of flexibility however and the lack of standardisation inevitably raises questions about reliability. Nonetheless the interview method has the potential of providing rich, deep and highly illuminating information (Robson, 1993).

### **Method of Analysis / Thematic Analysis**

The major task for the study is to find answers to the research question and to come up with trustworthy answers. Thus, the analysis has to consider the evidence gleaned from the research, fairly and without bias, moreover the conclusions must be compelling (Robson, 1993). When presented with raw data, analysis involves making interpretations. The notion of interpretation of data implies a researcher's understanding of the meaning implicit in the narratives of participant's interpretation is a productive process that sets forth the multiple meanings of an event, object, experience, or text. Interpretation is transformation. It illuminates, throws light on experience. It brings out, and refines, as when butter is clarified, the meanings can be sifted from a text, (Denzin, 1998).

Thus, when analysts interpret data they are translators of other people's words and actions (Bryman, 2008). The study for this thesis employed a methodology utilising qualitative methods. Initially, three focus groups were held with councillors with a view to informing and establishing the parameters of the investigation. At a later stage forty one to one semi-structured interviews were carried out with councillors. The interviews with councillors produced the raw data relative to the research project.

What then of the method, the approach used to best carry out analysis of the data so carefully and painstakingly gathered? The decision was taken to utilise the approach best described as thematic analysis. Though thematic analysis is poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, it is a widely used qualitative analytic method. Indeed thematic analysis is suited to a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. The idea is to construct an index of central themes and subthemes from the raw data gathered, for the purpose of this thesis, from one-to-one interviews conducted with councillors. Essentially, the themes are the product of a thorough reading of the transcripts and field notes that make up the data. It is not uncommon to read of themes 'emerging' from the data which is a passive account and denies the active role the researcher plays in identifying patterns/ themes, selecting which are of interest.

The majority of the councillors taking part in the interviews agreed to be digitally recorded, however a small number of councillors suggested that they would prefer notes to be taken. Once the full verbatim transcriptions were complete the next stage involved using colour coded lines linking words and sentences from the transcripts, so that emergent trends and themes were visible. A major consideration was to establish what exactly counts as a pattern or a theme. The starting point in the coding process was to recognise that a theme captures something important in relation to the research question. The next stage was to clarify whether the theme needed to be seen across the data set a particular number of times in order that it can be identified as a theme. There were a

number of instances of the various themes across the data which gave some comfort but in the end the data was interpreted in relation to whether words and sentences within the data were relevant and important to the research question. Analysis of the codes showed how the combination of codes resulted in overarching themes. Thus, the thesis concentrated on the four overarching themes and the two sub-themes identified through the data set.

### **Access to Councillors**

The decision was taken to approach only Metropolitan Borough, County and City councils in that they would be more likely than lower level councils (District and Parish Councils) to be involved in EU activity, through a variety of avenues including bidding for funding, involvement with the CoR or the Interreg programme. The selection of interview participants was structured through contact with officers, in either Scrutiny, Democratic Services, Member Development Services, or through professional contacts. Each was asked to use their member contact lists to invite members to take part in the interviews. The study did not seek to interview any particular political party representative, gender, age or seniority of councillors. Council colleagues were asked not to seek out those members who might be particularly interested in the EU, in order to ensure that a cross section of councillors with or without interest in the EU would have the opportunity to take part in the research. Councillors then volunteered to take part in the interviews. What actually happened in practice was that as councillors were interviewed they suggested to other councillors that they might be interested in taking part in the research

### **Participants and Settings**

Within the group of councillors however, a variety of differences exist to do with political background, age, culture, race and gender. The research was conducted interviewing councillors from eight borough councils in the North of England and two city councils, one in Germany and another in Romania.

At the time the research was being conducted, of the forty participants taking part twelve are women, twenty eight are men. Included in the group were four

Leaders of their local authority, two were Deputy Leaders within their authority and one of the participants a directly elected Mayor of his municipality. All these positions were held by men. Three of the women councillors interviewed were members of the executive of their council at the time the interviews took place.

Figure 4: Participants in the Study

	Female	Male
<b>Leaders</b>	0	4
<b>Deputy Leaders</b>	0	2
<b>Elected Mayors</b>	0	1
<b>Executive Member</b>	3	0
<b>Backbench Councillors</b>	9	21
<b>Totals</b>	12	28

### The Interviews and the Councillors

The interviews undertaken for the thesis offered the opportunity for councillors to share their views on the EU which may or may not have been in line with the views of their council, their party and or their electorate. Although the subject focus of the interviews was managed, there was opportunity for the councillor to respond freely, with the response to points that seemed worthy of being followed up. The decision to conduct semi-structured interviews stemmed from the desire to place emphasis on the councillors' thoughts and experiences of the EU. The intention was to be as un-intrusive as possible and to allow the councillor to develop their views and pursue their train of thought. Thus, the only questions posed initially having introduced the topic for discussion, which the councillor was aware from the initial contact, were to do with how the councillor initially got involved in politics and how they became a councillor. Both semi-structured and un-structured interviews however, are on a continuum and in practice slide back and forth along the scale. The advantage of semi-structured interviews involves encouraging the councillor to use their own words and to develop their own thoughts. Ensuring that councillors are able to 'speak their minds' offers a better way of discovering things about complex issues rather



than simply checking through set questions. The interviews ranged in length from one hour to an hour and a half. Each councillor agreed at the initial contact to be interviewed for a maximum of one hour. However, many of the councillors' were happy to go beyond the agreed time frame.

It was also important that in conducting the research certain aspects of research needed to be considered including the ethical considerations. The following section will examine those significant aspects of research.

### **Ethics in Research**

Ensuring an ethical approach to research is based on some core principles of research ethics, the first of which is that no one should suffer harm as a result of participation in the research. The notion of harm in this context is wide-ranging and requires the researcher to carefully consider to whom and in what way harm might occur. The emphasis here is very much on the possibility of harm rather than the actualities so the researcher needs to, as far as is possible pre-empt and be aware of the likelihood of things taking place which could cause harm if they were to happen (Denscombe, 2010). In respect of participants willing to take part in the research, issues include basic personal health and safety, for example in terms of setting; confidentiality; anonymity; understanding of the nature of the research and their involvement; that they voluntarily consent to being involved.

At all times participants interests should be protected and researchers must respect their subjects and remember to 'preserve our participants' 'dignity' although we may question their perspectives or practices (Blumer (1969). Moreover, when we are studying people's behaviour or asking them questions the researcher's responsibilities to those studied have to be faced, (Silverman, 2001). Interpretive qualitative methods mean entering into the research participants worlds with a view to trying to understand their lives from their perspectives though we do not necessarily adopt or reproduce their views as our own, rather we interpret them (Charmaz, 2014).

Participation in research should be voluntary and based on informed consent, with the participant knowing who is conducting the research and where they can be contacted. To assure participants the researcher should provide a brief summary of the aims of the research and the nature of the data that are to be collected. Finally, the researcher should at all times avoid deception or misrepresentation in their dealings with participants and provide fair and unbiased interpretation of their findings whilst upholding the highest standards of professionalism and honesty (Denscombe, 2010).

An ethical approach to research is considered intrinsic to the constructivist position particularly in respect of consideration of participant values in the enquiry. Interpretive qualitative methods mean entering research participants worlds, we must therefore test our assumptions about the world we study and not unwittingly reproduce these assumptions.

These issues are important in carrying out any research, however they are particularly important in respect of carrying out research that seeks the views of locally elected council members, given their public visibility, their reliance on the support of the electorate at the ballot box and their likely alliance to a political party all of whom at varying times may or may not agree with their views on a particular subject. The last point is pertinent in respect of this research, given the challenges confronting the EU in recent times.

### **Confidentiality**

It is difficult, arguably impossible, for researchers using the internet to guarantee that participant's contributions to the research will be kept private and will not be traced back to them. Governments and security agencies have the power and ability to trace just about any kind of internet communication should they wish to do so (Denscombe, 2010). Researchers therefore should be wary about making promises they are not in a position to keep. The study utilised the internet only to make contact with potential participants to set up meetings, to provide a brief outline of the research and information about the way in which the meeting would be conducted. The researcher should be careful when

publishing results that the personal identities of those that have contributed to the findings are not disclosed.

### **Conclusion - Reflections on the Research Process**

The aim of the chapter is to set out how the task of investigating how councillors have responded to the impact of the EU on local government with a particular focus on their role. The chapter considered the choices available in respect of the theoretical framework from which to carry out the research. The decision was taken to address the question through an approach that was qualitative in nature underpinned by interpretivist ontology. The decision was taken to carry out one-to-one interviews with forty councillors who are introduced in the chapter. The issues associated with ethical standards in research are discussed within the chapter, informing the reader as to how the issue of confidentiality was addressed throughout the research process.

The overall reflection of the research process relates to the challenges experienced in carrying out original research with limited academic experience which is reflected in the work. However, this setback may be mitigated, through bringing knowledge and experience of councillors and local government to the research process.

## **CHAPTER 3 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE E.U.**

### **Introduction**

The third chapter highlights the way in which differing local government systems impact the central local relations illustrating the decision making powers of councils and councillors. Given the focus of the study the relationship between central and local government in England is of particular interest within the thesis and will be explored through the concept of policy narrative analysis which provides the opportunity to consider the way in which stories confirm the assumptions for decision making despite uncertainty, complexity and polarisation. The thoughts and actions of human actors in any number of settings can be influenced through the use of narrative. According to (Copus et al., 2017) a policy narrative is described as a set of stories which work together to shape our thoughts and actions in relation to political issues. Thus utilising the concept of policy narratives is helpful in our understanding of both the relationship between central and local government and crucially the way in which councillors are both perceived by others and view their role. Moreover, the concept of policy narrative is also helpful in our understanding in respect of the way in which the European Union is perceived by the public and central and local political actors.

The chapter goes on to explore the political and social trends and developments taking place across Europe in the recent past examining the implications of a more complex environment for councils and councillors. The chapter explores the potential for councillors to contribute towards EU policy development through engagement with the Committee of the Regions (CoR). The final section of the chapter examines the changing relationship between the councillor and the citizen. Chapter three is the first of two chapters which together present a picture of the complex, interconnected environment within which local political actors exercise their role in the governing of local communities.

Councillors are in many ways the embodiment of local representative democracy. Without locally elected politicians, locally representative democracy would be unable to function in any recognisable way (Egner et al., 2013). Moreover, the mandate on which the authority of municipalities rests is the same electoral principle on which regional or central government also rest, the only distinction is scale, with the fundamental process from which legitimacy is secured the same (Copus, 2014). Councillors in Europe are an important part of the makeup of an internationally recognisable model of local government, ensuring a role for them as representatives of citizens, in a local government system that carries out local welfare state functions with some degree of detachment from central government (Egner et al., 2013). It is crucial to the definition of local government that it is a democratically elected authority which operates through denoted boundaries, and co-operates across boundaries and sectors. It is open to the discretion of central government, thus there is great variation across Europe (John, 2001). For example, Britain has a more centralist and subordinate character to its local politics than elsewhere in Europe, though there has always been a high degree of contact between central and local government in respect of professional and policy making communities. There has, in Britain, been some devolution of responsibilities from the centre to a more local level which on the face of it is to be welcomed. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have different levels of devolved power. The Coalition government's (2010-2015) devolution agenda in respect of England, emerged in June 2014 when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne gave a speech in Manchester introducing the notion of the Northern Powerhouse. He described how a collection of Northern cities could together be strong and be able to take on the world. The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has been created involving ten authorities headed up by the elected mayor, currently Andy Burnham (Labour). A Combined Authority is a legal entity which allows a group of two or more councils to work together and take collective decisions across council boundaries. There are however a number of issues in relation to the form of devolution being put forward by central government. In the first instance the devolution of service responsibilities

does not bring with it the financial devolution, which is essential if local government is to manage its own affairs. Moreover, the offer of devolution comes with strings attached including reorganisation and directly elected mayors, though combined authorities can be established with or without an elected mayor. Secondly the outcome of the offer of devolution involves the creation of local units far larger in area and population than most of existing authorities which in essence moves away from decisions being made closest to the citizens of the area. The major criticism of devolution in its current form is that it undermines the principle on which local democracy is based because it does not transfer powers to an elected local authority, but rather to a multi-purpose joint board led by an elected mayor (Leach, 2017). The broadly accepted definition of a local authority is that it is the level of authority that it is closest to citizens and its task is to represent the significance and views of its locality (Futó et al., 2019). Local government however, exists only if the state recognises its legal existence. The exercise of local government relates primarily to the division of powers between the state and local communities. Historically local government in England has been valued for its local accountability and its ability to make decisions at local level that impact local residents. Historical reviews of local government reference the way in which politicians in powerful local authorities such as Birmingham, London, Manchester and Liverpool were able to carry out major improvements in their localities improving the quality of life for the people they represented. Public utilities were provided by undertakings established by the local councils. Examples include slum clearance and the provision of council house accommodation for those who were moved from the slums. Public transport and libraries were introduced. The value of local government in England however has come to be questioned over the past 35 years. Successive governments have sought to reduce its powers and diminish its status. There have been a series of reorganisations and reductions in power and resources imposed on local government over the period, which to their credit, local authorities have adjusted to and continued to deliver services though in a much reduced state (Leach, 2017). As pointed out however, 'making the best of a bad job is at best

Panglossian and at worst dangerously complacent' (Copus et al., p.57 2017). Thus creating a situation where the public are unhappy with the levels of service they experience and in turn blame the council.

Unlike many of its European counterparts, the absence of a formal written constitution in the UK means that central government decides the way in which local authorities are structured, designated and managed resulting in a lack of clarity in respect of their roles and responsibilities and importantly in their ability to challenge the centre. Hence the member states in the European Union operate diverse and different arrangements from each other in terms of scale, tasks and structure in addition to their differing relations with regional and national levels of government. Nonetheless, whilst operating within different structural contexts, the role of local government across Europe falls into two broad functional formulations.

Firstly, the service provider is important to nation states that have prime responsibility for social welfare, social cohesion and the development of national infrastructural integrity. In this instance local government provides a range of public services or through its responsibility for service delivery ensures that services are delivered utilising a variety of different providers, including the voluntary sector, private enterprise and other arm's length agencies. Secondly, local government has a politically representative and governing role, however the powers that municipalities have in this regard varies across Europe (Bäck et al., 2006; Copus, 2013; Denters, 2005; Egner et al., 2013)

Therefore, when considering the role of local government in Europe the nature of the political system within which it is located must also be examined. This section of the chapter considers the impact of differing local government arrangements which determine the power relations with other tiers of government impacting on decision making and designated responsibilities at local level.

## **Local Government Typologies**

Across the European Union there are many different kinds of councillors. These differences are evident in a number of ways including their position relative to central-local power relations; executive decision maker as opposed to non-executive back bencher; members of the ruling political party or not; differences in age; gender; ethnicity and background and the particular role that they carry out as locally elected politicians. They may be paid, unpaid, full or part-time. Councillor roles are not generic across different political organisational and democratic systems, neither are they static in the face of changes within their own context. Despite these differences all councillors have one factor in common; they are in a position of formal authority and have to assert their political convictions.

All EU member states have democratic political systems at levels below the national level. There are however varied arrangements for government at the different levels of government in respect of elections, structure, function and central-local power relations. There are a number of well-established typologies put forward by a number of writers, on the models of local government across Europe which identify different groups of local government systems (Bäck et al., 2006; Hesse and Sharpe, 1991; D. P. John, 2001; Kersting, 2003; Loughlin et al., 2006; Page and Goldsmith, 1987). Drawing a distinction between the Southern European systems of local government and the Northern European systems (Page and Goldsmith, 1987) and later (John, 2001) distinguish systems relative to the number and type of functions ascribed to the sub-national authority; their legal discretion and their access to central and where it exists, regional government. They describe the Southern European systems as being characterised by municipalities with few functions and competencies, low legal discretion but high access by local politicians to the central and regional government. The Northern systems in contrast are characterised by strong decentralisation of functions, high level of discretion and low access of local politicians to central government.



The typology put forward by Hesse and Sharpe (1991) makes a distinction between three types of local government systems which address the distribution of power and decision making in respect of service provision and the political influence of local government in relation to upper level governments. They divide the Northern European group of Page and Goldsmith (1987) into two parts and include a larger number of countries. The first group is described as the Franco group. This group of local authorities cover territorially defined communities and establish structures in order to manage at a lower level of governance. The mayor's role is to represent the interests of the local community to higher levels of government, and this group includes France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Portugal and Greece. The second cluster is described as the Anglo group, which is characterised by the weak legal and political status of local authorities and includes the United Kingdom and Ireland. The third group is the Nordic and Central European group which includes the Scandinavian countries, Germany; Netherlands; Austria and Switzerland. The group is characterised by having a strong institutional position and relatively high levels of financial autonomy (Futó et al., 2019).

These differing arrangements between the North and South of Europe have their roots in the historical background. In the Southern States, the centre created a uniform administration over the whole territory. With the emergence of the welfare state during the twentieth century, central government established its authority over the whole country. The centre were suspicious of local leaders, who acting as advocates for their local area utilised every opportunity to address local needs, through the use of different networks of access to the national centres of political power. The size of local government units remains small with many levels of government, partly as a way of increasing the potential for territorial representation (Bäck et al., 2006).

In the Northern European systems, central governments relied on local bodies to carry out their policies and functions. The process of industrialisation, with movement of large populations from rural to urban areas was accompanied by problems of overcrowding, poor health and crime. In Britain for example, central

government's response to these issues was to establish bodies at local level with responsibilities for a number of limited functions. The Municipal Corporation Act 1835 created elected municipal councils with a range of powers and property. The democracies across Northern Europe, in developing the welfare system, delegated responsibility for delivery of welfare services to the local authorities arguably best placed to respond to local needs. (Loughlin et al., 2006) raises some concerns in respect of the (Page and Goldsmith, 1987) typology, suggesting that whilst their analysis is useful in drawing attention to the different legal or political basis of local government in Europe, it is not capable of analysing with any degree of accuracy the variety of situations that exist. In their study, Page and Goldsmith (1987) did not take into account the federal systems of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Moreover, when the Page and Goldsmiths (1987) models were initially put forward, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe could not be included and only classified the countries of Western Europe (John, 2001). Analysis of local authorities considers different aspects of the division of powers between local and higher levels of government. For example, Bennett (1989; 1993a 1993b cited in Bäck et al., 2006) describes a threefold structure. First, a dual structure where central government and local government exist side by side but with different competencies for example the United Kingdom; second, fused systems where local authorities and their competencies are determined by local and upper level governments for example Poland and Hungary, and third, a mixed system. Bennett goes on to suggest that the Eastern European countries are moving towards fused systems. This typology has not been widely accepted since all European countries, with the exception of the UK, were said to be moving towards the fused system. Moreover such a typology was also considered to be too simplistic to take account of the radical changes that have taken place in many of the Eastern European countries. The major political structural changes that have taken place in central and Eastern Europe since 1991, coupled with extensive research into the impact of the changes and although based on earlier results a further typology has been added. This approach focuses on the vertical and horizontal power relations with a particular focus on the position of

the mayor importantly this typology includes three countries in Eastern Europe, (Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland) which should be classified as a different type (Swianiewicz, 2014). The Central East European group is concentrated in the former communist countries, who, given the breakdown of the communist regimes since 1989 face dramatic challenges to the ideological, economic and political structures of the former regimes. Moreover considering the EU membership requirements and the strategy of conditionality which include states demonstrating that they have the institutions in place to ensure democratic governance; have a functioning market economy and respect and protection for human rights. For those who wish to join, and who have not been party to its establishment, there are likely to be changes in principle, behaviours and in arrangements for government and possible changes in local government in order to satisfy the demands of membership.

Swianiewicz (2014) raises some concern as to the way in which the academic literature on local government treats Eastern Europe, arguing that much of the academic literature tends to put the whole region into one basket, described as 'new local democracies', coupled with the accompanying stereotypes (Swianiewicz, 2014). His view is that there is considerable variation within the group of Eastern European countries and the differences are so great that their local government systems cannot be viewed as a single, uniform group. Though they share some common features, a belief in ideas of decentralisation; weakness of the meso (above the municipal) tier of local government; and new trends in management. The differences however between Eastern and Western Europe and within the East itself however, are so great that their local government systems cannot be treated as a single, uniform group. Differences include local election systems and the position of the mayor, the role of national political parties, territorial organisation, and particularly the level of territorial fragmentation of the municipal tier, functional decentralisation where the scope and functions of local governments in individual countries of the landscape is very different.

Well established typologies tend to ignore local governments in Eastern Europe (Swianiewicz, 2014). He cites Loughlin et al, (2010: p. 724) who justify their grouping of all European countries into one type by the common histories of countries that share a common experience of communist dictatorship, they also share a common experience of the transition to democracy and preparation for and accession into the EU. Swianiewicz's (2014) view is that their analysis ignores countries of Eastern Europe other than those who became new members of the EU in the 2004-2007 period.

Swianiewicz (2014) is not suggesting however, that the longer established typologies are ineffective; rather they enable the definition of the dimensions to be considered in building any new typology of local government systems. The new typology should take account of both horizontal and vertical power relations as well as the central – local relations identified by (Page and Goldsmith, 1987). Thus in proposing an alternative typology for the Eastern European countries, Swianiewicz (2014) refers to the criteria used in earlier classifications of the Western European systems. The new typology however, is conducted on the basis of measurable indicators in terms of applied criteria, seeking to identify clusters of cases which are relatively close to each other and allows identification of five clusters of countries. According to Swianiewicz (2014), the typology presented confirms the claim that treating the whole region as one homogenous group, which constitutes a single, separate type of European local government, is a mistake. Moreover, the variation among local government systems in the region is very significant and must not be ignored.

Swianiewicz (2014) acknowledges that more work needs to be done, including addressing the question as to what extent, might results of this typology, be linked with results of the typologies conducted earlier in Western European countries. Regardless of the particular typology however, the boundaries of local government are set by the centre who decide on the shape, size number of tiers, functions, powers and responsibilities of local government. Moreover, changes in economic, social and political structures across Europe impact on local governments, creating greater demands on councillors to find ways of

managing changing external and organisational contexts. The following section examines the changing landscape within which local government operates.

### **Changes in Context for Local Government**

A growing body of work explores the European wide pressures that are leading to change in the role of the councillor as an elected representative, changing organisational and political contexts, developments in local government functions and expectations, shifts in central-local relationships and growing demands for citizen participation (Denters, 2005; Goldsmith and Page, 2010). Commentators point to the impact of globalisation, resulting in traditional ways of living, working, thinking and consumption being affected by the emergence of closely connected global markets and the competition and innovation they have generated (Mintrom and Wanna, 2006). Others comment on the impact of Europeanisation processes within cities, urbanisation and note the trend towards local governance in many states. These developments and other reforms that have been introduced in local governments across Europe in the recent past, appear to have been introduced around local councillors with little consideration of the impact on their role (Egner et al., 2013).

Changes in the macro context of local government, globalisation and Europeanisation, have resulted in changing patterns of intergovernmental relations generally, (Goldsmith 2005 pp.228-245 in Denters and Rose, 2005). Practically everywhere, a move from local government to local governance is clearly discernible in that local governments increasingly have to work with other agencies and sectors and there are signs of greater inter-municipal cooperation. This trend has been well documented, less well documented however is what the complexity of governance networks has meant for councillors and the activities they undertake (Copus, 2015).

Moreover, in the EU context there has been a clear tendency towards the development of complicated patterns of vertical and horizontal relationships between different municipalities which cross borders creating new economic and political spaces. These may well contribute to breaking down old cultural differences in Europe. Amongst the EU states there is increasing cross border

cooperation not just with the member states but with the accession countries as well (Goldsmith 2005 pp. 228-245 in Denters and Rose, 2005).

Old practices and customs however, die hard, and national values that maintain the differences identified earlier in the chapter in respect of local government arrangements and systems, remain strong (Denters and Rose, 2005). Nonetheless, though national governments remain in charge of the major decisions about the EU's policies and polity, and municipalities engage in a relatively limited range of policy areas, local actors feed into the multilevel realities of the EU. The increasing scope and number of EU policies has led to a corresponding impact on the local level. Around three quarters of EU outputs are implemented at the subnational and local level and directives directly apply for local government (Guderjan, 2012). It is however always necessary to examine complex relations between actors within a particular local government form and the local and national context in which it is embedded with a view to developing a better understanding as to the implications arising from particular arrangements (Berg and Rao, 2006).

There hardly exists one classic model of local government organisation. Even if some classification is possible, no two national systems are identical. Generally however, the highest authority rests with a directly elected representative council. Other than that, the allocation of functions, responsibilities and powers vary considerably. Unlike national politics where participation is generally limited to casting a vote on polling day, at the local level the situation has traditionally been quite different. Local authorities are in many respects much closer to citizens. In the English context, surveys show that local government as an institution and councillors collectively generate greater levels of public trust than do Parliament and Members of Parliament (Leach, 2017). Paradoxically however there is a climate of indifference towards local government except when individuals are aggrieved about the impact of particular local decisions.

There does not appear to be any great protest at the way in which local council budgets have been drastically cut in the last decade. Despite the significant shift in the balance of power between central and local government over the last

thirty years especially in England there is little sign of public concern (Leach, 2017). In seeking a clearer understanding of the way in which local government and councillors are 'marginalised' it is important to consider how this process of marginalisation has come about (Leach, 2017). There are a number of different approaches to understanding central local relations including a focus on the conduct of particular actors; groups of actors; the institutional approaches (Copus et al., 2017). Another approach of examining the relationship between central and local government is through the concept of policy narrative which provides the opportunity to consider how stories are told in a particular way with a view to influencing the thinking and importantly the actions of political actors, members of the public and organisations. (Copus et al., 2017). The complexity of many policy issues to be addressed in the UK in particular, as well as other member states, including policies on immigration; the environment; child protection; health issues and national security, all have been debated and contested over many years. Policy narratives provide politicians and disparate groups within society the opportunity to come together and reach some level of consensus around difficult complex issues. Thus policy narratives support the decisions taken by policy makers at local and national level despite the uncertainty and complexity of the issue. Moreover narratives propose a particular version of reality whilst at the same time attempting to deny any contradictions within that reality. We should however be mindful that it is not a question of which narratives are more accurate or have greater plausibility, rather the issue is the way in which the policy narratives are able to support the assumptions needed for decision making in the face of what is genuinely uncertain and complex (Roe, 1994).

Policy narratives can be inaccurate but still persist especially when the particular narrative enables us to make more sense of the uncertainties and ambiguities around us. Returning to the way in which narratives impact in respect of councillors and central local relations. (Copus et al., 2017) offer a number of examples which serve to illustrate the way in which a policy narrative works and is used to support a 'grand conception'. Thus we might become aware through the media that a child has been badly neglected or killed by its

parents, progressing through a collection of stories to the grand conception that the local council responsible for child protection is dangerously incompetent, failing the children of the area. Other examples include the stories about councillors on the 'gravy train', spending public money on jolly jaunts, or the narratives about councillors 'fiddling' expenses culminating in the grand conception that local and central politicians alike are corrupt, only out for themselves.

Focusing on the central local relations in terms of narrative, (Copus et al., 2017) discuss three 'meta narratives' in that this description has the capacity to span the period of time (from the early 1980's). This is the period within which local government came to be viewed variously as incompetent, corrupt, ineffective, inefficient and resistant to change but also paradoxically as the best organisation to deliver welfare services to citizens. In the first instance the 'Sovereign Council' is narrated as politically sovereign in terms of service provision to citizens, in this case creating a strong normative message that services are best delivered by an organisation which is democratically accountable to citizens. Different stories play out around the notion of the sovereign council. On the one hand, there are stories about council staff and elected members becoming complacent and indifferent to the citizens they serve, perceiving themselves to be beyond scrutiny because they have been mandated by the people through democratic elections. On the other hand, stories tell of the sovereign council's monopoly on service delivery characterised by incompetence, favouritism and financial impropriety thereby creating the normative message that councils are corrupt.

Thus these narratives generate both consensus and conflict in respect of local government's elected members and staff. The second meta narrative to emerge was that of New Public Management (NPM) which stresses the importance of 'production engineering' in public sector delivery. Stemming from a Thatcherite narrative the public sector is described as 'bloated, wasteful, over bureaucratic and underperforming' (Ferlie, 1996). The sets of stories around this narrative suggest that if only the public sector adopted the practices of the private sector



it would ultimately become more efficient and effective in the delivery of services. The particular narrative also introduced the notion of competition in respect of public sector delivery of services. Thus the stories told relate to the idea that competition underpins service improvement.

In the English context the introduction of NPM created purchaser –provider splits within councils. For example, the Housing Department within the council ‘purchased’ the services for repairs and maintenance of the council’s housing stock from the Building Works Department. The NPM narrative replaced the idea of citizens being service ‘users’ to a story about how citizens utilising the council services are customers. Thus, they have choices as to the services they access. In reality however despite the notion of choice for citizens, many have little choice as to the services they access, including public sector housing, adult social care and children’s services. In order to ensure value for money led by crude notions of efficiency the centre introduced a raft of inspection regimes led by advisory bodies such as the Audit Commission. Critics of NPM suggest it reflects an inappropriate and imported model which takes little or no account of the particular characteristics of public sector organisations. The NPM approach, it is suggested by some authors is now in terminal decline (Copus et al., 2017). However, the NPM policy narrative has a continuing influence in respect of the consensus between political actors and managers that public services can, through the NPM approach, continually improve and the question is raised as to how far we can realistically go in respect of the notion of continuous improvement (ibid).

The third meta narrative to impact on local government is the Network Governance narrative to be further discussed in chapter seven of the thesis. Narratives carry powerful normative messages about local government and how it should operate. Narratives however are not fixed entities they evolve and are always open to interpretation not least because they are themselves ambiguous (ibid). Moreover, important social and moral concepts often get defined in different ways by different groups for different purposes. Understanding these differences is important for councillors, not least in terms of their interaction with

their electorate. An important consideration is whether councillors know what their electorate want and whether they actually do what they think their electors want. In other words, what is their interpretation of 'representation' (Rao, 1998). Rao suggests that just as electors' expectations vary according to their own circumstances, so do councillors vary in their approach to how they respond to electors' preferences. There is no one right answer regarding which groups or interests a councillor is supposed to prioritise. It is instead up to each councillor to interpret his or her mandate (Egner et al., 2013). The modern electorate is more likely to challenge the definition of the community interest proclaimed by national and local politicians. The current electorate are more able than earlier generations to offer and articulate their own perceptions of the public good (Barron et al., 1991).

Since the early 1990s the implementation of EU legislation and the European Regional and Cohesion Policy have led to Europeanisation processes at the local level, with local authorities becoming increasingly aware of the EU's influence on their practice (Guderjan, 2012). EU membership has provided local authorities with opportunities for development that changed local decisions and encouraged municipal entrepreneurship to promote and address local concerns at the European level (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). Consequently, a new quality in the relationship between the local and the European level has been achieved. Institutional opportunities for lower levels of government to promote their interests at the supranational level however are very limited in their impact on European decision making or only available to a few regional actors (Elias, 2008). Only the most entrepreneurial and well-resourced of sub-state actors are successful in mobilising directly at the supranational level (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). Moreover, national governments are skilled in acting as gatekeepers with only a small number of sub-state actors contributing towards but not determining, the key nature of regional policy planning and spending. Moreover, the diverse domestic conditions amongst the EU member states produce differing arrangements with respect to the role, responsibilities and power of different levels of government.

Nonetheless the power, policy development processes and activities of the EU should be a significant issue for councillors, given the subsequent demands made on local government. There are, however, opportunities for local authorities and councillors to engage with EU policy-makers and decision-takers with a view to influencing and shaping the EU initiatives that impact on local government. A particular route that local authorities could potentially utilise in respect of contributing to the decision making processes of the EU is through the Committee of the Regions (CoR). The chapter considers the relative importance of the CoR which offers the opportunity for municipalities, through their representatives, to influence and shape EU policies impacting on local government. With regard to the EU's institutional arrangements, the CoR is the only body through which local representatives formally participate in European policy making. Given that local political actors have few formalised opportunities to contribute towards the development of EU policy decisions, it is important to the thesis to explore in some detail how the CoR might best facilitate the opportunity for councillors to interact with the EU. Though national governments continue to be the most important actors with regional and localities remaining relatively minor actors in relation to the EU, there have over time been attempts to strengthen the regional and local levels of government in relation to the EU.

The idea of a Europe of the Regions became popular in European politics during the 1980's and 1990's in response to innovative policy and institutional development in European integration (Elias, 2008). However, understanding what such a Europe of the Regions would look like varied significantly between its various proponents. For some this suggested that national institutions and powers would weaken under the growing power of the European state in that regions and cities would have direct access to the European policy making process. For others it meant a transformation in the nature of the European polity, moving from a Europe of States to a Europe where regions would in effect be a 'third level' in a position to make a serious contribution to supranational decision making (Elias, 2008). During the 1980s, individual regions across Europe came together and formed the Assembly of European Regions, to seek a formal role in EU affairs. The EU Commission applauded the

assembly's efforts to give the regions and localities a greater input in the Community arrangements. The assembly was however deemed too large and unwieldy and many of the members were not formal members of the EU.

The interest in the role of the regions was stimulated by a number of key developments, including changes in EU structural funding rules and the legal and institutional innovations of the Maastricht Treaty (1993) and created opportunities for regional actors to acquire new resources and to participate in the European policy process. For some, this meant establishing a direct presence in Brussels whereas for others it also meant creating new regional partnerships and engaging in diplomatic activity in order to lobby effectively for regional interests within the EU (Elias, 2008).

Notwithstanding the importance of states in framing the parameters for lower tiers of government, a number of local and regional authorities established 'Brussels Offices' initially with a view to being in a better position to access funding evolving over time to seeking to influence emerging EU policy in directions supportive of locally and regionally derived policy goals (Sykes and Lord, 2011).

The opportunities to engage in networking with other regions and local authorities, and to develop partnership working, which can be a prerequisite in the bidding process for particular forms of EU funding created incentives for local and regional authorities to maintain a Brussels representation. Further, where authorities have limited policy-making powers and resources within their nation state, the opportunity to reach beyond the national level and to benefit from policy learning at the EU level can prove to be beneficial to those authorities.

In the English context, local authorities have little constitutional standing and are subject to a restrictive ultra vires rule, preventing them from taking any action outside of their expressly granted responsibilities. Thus, opportunities to benefit their areas through European interaction may be very attractive. Moreover, the Brussels offices carried out an important function in respect of the provision of

information, either on request from the sponsoring authority or because the office would be aware that the particular authority had an interest in a particular subject. In this respect the offices acted as a kind of look out or listening post, picking up intelligence on policy initiatives which the EU Commission might be considering (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). In addition, the Brussels offices provided the opportunity to build relationships, become involved in policy networks and develop understanding with EU officials and with partners in other countries thus enabling local councils in the UK to be in a better position to know what is happening and what is going on. Nonetheless, British local authorities were largely reactive in terms of their European activities and most of the British offices tended to be understaffed in comparison to their European counterparts. Though not having directly elected regional government, under the New Labour Government of the latter 1990s and 2000s, the process of regionalisation in areas such as spatial planning and economic development; the creation of the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and regional strategies was accompanied by the establishment of British representation in Brussels for the English regions. The number of 'Brussels Offices' overall grew substantially from the 1980s with reports of 165 Offices in 1999 to a growth of 235 sub-national representations in Brussels by the mid-2000s.

National and local settings play an important role in framing the degree of political and social constitution of the areas described as 'regions' across Europe. In the English context for example the 2004 negative vote in the referendum which took place in the North East region led to the abandonment of plans to establish elected regional assemblies. Following the 2010 election the UK Coalition Government proceeded to dismantle the structures of regional spatial and economic and development resulting over time in the scaling down of the representation of English sub-state interest in Europe. Specifically that scaling down saw a closing down of the majority of the regional Brussels Offices, notably those which were heavily dependent on support from their respective Regional Development Agency (RDA).

Drawing from interviews conducted with actors engaged in representing the interests of English regions and English local government within the EU, Sykes and Lord (2011) found respondents were clear that regional representation is not just about funding opportunities. Crucially, regional representation is about the importance of influence in respect of EU legislation that may significantly affect the activities of English local authorities and or impact on new funding opportunities (Sykes and Lord, 2011). Clearly local authorities are subject to legislation and regulation which originates at EU level. Thus seeking to understand and influence such measures are vitally important to local authority actors and those representing them on bodies such as the Committee of the Regions.

The EU Commission proposed that a Committee of the Regions of the EU Member States be established with a view to that committee having an advisory role on relevant policy issues to both the Commission and the Council. The Maastricht Treaty (1993) included a provision for the Committee of the Regions (CoR) to be established. It held its inaugural meeting in 1994. National governments nominate, in the main, elected representatives who are formally appointed by the EU Council.

The Committee of the Regions (2009) asserted that the EU will be strong, its institutions legitimate, its policies effective, and its citizens feeling involved and engaged if its mode of governance guarantees cooperation between the different tiers of government. There is however some debate as to the effectiveness of the CoR, not least because the EU institutions can ignore any advice from the CoR. In addition, there is disparity between the size and political power of regions in the EU; smaller countries themselves constitute single regions. Therefore small unitary states such as the Netherlands have little interest in the CoR. whereas federal states and larger countries and those in favour of federalism, view the CoR as providing opportunities to develop their independence in relation to their central government.

The European Parliament also expressed concern prior to the establishment of the CoR specifically in respect of its relationship with them amid fears that the

CoR would undermine the Parliament, consequently the CoR were unsuccessful in their proposal to be designated an EU institution. The structures, powers and resources set out in the CoR were not what had been hoped for. In the first instance the Committee was to be made up of an amalgam of both regional and local representatives, even where member states had fully-fledged federal or regional structures of government. The regional and local authority split is perceived by many of the regional representatives as having diluted the standing of the Committee by the presence of local representatives, particularly where the member state has mature regional structures of government in place. Moreover having only advisory status modelled on that of the 'perennial bridesmaid' among EU institutions, the Economic and Social Committee (ESC) the CoR, as 'undoubtedly intended', is overall a weak Committee (Jeffery, 1995). Arguably the CoR was deliberately established as a relatively weak body under pressure from the more centralised member states that had no desire to see the Committee develop into an effective body.

The establishment of the Committee of the Regions in 1994 was however an important step in bringing lower tiers of government into the EU arena, though it still has no more than consultative powers and its opinions may be ignored. Nonetheless, the Committee of the Regions brings together regional and local politicians from all the EU member states providing opportunities for learning, exchange, and sharing of good practice and the opportunity to put views forward in a formal established setting. The CoR, despite its limited constitutional powers is nevertheless establishing an important niche for itself in the institutional architecture of the EU to represent the interests of regions and local authorities (Loughlin et al., 2006).

It is the case that a relatively small number (there are 24 full members and 24 alternates representing the UK) of councillors can be members or alternates of the Committee of the Regions which raises questions as to how the majority of elected councillors can share in the opportunities provided by this engagement with the EU. It would appear however, that not all councillors are aware of the

existence of the CoR, and of those that are, many do not know who their representatives are on the CoR, therefore are unable to utilise any opportunities presented by that body, resulting in the possibility of a missed opportunity to contribute towards policy development at the EU level. Moreover, the research suggests that those who are aware and involved are much more likely to be in leadership positions within the council. What follows is a series of comments made by councillors during the research interviews which elaborate the differing attitudes about the relationship between councillors and the EU and the CoR in particular:

As one Conservative Deputy Leader stated:

*I think local government can influence what goes on to some extent through the CoR. I got involved through the INTEREG programme, another opportunity for councils and their political representatives to get together, and share good practice.*

Whilst a Labour councillor's comments show an entirely different knowledge base, perspective and understanding of opportunities afforded by the CoR.:

*I know nothing about the CoR can't really see how councillors would be able to contribute anything through that body. I have never heard of anything being brought up about the EU even. All councillors are interested in is their own area. I don't think anybody is going to be thinking anything much about Europe.*

A Conservative Councillor added:

*I don't have any idea where the mechanism to know about the EU exists so I have no idea how we as councillors would be able to feed anything in, probable through the party. As far as I am aware there is nowhere in the council. I would be concerned about worrying officers with those questions. Difficult to know who on the council would be involved, I couldn't say which Directorate it might be The public out there want us to be involved in our own area I know there*



*are some issues about immigration to do with the EU but that is a national issue not a local one. I think there is a failure on the MEP to communicate to councillors about the EU.*

A Labour Councillor commented:

*Only senior councillors are involved in anything to do with the EU not lowly back benchers. The former leader was involved but I am not sure if the current leader is. It might come under community cohesion. I am not sure. I have been involved in twinning when I was the civic mayor. That was brilliant because the exchanges gave each an understanding about each other's lives.*

During the interview a Labour Deputy Leader said:

*We have a good bunch of MEP's lots of communication and information from them. I have attended the CoR meetings it's a very good forum for councillors across the member states to get together and to get involved.*

To illustrate the point that the views of councillors differ across the EU in regard to the value of the CoR a councillor in the National Socialist Party from Romania summed up many of his European counter-parts opinions when he succinctly commented:

*I know very little about the CoR. I know it exists. Our main involvement with the EU is to access EU funding, all we need to know is how to get the funds to get things done in our country*

What we see demonstrated in the quotes is the overall findings of the research that it is leading councillors that are most likely to engage with the EU and be aware of its activities and operation. It is evident that numerous councillors have a limited knowledge base about the intricacies of the CoR, leading to confusion and reluctance to address gaps in knowledge for fear of not being seen to focus on their local area. While that might be an obvious conclusion, in essence

leading councillors are leading-it highlights the distance between other councillors with both their leadership and the EU as an institution. That distance has serious implications for how councillors can represent their constituents and how they can hold to account, through scrutiny or other processes, their own leadership and what the EU is doing. As we have seen however, any consideration of local government and the councillors within it must take account of the national political system within which it is located. Though there are common patterns of development and common issues across Europe, austerity being one such issue, local government across Europe is shaped by differing political, cultural, historical, geographical and traditional patterns each within their own national context. The differences that exist in local government systems across Europe determine to a large extent the way in which the councillors address their political, economic and social issues.

Moreover, in an era of increased European integration and globalisation, we are becoming more familiar with the notion that we are perceived as global citizens. There is little doubt that global governance is an important strand in how rights and responsibilities are conceptualised at a personal, local, national and global level. Arguably there is greater awareness and execution of our individual responsibilities in a global world. We might wonder what this notion of multi-level citizenship means for councillors and their relationship with the electorate. The following section considers the concept of citizenship and how the notion of multiple citizenship has implications for councillors and their electorate.

### **Councillors and Their Electorate**

Recent democratic transformations in Europe and because citizens have changed have produced greater responsiveness on the part of the major political actors towards the demands of citizens (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1995). Many observers have pointed to the changes within local communities arising from the modernisation of citizens, which in turn influences their relationship with local government. Thus, citizens display assertiveness in presenting councillors with their views and unwillingness just to accept decisions and

policies to which they are opposed. The modernisation of citizens encompasses a substantive and a formal dimension (ibid). In this context, substantive means that citizens' view and approach to local government is more inclined towards the performance and efficiency of governments in meeting citizens demands. In formal terms the phrase individual modernisation refers to the increase in personal skills of citizens and an associated rise of new demands for participation and consultation in respect of decisions taken on their behalf. Further developments in technology, the expansion of mass communication, increasing geographical and social mobility and economic growth characterise the changes at the system level which have a systematic influence at the individual level (ibid). In the political system, these developments result in citizens making new demands on the democratic process and its actors. Difficulties arise, not through rising demands, rather in the extent of responsiveness, the lower the degree of responsiveness of these actors to the demands of citizens, the weaker the attachment to them. With increased education, more people are acquiring politically relevant skills and a sense of political competence, characteristics which in many instances result in demands for more extensive opportunities for political participation going beyond that of voting. Studies indicate that in a variety of European countries, citizens are becoming ever more politically aware and becoming more critical of governments. Individuals and communities are extending their political action beyond the traditional forms of political participation (Denters, 2005).

Citizens have status, rights and responsibilities at different political and governing levels. At the local level tied to their communities and at national level, where they are subject to laws and to participate in the democratic structures that govern (Held, 1995).

The concept of citizenship can have significantly different meanings in different contexts and conceptualisations and it has no "essential" or universally true meaning. It is what philosophers call an 'essentially contested concept' subject to a number of contextually specific interpretations (Lister, 2003). Since Aristotle (384-322 BC), citizenship has been accepted as an inherently political concept

that raises questions about the sort of society we live in. Active citizens are said to be as political as they are moral; moral sensibility derives from political understanding; political apathy spawns moral apathy (Crick, 2000).

Historically there has been a fundamental difference between the concept of a citizen and the concept of a subject. In essence a subject obeys the laws whilst the citizen plays a part in making and changing them. In its usage in modern times, it concerns 'membership', usually attached to a state. It is also a 'normative' idea, a 'set of practices which define a person as a competent member of society' and here there are qualifying, associated rights and responsibilities (Turner, 1993). Citizenship concerns a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed (Cole, 1951). Several of the key writers on citizenship adopt two broad traditions in considering the concept of citizenship (Faulks, 2000; Heater, 2006; Lister, 2003). They define citizenship in terms of 'liberalism (rights)' and 'civic republicanism (obligations)'. Modern citizenship is characterised in the main, by its roots in the liberal tradition, an 'inherently egalitarian establishment of individual rights' (Faulks, 1998). It is the liberal form that has been dominant for the past two centuries and remains so today. Modern day citizenship however is a more complex concept (Heater, 1999). Moreover, in an age of globalisation citizenship cannot be confined within the boundaries of the nation states, rather it must become transnational. Citizenship of the EU however is not an autonomous concept of European law, but is defined exclusively by the legislation of the member states (Majone, 2009).

### **Citizenship and the EU**

The EU citizen provisions of the Treaty on EU (TEU) are surprisingly light in terms of either substantive content or prescriptive guidance. The provision articulates minimal political rights (voting in local and European Parliamentary elections) whilst glossing over social and fundamental rights. Indeed, the treaty language on citizenship is devoid of prescriptive guidance on such key issues as the relation between EU citizenship and member state nationality or

fundamental rights. Clearly nationality can be distinguished from citizenship however as a practical matter the latter is inextricably bound up with nationhood and national identity. The treaty says little more than that EU citizenship is only available to individuals who are nationals of the EU member states, the latter being defined by member state nationality laws which the TEU (1993) decisively leaves as a state-level prerogative. Moreover, the EU makes far lighter demands on the loyalties of EU citizenry compared to the nation-state. It still cannot for example order armies to fight in the name of Europe; nor can it directly administer criminal justice systems.

Nonetheless many key legislative developments impacting on the citizens of the member states have arisen, not from social movements in locally or nationally based contexts but in terms of European social directives often delivered outside of democratic procedures of the nation state. EU citizenship however, needs to be more than the sum of its official and legal pronouncements. This suggests a commitment to the duties and rights of civil society covering discrete areas of public life. In contrast, critical commentaries of EU citizenship, caution against the exclusive character which is intrinsic in the notion of citizenship (Winn, 2000). From this perspective, the EU directly challenges values incorporated in national concepts of citizenship, contract and identity as well as solidarity, cohesion and redistribution in a social sense. Moreover, collective identities form in the context of communities of memory, experiencing communication; clearly the EU is not a community of communication with multilingualism hampering the emergence of common structures of communication and understanding. Further, the EU is not yet a full economic and political union with institutional stability. Indeed, the EU has no prospect of rivalling the nation as the dominant site for individual and collective loyalties. It is the nation that has been the carrier of a special authority to contain and arbitrate more diffused identities.

During the research a Liberal Democratic Councillor illuminated the point by suggesting:

*We are separate, different and we should celebrate the differences. Politicians keep giving us mixed messages about our place in Europe, We actually don't need to be in the EU but we should be in, but we are not a federal state, like America, we are not classed as Europeans, we don't think of ourselves as European.*

A Conservative Councillor said:

*The MEP's could do a bit more, they forget their roots and because they spend so much time in Europe they have a greater sense of being European.*

Another councillor in interview was passionate about maintaining what he viewed as the uniqueness of the cultural identity of his country (Romania).

*Don't push us let us come slowly. We are a very special community where are others like us? Our dignity, our speciality should be preserved. It is hard to say we are all Europeans; I don't want to be a European. Trying to put together 28 different cultures and languages is not good. I like Europe but not the EU I am a sceptic. I don't like all the politics coming together but I know we have to be in the EU so that we can progress.*

The comments above reflect the results arising from the Eurobarometer (2018) which concluded that 89% of the respondents to the survey feel attached to their particular town or city ,93% feel attached to their country and that more than half say they feel attached to the EU. However, in the UK only 11% say they are attached to the EU. In terms of viewing themselves as EU citizens however 57% of those surveyed in the UK said that they do view themselves as EU citizens ("European Citizenship," 2018).The councillors quoted above would be expected to be more aware of the tensions and distinctions between those claiming a 'European' attachment and those more inclined to see their nation as the focus of their attachment. The comments also summarise the findings from the research that councillors, working close to their citizens, will see first-hand

how the idea of attachment and belonging can shift and overlap and play out at different times in different ways and in different circumstances. Councillors are required to navigate these shifting attachments and to do so while focusing on the needs of their wards or their overall council area. It is interesting to note that the reasons stated for being part of the EU community centre around a recognition of the perceived financial and social benefit to their local communities rather than a desire to belong to the wider 'family' of the EU.

It would appear that of all the levels of government it is the responsibilities to the European level of government that seem most difficult to define. Though citizens elect the politicians (MEP) in a supranational form of democracy, the opportunity for local representatives to engage in the formalised structure is very limited. The political capacity of local decision making is restricted when supranational political bodies shape our individual lives and communities.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the impact of the central–local power and decision making arrangements for local government in Europe emphasising how the differing systems across the European landscape dictate the way in which the particular council can conduct its business. The chapter illustrates that central, regional or state government is a powerful force in determining the nature of the responsibilities of local government and the roles and responsibilities of councillors (Copus, 2015). We see within the chapter how changes across Europe are impacting local government through the process of Europeanisation; (to be further explored in the following chapter) increased expectation from citizens and the trend towards local governance (to be further explored in chapter seven). The chapter considered the challenges confronting the Committee of the Regions in respect of the limited nature of its powers, the unsatisfactory resources allocated to it and the dilemmas associated with the split between regional and local representation. Moreover whilst ever the Commission and the Council are not actually obliged to respond formally to the opinions the CoR presents, it is difficult to envisage how the CoR can be a real force in EU matters. (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997) The chapter also however,

suggested that councillors may be able to influence policy development through engagement with the CoR. Indeed, as is shown in the chapter, there are examples where councillors are engaged with the CoR and recognise the benefits of being involved. These active councillors however, are more likely to be in leadership positions whereas non-executive councillors either have little knowledge of the CoR or don't know how they could be involved, raising questions as to how information about the CoR is communicated to councillors across the board. The chapter offers some debate about the nature of citizenship and some consideration of whether membership of the EU encourages the notion of European citizenship. The conclusion drawn from the councillor contributions to the research suggests there is a reluctance from the councillors to be other than a citizen of their particular country, rather than be classed as a citizen of Europe. The notion of European citizenship appears to be hampered by notions of uniqueness, different languages, cultures and differences in economic development. The following chapter provides the opportunity to consider implications of European integration from a local government perspective.



## **CHAPTER 4 - LOCAL GOVERNMENT, EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND EUROPEANISATION**

### **Introduction**

It is misleading to reduce the history of European integration to one particular approach, even one as important as that which has produced the EU of today (Majone, 2009). Neither geographically, functionally or culturally does the 'Europe of Brussels' represent the entire continent of Europe. Moreover, the notion of European integration is not new, rather, has been a continuing theme in the long history of Europe. Political thinkers, scholars and philosophers have over time considered the possibilities of countries across Europe coming together in a cohesive unified manner. A long tradition of respected writers have sought to devise ways and means of eradicating conflict variously proposing the idea of a European community as a long term desirable political objective (Rosamond 2000).

On the other hand, Europe has long been subject to relatively high degrees of political, economic and cultural division and fragmentation, often characterised more by division and conflict than by unity and harmony. In reality European societies and polities have long been characterised by tension between the forces of integration with the intention to promote greater economic, social, cultural and political cohesion and the forces of disintegration, fostering concerns about sovereignty, interstate friction and protectionism.

Nonetheless the EU's political and economic integration project has grown dramatically since its inception in 1952 (Polyakova and Fligstein, 2016). European integration triggers top down and bottom up Europeanisation processes of local government, which involve cooperation and exchange of best practice and innovations through transnational networks, and organisational adaptation within the politic-administrative structure of local authorities (Guderjan, 2012).

The chapter considers the way in which European integration impacts at local government level. Considering the UK in respect of European integration, it has been a long term process dating back to the application to join the EU by the then Conservative government under Harold Macmillan. Following the election of the Labour governments under Tony Blair in 1997 and 2001 the process of adapting to Europe came sharply into focus (Bulmer and Burch, 2002). The 1997 manifesto included the intention to conduct a constructive policy within the EU. It also included domestic reforms that would take account of the pattern of EU policy making. The UK in particular however, demonstrates an apparent paradox in relation to the integration and Europeanisation of sub-national government. Given that at a time when local political institutions are responding to the EU by seeking to influence supranational policy, at the same time, central government is limiting the autonomy of locally elected government. Thus, the opportunities for local government to influence policy development at the EU level are limited if at all possible. Moreover, EU policy making is underpinned by a complex network of committees that shape policy options before policies are confirmed by overtly political decision makers (Peterson, 2003).

Considering the UK in relation to the European Union, the centralised nature of its political system, scepticism in relation to the European project and a propensity to favour intergovernmentalism over supranationalism, coupled with the UK's historically ambivalent attitude towards Europe explains to some extent why the UK has not been politically effective at the European level. The difficulties associated with shaping British European policy are taken not only in the context of Britain's relationship with Europe but also in respect of the implications arising from relations with the US and the Commonwealth (Forster and Blair, 2001). The transatlantic relationship with the US has proved to be a dominant factor in shaping British European policy (Forster and Blair, 2001). Yet, the UK also demonstrates the opportunities and constraints experienced by sub-central governments as they react to the changing EU, thus revealing the complexities involved in the process (John, 1996). The relationship between regional and local governments and the institutions of the European Union has changed and developed over time with a growing interdependence being a

main feature of the relationship between both partners (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). However the member states, as represented in the Council of Ministers, hold the balance of power, thus regional and local governments are relatively minor partners in a three way relationship. Changes in the agendas and relationships of the EU impact on the complex coalitions between the many elected and unelected sub-central decision makers and extend into the more segmented institutions of the EU (John, 1996). Nonetheless, since the EU has no administrative capacity within the member states, it is reliant upon central governments' to ensure the implementation of policy who in turn are dependent upon regional and local authorities to carry it out. Thus, though rarely able to influence policy development at EU level, local government in the UK plays an important role in implementing EU policies whilst at the same time being relatively weak in terms of the central-local relations.

The Lisbon Treaty (2007 effective 2009) is the first EU treaty that refers explicitly to the local level of government, indicating the growing significance of local government in the European integration process. The Lisbon Treaty illustrates the constitutional recognition of a 'Europe of four levels' and introduces the principle of subsidiarity to the regional and local level. The general aim of the principle of subsidiarity is to provide the opportunity for a degree of independence for lower authorities in relation to a higher body and for local authorities in relation to central government. The principle of subsidiarity however was first introduced by the Council of Europe, through the European Charter of Local Self Government, (1985) the first multilateral legal instrument to define and safeguard the principles of local autonomy (Crawford, 1992).

The Charter requires that the principle of local self government be enshrined in domestic law or in the constitution in order to ensure its effective implementation. The Charter is the first treaty to establish the principle of subsidiarity which allows for the decentralisation of power towards the level closest to the citizen. The two core provisions contained within the Charter are Article 4 which relates to the scope of local self-government and Article 9 which concentrates on the financial resources of local authorities. The Charter

requires that, as well as specific duties and responsibilities, local authorities should be given the right to exercise initiative in matters relating to the general welfare of their constituents. Moreover, that in order to carry out certain functions the local authority should be able to determine expenditure priorities, and to obtain adequate resources to carry out its tasks. While seeking to harmonise the diversity and range of institutional arrangements which exist across Europe however, part 11 of the Charter permits the parties, in other words the countries to exclude certain provisions from those by which they will be bound (Crawford, 1992). Difficulties arise when member states, most notably the UK, do not and do not want to endow sub-national authorities with policy competences (Jeffery, 1995). Indeed all local authorities are created by statute, they have no protected status and legally parliament can add or reduce their powers purely by passing any other piece of legislation (Crawford, 1992). Moreover when the Council of Europe introduced the European Charter of Local Self Government in 1985, the UK did not sign up to the Charter until 1997 and then Northern Ireland was excluded from its provisions. Further the principle of local self-government is not specifically mentioned or indeed recognised let alone defined within the UK context, thus the UK does not meet even the basic requirement of the Charter which is that local self government should be recognised in domestic legislation.

The CoR's 'Opinion on the Revision of the Treaty on European Union' (Committee of the Regions 1995) both far-reaching and detailed recommended a revision of Article 3b to the European Council (EC) with a view to extending the principle of subsidiarity to the sub-national level, so that :

'The Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, or by the regional and local authorities endowed with powers under the domestic legislation of the Member State in question' (Committee of the Regions, 1995.p.9 cited in Jeffery, 1995).

There was however much debate between the EU and the member states as to the precise meaning of the principle of subsidiarity, even before the principle

was introduced into the Treaties. Its vague and complex character not without ambiguities and contradictions raised questions around the different national interests and visions of European integration as well as the lack of definition of the EU concept of subsidiarity (Estella, 2002). The principle of subsidiarity was introduced, in essence, as a way of addressing the legitimacy problems arising from the expansion by the EU, of the majority principle. Prior to the Single European Act (SEA) (1986), member states were confident that European Community powers would not develop if a single Member State opposed it. This situation however changed dramatically with the introduction of the SEA, which both paved the way for the expansion of European Community powers and included the expansion of majority voting. Member States could no longer rely on the procedural safeguard of unanimity to defend their national interests. Under the unanimity rule European Community decisions were indirectly legitimised through the role played by national governments in respect of the Community's decision making process. Any decisions at Community level would have to be acceptable to national parliaments.

The following case study illustrates how the majority principle proved to be problematic for the UK and its environmental policy. Initially the SEA appeared to be in line with UK interests in respect of water quality protection, with the British relying on a more flexible approach to pollution control, taking advantage of a uniquely favourable ecosystem, characterised by the existence of tidal sea waters; greater absorption capacity of its rivers; the resilience of soil and strong winds. With the introduction of the European Community Environmental policy in 1972 (though the UK did not formally enter the Community until 1973 it took part in the deliberations that took place) Britain's autonomy in the field of environmental protection was compromised. Whereas prior to the SEA all measures relating to environmental protection were agreed through unanimity, this changed with the introduction of majority voting. Thus, curtailing the UK's preferences in the field of the environment. Moreover, policy making, during the SEA period, developed largely through majority voting (Estella, 2002).

Though the subsidiarity clause is not intended to change local-central relations within member states it goes some way in protecting local freedoms and flexibilities and allows the CoR to invoke the principle in front of court (Court of Justice). Subsidiarity in essence gives the Court the opportunity to annul measures adopted by the EU legislature but which were challenged by a minority in the Council. Thus, the subsidiarity clause creates the potential to further develop integration through greater mutual awareness between the local and the European level. Moreover, since local actors are not the major actors in shaping the evolution of the EU, they provide an example of how European integration is modified through and within compound policy areas in which various stakeholders from different levels engage and interact (Guderjan, 2012). Considering European integration from a local government perspective provides the opportunity to explore how active local actors create new dynamics of integration rather than how local governments alone are forceful drivers on integration. We understand integration from a local government perspective as an evolving, yet not omni-present and everlasting pattern of cooperation and interaction between actors from multiple levels (Guderjan, 2012).

### **Developing European Integration in Local Government**

Prior to the 1980's, the international dimension to local politics consisted of two main activities. The first was the individual links between local governments in different countries, such as twinning arrangements. The image is of locally elected leaders visiting each other's municipalities, as an addition to the calendar of municipal events, visits that were enjoyable but largely meaningless. The second aspect of cross-national local politics was the activities of the international local government associations (John, 2001). The international dimension of politics and policy appeared to be relatively unimportant at local level, in comparison to matters such as local government finance and the provision of services. Nonetheless, the more informal relationship building and transfer of ideas and practices between Europe and actors at local government level may have been much more meaningful than envisaged at the time. Increasingly however twinning arrangements have been

used by local governments in a strategic way (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). Even the supposedly symbolic arrangements of twinning foster changes in the behaviour of local actors (Marshall, 2005).

The establishment of the EU provides opportunities for greater interaction between local authorities and the European level. Moreover, the size of the EU bureaucracy in Brussels is relatively small. Additionally, different parts of the Commission emphasise different elements of policy and administration. Thus, EU officials have a particular interest and at least two good reasons for wanting to develop relationships with sub-national government. In the first instance the Commission needs information, both about its policy objectives and about how its programmes are operating. Undoubtedly national governments will provide information but their advice and information may reflect their own special interest. The EU bureaucracy needs alternative sources of information in order to counter balance this national bias. Regional and local governments can provide such sources. Moreover, as most EU programmes are located below the level of the national state, dealing directly with regional or local levels of government may be viewed as improving policy operations. Secondly, the small size of the Brussels bureaucracy makes it difficult to police its policies. Working directly with sub-national government actors may also help the regulation part of its work. The Commission believes that collaboration with local and regional authorities is an effective way of incorporating the practical experience and expertise of levels below national governments into European policy making. This approach works to the political advantage of the Commission which hopes to advance the European project and bypass national governments (John, 2001).

The study carried out by Goldsmith and Klausen (1997) concluded that local and regional authorities have over time, increased their involvement with the EU but that response to the EU is patchy. They develop a four-fold classification of responses, these being counteractive, passive, reactive and proactive. They find that most authorities are passive, suggesting that the impact of the EU is at best patchy or limited to a few active local governments. Some pioneering

regional and local governments lead the integration process from below. They are the 'bright stars' that are among the many 'black holes' of responses to European integration (Balme and Le Gales, 1997 146-171 in Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). Some more dynamic local administrations and some regional governments across the member states have much stronger relationships with European institutions than do others, driven by politicians committed to the ideal of political integration.

Examples of local government with strong EU connections include local administrations such as Milan, Manchester, Birmingham and Barcelona and some regional governments such as North Rhine –Westphalia and Nord-Pas de Calais. In order to place themselves in European policy making arenas these pioneering local and regional governments, driven by the political incentive, established European units within their organisations, employing specialised staff and opened offices in Brussels. Nonetheless, the main aspect of the EU that occupies large numbers of regional and local governments across the nation states is the disbursement of funds, and for many this is the main reason for engaging with European affairs. Most public authorities are interested if they can access monies for their area. Since the mid 1980's and with the introduction of the partnership principle to the EU's regional and cohesion policy in 1988, local actors have developed pro-active links with the Commission and the European Parliament. Local governments have to varying degrees become Europeanised. Councillors strongly involved in EU activity and interviewed for the research illustrate their links with the institutions of the EU in the following comments which summarise the data collected from the interviews and which explain both their involvement with the EU and how they utilise the opportunities presented through membership of the EU and how they use the EU for policy impact for their communities.

*In all my years of involvement with Europe, through being a trade union representative in the steel industry one of the most successful experiences of cross border projects I have been involved with is the Interreg programme. Fourteen EU countries are involved in*



*partnership working to achieve environmental improvements. The thing that really sets this project aside from many others is the political leadership from each of the partner regions and the potential to strengthen this transnationally. Unfortunately other members in the council don't really understand how it all works and what the benefits are. (Labour Council Leader).*

*I see my role in the council as doing everything I can to increase our EU income. For me it is all about the city and its direction going forward. We are very proud of our new park, new theatre, and lots of projects we have been able to do with EU funding. (Social Democrat Party councillor Germany).*

*Regeneration is a major political priority for us here in this area. This area was basically dying; our national government did not want to know. Thanks to EU funding support, the area is now thriving, vibrant and regenerated with big employers investing here. We would not have been able to achieve so much without EU funding. (Labour Council Deputy Leader).*

*Though poles apart politically, my colleagues on the Improvement Board for the region have taken a very common sense , totally together approach with the same goal, to get the best possible for the people. We work together to secure funding from the EU to benefit not just our own area but the wider electorate. I have learnt that though party politics play a large part in the Town Hall, outside of that and looking to improve, together the whole area, party politics are suspended in the interests of the wider area. (Conservative Council Deputy Leader).*

*We have been cut £139.00 million which is a 40/60 percent cut in funding. The only funding we can draw on is from the EU transition area. We want to make sure that our young people are fit for work*

*through education and training. The EU knows and recognises this. Problem we have is that the funds, though agreed go through central government and as yet we have not had a penny, it's very frustrating. We want the funding to go through the LEP. This is where all members can see where that money comes from and how it can make a difference. (Labour Councillor).*

*I am absolutely confident that the funding we have received from the EU has totally regenerated this city. In my view, purely because we are in the EU we have been able to attract a major employer, which has created jobs in our city and contributed to improving the quality of life for our people. Without the EU we would really have struggled to regenerate our area, (Labour Council Leader).*

*What we have got to remember is that though the council gets EU money it is our own money. We have to bid for funds which are then ring fenced. (Conservative Councillor).*

What is illustrated by the quotes above, is how some councillors recognise the opportunities to improve and regenerate their communities by taking an active part in the EU take full advantage of the expansion of European policies providing opportunities for economic cooperation, partnerships amongst localities and institutional development of subnational entities (Guderjan and Miles, 2016). The Labour councillors (council leaders in particular) see the EU as a way of working around British central government and austerity policies in particular. For them the EU is a resource replacement mechanism which has generated loyalty from them to the EU as well as a certain dependency on the EU and its resources, in a similar way to which local government is more generally dependent on central government. Thus, there are genuine pro-EU sentiments displayed in the comments. These sentiments however are tempered by a superior- subordinate relationship based on the channelling of EU resources to local government. For some of the councillors the EU is seen as the only source of support to their particular area. Thus, the EU provides

both resources and a framework for political action. But, as the last comment from a Conservative councillor indicates, there is an alternative view, that the resources channelled to local government are not new resources but ring-fenced rechanneling of existing UK based resources to local government. Thus, there is, as would be expected, a dual narrative based on party allegiances existing in local government about the nature of EU resource allocation.

It has been widely recognised that European integration has prompted emerging patterns of interaction between local and European levels (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997; John, 2001; Rosamond, 2000). Yet the study of the complex inter-relationship between the development of European governance and local government is under researched from a perceptual perspective (Guderjan and Miles, 2016). These authors offer consideration of the fusion approach, which understands European integration as a merging of public resources and policy instruments from multiple levels of government, whereby accountability and responsibilities for policy outcomes become blurred. EU membership does not always make a noticeable difference in the relationship between local and central government within the member states (John, 2000:878 et al cited in Guderjan, 2012b). Control and power over policy making remains a key determinant in the design and implementation of EU policies, and local actors continue to face political or bureaucratic resistance from national executives, which defend their powers vis-a vis enhanced multilevel governance. Pro-active cooperation with higher levels is determined by domestic constitutional settings, the good will of national and regional governments, administrative capacities, resources and entrepreneurial actors (Guderjan and Miles, 2016).

Nonetheless some of the councillors involved in the research, in the main those in leadership positions, presented as active, innovative and entrepreneurial and as we have seen despite the obstacles described above, there are examples where councillors actively become involved in EU affairs. Thus local political decision makers can re-invent their political role. By engaging with transnational decision makers, localities and local political actors' contribute to a political world that is more complex, changeable and interdependent than before (John,

2001). The overall strategy for developing European integration, it is suggested, includes shifting loyalty from national forms of authority towards the European system where the new supranational system promises the fulfilment of social and material interests. Thus, deepening economic integration will create the need for greater European institutionalisation requiring greater regularity complexity (Rosamond, 2000).

Moreover, as Europeans learn more about each other through travel; the development of mutually beneficial business and social networks; youth exchanges, a European identity will very gradually and inevitably develop over time (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997). European integration creates a new political system and creates links between the Commission and sub-national authorities. In Leon Lindberg's study of the early EEC, *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration* (1963) political integration is described as the process whereby nations forgo the desire and ability to conduct foreign and key domestic policies independently of each other, seeking instead to make joint decisions or to delegate the decision-making process to new central organisation (Lindberg, 1963). This is seen as a process whereby political actors in several distinct settings are persuaded to shift their expectations and political activities to a new centre. In their study of European integration and local government Goldsmith and Klausen (1997) suggest that there are two sides to European integration. In the first instance implementation determines whether or not integration takes place and secondly implementation serves as a feedback and driver to new undertakings which accelerate or decelerate integration (ibid). The EU has created directives and regulations which affect the practice of municipalities and trigger engagement with EU policies (Rosamond, 2000) asks us to consider whether European integration is an economic or a political phenomenon. Many writers define integration in terms of the radical reordering of the conventional international order and of the existing authoritative structures of governance. Objecting to the approaches to integration of the early 1970's Puchala (1972: p. 89 cited in Rosamond, 2000) argued that they each characterised the Communities in particular terms and generated narrow research agendas with limited capacities to explain:

“Our conventional frameworks have clouded more than they have illuminated our understanding on international integration. No model describes the integration phenomenon with complete accuracy because all the models present images of what integration could be or should be rather than here and now” (ibid).

The observation above however relied on the empiricist idea that the full objective of integration would be visible to an observer equipped with the right conceptual telescope. Proposing an alternative approach to European integration, Puchala describes a concordance system where the primacy of the nation states is important, but where political action operates at several levels, subnational, national, transnational and supranational, and where levels of influence varied from issue area to issue area cited in (ibid).

### **Integration by Stealth**

An important concept in respect of European integration is this idea of spill-over put forward by Ernst B Haas in his seminal work *The Uniting of Europe* (1958) Haas in 1958 (Haas, 2003), defined integration as the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities towards a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over pre-existing national states. As a result of these processes of spill over, neo-functionalists see European integration as a self-sustaining process which will culminate in the creation of a new polity. This approach is referred to as the ‘Monnet method’ the strategy for promoting spill-overs from one economic sector to another and eventually from market integration to political integration (Rosamond, 2000).

Stemming from a neo-functionalist perspective Haas (ibid) refers to spill-over as the way in which the creation and deepening of integration in one sector creates pressures for further economic integration above and beyond that sector, furthering the authoritative capacity at European level. Drawing from the experience of the Coal and Steel Community (which ceased to exist in 1967) the conditions under which sovereignty sharing and transnational community

building could take place, Haas developed the idea of spillover. He suggested that spillover would occur not on economic determinism, rather on changes in attitude and behaviour of government parties and in particular business, labour, and interest groups. He believed that group pressure would over time spill over into the federal sphere, thus adding to the integrative process (ibid). However during the advent of the recession during the 1970's the notion of European integration and neofunctionalism began to take a back seat until the 1980's when the concept of European integration and neofunctionalism experienced a revival. 'The Uniting of Europe' did not suggest the inevitability of European integration; Haas himself appreciated the potential challenges of European integration. Though criticised for suggesting an ever upward trajectory towards European Union, Haas understood the pitfalls of European integration. Rather he viewed his work as a step forward in terms of understanding the processes of integration rather than having identified the definitive last word on integration theory.

European level institutions and policies, transfer ideas and working practices in a way that moves local decision making away from national and hierarchical forms of politics toward more negotiated and interdependent practices, involving a wide range of interest groups. Moreover, the already dense networks that join levels of governments within nation states become more complex as a result of Europeanisation (John, 2001). Europeanisation closely links to economic interdependence, which drives sub-national authorities into closer relationships with each other and the EU (Goldsmith, 1993).

A key development during the late 1980's was the programme for completion of the Single European Market (SEM), also known as the '1992' programme. However this programme was not just one of market integration, in goods, services, capital and the free movement of labour; it also included a wide-ranging legislative agenda, leading to Europeanisation of public policy in important areas. European regulation thus seeped into the nooks and crannies of the member states, and has acted as a catalyst in restructuring both the economic and the political contexts (Laffan et al., 2013). One important

consequence arising from this process was the ever increasing range of political and economic actors with the aim of influencing policy at the European level. The balance of power, however, has major substantive effects on the content and the operation of policies.

The legislative agenda brought with it increasing responsibilities to the local level. Though European legislation is mainly implemented by national laws, an increasing amount is directly applicable into national law. Implementation however, is by no means straightforward. For example, citizens may now appeal to their local courts to require the enforcement of directives by an 'emanation of the state' such as a local authority. Central government does not enforce the law in these cases, local government and the local courts do. The expansion of the responsibilities and powers of the EU creates the possibility to decentralise authority to local and regional governments.

The role of sub-national politics in the EU is described as multi-level or multi-layered governance. The perspective starts from the existence of three levels of political organisation in the EU; the European, the national and the local, suggesting that the interaction between them creates a new form of politics. The growing activity of regional and local policy making takes place away from the negotiations over treaties. Sub-national bodies influence the EU political process through their everyday interactions with other levels of government, their role as a conduit of information on EU affairs and their responsibility for the implementation of EU policies.

Not all accounts of European policy however suggest the growing influence of sub-national government and some writers argue that the nation state remains dominant over both policy formulation and implementation. Nonetheless, due to the new opportunity structure provided by the EU's regional and cohesion policy, local authorities have possibilities to interact with institutions at different levels. They can take individual action, or more commonly rely on the domestic municipal associations and organisations and participate in transnational networks. Importantly, as pointed out by (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997) networks play a specific role in the process of European integration. They

suggest the term 'network' refers to a system of interactions and exchanges of information characterised by informality rather than formal structures; networks take the horizontal rather than the vertical form; they are often linked with ideas about innovation. There are, however, also vertical links between networks whereby for example, a network of national cities be built on a network of regional cities. Thus many local governments co-operate together possibly because it is a requirement for funding but also because it proves to be mutually beneficial in other ways including providing opportunities for local governments to shape policy initiatives. Although the EU Commission does not offer institutionalised access to local actors, it seeks to legitimise its activities with input from regional and local government (Guderjan, 2012). As the research has shown, some local actors are involved with the EU but they are in the main, councillors in leadership positions. The majority of councillors, it would appear, have little knowledge of the EU and are not engaged. Moreover, most of the literature on local government and its interaction with the EU draws attention to the pace-making local governments (Goldsmith, 1993). The focus is on those who are most active and as such perhaps gives a misleading impression of the impact of Europe on European local governments and vice versa. According to Goldsmith (1993) it is the larger, probably more urban municipalities who are more active, or else those levels most able to relate to the idea of peripheral regions.

Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the European integration process has significantly affected local governments across Europe. The implementation of EU legislation and the European Regional and Cohesion policy have led to europeanisation processes at the local level. Therefore, local municipalities are increasingly aware of the EU influence on their practice and as a consequence they adapt their politico- administrative structures (Guderjan, 2012). What then of the councillors representing the electorate at local level, how do they interpret the influence of the EU in respect of their practice?

The experience of deep integration within Western Europe however does not provide a model for others to follow. Its historical development was rooted in a



stage of economic development and security framework that have now both disappeared (Rosamond, 2000). If as suggested, the EU is unique, and is nothing more than an instance in itself, then we have the dilemma of being unable to develop general theories of integration. However, in attempting to explain European integration, the EU is indeed the only available case (ibid).

Contrasting the logic of integration with logic of diversity in respect of European integration Hoffman (1966) advanced the suggestion that nations prefer certainty or the self-controlled uncertainty particularly in matters of key importance to the national interest rather than the uncontrolled uncertainty of integration. Rosamond argues that despite a misreading of Hass's statement suggesting that integration theory was no longer relevant, rather he was in fact suggesting that a turning point in integration theory had been reached and phenomena such as the European Community should be conceptualised differently.

Europeanisation and European integration continuously interact with each other, for example the development of the supranational level can be viewed as bottom up Europeanisation, in the context of institutions and policy. On the one hand Europeanisation can be seen as a source of change in relation to the EU level in terms of European integration and the development of supranationality. On the other hand, European integration can be seen as a source of change and Europeanisation the outcome of change on member state government, legal and regulatory structures (Howell, 2002). The following section draws attention to the concept of Europeanisation with a view to considering the impact of Europeanisation on local government and councillors.

### **Defining Europeanisation**

Europeanisation is linked foremost to the organisational and administrative power of the EU. In its most explicit form Europeanisation is conceptualised as the process of downloading EU directives, regulations and institutional structures to the domestic level (Howell, 2002). Scholars have extended this conceptualisation in terms of uploading to the EU, shared beliefs, formal and

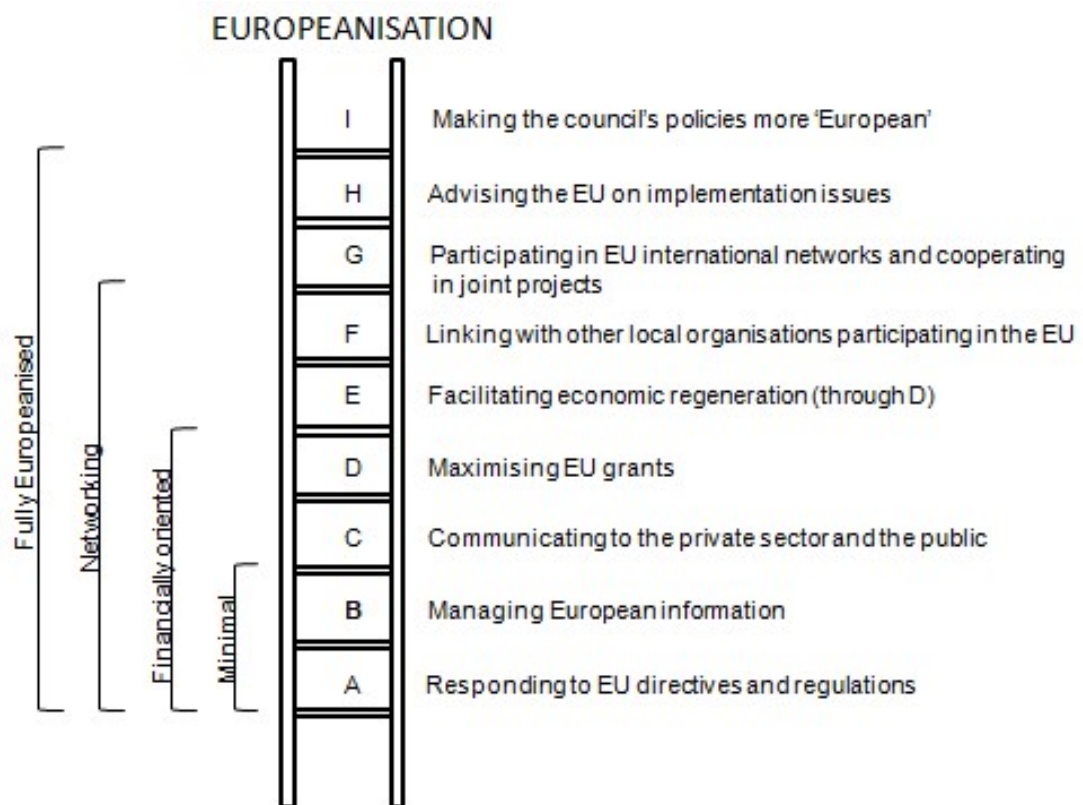
informal rules, discourse, identities and vertical as well as horizontal policy transfer. Europeanisation is a fashionable term for which there are many definitions (Howell, 2002). She questions the usefulness of the term given the uncertainty that surrounds it and enquires whether it was even worth bothering with. Others argue that it is a useful concept, even though it needed further exploration, explanation and conceptualisation (ibid). Europeanisation, is sometimes used narrowly to refer to implementation of EU legislation or more broadly to capture policy transfer and learning within the EU. On other occasions the term is used to identify the shift of national policy paradigms and instruments to the EU level. Sometimes it is used in a narrower way to refer to its effects at the domestic level or in a more expansive way to include effects on discourse and identities as well as structures and policies at the domestic level. (ibid). Europeanisation is an incremental process changing the direction and shape of politics to the degree that European political and economical dynamics become part of the organisation of national politics and policy making (Ladrech, 1994). Europeanisation is also described as a process whereby European ideas and practices transfer to the core of local decision-making as well as from local policy making arenas to the supranational level (John, 2001). The European function is a means whereby public authorities can innovate and initiate policies and programmes in the context of trans-national co-operation and European policy-making (ibid).

John (2001) describes Europeanisation as a stepped set of activities whereby local and regional authorities ascend a ladder. He divides the steps of the ladder into stages that reflect the degree of choice local public bodies have over their activities. Initial stages such as responding to regulations are compulsory and therefore have little effect. The more action however, that the local authority undertakes the greater the interplay with European ideas and practices, finally reaching the fully Europeanised stage.

John (2001) argues that in the final stage, there is a fundamental transformation within which local policy making becomes an aspect of EU politics rather than just changes in short term instrumental behaviour. From this perspective

European ideas and practices transfer to the core of local decision making and local policy making arenas transfer to the supranational level. Thus, the European dimension provides a means whereby local public authorities can innovate and initiate policies and programmes in the context of transnational co-operation and EU policy making.

Figure 5. The European Function



(source:p.72 John, 2001)

The growing body of research on Europeanisation seeks to find out the extent to which domestic policy choices have been constrained and shaped by European policy. Many studies deal with Europeanisation through consideration of the impact on member states, while others view the EU as just one feature of Europeanisation (Wallace, 2000). Wallace's (2000) arguments are important in

considering the importance of placing the impact of the EU in the context of other sources of change. Her definition of Europeanisation is that the development and sustaining of systematic European arrangements to manage cross-border connections thus a European dimension becomes an embedded feature which frames politics and policy within European states (Wallace, 2000).

Wallace (2000) argues that rather than aligning the definition of Europeanisation with membership of the EU, she seeks to argue the point the other way around; rather, that the creation and the development of the EU are in themselves responses to Europeanisation and reflects a set of choices about ways of channelling or influencing the patterns of Europeanisation. Her view is that contemplating the concept of Europeanisation this way provides the opportunity to consider the role of the EU in its broadest context, as part of a wider fabric of cross-border regimes in Europe. Further that Europeanisation can coexist with protected domestic political spaces; she challenges the notion of Europeanisation as a one way process of intrusion. Moreover, the scale and focus of protected political spaces changes over time, therefore Europeanisation, is for her, in some respects an unstable process. Europeanisation in relation to the UK however is an iterative process in place, not least because the adaptation of the UK government system is designed to be able to input into EU policy making (Bulmer and Burch, 2002). Their definition of Europeanisation suggests;

“A set of processes through which the EU political, social and economic dynamics interact with the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies” (Bulmer and Burch, 2002, p.116)

There is however, no shared definition or even a stable meaning of the concept of Europeanisation, frequently definitions differ from one article or book to another. Nevertheless, the common view describes Europeanisation as the *modus operandi* through which supranational institutions and policies impact member states' institutions and policy development, impacting on all levels of government (Wallace et al., 2015). This view evades any teleological inference

and leaves it open to empirical corroboration whether a state has internalised the institutional logic of the EU.

## **Conclusion**

The debates between the theoretical perspectives in respect of European integration and Europeanisation continue with new theories emerging carrying additional explanation as to how the European integration process is being shaped. The point made by (Moravcsik, 1998 p 805 in Moga, 2009) seems edifying: “Any general explanation of integration cannot rest on a single theory ..... but must rest on a multicausal framework that orders a series of more narrowly focused theories” The central point of the chapter is that the establishment of the EU has provided additional opportunities for local government to interact at the European level. The chapter illustrates that though opportunities for local actors to be involved and active at the European level are limited, some councillors do take whatever opportunity is presented to be involved

The more active (in terms of EU activity) group of councillors taking part in the research articulated the way in which they believe they can influence policy development at the level of the EU. The chapter also demonstrates that the more informal networks established by local governments within the EU member states provide a platform for exchanges of ideas, sharing good practice and developing relationships between municipalities. Thus, contributing towards a particular kind of European integration which centres around the transmission of ideas and practices often taking unexpected routes, where chance and contingency play as much a role as powerful political movements and ideologies (John, 2001).

As we see in the chapter there are some pioneering councils who proactively take a bottom up approach to European integration. Driven by politicians committed to the ideal of political integration, the councils are described in the chapter as the ‘bright stars’ that are among the ‘black holes’ of responses to European integration. Though the chapter shows that local actors are excluded

from most major decisions about the EU's macro policy and polity developments, they do have an impact on the dynamics of integration, though modest and limited in scope. The chapter considered the theoretical perspectives in respect of Europeanisation with a focus on local government utilising John's (1994) step model which suggests that Europeanisation is a stepped set of activities with sub-national governments ascending a ladder, culminating in the final step whereby local policy making becomes an aspect of EU politics (John, 2001).

Thus, the study of European integration and Europeanisation from a local government perspective needs to consider the interactive, co-operative arrangements involving actors and institutions from multiple levels of government (Guderjan, 2012).

The following chapter will focus on the issues associated with the concept of democracy and the notion of sovereignty with a view to exploring the debates as to the democratic nature of the EU.

## **CHAPTER 5 - DEMOCRACY AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE E.U.**

### **Introduction**

Given the contested nature of the EU polity, assessing its degree of democracy is problematic. Debates about the democratic legitimacy of the EU have occupied theoretical and political debate since the 1970s. The term 'democratic deficit' in respect of the EU is commonly understood as a lack in the ability of EU citizens to affect decisions made at European level. Given the above, we need to enquire into the key features of democracy given the most defensible and attractive form of democracy is one in which citizens can, in principle, participate and deliberate about decision making in respect of the political, social and economic spheres (Held, 2006). The narrative of a bureaucratic despotism by a 'superstate' in Brussels is a widespread concern in contemporary politics (Moravcsik, 2002). Moreover there is growing interest in the way the EU is narrated and the political uses conveyed by narratives of the EU (Bouza Garcia, 2017).

The story of the European Union has changed over time from being one of directional progress towards a common future into one of muddling together through crisis after crisis. Debates about whether the EU is democratically legitimate are couched in ideal and isolated terms where comparisons are drawn with an ancient Westminster- style of or utopian form of deliberative democracy which no modern government can meet (Moravcsik, 2002). Moreover the debate about the EU's democratic legitimacy reflects a broader discussion about democratic challenges confronting advanced industrial democracies and about which local government and councillors can make a major contribution to resolving. In seeking councillor's views about the EU, the issues associated with democracy were highlighted by those councillors that took part in the research. The majority of councillors taking part in the research were keen to share their thoughts about the democratic nature of the EU. In summing up the opinions of the majority of the councillors interviewed for this research, a councillor commented that:

*I am not sure if the EU is democratic because it feels as though decisions are made by unelected people. Also there are so many countries involved now there must be cliques where some countries agree to something because they are promised something else. I voted for a common market but not a full union. I don't want a central Europe. I don't think we were ever told properly how it would work. (Conservative Councillor)*

This comment illustrates a commonly held understanding about the EU's democratic legitimacy. The comment also illustrates a distrust felt by some of the councillors interviewed for the research, as to the workings of the EU and the perception that some member states might be persuaded to take a particular path in exchange for some benefit to their own country. The chapter has four overall objectives: first to consider the question relating to the perceived democratic deficit of the EU. Section two introduces the story of democracy through a brief overview of the way the concept of democracy has developed over time in Europe. The third section goes on to introduce leading models of democracy, focusing on participatory democracy with some analyses of councillors' understanding of democracy. Stemming from the interviews with councillors the final section of the chapter examines the debates about whether membership of the EU erodes the sovereignty of the member states.

## **Democracy and the EU**

Many scholars share the assessment that even though democratic structures are in place at EU level, the EU has a democratic deficit (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). Research on the EU's democratic credentials is underpinned by different notions about the essence of democracy. The EU is a hybrid organisation that can be viewed either as a supranational institution or as an intergovernmental organisation. The first approach focuses on the vertical and hierarchical aspects of its institutional structure, while the second focuses on the horizontal dynamics between the member states. Thus, different approaches focus on different aspects of the nature of the EU. Whether there is a democratic deficit in the EU is dependent upon which particular benchmark is



used for comparison. Different approaches start from different assumptions about the nature of the EU and from different ideas about democracy and legitimacy. There are those that argue that the EU is as democratic as it can be whilst others suggest that more institutional reforms are needed to make it more democratic (Paolucci, 2011).

Considering the literature on the EU's democratic credentials (Majone, 2009) argues that;

‘we are still groping for the normative criteria appropriate to the *sui generis* character of the European community.....since the legitimacy debate is still in the standard-setting state, current evaluations start from different normative premise to reach different, even contradictory conclusions’ (Majone, 2009, p. 46)

Though the idea of democracy is firmly entrenched in the EU's primary law, participatory mechanisms beyond elections do not feature, there is no principle in EU primary law which offers affected parties a right to participate in EU decision making. In other words, though there are elected representatives who may be able to influence policy decisions at EU level, EU democracy is characterised by an emphasis on the political institutions of the state.

Many politicians, and members of the European public appear to agree that, despite democratic structures at EU level, such as a directly elected parliament, the EU does appear have a democratic deficit. An organisation of this continental scope will be perceived as being too far distant from the individual European citizen (Moravcsik, 2002). Moreover the EU lacks the grounding in a common history, culture and symbolism upon which most polities can be drawn. Many perceive the EU to be biased in the outputs of European policy making, focusing on directives and regulation which promote markets whilst providing a limited range of policies pertaining to regulatory protection social welfare. Nonetheless, there is always indirect democratic control through national governments, coupled with the increasing powers of the European Parliament (though it has to be said, not as strong as the Council of Ministers or the

European Court of Justice) and constitutional checks and balances, ensuring that EU policy making is open and transparent as well responsive to the demands of European citizens. Stories about the power and secretive nature of EU officials fail to recognise that information appears more plentiful about the EU political and regulatory process, than about similar processes in nearly all of its member states (Moravcsik, 2002). Thus, the constraints inherent in the EU's constitutional settlement prevent the EU from becoming an unaccountable super-state. Further, policies on taxation, social welfare provision, defence and education policy are still firmly in the hands of the nation-state. Moravcsik (2002) argues that the democratic deficit argument is unsupported in that existing checks and balances are much better organised than those of the member states and therefore sufficient to ensure enough transparency, effectiveness and responsiveness of EU policy making.

Research on the democratic deficit of the EU explicitly or implicitly focuses on different aspects of democratic legitimacy whereby benchmarks are derived to assess the EU democratic quality or its democratic potential. Most of the research however, focuses on the input side where procedures or requirements for identifying the will of the people are defined. Input legitimacy focuses on how much participation is required to make a government legitimate. As Larsson (2008) points out, there are opposing views as to this issue,

“one stresses the importance of the citizens’ active participation, while the other focuses more on citizens being able to participate when it is in their interests, but most of the time letting the elite go with the ruling. The elitist approach even stresses that too much participation can be harmful for the efficiency of the government and participation should therefore be restricted” (Larsson, 2008 p.24 cited in Paolucci, 2011).

On the other hand, the literature defines output legitimacy in terms of the problem solving capacity of the government.

“When a government loses its ability to take decisions and to solve problems in society, it will soon lose its legitimacy” (Larsson, 2008. p. 24 cited in Paolucci, 2011)

There is however an inter-connection between input and output legitimacy, both must be present to ensure democratic legitimacy. Disaffection with the EU however seems to be at its peak after the experience of a refugee crisis that is challenging its values, a currency debt crisis resulting in austerity and slow economic growth and European Parliament (EP) elections with below 50% turnout. All is fuelling populism and nationalistic comebacks (Bouza Garcia, 2017). The narrative that the EU has long been successful in securing peace on the continent is no longer sufficient or accurate to articulate and communicate the need of EU policies and its positive effect on the lives of the people of its member states in the face of contemporary challenges. The growing interest in narratives in the EU can be viewed as a result of the decay of the grand narrative of an ever deepening integration amongst the member states. Thus, there is a need now for a ‘narrative turn’ by EU institutions in an attempt to re-create a broad consensus on what the EU is and ought to be. European public debates however are disconnected from each other and a coherent European narrative infrastructure is not yet in place (Bouza Garcia, 2017). Meanwhile the competition among diverging narratives around the EU is likely to increase rather than diminish.

The fundamental value of democratic legitimacy however is the principle of autonomy which implies that people are free and equal in the determination of their own lives. Self-determination therefore challenges any notion of domination which denies that people are the best judges of their own individual good or interest. The normative justification for democracy is to check and channel arbitrary and potentially corrupt power of the state. Moreover, an effective democracy requires that its citizens are able to participate in the political system. Thus, democracy requires that people have more than the right to vote, they should not be alienated from political decisions, but are confident they are governing themselves through a set of responsive governing

institutions, particularly at a supranational level where the vast distance between the people and the decision makers crosses national boundaries.

Local government provides the opportunity for people to be involved as councillors thereby being party to the decisions that affect their communities. As pointed out by (Chandler, 2009) in the context of Britain, government reports have all endorsed the importance of local government for securing democracy. Moreover, an essential value of local government is its ability to enhance democracy (Jones and Stewart, 1983). The management of all affairs in which a number of people have a common interest should be in the hands of those persons themselves, and without liability, as to those affairs, to external dictation or interference. In other words, through local self- government (Toulmin Smith, 2005). Many of the councillors taking part in the research do not appear to be entirely convinced that the EU is democratic, a view which is illuminated in the comments below:

*There are too many nations involved in the EU now; it's becoming stretched and dangerous. To my mind the imbalance between the countries is highly dangerous in that some of the countries are very poor and others rich, this causes problems. The EU has become far too powerful and unaccountable. I believe that to all intents and purposes, decisions are made by a few bureaucrats. I believe that the role of the MEP is weakened because they are not of the same. Seems to me they have no power or influence. Having said that I have never seen the MEP in the Town Hall and I am not sure what she does anyway. (Conservative Councillor)*

*I think the EU needs reforming, there are too many bureaucrats being paid too much money. I think we should try harder at local level to influence the policies that come out of the EU, through our MPs' and MEPs' we don't work hard enough at it. (Conservative Councillor).*

*I don't really understand how it all works in the EU. It is too complex and it makes little sense that everything has to be gone through twice, what a waste of money and who is paying for all that? There are too many rules and regulations. We just need to have a better understanding about how it all works. I think it would be helpful to have seminars on how the EU operates and open up to the public. There are benefits like human rights and employment benefits that we are aware of coming out of Europe, but I am not sure who makes all the decisions. (Labour Councillor).*

In contrast a Labour Deputy Leader, demonstrating a pro EU stance expressed concern as to the way in which central government is too far removed from local government to understand and appreciate the needs of particular local areas, whereas, from the perspective above, the EU offers a better outcome.

*When people complain to me that we are being ruled by people a long way away who we didn't elect and I say yes I disagree with London as well, people we didn't vote for in a parliament a long way away. Some people here probably feel closer to Brussels than Westminster. The who rules who about Europe for me is no different to the situation with our national government. CoR is what it's all about, we work regionally. I feel more protected being part of the EU- as a citizen.*

There are differing views expressed by councillors as to the democratic nature of the EU, councillors taking part in the research, with a positive attitude towards democracy in the EU, are in a minority and are more likely to be in leadership positions.

What is also illustrated in the comments above is how councillors are concerned about what they perceive to be the opaque nature of the structure and organisation of the EU. The comments also illustrate the frustrations felt by some councillors around the role of the MEP and what they view as the lack of engagement between the MEP and their local area. Moreover, the comments

display a concern in respect of the role of the MEPs' in that they appear to have little influence at the EU level. Thus, the elected representative within the EU is unable to carry out their representative role.

The dominant principle of representative democracy is increasingly experiencing alternative modes of democracy such as direct democracy and participatory democracy which imply that citizens and other non-political actors participate directly in the formulation and administration of public policy. With the emergence of different governance models bringing yet more concerns and debate about the challenges to representative democracy and the challenges the institutions of representative government face in a globalised and increasingly interdependent world, raises questions about accountability and concerns in respect of political equality and control (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007).

Democracy however, has a variety of meanings, the most important of which for modern states, are direct or participatory democracy and representative or liberal democracy (Loughlin et al., 2006). Other forms of democracy have developed arising from the development of governance networks; they are network and market democracy. However, these forms of democracy operate within a representative democratic framework at the local level and are not therefore forms of democracy that exclude councillors (Copus, 2015). Thus, market and network democracy will not be pursued in any depth here. The following section considers the leading models of democracy with a view to examining the research into councillor's attitudes towards democracy.

Questions arise as to who makes the decisions in democracy; the citizens themselves, through self-determination and participation (direct democracy), or caretakers, delegates or trustees, through representation (indirect democracy) (Hendriks, 2011). Moreover, the EU Commission is motivated to drive political advocacy for and action towards participatory democracy at the EU level with a view to increasing the opportunities for popular participation in an effort to counteract the assumed EU democratic deficit. (Moravcsik, 2002) Participatory democracy requires widespread participation of individual citizens and civic

associations including minority and fringe voices in a bottom up process of decision making. In participatory democracy, “the other” must be included not excluded (Hendriks, 2011). The notion of citizens being able to participate in public affairs is reinforced through the European Charter of Local Self Government, the Group of Independent Experts (GIE) state:

“a right that is not mentioned in the articles of the Charter but finds its only source in the preamble: “the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs”. Actually, the Charter only refers to local authorities, not to local citizens. This citizens’ right has been later implemented by the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority entered into force on 1st June 2012 Furthermore, the preamble considers that, although the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of public affairs can be exercised at any level of government, the local one is the most appropriate” (Group of Independent experts, 2019)

### **Developing Democracy**

The development of democracy in Athens has been a central source of inspiration for modern political thought its political ideals, essentially, equality among citizens, liberty, respect for the law and justice have influenced political thinking, particularly in the West. The early days in the history of democracy were dominated by ‘assembly democracy’, essentially self–government through public gatherings, assembling often out in the open. That this form of democracy goes back some 2000 years before Athens, the latter is still the strongest and best documented example of assembly democracy (Rhodes and Hart, 2014).

Despite its vulnerabilities, democracy remains the best possible governing arrangement, offering the most compelling principle of legitimacy as the basis of political order. Democracy offers a way of organising political arrangements which is fair and just and provides the opportunities to reconcile differences. In

a plurality of identities, cultural forms and interests, democracy offers a basis for tolerance, negotiation and discussion of differences (Held, 2006). Councillors inhabit an office that derives from traditional representative democracy which has long been accepted as a fundamental aspect of government both central and local (Copus, 2015). Representative democracy is based on the core elements of; the open public expression of social needs and interests; the appointment of representatives through free and fair elections; and the temporary granting of powers by the represented to the representatives. The early champions of representative democracy offered a pragmatic approach to representation; suggesting a more practical expression of a simple reality: that it was not feasible for all of the people to be involved all of the time, even if they were so inclined to be involved in the business of government.

This being the case, the people must then delegate the task of government to representatives who are chosen by the people at regular elections. The task of those representatives is to monitor the expenditure of public monies, domestic and foreign policies and all other actions of government. Representative democracy is a distinctive form of government whereby those holding political power through their role as representatives are periodically chastened by the people whose interests they are supposed to serve (Alonso, 2011). Political discourse arguing for reforms in the EU, echoed across member states at all levels of government, appear to be influenced by the debate that the present institutions of liberal democracy are not operating satisfactorily and that a key problem is the lack of civic engagement, therefore a main concern is how to promote effective citizenship and more involvement of citizens in the decisions that affect them.

### **Participatory Democracy**

The notion of participatory democracy at the EU level is driven by the belief that increasing the opportunities for popular participation is vital to contribute towards countering the democratic dilemma associated with the EU (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). Moreover, in the last two decades the nature of democracy in Europe has changed considerably. In response to processes of



social and individual modernisation, the demise of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, democratic reforms have been implemented in many countries which have characterised these changes as a transformation of representative democracy (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1995).

The dilemma between on the one hand seeking to achieve effective and efficient government for the people by supranational problem-solving, and on the other hand the associated reduction of government by the people by making it more difficult for citizens to be heard via traditional parliamentary channels has resulted in calls for expanding the opportunities for discussion, citizen participation, and influence. The capacity of the people to influence their fortunes democratically through decisions taken by representative bodies are limited; consequently, participation cannot rely merely on government backed by the state, but on governance. Governance is seen as the method of problem-solving which reaches beyond the hierarchical authority of the state into the societal realm. Decision-making here takes place by means of deliberation and exchanges of reasoned arguments instead of bargaining, or hierarchical direction or indeed through preference aggregation, in other words through voting, (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007).

One of the ways to address this issue is to transform governance into participatory governance thereby enhancing the realm of democracy, in essence bringing citizens back into the democratic process. A number of scholars outline the advantages of participatory governance, citing that in some traditions in democratic theory it is assumed that participation produces better decision making results (Alonso, 2011; Andrew and Goldsmith, 1998; Hendriks, 2011; Michels and Graaf, 2010).

In summary there are three ways that participatory governance arrangements enhance the quality of decision making: (a) they enhance the opportunities for mutual accommodation through exchanges of reasoned arguments; (b) they serve to generate higher levels of trust amongst those who participate and (c) this in turn allows them to introduce a longer time horizon into their calculations since sacrifices and losses in the present can be more reliably recuperated in

future decisions (Heinelt pp. 217-232 in Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). He goes on to suggest that participatory governance arrangements have contributed to the effectiveness of political interventions and of the legitimacy of EU policies in general.

In his exploration of councillors' notions of democracy Heinelt (2013) argues that a vibrant and broader involvement of citizens and public deliberation within the policy process, can be seen as compatible with the exclusive power of elected representatives to take final decisions of common interest, (Heinelt, pp.84-96 in Egner et al., 2013). He does however acknowledge that there are differences in arrangements not only between member states but also between the regions within a state. The discourse on participatory governance either with reference to global governance, the future of the EU and its multilayer system of government and governance arrangements or within the nation state-represents, and in many cases actively promotes an ongoing fundamental change of perceptions and normative justifications of politics state. The common understanding and perception of concepts like representative government, democratic legitimacy, citizen, freedom, equality and solidarity are at stake in their traditional normative justification (Greven 2007 pp.233-248 in Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007).

However as suggested by Heinelt above, we need to have some knowledge as to local political actors understandings of democracy and consider what councillors see as the essence of democracy. The issue here is whether councillors believe that the traditional mechanisms of liberal representative democracy, through elections and representation by directly elected councillors, need to be complimented by other modes of democracy, including participatory democracy. From a democratic perspective, citizen participation is viewed as a beneficial element of democratic citizenship and democratic decision making. Proponents of citizen participation argue that it has positive effects on the quality of democracy (Michels and Graaf, 2010). Democratic reformers wish to eliminate what they consider paternalistic tendencies in representative democracy with a view to strengthening citizens non- dependence on others for

having their voice heard, loudly and clearly. Thus, self governing communities make choices between binary options through referendums and by raising hands in matters to do with local issues. Commenting on democratic models, Hendriks (2011) suggests that in principle a model of democracy that keeps itself and its rivals in check is a blessing for democracy. Thus, positive and negative feedback mechanisms are vital but they need to be multilateral, connected to various, competing ways of approaching democracy, and not unilateral (Hendriks, 2011). Thus in the real world viable democracies encompass a blend of models in other words a more democratic hybridity.

### **Councillors and Participatory Democracy**

In their study of citizen democracy and the responsiveness of councillors across sixteen European countries Deters and Klok (2013) examined the influence of the particular institutional structure on councillors' individual support for a particular model of democracy. The focus here is on a system that defines democratic systems as more citizen oriented as opposed to systems that relied on a more representative democracy with a limited form of citizen participation. The research focused on whether differences in the design of local government institutions mattered for the quality of democracy. Institutional differences include those that strengthen the position of political parties; weakness among local groups, small parties and independent candidates; an indirectly elected leader, contrasted with strong local groups, small parties and independent candidates; citizen-initiated binding local referendums and leaders who are directly elected by citizens (Vetter, 2009).

The results of the study indicate that an individual's support for participatory governance is not directly affected by citizen democratic institutions; however there is an indirect effect. Moreover the support amongst fellow councillors does have a positive effect on the support of individuals for participatory governance. The study also found that councillors who support participatory governance also value responsiveness highly.

Somewhat unexpectedly the study found that councillors who are motivated by a desire to serve their party are not less but more inclined than others to consider openness to be important as part of their job. It was also found that attitudinal responsiveness is more widespread among female councillors than among their male colleagues. In addition, there is a weak negative effect of education, whereby higher educated councillors attach less value to responsiveness than other councillors. It is more likely however that in citizen democratic systems councillors tend to be more supportive of the idea of democracy as a system of participatory governance, where citizens have more direct political influence. However the study also found that the stronger citizen democratic institutions in local government were, the less likely councillors are to maintain contacts with citizens and local groups.

A councillor interviewed for the research commented on the notion of citizen involvement in decision making as follows:

*Consultation with the electorate is just divisive all this transparency is bunkham, officers and members need to be able to have a confidential conversation, sort stuff out. Some documents should not be in the public domain. People become disillusioned because we are too open, some stuff should never see the light of day not until there is a concrete proposal (Conservative Councillor).*

The comment crystallised the views of many councillors in the research by illustrating the tensions between the expectation that citizens should be involved in the decision making that affects them and the councillors' role of the elected representative who is expected to make decisions on their behalf. Many of the comments are in line with previous studies relating to councillor views on participatory democracy which conclude that many councillors' pay 'lip service' to the involvement of citizens in decision making.

In his exploration of councillors' views on democracy (Heinelt, 2013) also found that their notions of democracy are not determined by institutional conditions.

Rather their notion of democracy can be taken as an expression of their basic beliefs about appropriate behaviour and their subjective norms affected by gender, age political orientation and personal characteristics. The findings on age where older councillors are more likely than younger councillors to support representative democracy confirm the relevance of generation.

Finally, the self-perception of councillors on a political left-right scale plays a role as right-wing councillors are more in favour of representative democracy and against participatory governance, while the opposite applies to members of some left political parties. In practice both concepts of democracy can complement each other to the benefit of self-determination (Heinelt, 2013). However, his analysis indicates that the councillors' understandings of democracy do not connect these different concepts.

### **Citizens and Democracy**

Over the past decades citizens in many West European countries have gained influence in policy-making, with collaborative governance and particularly in relation to participatory budgeting (Cain et al., 2006 p1 cited in (Michels and Graaf, 2010). Questions are raised as to whether citizen participation in policy-making implies a new division of roles and power between citizens and politicians. Studies include focusing on how to improve or design the management of administrative and management processes in respect of participatory policy.

In their two case studies in the Netherlands (Michels and Graaf, 2010) conclude that although both cities paid lip service to citizen involvement, in reality citizen participation in policy-making did not lead to a new division of roles between government and citizens. In essence the role of citizens is to provide information on the basis of which government can make decisions. Participation re-policy-making therefore, leaves vertical government decision-making intact. The idea of democracy has become firmly entrenched in the EU's primary law within the past decade. Democracy still finds its most prominent expression in the role of elections. In the first instance directly via the European Parliament

and indirectly via the Council and national parliaments. The people therefore continue to 'allow' others to make decisions on their behalf through the political process.

On the other hand, there is some evidence that within societies in the EU the shift from government to governance is complemented by a strengthening of participatory policy-making beyond the state and the core institutions of the EU (Heinelt, 2013). Multi-level governance in the EU is however a "Faustian bargain" where democratic values are traded for a broad range of interests and implied increases in policy making effectiveness's and efficiency (Pierre and Peters, 2000). EU integration has contributed, without a doubt to the democratic consolidation of European post-war societies. It remains to be seen whether and to what extent this collective practice of identification is turned into a collective practice of democracy (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). There is however, an assumption which underlies much of the scholarly writings about the EU, the assumption that it is an antithesis to the nation and that membership of the EU erodes the sovereignty of the nation state (Milward et al., 2000). In respect of local government where councillors operate in multi-level governance networks the notion of the sovereign council if it ever existed, has long diminished. Thus, the actions of those more innovative councillors should be supported so as to maximise the influence they can have within wider networks outside of the council, including how they might best utilise opportunities stemming from membership of the EU (Copus, 2015). There are however differing views expressed by councillors as to their views of citizen participation and their relationship with the EU. A Conservative councillor summed up his view of the councillor /citizen relationship when he commented:

*I think my job is to represent to the best of my ability, listen to the people; trouble is which people do you want me to listen to. You can't avoid conflict, its part and parcel of the role, so you have to make a judgement. Our job is to spend money in the city area. We should look to what we are responsible for, concentrate on the job*

*we should do and not be involved in EU. There is no role for local government in European politics. (Conservative Councillor).*

The comment above supports the view expressed by the previous conservative councillor and illustrates the councillors' preferred approach to the representative role, that of trustee. Moreover, the comments crystallised the views of many councillors in the research by elaborating on the tensions between participatory democracy and their role as trusted representatives.

Another councillor commented:

*I think the job is to support and assist every individual in your ward, obviously even them that didn't vote for you or vote at all. It's to guide them and help them sort out where they need to be, some people though don't know what they want. I don't have any part to play in EU stuff. We lead busy lives as councillors. If it's not in your remit then you wouldn't be bothered to find out about it. The MPs' sort national issues and the MEPs' should be sorting EU but tell us about it. I think all the MPs' and MEPs' should be first a councillor they would have a much better understanding about the electorate's view and issues and have a better understanding about how people live, that is what democracy is all about they select us to sort stuff out for them (Labour Cabinet Councillor).*

These views summarise the findings of the research which indicates that for those councillors who 'abdicate' the distance between local government and the EU is insurmountable and irrelevant to their day to day activities in their councillor role. These councillors are firmly focused on their wards, rather than viewing a distant supra-national body as the centre of their representative attention.

There is no suggestion that the concept of democracy is today one on which a consensus exists. Even among those that accept the principles of the modern democratic state, to the extent that the principles are embodied in the

institutions and practices of actual states, there remain ambiguities. Moreover, while many states today may be democratic, the history of their political institutions reveals the fragility and vulnerability of democratic arrangements. Democracy means a form of government in which, in contrast to monarchies and aristocracies, the people rule. However, the notion of 'the people rule' can be interpreted in different ways. The following section considers the differing views as to the notion of democracy with a view to better understanding councillors' interpretations of how democracy works in practice.

The development of complex mass societies in Western democracies however means that we have to be realistic in terms of citizen involvement in policy decision making. Thus, the way forward is to ensure we have a set of conditions that are necessary and sufficient for maximising democracy (Dahl 1956, p479 cited in Michels and Graaf, 2010). Participatory democrats on the other hand argue that delegation of decision making power away from citizens' results in citizen alienation from politics therefore citizen participation in decision making is vital to democracy. Participatory theorists argue that citizen involvement increases civic skills and creates a sense of greater involvement in the community. Moreover, participatory democracy contributes to a greater legitimacy of decisions. Participatory policy making creates opportunities for citizens to put forward their ideas and suggestions. There is however a need to manage the expectations of citizens in respect of how much influence they have over policy decision making, in essence citizens provide information, leaving vertical government decision making intact. (Michels and Graaf, 2010). Nonetheless, in the English context, as outlined by (Leach, 2017) the principle of subsidiarity should be a key reference point in respect of the devolution of powers to the local government level. The result of the 2016 referendum which involved Britain leaving the EU centred around (amongst other things) the devolution of powers from Brussels to the UK. Thus, the same principle applies in respect of local government; public responsibilities should be exercised by those authorities closest to the citizen. Moreover, the narrative relating to a loss of sovereignty for the UK in relation to membership of the EU also played out during the referendum. Britain rejected the belief that nation states should share



their sovereignty in certain areas of low politics, in commerce trade and agriculture, in the hope of economic benefits. British policy makers have a more minimalist approach emphasising a clear distinction between the economic and the political with power clearly resting with the nation state (Forster and Blair, 2001) Nonetheless membership of the EU has had an impact on the normative view of state sovereignty, thus it is widely held that member states do not have absolute sovereignty over much of their affairs.

The UK's preoccupation with sovereignty and its preference for intergovernmental solutions feed the narratives focusing on the sovereign state of the nation. There are a number of reasons for the interest in sovereignty including the processes of globalisation bringing the world closer together; humanitarian intervention in weaker states; attempts to promote democracy and human rights; and greater cooperation in Europe (George Sorensen, 1999). Sorensen enquires as to whether sovereignty is a stable and unchanging institution or has it undergone dramatic change.

The issue of sovereignty was raised as a concern by the councillors taking part in the research for this study. Rather than the sovereign power of assembled citizens, the concept of sovereignty of the nation state, or rather the erosion of national sovereignty was highlighted as an important issue for the councillors taking part in the research. Thus, the following section explores the notion of sovereignty and introduces some of the comments made by councillors in respect of whether membership of the EU has any impact on the sovereignty of the member states. Sovereignty used to be taken for granted in the study of world politics.

Miller (1981) put forward the prevailing opinion thus: "Just as we know a camel or a chair when we see one, so we know a sovereign state. It is a political entity which is treated as a sovereign state by other sovereign states" (George Sorensen, 1999, p. 590) It is unlikely that Miller's view would be acceptable in modern times given the changes relating to the processes of globalisation, issues of co-operation and integration across Europe. In addition, the emergence of a large number of independent states raises considerations about

the possible implications for sovereignty. It is however widely accepted that the nation states of the European Union do not have absolute authority over much of their affairs. The ability of the nation state to have control over authority, including law making, security and setting legislation and for the state to be able to perform as an actor in the international system is impacted on through membership of the EU. One example concerns Britain's exit from the Exchange Rate Mechanism September 1992, highlighting the lack of control that the government had over currency fluctuations (Forster and Blair, 2001).

The notion of sovereignty however is deeply embedded within the psyche of the peoples of Europe in both a positive and a negative sense. The historical changes that contributed to the emergence of liberal democratic thought have been immensely complex. Struggles between monarchs and estates over who had rightful authority; peasant rebellion against the oppression of excessive taxation and social obligation; the spread of trade, commerce and market relations; conflict between church and state compounded by changes in technology; all played a part in the journey from absolutist rulers proclaiming that they alone held a legitimate right of decision over state affairs.

At the centre of the debate about democracy has been a taken for granted conception of 'sovereignty' (Held, 2006). The sovereignty of the nation state has generally not been questioned. It has been assumed that the state has control over its own fate. From a normative perspective sovereignty is central to our understanding of the state system. However, as argued by Held (2006) the precise scope and nature of the sovereign authority of democratic states can be profiled by examining a number of 'disjuncture's' between on the one hand the formal domain of public authority they claim as a nation state, on the other, the actual practices and structures of the state and the economic system at regional and global levels. There is therefore some discord between the idea of a democratic state able to determine its own future and the plethora of external influences, including, the world economy, international organisations, military alliances and international law which both shape and constrain the options of individual nation states.

## **The EU Member States & Sovereignty**

Commentators argue that states have lost sovereignty and that at best, in modern times they share it with regional and international organisations, non – governmental actors or global networks (Hay, 2010). The EU is viewed as particularly important in relation to the debate as to whether there has been a shift away from the states' towards sites of transnational governance, in the main because the EU is a distinctive form of political entity that goes beyond what is understood as the strictly demarcated territory of states.

Referring to the impact of the EU on member states the nation state has lost the last shreds of its supreme authority to make decisions on domestic policy matters (Michael Marder, 2012). He suggests that the notion of self-determination and sovereignty in Europe is outdated yet still used even though its characteristics and form have grown obsolete. A distinct yet unnamed model of sovereignty is being formed. Sovereignty is eroded when another possibly higher and independent authority is able to constrain the decision making within the national framework.

The Euro crisis illustrates the impact of such a situation when considering the austerity measures imposed by the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund upon those member states who have little choice but to declare economic default. These nation states must abide by the rules of other external political bodies who gain the right to variously decide for that member state, the minimum wage, the extent of salary and pension cuts among other policies. The domestic-international dichotomy therefore and the interplay between the two are crucial to the institution of sovereignty both within and external to the EU member states (Thomson, 1995).

Developments in the EU have, since its inception, raised concern and questions about the consequences of European integration for the autonomy and authority of the states in Europe. What began as interstate co-operation between what were in essence, Westphalian ideal type states in the 1950s has developed in qualitative new ways since then. Instead of mainly national political regulation a

complex network of supra-national, national, and sub-national regulation has developed (George Sorensen, 1999). Thus constitutional independence ceases to exist in more than purely nominal terms. Indeed for some commentators the sovereignty of individual states is diluted in the European arena by collective decision making and by supranational institutions (Marks et al., 1996). This approach argues that European integration is a polity creating process in which authority and policy making influence is shared across multiple levels of government, subnational, national, and supranational (Marks et al., 1996). Though national governments are powerful participants in EU policy making, control has shifted away from them to supranational institutions. The consequences of this are such that national governments have lost some of their former authoritative control over their respective territories to supranational institutions.

The member states have always guarded their national interests and placed strict limits on any future transfer of sovereignty. Thus, they tried to avoid granting supreme authority to central institutions that could weaken their sovereignty, preferring instead to work through intergovernmental institutions such as the Council of Ministers (Moravcsik, 2002). There are however, consequences for the sovereignty of the nation states arising from intergovernmental institutions becoming more interdependent.

### **Interdependence and Sovereignty**

The challenge to liberal interdependence arguments tend to come in one of two forms. In the first instance there are those that argue that interdependence has not increased and therefore sovereignty has not eroded. This position is supported through consideration of ratios of cross-border to within border flows of people, information, and capital arguing that these ratios have not changed so dramatically as to suggest that interdependence is on the rise and therefore does not reflect an erosion of sovereignty. The alternative response is to argue that, if interdependence is growing, it is a reflection of state power and interests. The argument here is that cross-border flows can occur only if states agree to provide the institutional framework in which interdependence can flourish.

Questions arise as to whether increasing interdependence is the cause of declining sovereignty or vice versa? In other words, is interdependence reducing the state's ability to control its borders, or is the state's declining ability to control its borders facilitating the development of greater interdependence. In addition, if interdependence is eroding state sovereignty, why do states accommodate it in the first place? How do we reconcile the state's apparent interest in undermining that which enables it to rule-namely sovereignty? It may be that the economic benefits of interdependence offset the costs associated with reduced sovereignty. The problem with this argument is that it cannot explain why most states have apparently failed to make the proper calculus, preferring sovereignty to the benefits of interdependence.

### **The Importance of Concepts of Sovereignty**

Sovereignty is something that many people want to keep and others want to have. Sovereignty is not a status that is easily surrendered. Though states have in the past surrendered their sovereign title over what had been their colonial territories they retained sovereignty over their own state. Nonetheless a number of European states, later joined by other states, opted to establish a union of European states within which the question of sovereignty is increasingly raised. There are those that view the arrangement as one where the member states have formed a European political and legal authority which is distinct from those states, where they have limited their sovereign rights and prerogatives in certain important aspects.

On the other hand, there are those who argue that the member states of the EU remain sovereign, in that what they have established is an international organisation with the purpose of improving their socio economic situation and in order to ensure stability, in respect of preventing conflict and ultimately as in the past, going to war against each other. Therefore, the EU is a union of sovereign states and membership does not involve a transfer of authority. However, the European Court of Justice can rule on the validity of national legislation in

certain areas of common policy creating a legal order to which the member states have freely transferred certain of their sovereign rights (McCormick, 2013).

Councillors taking part in the research here expressed differing views. The issue elaborated in the first quote below illustrates the impact of EU policies on the particular circumstances in a certain local area which have a significant negative economic effect on the community in that area. Moreover, the councillor holds central government wholly responsible for what is perceived to be an erosion of the sovereignty of the nation state. The second quote on the other hand acknowledges that the notion of 'sovereignty' is different to historical notions, rather in modern times, sovereignty is adapting to changing circumstances..

*If I look seriously at the EU directives on fishing, it has ruined the fishing industry here. I think EU directives are interpreted differently by the various countries. Our government should be more assertive in the EU. I think national government have to take some responsibility for the way that people perceive the EU because they don't do enough to stand up for their own country. And I am someone who was instrumental in taking forward plans about the issues for a coastal area, fishing and tourism and I presented to the European Parliament and I was very proud to do that. But our governments have basically allowed our sovereignty to be eroded. We are no longer a sovereign independent nation because of the EU (Conservative Councillor.)*

*There is no point thinking we are a little island and can sit on our own. People move around and the world doesn't stop. And clearly environmental impacts have no respect for boundaries, pollution doesn't respect national boundaries. I really don't think that pooled sovereignty is sovereignty lost, even if that can be understood. We are part of it (EU) and it is part of us I suppose (Labour Council Leader).*

There is little doubt that on the one hand, common obligations under EU law remove from member states their previous freedom of action within those policy areas whilst on the other the EU does not constitute a fully sovereign entity either. The main arguments about state sovereignty and the impact of membership of the EU can essentially be presented, through principled arguments, from two opposing views. In the first instance the EU is viewed as a political and legal authority which is constitutionally different from its member states within which states have limited their sovereign rights. The second approach is that the member states of the EU remain sovereign; therefore the EU is a union of sovereign states. An important question in relation to the status of sovereignty is posed by Sorensen (1999). He enquires as to the definitorial content of sovereignty that is bestowed on some states. His response is that it is recognition of the fact that the state entity has constitutional independence. Thus, the sovereign state is legally equal to all other sovereign states, regardless of differences in economics, political and social aspects (Sorensen, 1999).

It would appear that the values associated with sovereignty are highly regarded including the following principles; international order among states, membership and participation in the society of states, political freedom of states, legal equality of states, co-existence of political systems and respect for diversity of different groups of people around the world. The institution of sovereignty is changing, whilst at the same time there are core elements of continuity, thus the notion of the end of sovereignty is misleading (Sorensen, 1999). What is actually happening is that the institution of sovereignty changes in order to adapt to new challenges

## **Conclusion**

The introductory chapter of the thesis suggested that the importance and power of the EU and the implications of its influence on local government and councillors is a significant issue for local democracy.

The chapter raises questions as to the democratic nature of the EU which emerged as an important issue for the councillors taking part in the research.

The chapter shows however, that councillors have different understandings as to the nature of democracy. Moreover, councillors' behaviour in respect of democracy, particularly participatory democracy are subject to a number of influences. In addressing the question as to councillors' response to the impact of the EU on local government, there was evidence from the interviews that councillors believe that EU policy decisions affecting local government appear to be made, in the main by unelected bureaucrats. There is however some evidence from the interviews that suggest the EU has had a positive effect for local government and the debates about who rules who matter less than the positive outcomes for local areas.

Given that a significant number of the councillors taking part in the research suggested that the EU is non-democratic and erodes the sovereignty of the nation state, a surprising outcome from the interviews is that an equally significant number suggested that membership of the EU has a number of benefits both for the nation and for local government, and that it is important that membership continues. Though the majority of councillors presented a negative view in terms of the democratic nature of the EU their overwhelming response suggests, that the EU does need reforming but that can only be achieved from within. Thus, these councillors were not anti EU in terms of a desire to leave the EU; rather they were more inclined to abdicate responsibility though not in a pejorative manner, choosing instead to concentrate on other matters with a focus on issues within their wards. Other politicians however are expected to carry out the work relevant to EU activity, for example the MPs and those in leadership positions. Moreover though saying that they knew little about the EU, many of the councillors talked about the positives of being in the EU including the impact of policies on environmental issues, equal pay, health and safety and human rights. The research revealed an unexpected outcome in relation to both the academic debates about democracy within the EU and councillors' comments in respect of the EU being undemocratic. Only two of the councillors that were interviewed expressed the belief that we should not be in the EU. The findings showed that this very small example were anti EU. They express the belief that being a member of the EU erodes sovereignty and is



trying to create a united states of Europe which they disagree with; their perception is that the EU takes power away from national governments and that it is impossible to reconcile the differences in cultures ideologies and aspirations of the different nation states.

The introductory chapter of the thesis also suggested that regional and local governments and councillors have an important role to play in respect of EU policy development. It is to this issue of the councillor role that we now turn. The theme focusing on the councillor role was perhaps the strongest to emerge from the interviews with councillors.

## **CHAPTER 6 - COUNCILLOR ROLE THEORY RE-IMAGINED**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapters have considered the impact of the EU with a focus on local government itself. Any exploration however of local government is inadequate without careful consideration about the office of the councillor, the elected representative of the people in their communities. Moreover councillors are the primary focus of the thesis thus their role and how they view it are a serious consideration throughout the thesis. The theme of the chapter encapsulates the strongly held views of those interviewed for the research as to their role as councillors. Their input here confirms much of the previous research and studies carried out by notable scholars, relating to councillors' belief in their primary role being that of the mandated representative of the people in their locality (Alonso, 2011; Barnett, 2013; Barron et al., 1991; Copus, 2015b; Groot et al et al., 2010; Heinelt, 2013a). There are however different interpretations from councillors in respect of their view of the representative role. The focus of the chapter is councillors in the English context and draws upon the sustained debates about the roles and role orientations of councillors.

The chapter is organised into four sections with the first considering the importance of the place councillors occupy in the political arena. The context within which local government makes policy has changed dramatically because of a more internationalised economy and social and physical changes which directly affect local public bodies as regulators and providers of welfare services. The challenge for local representatives is to find ways of adapting to new forms of politics, utilising the opportunities to reinvent their roles, thus the second section of the chapter considers the debates about how councillors can best represent their electorate in an internationalised and Europeanised context.

The demands of partnerships and larger policy networks implies that traditional institutions have become less important at local level however councillors continue to hold the mandated authority to make decisions on behalf of citizens

It is however no longer clear what we mean by representation in the context of complex, multi-level government. The growth in the scale and complexity of government brings with it different interpretations of 'representation' which have multiplied over time. Section three of the chapter therefore considers the academic literature in respect of the concept of representation and how it translates at local government level. The final section stems from the comments made by a number of councillors illustrating their understanding of their role as community leaders, identified as a sub-theme. The section considers the nature of the challenges confronting councillors in developing the community leadership role.

The nature of the councillor role and responsibilities is determined by other levels of government whether regional or state government and as has already been shown, reflects the subordinate position of local government and councillors in the political system of the country. Writing in 1861, Mill, whilst accepting that administrative decentralisation was essential for efficient government had serious concerns about the capabilities of local political representatives suggesting that they were inferior in terms of intelligence and knowledge to representatives at national level (Mill, 2014). Sadly, this view prevails, underpinning questions about the role of councillors' is that they are somehow under-developed, in need of reshaping and the product of a lower level of governing capacity (Copus, 2015). Copus argues that such views, stemming from a disregard for local representative democracy fail to understand the office of the councillor. He goes on to suggest that questions about the purpose of councillors reflect the subordinate position of local government vis-a-vis the centre. In the English context, the Labour governments from 1997 to 2010 put forward changes in and a vision for, local government, supported by the narrative that suggested local government lacked accountability and transparency and that there was a failure of local leadership. Moreover, councillors themselves were described as incompetent; lacking in ability and unable to solve complex policy problems (Copus et al., 2017). The important question centres around how and why have councillors been persistently constructed as a problem for local governance (Barnett et al., 2019). These

scholars look to address this question drawing upon Foucault's method of problematisation. The practice of problematisation involves 'a movement of critical analysis in which one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematisation' (Foucault, 1997: pp. 118-119 cited in Barnett et al., 2019). Within this narrative context, there is a problem with local government and the councillors within it. Therefore, solutions need to be identified to 'fix' the problem. As suggested by this scholarship, in an age of austerity and drastic public spending cuts, much of which is directed at the local state, councillors are the target of competing pressures and demands. They are encouraged to adopt new positions and behaviours in order to address shifting patterns of service delivery. In reality, however, these demands on councillors are not new. Moreover, councillors are accused of being out of step with shifting political and social demands largely due to their intractable attitudes. Thus the 'localist' rhetoric of the Coalition and Conservative governments from 2010, called for changes in the behaviours and orientations of councillors.

Eric Pickles, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, speaking at the Local Government Association (LGA) conference in 2011 suggested that councillors needed to step up to the challenges of reduced budgets and what he described as the new freedoms of the localism agenda. He basically ridiculed the statutory duties of councils as a 'comfort blanket' telling delegates that their communities needed them to be their champions. Both Labour and Conservative governments from 1997 onwards introduced various measures that centred around the notion of localism which implies the offer of greater power and responsibilities for local government whereas in reality when the term localism is narrated by policy makers they are not referring to a situation where local government becomes more local and more government (Copus et al., 2017). Rather, central control and monitoring of local government and councillors continues at a pace. Local government in England experiences a constant battle between pressures of centralisation and localism (Chandler, 2009). Some of those pressures are attitudinal or

ideological rather than underpinned by social, moral, political or technological factors (Copus et al., 2017). Returning to the LGA (2017) conference, and continuing the negative narrative in respect of councillors, Sajid Javid then Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, suggested a propensity for councillors to operate in 'comforting shadows, behind closed doors' as a contributory factor of the Grenfell Tower disaster which happened in June 2017 (Barnett et al., 2019). Moreover in addition to the power exerted by the centre in respect of the roles and responsibilities of councillors, the expectations of communities and citizens exert pressure and impact on how those roles are carried out.

The councillor's role, has over time been considered from a number of different perspectives including examination of councillors in Europe with consideration of the contexts within which localities, local government and councillors now operate (Berg and Rao, 2006; Denters, 2005; Groot et al., 2010; Rao and Berg, 2005). The description and analysis of councillors' recruitment pattern, career, political party associations, attitudes to democracy and role behaviour in an international comparative perspective have also been explored (Egner et al., 2013). The councillor role in respect of involvement with the EU however has not been explored.

Consideration and examination of the roles of elected councillors has, over time focused on a variety of aspects including their role as facilitator and or advocate, suggesting that the councillor will be skilled in advocating for people from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures and values within the council, and be able to advocate for the council to the community (Denters and Klok, 2013). Also suggested are the roles of community champion or community leader; commissioner of services where rather than delivering services, as has been the traditional role of local government; the councillors' role is to buy the services in. Other suggested roles include, that of place shaper, being a local figure head/role model in being able to shape the very local environment. Another role put forward is knowledge champion, with the councillor as a primary source of information flowing between the council and the community

and that of representative. These roles vary according to their source, including government and policy makers, political parties, the media and councillors themselves (Copus, 2015). Many attempts have been made to introduce new roles for councillors (Barron et al., 1991). For example, in the British context suggested roles include that of caseworker which involves helping people deal with council services, such as housing, social services, essentially carrying out the work relative to their particular area or ward.

Councillors, however develop a preferred focus of attention for their activities but there is little freedom for them to choose their particular preference (Copus, 2015b). Rather they must span a range of activities within an arena where local politics has become more networked and interdependent. Moreover, local leaders build alliances with businesses; seek to find new local solutions to policy problems and link to higher level organisations in a bid to acquire resources for their communities (John, 2001). Though it is impossible to consider local government as an entity with autonomy from the centre, both levels have evolved complex structures and procedures to manage their mutual interests (Chandler, 2009). As mandated representatives therefore, councillors have a crucial role to play in respect of the development, vitality, well-being and success of their areas. The councillor role, understood from a normative perspective is one of providing a link between citizens and political decision making.

### **Councillors and their Place in the Political Arena**

Councillors are the largest group of elected politicians, (Bäck et al., 2006). They are a vital element in local representative democracy, linking citizens to local decision makers. The 'representational transmission of power' is a basic requirement for representative democracy, where there is a serial flow of authority from the electorate to their representative in parliament and then to the government (Judge, 1999). This same flow applies at the local level from the electorate through councillors. In the traditional model of representative democracy, the council is central in an electoral chain of command. Initially councillors are elected to represent the citizens in their municipality ensuring

responsiveness in respect of local citizens (Groot et al., 2010). In addition, they have to ensure that actors in other positions, including the executive and the administration act in accordance with citizens preferences.

The electoral chain thesis prevailed when the council occupied a key position as representative of the people (Dearlove, 1973). This model could be seen as layman rule in which people are ruled by their equals. The electoral chain of command theory is predicated on local government having high levels of discretion available to it. As we have shown however, different systems and constitutional arrangements impact on the discretion available to local government. Where discretion is low, the electoral command theory is weakened (Copus, 2015). Moreover, the emergence of more participatory elements into local democracy, giving citizens voice to their demands heralds the possibility of a shift from one mode of democracy to another or possibly a mixture of models. Nonetheless, nearly all local government systems incorporate layman rule, and the closeness of local politics strengthens the notion of approachability and accessibility of the council and its members. What follows is a consideration of the impact of changes for local government and the implications arising from such changes with a view to understanding the pressures brought to bear on councils and councillors arising from changes over which they have little or no control.

Major structural changes have been taking place in European local government systems around the turn of the millennium but from different starting points. These developments plus a move to a more participatory democracy raise questions as to the councillor's role and their willingness and ability to adapt to the challenges and changes that confront them. Personal characteristics and age have an influence upon propensity to change amongst councillors (Groot et al., 2010; Heinelt, 2013). Moreover, drawing on Karl Mannheim's (1928) reflections on 'generations' age might matter insofar as specific age groups have had not only particular experiences in historic-socio context but have also interpreted these experiences collectively (McCourt, 2012). Thus, councillors

may believe that doing things differently challenges their basic beliefs about appropriate behaviour and subjective norms (Egner et al., 2013).

Research carried out in the English context, examines the councillor's role in respect of complex governing networks and how they, as elected representatives are able to influence or otherwise unelected decision makers in a range of public and private bodies (Barnett, 2013; Copus, 2015; Sweeting and Copus, 2012). While councillors may at times be part of the local political 'elite', at other times they are 'lay persons' and are therefore, largely amateurs (Copus, 2015).

Though councillors provide another layer of democracy through their political representation and are at the heart of local government through their electoral mandate, there is concern they are losing importance. If they are unable to adapt to the changes and challenges presented by globalisation, europeanisation and shifting political contexts, they are likely to be left marginalised. Moreover, the relationship between central and local government in the UK over recent decades is characterised by a mixture of conflict and consensus (Copus et al., 2017). On the one hand increasing distrust between the two tiers of government with the centre imposing its will at the local level creating conflict. On the other hand, a consensus amongst many politicians as to the supremacy of the centre to the extent that many local councils carry out government policies beyond mere compliance. Thus, when the centre introduces different ways of doing things at local government level, the local have little or no control over what happens.

A number of consultative papers including Local Democracy and Community Leadership, (DETR,1998), Modern Local Government: In Touch with the People (DETR, 1998), Local Leadership: Local Choice (DETR,1999), and Strong Local Leadership: Quality Public Services (DTLR,2001) proposed that councils should be more accountable to citizens and made recommendations for change in the way councils operate. One major change for local government and councillors was introduced through the Local Government Act 2000 under a Labour



Government. The Act introduced the executive scrutiny split with a view to ensuring more openness and transparency in respect of council decision making. The Act heralded new and 'powerful' roles for councillors including the roles assigned to the so called 'back benchers' whose role included holding the executive decision makers to account, in essence modelling the Parliamentary approach. The legislation brought with it concerns from non-executive members about what they viewed as disenfranchisement from the decision making process. Thus non-executive councillors, not in a position to actually make decisions are nonetheless accountable in terms of the notion of collective responsibility as a member of the council or a member of a particular political party. Moreover a select Committee report in 2002 concluded:

'A great deal of time, money and effort has gone into changing the political management arrangements of local authorities with apparently little change to the overall quality and credibility of local government. The Government's stated intention at the time of the Act to restore the self-confidence of local government—has been lost in the focus on internal change' ("House of Commons - Transport, Local Government and the Regions - Fourteenth Report," n.d.).

What is shown here is an illustration of the way in which local government and councillors within it are 'blamed' when legislation does not produce that which was intended. Anyone working closely with councillors at the time and since would have been able to describe why it wasn't working for example there was little recognition of the role of the political party, which in a majority held council was in a position to 'influence' the scrutiny members. The report above goes on to say that the Government should recognise, that if there are problems with the legislation, it is likely that they would be identified most quickly by councillors who are operating under the new arrangements but that councillors had not been listened to. Other changes impacting on councillors are illustrated below.

During the 1990's Germany introduced directly elected executive mayors. This new form of political and administrative leadership has a major impact on the local political and administrative arena (Wollmann, 2014). Though there are

some differences in form between the '*Lander*' (*municipalities*), in the main the strong mayor concept has given the mayor an institutionally remarkably strong position vis-a-vis the elected local council in a number of ways. In the first instance the mayor is given the sole responsibility to conduct all routine administrative matters on his/her own without interference by the council and the councillors. Indeed, the elected councils have been explicitly denied the right to call in decisions on routine administrative matters for the council's own determination. Only in three '*Lander*' can the council call in any matter, on the basis of its claim to comprehensive competence

The right of the local citizens to directly elect the mayor has significantly changed the power relations between local citizens, the mayor and local political actors within the local council. Traditionally German local government was based on representative democracy, limiting the role of local citizens to electing the council. Stemming from the changes described above the traditional rules of the game has been changed. The introduction of the direct election is an important element of direct democracy, with implications for representative democracy. In the English context the Local Government Act 2000 introduced directly elected mayors. Initially the position of directly elected mayor could only be established after a referendum in the relevant local authority.

Since 2007 however, local authorities are able to create an elected mayor by resolving to do so. As of May 2019, 15 council areas have directly elected mayors, and as of 2019 of the ten combined authorities in England eight have directly elected mayors. Various institutional redesigns of the councillor role mirror the changes associated with local government reorganisations. In the context of English local government however, existing representations of councillors still characterise them as having the wrong personal attitudes, a lack of managerial skills, political shortcomings, resistant to attempts to get them to modernise and they are overtaken by events (Barnett et al., 2019). Thus this deficiency narrative perpetuates the normative perspective associated with the 'failings' of local councillors and their inability to carry out their roles. If

councillors are faced with a multitude of roles, we might wonder which roles are seen as particularly important and which of these roles are actually performed by them (Klok and Denters 2013 p63-83 cited in Egner et al., 2013) This question becomes increasingly relevant in the context of challenges and changes confronting local government, including the challenges associated with being a member of the EU. For councillors, the notion of political representation is deemed to be the most important to them. There can however be disjuncture between councillors perceptions of their role and their actual behaviour (Copus, 2015).The following section considers the way in which councillors view their role as political representatives.

The representative form is the most common and recognisable form of local democracy. It uses elections and voting to select representatives to some sort of decision-making body, usually a council chamber (Sweeting and Copus, 2012). Yet the particular arrangements for elections and voting are such that some authors raise questions as to whether territorial electoral constituencies as part of that arrangement are commensurate with the basic principles of democratic legitimacy. Representatives receive their political mandate from the represented, through free meaningful and lawful periodic elections. Though elections are regarded as the essence of representative democracy, elections do not put an end to the representative process, as a narrowly electoral conception of democracy would have us believe, the so called 'thin' mode of democracy (Alonso, 2011). Rather, the election of representatives is a dynamic process to what is described as the 'disappointment principle' (Keane, 2008 p.6 in Alonso, 2011).

The whole point of elections is that they are a means of disciplining representatives who disappoint their electors. If representatives were always competent, responsive and impartial then elections would lose their purpose. Moreover, elections are not the be all and end all of representative democracy in that representatives need to be able to define and interpret the interests of the many they represent. Thus, there is a need to maintain a process of permanent contact and deliberation between the representative and the

represented. Without councillors it is unlikely that a local representative democracy would function in any recognisable way (Egner et al., 2013). In a representative democracy, citizens have accorded the elected politicians the power and privilege to deal with conflicts of interests between groups and individuals (Karlsson, 2013 p 97-119 in Egner et al., 2013). However, some commentators are suggesting that popular faith in politicians, operating at all levels, has reached an all-time low. Hardly a day goes by without our being told that politicians are parasites who squander public funds through mismanagement, reckless waste and extravagance.

Thus, not only is government made harder, but the anti-politician mood has encouraged the search for alternative approaches which threaten to undermine representative democracy. Politics, which arguably has never really commanded universal respect, is held today in near universal contempt (Hay, 2010). If public opinion is anything to go by, politics is failing us, with politicians trusted so little by the public they claim to represent that the very legitimacy of modern democratic institutions is increasingly called into question (Stoker, 2006).

The normative perspective of local representative democracy is that councillors are elected to represent the citizens in their municipality, transforming citizen's preferences into local policy (Denters and Klok 2010 4 63,-83 in Egner et al., 2013). They are also expected to ensure that other actors in other positions in local government and those involved in policy networks carry out citizen preferences, as an intermediary role between citizens, the executive and non – elected bodies. At the local level in the English context, other actors include members of the Health and Well Being Boards, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG). All of which are made up of councillors and non-elected groups and individuals. Moreover, the position of councillors amongst other relevant actors in their municipalities suggests that councillors have to perform several roles or tasks (Egner et al., 2013). The relative importance of the different tasks might change as a result of long term trends in sources of democratic legitimacy. Observers note that traditional

representative input based democracy might be replaced by output based democracy, where emphasis is placed on the actual outcomes that citizens demand as customers rather than on the representative tasks of councillors (Egner et al., 2013).

There is no agreement as to how the mandate of political representatives should be interpreted. It is true to say that there has never been a unified role model for the councillor as representative. Councillors inhabit an office that is the product of traditional representative democracy and they declare a strong attachment to this form of democracy (Copus, 2015). Indeed, in most European countries, representative democracy has traditionally been regarded as the essence of national and local democracy, and still today the election of councillors as representatives of the citizens can be considered as 'the starting point for local democracy' (Bäck et al., 2006).

Councillors are central to local representative democracy, linking ordinary citizens and decision-makers in municipal arenas. For some, however, councillors are perceived as the weakest link in the power relations between the various actors at local government level (Razin and Hazan, 2014). For others, the councillor as a democratically elected representative occupies a central position in the dynamics of politics (Copus, 2015). Councillors can be both internally and externally focused. They are an essential part of the fabrics of internal municipal politics as well as being members of the broader local polity.

Councillors are members of the local social and political systems and therefore provide links between the inside and outside of the council chamber (Egner et al., 2013). A major dimension for the external focus is that brought about by greater integration of EU states which offers municipalities spaces in which to act. Greater integration provides municipalities the opportunity to bypass national level state institutions and gain influence in decision making in Brussels (Egner et. al 2013). Moreover, involvement in European integration creates possibilities for participation by local authorities in coalitions, thus eroding the existing patterns of government in tiers, creating a form of governance based on

interlocking spheres of influence. The effect is a paradigm shift in the nature of representation and participation (Alonso, 2011).

With numerous debates about the nature of representation and terms such as symbolic, juristic sociological used to describe political representation, it is difficult to understand what representation actually means. Moreover, in the world of local government and councillors, politics is said to be populated by terms such as trustees, politicians, standard bearers, delegates, crusaders and policy brokers to describe representatives thus compounding the difficulties in understanding the nature of representation and trying to make sense of what local political representatives actually do (Rao, 2000).

Even though representation is the legitimising factor that enables councillors to carry out a number of activities and roles, it does not define what councillors do in their political office. Each social, political, economic and contextual change that takes place around local government has implications for the role of the elected member (Copus, 2015). Newton (1976: pp.115-116 in Copus, 2015) pointed out that while democratic theory makes it clear that the representative-in this case the councillor-should take into account the 'interest and well being of those he or she represents' it says little about how they should act (ibid). The fundamental aspect of politics is to manage conflicts of interest between groups and individuals in society. In a representative democracy, citizens 'allow' their representative to manage these conflicts. There is however no consensus on how the mandate of local political representatives should be interpreted.

Representation is generally understood as a relationship between two persons, the representative and the represented or constituent, where the representative holds the authority to perform various actions with the agreement of the represented (Rao, 2000). A representative acting for others by virtue of a contract or mandate between them is engaged in juristic representation, an example here would be where a solicitor is acting on behalf of others. Where a person is representative because of personal attributes for example religion, race, social status, education or some kind of community membership we may

describe sociological representation, an example here could possibly be where someone is representing a group of people who are for or against something.

There are however, questions as to the nature of the relationship between the representative and the represented. There are those that argue that the best form of representation is by delegates who carry out the instructions of the constituents. Whereas, others argue that only someone typical of a group, in the sense of personally bearing its characteristics, can be said to be representative of that group, and therefore in that circumstance acceptable as its representative. The important question discussed by the majority of theorists on the concept of representation, centres around the way in which the representative should act or should not act ( Rao, 2000).

In the classic traditional model of government, governments could be seen as agents with just one key principle: the voters, as mediated by Parliament. (Strom *et al* 2003 cited in Mair and Thomassen, 2010). In modern day politics, by contrast, they face many different constraints. On the one hand they now face an increasingly modernised and fragmented electorate which is difficult to treat as a coherent source of mandate. On the other hand, their actions are limited by an increasingly complex legislative policy-making process, by the external controls and commitments deriving from various international agreements and protocols including from the EU. Moreover, the situation is compounded by the increasingly numerous domestic and often autonomous veto players who are now to be found within the wider institutional order and within the private sector.

In response to internationalisation and Europeanisation, the demands of partnerships and larger policy networks however, local political actors have the opportunity to re-discover local governments' contribution to democratic representation (John, 2001). Theorists have developed typologies of representational style the concept of which has long been used in local government studies. Understanding the differing types and styles of representation and crucially which approach councillors take, serves to enhance our knowledge of councillor behaviour in respect of their representative role.

How then should councillors carry out their role as political representatives  
Answering that question involves understanding the approaches councillors take in carrying out their representative role.

### **Representational Style Delegate or Trustee**

Edmund Burke (1949 cited in Pitkin, 1967 p169-170) presented political representation as the representation of interest, and interest as an objective impersonal and unattached reality. Burke's view is seen by many scholars as elitist, he holds that inequality is natural and unavoidable in any society. Therefore the ruling group is genuinely elite, what he calls a natural aristocracy and such an elite is an essential and integral part of any large body rightly constituted. Such a perspective stems from the belief that the mass of the people are incapable of governing themselves, indeed were not made to think or act without guidance and direction. Government is not to be conducted according to anyone's wishes; rather government and legislation are matters of reason and judgement. This is because government has to do with duty and morality. Therefore a representative is not to consult the wishes of his constituents. In essence they owe their representative complete freedom to act as he sees fit; and they owe it is an act of homage and just deference to a reason, which the necessity of government has made superior to their own.

According to Burke (1949 cited in Pitkin, 1967). the representative owes the citizens the full exercise of his superior ability, not obedience or civility. A representative need have little much to do with consulting the represented or doing what they wanted. However, Burke was talking about the representation of unattached interests rather than when people are being represented, in which case, their claim to have a say in their interest becomes relevant. Therefore, if the representative and the electorate are viewed as relatively equal in capacity wisdom and information the more likely the requirement that the views of the constituents be taken into account. Burke's assertion that the representative should act as a trustee, having been authorised by the electorate to act according to his free judgement has been further developed by a number of scholars over time.



The authors, Eulau and Wahlke(1978) considered what they describe as the “problem of representation- how individual relationships are transformed into representation of the whole” (Eulau and Wahlke, 1978).They argued that political action takes place within a particular situation and that an understanding of that action was only possible when the actors perception of the situation was known. Thus politicians adapt in various situations. The authors make a distinction between representative style and focus, drawing attention to how representatives could act in a number of roles; as agents or trustees of the electorate’s interests, acting on their own independent and informed judgement. As delegates having been, in essence, delegated the task of carrying out the electorate’s wishes bound by and to them, or as a politico, in other words, as a trustee wherever possible or as a delegate as required. The trustee role is described from both a moralistic conception in which the representative is a free agent and follows what he considers right or just. In addition, a rational conception according to which the representative follows his own judgement based on an assessment of the facts and on his understanding of the problems to be addressed.

The delegate role on the other hand is based on the assumption that representatives should not use their independent judgement or conviction as criteria of decision-making. In this case the representative is expected to take note of the wishes and views of the electorate. The politico representational style is one where both the trustee and delegate roles are brought into play, whereby the representative is more flexible in adopting a style more suited to his/her decision-making. Another approach is that of following the party line, the representatives who choose this style are described as party soldiers. This style was added in later research and is especially relevant in the European context (Holmberg, 1974). A party soldier does not have a free mandate rather it is the political party rather than the voters that influence the decision taken by the councillor. The investigation across sixteen European countries, carried out by Karlsson (2013) investigated whether councillors see themselves as spokespersons for their voters or their parties. The study concluded that the most common representational style is that of trustees, with 57% of

respondents identifying with this role. The least favoured style is the delegate with 15% identifying with this style. Approximately 28% of the councillors taking part in the study identified as party soldiers. The study found considerable variation between countries but suggests this is only to some extent explained by nationality. Thus the study also examined other factors explaining representational style, including age, gender, position in the council and length of service as a councillor. The results of this analysis correspond with earlier research, concluding that the main division in representative style is between party soldier style on the one hand and a style where the mandate is not based on party affiliation. In other words trustee or delegate (Karlsson 2013 pp 97-119 cited in Egner et al, 2013).

One of the councillors involved in the research explains how she views her representative role:

*You have to represent the people and it is your duty to represent the party. After all you were elected on that ticket. Obviously as a councillor on the ground you should fight your corner in the political group, let the group know where your local people are coming from. It is part of the councillor's role to manage expectations, help people to understand that we have to make wider decisions local versus borough. It was quite a shock when I became a councillor that I was expected to know everything, I didn't but my party colleagues really helped me, we have a lot to do, sort out it's often difficult to fit it all in. When a councillor is working like I am, they have to be able to fit everything in, surgeries etc. They have enough to do without interfering in areas that is not their responsibility. (Conservative Councillor).*

The comment crystallised the views of many councillors in the research by elaborating the tensions inherent within the representative role. That is between 'representing' in a wide sense assisting and helping individuals and communities while at the same time maintaining the interests of the council area overall. She also illustrates the tensions experienced by councillors faced with

multi- faceted roles that are the expectation that they know everything and will do everything. Thus they are forced to spread themselves thinly or choose to focus on one or two areas and either ignore or minimise other aspects of their role. These tensions are explored through similar quotes below as they relate to the tensions between representing the political party, adopting the party soldier style, representing their local area, their ward, and representing the council overall.

*When I became a Cabinet member it's my whole town and Borough which includes ensuring that every opportunity is taken to help the area and that includes me having an active role in the EU. (Labour Council Deputy Leader).*

*Not to be a delegate, you cannot be a delegate because you have to do what is best for the borough and within that your ward. (Conservative Councillor).*

*Councillor role and party role have to sit together; there is constant tension in representing the community and representing the council back to the community. (Labour Councillor).*

*I see my role as a conduit between the public and the council, a voice for the people and in support of the council to manage expectations and help people to understand that we have to make decisions for the wider area that might affect them. As a councillor at ground level, politics doesn't come into it, politics arrives at the Town Hall, where we should be able to fight our corner in the political group, let the group know what our local people are thinking about. (Conservative Councillor).*

What we see in these comments are the tensions, that the research shows all councillors experience, to one degree or another, between representing the views of or behaving in a way supported by: the party, the public, the council or the views of the councillor themselves. Many councillors will go along with the

views of the party. However, each of these areas that councillors suggest they represent creates a focus for their attention. For some councillors the EU is just such a focus. What the comments indicate is that councillors have some degree of choice over which role they prefer to focus on. Such choice however is limited by circumstances and often by the position held by the councillor within the council. Thus, leading councillors find that they must consider the EU as part of their representative role. The issues elaborated in these quotes are explored below with reference to the literature on councillor roles.

Councillors are required to operate at the interface between their council and its external environment. How successful or otherwise they are in this, will depend on their ability to balance their ideological and party allegiances with the demands, conflicting priorities and differing perspectives on the same issues from their councils and their electorate (Bäck et al., 2006; Copus, 2015b; Stoker, 1988). Despite a strong preference for representational work however councillors actually spend the majority of their time, 58% overall on council and committee meetings, preparing for them and meeting officers, rather than carrying out their representational role (Rao, 1998).

As part of the Municipal Assemblies in European Local Government (MAELG) project, a comparative study focused on the analysis of role conceptions and behaviour. The distinction between role perceptions and role behaviour is described as relating to both the sociological concept of explaining role behaviour and the attitudinal model of planned behaviour (Denters and Klok, 2013). The authors sought to establish whether role perceptions (importance of tasks) are related to role behaviour. They posed two questions to measure role perceptions and role behaviour, each related to ten aspects of the tasks of councillors. The data is analysed on a national and individual level. At the individual level, the study highlighted a 'role behaviour deficit'- for all tasks the negative values indicate that a mean score on behaviour is lower than for importance. Though councillors identified certain tasks as highest in importance, actual contributions towards success of these tasks are perceived by the councillors as substantially lower. To a large extent this holds true for the

task of representing issues from local society. Paradoxically the tasks that constitute the core of the representative democratic model are still seen as central by the councillors that took part in their research.

Many councillors see themselves as playing a pivotal role through the democratic process, in the translation of citizens' preferences into municipal decisions. Councillors however have different understandings of what democracy means and that these differences can be directly related on the one hand to representative democracy and on the other to a model of participatory democracy in which the individual's right to participate in general elections alone is perceived as insufficient for democratic self –determination. In the participatory model of democracy, beyond the core of governmental structures at the local level is emphasised (Heinelt, 2013).

Moreover, people expect much more today from representative democracies than they did in the past. Post World War 11, publics have become increasingly sensitive to the core principles of democracy; hardly surprising then, the same public demand sometimes more strongly and more vociferously, that representative democracies and governments at all levels, must live up to the expectations they generate (Alonso, 2011). At some stage in its development representative democracy changed from being just a procedure for selecting and rotating elites, to one where questions arise as to which interests are represented, who chooses political representatives and who becomes a political representative each in their own way, adding to the pressures of representative democracies to perform well. Moreover, representative democracy is currently under attack from two sides being both under responsive and over responsive to electors. In the first instance under representing people with a weak political voice and favouring the rich and powerful. Secondly over representing the majority of the population whilst at the same time clamping down on core institutions of representative democracy including freedom of the press (Alonso, 2011).

Representative democracy, on the other hand, has been praised by a number of political writers and public figures. Defenders of representative democracy

view it as a way of governing through openly debating differences of opinion between representatives and those they represent and between the represented themselves. The representative bodies of a government should be places of public debate on the various opinions held by the population and to act as watchdogs for the professionals who create and administer laws and policy. Local government exists to promote liberty and pluralism, the key is that locally elected people should be in charge of matters that affect them. Local self-government is best placed to both manage and have control over local affairs. Moreover, if an elected government of a community wishes to act in its own interest it should be allowed to do so (Chandler, 2009). A community may be characterised by a group of people who share a common loyalty to a place. However as pointed out by Chandler (2010) in many areas of Britain such a sense of community is not necessarily well developed.

As we have shown however, and to be discussed in detail in the following chapter, local governments ability to manage its own affairs is impacted upon by diverse governing coalitions and the division of powers across and within political institutions (John, 2001). Indeed in respect of the EU no area of local government escapes European regulation. Thus, the representative role of councillors in terms of governing their own communities is impacted adding to the already crowded agendas that councillors have to address.

Historically representatives had little authority to act, let alone judge or enact law. Their role was merely to give their town or borough's assent to the king's demand for finance. Over time the representative role became more complicated as representatives were given more decisive authority over law and popular sovereignty emerged as a governing ideal, (Rehfeld, 2005). The history of political theory is studded with definitions of representation, usually embedded in ideological assumptions and postulates which cannot serve empirical research without conceptual clarification (Rao, 1998). She notes Pitkin's (1967) suggestion that the ambiguities of the concept have prevented generations of scholars of democracy from coming to grips with the problem of representation. Direct participation by all members of the community has long

been displaced by the process of representation, in which some are elected or deputed to act on behalf of the more numerous others, the represented (Rao, 2000). Moreover, given the many have become more numerous, it is increasingly more difficult to conceive of each person being represented in anything more than a formal sense.

Liberal democracy is founded on the process of representation whilst at the same time postulates an active participating citizen. Moreover, local political representatives in more modern times operate in a multi network arena. Whilst in theory, differing factions may well co-exist and complement each other, such developments require councillors to share their power and decision making with others, which hitherto has been seen as their prerogative. Moreover, councillors may believe those others lack legitimacy and scarcely represent the communities they claim to speak for. Thus, it is no longer clear what we mean by representation in the context of complex large scale multi-level governance and government, including the EU.

In her analysis of the changing attitudes of both representatives and electors in British local government Rao (2000) distinguishes between the quality of representatives and process of political representation. In respect of the quality of local elected representatives, the early 1960s saw a more public airing of the need to enhance the calibre of local representatives in order to restore public confidence in local government and indeed to better equip councils to handle the much greater responsibilities imposed on them by post war growth (Rao, 2000). Moreover, throughout the twentieth century the growing size of local government with local government having more responsibilities for the delivery of welfare services led to the 'nationalisation' of local politics (Barnett et al., 2019).

Party politics began to have a greater impact on local politics resulting in the election of more working- class and less formally educated councillors rather than the election of 'local notables' (Chandler, 2013). Returning to the Maud committee on the management of local government, established in the main, to address just that 'problem' of quality of local representatives. Reporting in 1967

*the committee commented that Parliament was becoming increasingly concerned about local government and the way in which local elected bodies were out of touch with their electorate* (Stanyer, 1967).

The survey undertaken for the Maud committee examined the representative character of local government in terms both of electors' perceptions and of actuality. It carried out a comparison of what electors imagined councillors to be- with what they would have liked them to be, concluding that the correspondence between ideal and reality were in some respects quite close, as in the case of age and education.

Overall the view expressed was that representation was best achieved through a high degree of representativeness, or resemblance. In other words regardless of the gulf between ideal and reality, the electorate at the time the Maud Committee were reporting wanted their councillors to resemble themselves. We might suppose that the electorate's own particular attributes provide an ideal description of the person we want to represent us. The research showed for example, that the preference for an older councillor increased with age, men had a stronger preference for a male councillor, the desire for a locally born councillor rose with the length of residence. Finally, the preference for a highly educated councillor rose with educational level (Rao, 1998).

Descriptive likeness is not the only basis on which one thing can stand for another. Symbols too are often said to represent something. We may call this the "symbolic representation" or "symbolisation" view, viewing representation as a kind of symbolisation, so that a political representative is to be understood on the model of, for example a flag representing the nation. Political representation will seem no different from symbolising an abstraction (Pitkin, 1967). The crucial test of political representation will be the existential one: is the representative believed in? Pitkin (1967) goes on to suggest that so long as people accept or believe the political leader represents them, by definition they will accept the political leader as their symbolic representative.



Representation in this context depends on the representative's characteristics, and what he is or is not like, on being something rather than doing something. The representative in this context does not act for others; he stands for them by virtue of a correspondence or connection between them, a resemblance or a reflection. It would appear however that in more modern times, electors are less inclined to project their own characteristics onto the 'ideal' representative. Philosophers have long held that the idea of resemblance has a wholly spurious connection with the concept of representation, it should therefore be separated. In respect of representation theory, we should redirect and focus our attention on that which emphasises the importance of responsibility and responsiveness (Rao, 1998). While democratic theory makes it clear that the representative, the councillor, should take account of the interest and well-being of those he or she represents, this says little about, how they define the interests of those represented, or what it is that the representative represents (Copus, 2015).

As noted above, reform of local government across European countries, the introduction of different forms of governance compounded by the need to deal with increasingly complex issues means that councillors across the European municipalities are required to reconcile the often conflicting responsibilities of their representative role.

Arising from the changes and challenges of a modern political landscape, the consequences for councillors is such that the relational aspect of representation itself is brought into question. Moreover, the complexity of local political and institutional structures and policies, where local politicians are involved in partnerships, European liaison and policy networks means they are less likely to be able to claim their role in representing the electorate in the making of decisions that impact their communities (John, 2001). The changes described in the previous chapters including the growing role of the EU mean that local decision makers are expected to adapt to new challenges and institutional frameworks.

More diffuse networks, the lack of predictability, complex policy challenges and multi –level decision making, characterise the modern political arena at all

levels of government across Europe. In the past, local government and councillors were not affected by European legislation to the extent they are today. This is not to suggest that networks and complex inter-organisational relations were not a feature of local political systems in the past, as some accounts of local politics show. Rather, there has been a step change in respect of policy decision making impacting at national and local level. Nonetheless local authorities are the only agencies representing communities whose councillors are chosen by elections open to all adult citizens of that community thus they can claim to represent the views and aspirations of their communities (Chandler, 2009). Much of the literature on political representation is concerned with specifying what may be expected of a representative, how he/she ought to act, what their obligations are, and how their role is defined. Theorists attempt to draw conclusions about the proper conduct for a political representative or the proper way of institutionalising representative government. Moreover, the selectivity of representation and the deficits of democratic accountability so typical of network governance are compounded by the multi-level character of governance in the EU. Thus, the lack of clarity as to where responsibility ends and effectively rests creates the possibility of an accountability deficit (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). In the following section of the chapter the thesis draws upon theories of representation from Pitkin (1967) with a view to exploring how different approaches to the concept of representation impact on the representative role of councillors.

### **Perspectives on Political Representation**

Contemporary accounts of the concept of representation begin with Pitkin's analysis (Pitkin, 1967), establishing the 'standard account' of political representation: political representation purportedly involves, authorisation, accountability and the looking out for another's interests. Under the standard account, a political representative has substantive obligations to act on behalf of another's interests as the basic assumption as to what it means to be a political representative. Nonetheless, Pitkin suggests that representation does have an identifiable meaning, applied in different but controlled and discoverable ways in

different contexts. She suggests that representation, taken generally, means the making present in some sense of something which is nevertheless not present literally or in fact. According to Pitkin what we need is not just an accurate definition of representation but a way of doing justice to the various more detailed applications of representation in various contexts. If that can be achieved it will go some way to account for many of the wide disagreements among theorists about the meaning of representation.

### **Types of Representation**

Pitkin(1967) identifies four types of representation; first, authorised, where a representative is legally empowered to act for another; second, descriptive representation, where the representative stands for a group by virtue of sharing similar characteristics such as race, sex, ethnicity, or residence: third, symbolic representation, where a leader stands for national ideas: fourth, substantive representation, where the representative seeks to advance a group's policy preferences and interests. Pitkin finds that each has ambiguity and complexity and hence must be accompanied by caveats. Most notable is Pitkin's (1967) dismissal of descriptive representation. She rejects its key assumption of a link between characteristics and action and believes that a focus on descriptive representation leads to a focus on the characteristics at the expense of attention to the action of representatives.

Drawing from Pitkin, (1967) the popularity of the concept of representation is predicated on its having become linked with the idea of democracy as well as with ideas of liberty and justice. In her view, the concept and practice of representation have had little to do with democracy or liberty. Representation does not necessarily mean representative government. For example, a king can represent a nation; a public official can represent the state. Therefore, institutions and practices which embody some kind of representation are necessary in any large and articulated society and need have nothing to do with self-government. Pitkin (1967) notes that some scholars argue that no government really represents, that a truly representative government does not exist. Nonetheless, political scientists and laymen alike talk about

representative government as distinct from other forms of government. Widespread acceptance of Pitkin's analysis however now needs to be challenged in the face of troubling real world developments.

The politics of representation in many countries and contexts is changing fast and there is some discussion of a crisis of representation (Saward, 2010). Challenging our normative understanding of political representation is important in light of a sense of remoteness of politicians in Western countries from real issues and citizen's concerns. The study of representative democracy however is said to have experienced a revival in response to a variety of political and theoretical challenges such as economic globalisation, climate change and environmental degradation and social movements based in claims about identity which cannot be addressed by participatory and deliberative theories (Brito Vieira, 2017). The emergence of political representation is seen as neither an alternative to nor a retreat from democratic self government but rather the best way of achieving it. Thus for Young (2000) representation allows for accountability and "rules" concerning who is authorised to speak for whom are public" (Young 2000,p. 125 cited in Brito Vieira, 2017).

### **Authorisation and Councillors**

The definition put forward by Hobbes, writing in 1651 (Hobbes, 2017) is that representation is essentially formalistic, considering representation in terms of formal arrangements which proceed and initiate it. This formal arrangement involves the giving of authority to act, authorisation. For Hobbes, the carrying out of actions on behalf of others through having the authority to do so is defined as the right to perform the action. From this perspective the essential nature of representation is that the representatives are authorised in advance to act together on behalf of their constituents and therefore bind them by their collective decisions. In terms of political representation one of the main areas of granting authority is through elections where the voters grant authority to elected officials. In her critique of Hobbes theories on representation Pitkin (1967) raises a number of issues including the significant problem of how the rights of the actor to act through authorisation reconcile with responsibility for

the actions carried out. Stemming from this definition of representation the assumption is that all authority is representative and that every representative is in authority over those for whom he acts.

Linking representation to authority however makes it very difficult to address the obligations of a representative as such, or to judge his actions in relation to his role. Politicians at all levels of the political spectrum however are likely to be influenced in their action variously by their political party, their particular interest and or expertise and by the wishes and demands of their electorate. Moreover, given the proximity councillors have to the community and local people means they are very visibly accountable for the actions and decisions that they either take or contribute towards. There are no boundaries between the public and the private person, and clearly councillors are also held to account through the ballot box (Copus, 2015).

### **Accountability and Councillors**

The representative from the accountability perspective is expected to act as if he would eventually have to account for any actions. Therefore, the representative should be prepared to justify the actions to those that he acts for. There are however a number of political realities to be considered. In the first place, the representative is elected by a great number of people, which raises questions as to how he is to determine what their needs are and indeed attempt to meet varying and possibly conflicting needs. Further enhanced public engagement with local government and greater public participation in local policy making is a theme which echoes across Europe, implying enhanced involvement by the electorate in public policy. Yet such efforts to bring citizens and councils closer together place the councillor at the centre of tensions between representative and participatory democracy.

Secondly, the local politician operates in a framework of political institutions, is highly likely to be a member of a political party who wish to be re-elected. How then do elected representatives, bound by the conventions of the political group behaviours and party loyalty view and work with participatory processes of

citizens? Thirdly, he will have his own views and opinions on some issues. His views may be shaped by those around him, by effective lobbyists and or by his sources of information. In addition, the councillor is expected to represent those who do not actually take part in elections, in fact who do not bother to vote at all. Therefore, the politician at whatever level, in particular in this context as a councillor in attempting to carry out his representative role, face a great complexity and plurality of determinants, any number of which may impact on the way in which he carries out that role at any particular time and for which he is accountable .

In relation to the citizens that are represented, councillors are expected to be responsive, they have to be aware of the preferences and interests of citizens and transform those into decisions by the municipality. (Denters and Klok, 2013) distinguish between a substantive and procedural conception of this role. From the substantive approach it is important that the content of the policies adopted by the municipality are in accordance with the opinions of the citizens (Egner et al., 2013).

Thus councillors represent the main requests and issues from their local area and define the main goals of the municipality accordingly. In the procedural conception of this task, responsiveness does not necessarily imply that the representative should constantly act in response to the citizens' wish, it does however require that councillors are able to account for and justify their actions. That argument is displayed in the following comments elaborative of the findings of the research:

*I didn't want the school closed in my area, I was not party to the decision, but couldn't go against it when I was up for election I lost my seat. I got back in again later but it's ridiculous really , if my role is to represent my ward I should be able to stand up for them and speak out against decisions about stuff they don't want to happen.  
(Labour Councillor).*

Another councillor commented on how people view the responsibilities of the council confirming the view of many of the councillors in the research that the public expect the local council and the councillors within it to be able to address any number of issues that impact locally whether it is the council's responsibility or not. The councillors however are often in a position and are willing, to signpost where their electorate can get help.

*You would be amazed at what we get asked about in surgery, lots of people think we still have control over the buses, when Princess Diane died , people were coming into the Town Hall asking where they could sign the book of condolences, we had to get one pretty quick. (Conservative Councillor).*

As the chapter has shown the roles of councillors in the modern multi-level governance arena are wide ranging and under pressure from greater expectations from citizens with a move towards a more participatory democracy and changing contexts which in the British context is changing again in respect of Brexit. Thus, the roles of councillors need to change subject to the particular circumstances whilst maintaining that of the representative. As suggested by Rao(1998) in the British context, there is no single role for the elected representative and that representation should be viewed more as a continuum of styles. A Labour councillor shared the way in which she believes her role has evolved over time which crystallises the views of the findings of the research:

*I think my role has evolved, it started out with sorting problems for people when people came looking for advice but its evolved into helping people to help themselves. We have always said you can help people better by helping them to help themselves. I think that is my community roles...know every nook and cranny..... Scrutiny took me beyond the local area, now I am in Cabinet, didn't know at first how everything worked from the inside. So my role has changed dramatically now much wider more strategic. At the end of the day you are elected to make decisions on behalf of the people. You have to stick by your decision even though it could affect re-election.*

*I have followed my view even against my local electorate. (Cabinet Member Labour Council).*

We see here again, the tensions existing for councillors in assessing how to respond to issues and which set of views they will prioritise. As suggested in the comment above, councillors will often preference their own view and or that of the party, over the views of the voters. Councillors can however still serve the voters in other ways including accessing resources or services for the communities in their ward and the council area. Moreover, power to make decisions and utilise judgement requires a very different decision making and influence generating framework than is currently in place for councils and councillors (Copus, 2015). Local authorities require a set of powers and resources for councillors to be able to take action and secure change as a local community leader. The issues associated with power and influence is highlighted by councillors in the research for this thesis, notably in respect of political leadership (Rhodes and Hart, 2014). Thus, the next section examines the concept of leadership and considers the role of community leadership which was highlighted as an important part of their role for some of the councillors taking part in the research, emerging as a sub-theme in respect of the thesis.

### **Perspectives on Leadership.**

In many countries across Europe, it is widely held that changes in structures and processes could give political leaders in local government a more clear-cut role- a role with a specific focus on its strategic and visionary aspects, thereby making political leadership key to the transformation of local democracy. In the context of local government particularly, leadership has been defined as ‘the ability to overcome resistance to particular courses of action, notably to cause others to agree to something they were not necessarily initially predisposed to’ (Sullivan et al., 2006). The interdependence of political leaders, horizontally and vertically, and with local citizens, emphasises the mutuality of leadership, interacting with others, rather than leadership locally being the province of the elected or selected leader.



Authority, conferred by office or attained by performance, is often linked with leadership. Yet not all political leaders have formal positions of authority, and not all persons who hold official authority provide leadership. Political leadership is a difficult subject to understand, questions are many and varied as to the nature of leaders and the process of leadership, often resulting in contradictory answers and little consensus.

As we have shown in previous chapters of the thesis, reforms that have been introduced in local governments across Europe appear to have been introduced with little consideration as to the impact on councillors. Uncertainties arise in respect of the councillors' role in governance networks, citizen involvement through public participation mechanisms and institutional changes and innovations which in turn creates a dilemma for democratic leadership. The introduction of reforms to strengthen leadership positions, including the creation of directly elected mayors, whilst bolstering political leadership at one level, creates the potential to reduce the hold that local councillors and other actors have over their political leaders (Egner et al., 2013).

The study of leadership came to the fore during the late twentieth century. An entire industry of leadership training and consulting began in the corporate sector but spilled into the government and third sectors. It left us with a myriad of concepts, frameworks, propositions and stories about leadership across many domains (Rhodes and Hart, 2014). Because the study of leadership is a complex and disjointed interdisciplinary enterprise it is important to be clear about what it is we wish to understand, is it the people we call leaders or is it the process we call leadership?

For many scholars, understanding political leaders focuses on delving into the personalities of leaders and their underlying motives, studying the characteristics, beliefs, value and deeds of people in formal positions as political leaders. There is now however, a growing body of thought and research that understands leadership as an interactive process between leaders and followers and about institutions and their rules of the game and the broader historical context. The normative view of leadership, at whatever level, is one

where 'leaders' persuade and influence 'followers' to act in such a way that they might not otherwise have been inclined. However, and for politicians at all levels, more recent exploration of the leader/ follower dynamic challenges this thinking.

The prevailing, more complex governance environment within which local government operates requires the application of 'catalytic' leadership, individuals, who among other things, have interpersonal and communication skills that enable them to engage others in productive collaboration (Lukes, 2004). Democratic societies have tended to treat the concept of leadership with mixed feelings. On the one hand, there are calls for strong, transformational, visionary, authentic or other allegedly benign forms of public leadership because a democracy needs good leaders. On the other hand, there is a need to protect societies so they are not at the mercy of all too ambitious, ruthless and above all dominant leaders.

Thus, though democracy needs good leaders it has no clear theory of leadership to counter its concerns about strong leaders (Rhodes and Hart, 2014). The notion of democratic leadership is inherently paradoxical, in that, the concept of democracy rests on the idea of popular sovereignty and is based on an essentially egalitarian ethos, the concept of leadership necessarily encompasses hierarchy and hence inequality. In a democratic context political leaders are confronted by a serious dilemma, the more they lead from the front the less democratic they appear whilst the more democratically (collectively) they behave the less they present as true leaders. Nonetheless democratic practice cannot do without leadership, moreover, democratic leadership is firmly rooted in an institutional context that aims to prevent corruption and the abuse of power through a variety of accountability mechanisms. In addition the relationship between democracy and leadership is strongly influenced by intermediate variables, context and the particular accountability mechanism that have been established to keep leaders in check. The normative view in respect of leaders and leadership is that whereby an individual is either elected or

selected or indeed assumes the role of leader leaders come in many guises, including those who lead within their communities.

### **Councillors' Role as Community Leaders**

The 1998 White Paper *Modern Local Government: In touch with the People* presents the idea of community leadership as moving towards more modern government (Brooks, 1999). The New Labour Government under Tony Blair (1997) pledged to modernise councils and to rejuvenate democracy in local government. At the core of the Government's strategy to modernise local government was their claim that the decision making structures, specifically, the committee system was confusing and inefficient. Moreover, that the structure in place was opaque and lacked transparency, which meant that citizens did not know who was making decisions on their behalf. It was argued by the Government that public dissatisfaction with the structure of local government and councils' poor performance was demonstrated by the low turnout at local government elections. Stemming from the disaffection with the notion of being described as 'backbench' councillors, compounded by the Executive-Scrutiny split, and later in many of the member states of the EU the introduction of elected mayors, new ideas about the role of ward councillors begin to emerge. In the English context the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2006) issued a strong statement about the importance of ward councillors as local political and community leaders. Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a package of powers and responsibilities to empower members including new opportunities to act on local issues, influence mainstream service choices and be more effective advocates. The rationale for giving the community leadership brief to councils and councillors suggests councils have a special status and authority as local directly elected bodies. The model of community leadership continues to be actively promoted by councils, councillors themselves and the Local Government Association ("Highlighting political leadership," n.d). Calls for councillors to be more community focused, consistently link those roles with the need for 'high performing councillors' (Kitchin and LGIU, 2013) Such community leadership is to be carried out in

individual wards, working with and engaging local communities to identify needs and shape service delivery. Thus, creating a role for 'backbench' or 'frontline' councillors who increasingly believe they have little influence over decision making. Yet many councillors are strong advocates of the community leadership role seeing it as their primary responsibility as highlighted in the following comments from councillors who took part in the research and which summarise the general view expressed:

*My ward is one of the most disadvantaged in the borough. People are not good at coming forward. They are used to putting up with having nothing. They don't complain. There is very little pressure from ward residents about anything. I make it my business to seek them out, to find out what they need help with and as far as I can I will do my best for them. I am determined that they develop more confidence, more able to come forward complain even and get better at being able to help themselves. (Labour Councillor).*

An independent councillor summed up his practice in respect of his role as a community leader;

*I am a councillor in a disadvantaged area. I will always put the people before the politics. If I can make a difference in their lives I will do. They don't always agree with me but I persuade them. Kids were bringing lunch boxes to school but there wasn't much in them and the kids were falling asleep at their desks. I am a governor there so I worked on getting the lunchboxes banned. Parents disagreed but I managed with help, to get subsidies from various places. So every child gets a proper meal when they come to school, some breakfast and some fruit. And they are not falling asleep at their desks anymore. Sometimes I might not be popular but it usually works out alright in the end. (Independent Councillor).*

Here we see the intense passion and concern for those who are represented by the councillor but which go beyond providing a limited service. The comments

illustrate how councillors can lead by trying to change attitudes and approaches to issues taken by citizens and communities.

The study carried out by Sullivan et al., (2006) concluded that there are three challenges to community leadership (Sullivan et al., 2006). In the first instance, issues centring on engaging the public require that local authorities involve citizens from across the community. Moreover, authorities are expected to enable citizens to take action on their own behalf which presents a major challenge for the authorities involved in the study. Attempts by councillors to convert passive service consumers into active participants were by and large perceived negatively. The second challenge of community leadership is focused on the need to provide strategic leadership by setting a strategic direction for the local area and represent community priorities beyond the locality. Whether the priorities put forward in the strategic plan however, are shared with key stakeholders is not easy to determine. The third challenge involves developing collaborative capacity which proves to be a major obstacle given the complex and fragmented character of local governance (Sullivan et al., 2006).

Sullivan and her colleagues' investigation concludes by expressing a number of concerns about the notion of community leadership, suggesting that leadership appears to be coming from officers of the councils rather than elected members. Thus suggesting that without the full engagement of elected members 'the democratic legitimacy identified as being a cornerstone of the local authority's role as community leader is at best weak and at worst absent' (ibid).

## **Conclusion**

When examining the various focuses for councillor activity in respect of representation and role, account must be taken of the way in which the choice of representative focus has undergone significant development in recent times to the extent that councillors will focus on a variety of differing groups and organisations within their communities. Moreover, the complexities and challenges associated with local governance networks all make demands on councillors' role as representative with the expectation that the councillor will

carry out the process of representation in a host of forums external to the council. The councillors contributing to the research for this thesis, as individuals, are very clear as to their interpretation of the role of the councillor. A number of councillors view themselves as trustees making their own judgement having assessed the particular situation and despite resistance from members of their community, if they are in a position to make a decision, do so based on their consideration of the matter in hand. Other councillors taking part in the research describe their role as in line with that of delegate, trying to ensure that the electorates' wishes are met, whilst at the same time recognising the difficulty of trying to meet the needs of everybody. From the interviews there are few examples of the councillor acknowledging their role as party soldier, though a small number do refer to their responsibility in putting forward the views of the political party.

There were some examples during the interviews where the concept of community leadership was referred to but not in the exact terms required for community leadership as outlined in the chapter. This sub-theme captures the behaviours described by the councillors themselves which align with the notion of being a leader in the community. The interviews illustrate how some councillors are very proud and passionate about the people in their communities. The stories they told about happenings in their community that they became involved in specifically in their role as representative councillors demonstrates how, they are politicians close to the people they represent and for whom must make governing decisions (Copus, 2015). They regularly go the extra mile to help and support their communities.

Moreover, the office of councillor is shaped by a range of external forces which include international trends and developments and the demands and changes that central and regional governments make to local government, and the demands and expectations of citizens. The chapter has examined the place occupied by councillors across the political landscape, explored their representative role and considered the process of representation highlighting

the constant pressure on councillors to perform a number of different roles (Copus, 2015).

Finally, the thesis clearly demonstrates through chapters three and four that the majority of this body of councillors abdicate any responsibility for activity and involvement toward the EU. The interviews showed that; they do not view this as part of their role; they have some knowledge about the EU; though information about the EU is available it is difficult to access. The majority of councillors have little or no knowledge as to who in the council might be responsible for EU activity and there is limited, and in some cases no interaction with the MEP. For many councillors, there is an absence of formal reporting about EU activity and this group of councillors believe they have more pressing priorities than being involved with the EU. These councillors believe that the responsibility for that level of outward focused activity is the responsibility of those in leadership positions as best illustrated by the following comment from a council leader;

*“I think that back bench councillors are unlikely to have any influence in any of the policies that come out of the EU I think that is a Leaders role. They could put their views forward but they rarely do and that is because they are not interested. I know that lots of the councillors here think I just go off having a good time in Europe, they never properly see what we get from Europe. The information is there if they have time and inclination to get it. Besides the Leader gets paid more than non –executive councillors I have different responsibilities so it’s not expected by me or them that they need to be involved if they don’t want to.” (Labour Council Leader).*

The comment above displays the view held by many of the councillors taking part in the research, that those in leading positions are responsible for the more outward facing activities of the council.

The majority of councillors believe that they have no influence in respect of decisions taken by the EU; there were however a small number of councillors

able to identify how they might be able to improve their influence through other bodies but were unable to identify whether that had ever been done.

Regardless of the myriad of roles carried out by councillors including the one role they themselves view as the most important, drawing from Heclo (1969) it seems clear that local government is receiving an immense subsidy, a subsidy in services from the private citizens who undertake the role of councillor. It is valid to suggest that the councillor is meant to represent the public's ordinary, non-specialist view, but this does not mean that the councillor can do so without the time and resources to study and comprehend what is happening in a complex local authority (Heclo, 1969).

The following chapter examines the way in which councillors, who have a mandate granted by voters to speak and act on their behalf, are required to work alongside unelected bodies making policy and resource decisions within their locality, with a view to being able to govern in governance networks.



## **CHAPTER 7 - GOVERNANCE & LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Introduction**

The previous thematic chapters examined councillors' views on the democratic nature of the EU and the councillor role with an emphasis on the representative role. In seeking some understanding of the councillor role in respect of the EU, the thesis shows that the majority of councillors taking part in the research believe they have no role to play in regard to the EU. The majority of the councillors taking part in the research linked their views of what appears to be the undemocratic nature of the EU with a corresponding democratic deficit in respect of the development of the transition from government to governance at local level. Chapter seven considers the way in which local government is impacted in respect of the multi –level nature of the EU and in the English context specifically, in respect of the changes associated with the emergence of 'governance' at local level and what that means for local political actors. The thesis illustrates the more complex, interdependent environment within which local government and councillors operate, suggesting a move towards a more flexible pattern of public decision making.

The word 'governance' appears in a variety of academic disciplines including development studies, economics, geography, international relations, planning, as well as public administration. In the context of this thesis 'governance' refers to various new theories and practices of governing and the dilemmas to which they give rise including the dilemmas described by councillors in relation to unelected groups and individuals making public policy decisions, which affect citizens in their areas. It has long been held that government alone is unable to resolve all the tasks and demands placed upon it by society, in essence it is overloaded. Most advanced Western democracies are confronted by serious financial challenges exacerbated by the financial crisis in the 1980s and 1990s and the global financial crash in 2008/9. Thus, governments cannot use financial incentives to ensure compliance from external actors to the same extent as perhaps in the past. These financial challenges also forced the state to cut back public services, something which in turn prompts a search for new

strategies in public service production delivery. One such strategy is that of shared responsibilities in terms of public service delivery, to state civil society. There are, however questions to be considered rising out of these developments in respect of shared responsibility, what new forms and shapes the pursuit of the collective interest should take?

Over the past decades , numerous governments within Europe and beyond have sought to directly engage and include citizens with a view to more effective collaboration between the public, politicians and officials in making and implementing local-level public policy. Thus, with the growth of partnerships and policy networks, actors are interdependent and policy develops from the interactions between them. Policy networks are defined as sets of formal institutional and informal links between governmental and other actors through negotiated beliefs and interests in policy making and implementation (Rhodes, 2017).

The term policy network is used in three different ways within the academic literature. In the first instance as a description of governments at work, secondly as a theory for analysing government policy making and finally as a prescription for reforming public management (Rhodes, 2017). Moreover, a network is described as complex and dynamic: there are multiple overlapping relationships, each one of which is to a greater or lesser degree dependent on the state of others. The particular characteristics of a policy network include: a limited number of participants who deliberately exclude some individuals and groups; positive and effective interaction between all members of the group in relation to the policy issues; shared values and broad policy preferences between the groups (Rhodes, 2017). One such example which describes a positive outcome arising from a policy network was powerfully illuminated by one of councillors taking part in the research as follows:

*I built my reputation through my work as a trade union representative in the steel industry. I went all over Europe representing workers in the steel industry. When the government were closing the steel industries down there was money available*

*from Europe to help, but because the government didn't put all the relevant information forward we would have only got £1 million. I got together with the steel representatives and to cut long story short because of the work we did that amount increased to £30 million, so in later years as a leading politician I had lots of great working relationships right across Europe and doors were always open (Labour Councillor).*

What this quote clearly demonstrates is that a group with shared concerns about particular policy issues can through working together achieve much to benefit their particular communities. An historical example of a strong policy network was British local governments in the context of a restrictive financial regime, working together to seek funding from the EU in an effort to alleviate the problems of local economic development. Many local governments were involved in the campaign to reform the structural funds and extend the areas eligible for funding. The Coal Communities Campaign was active in specific campaigns to develop new EU programmes (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997).

Policy networks can however, vary along several dimensions including membership, integration and resources (Rhodes, 2017). Networks are described as a common form of social co-ordination and are just as important for private sector management as for the public sector and they rely distinctively on trust, co-operation and diplomacy (Bevir and Richards, 2009). The term policy network suggests a cluster of actors, each with an interest in a particular policy sector and the capacity to contribute towards policy success or failure. Policy networks within the EU tend to be discrete, distinct and to a large extent disconnected from one another, even when they are dealing with policies that are clearly connected. Many have diverse memberships extending to public and private, political and administrative national and European (Peterson, 2003). Typically policy networks work through interdependent relationships, with the intention of trying to secure their individual goals by collaborating with each other

(Bevir and Richards, 2009). In respect of policy networks responsible for policy development, the EU relies on committees of apolitical officials, experts and other stakeholders to broker agreement and move the policy agenda forward. Thus questions arise as to how often representatives and policy networks of lower tiers of government, who might participate in domestic policy networks, are excluded from the EU level of policy development and formulation. In essence policy choices are shaped and refined in bargaining between a diverse range of actors, including some who are non-governmental, though governments remain ultimately responsible for governance. Policy networks have long been a topic of study in the social sciences, and over time have become central to the literature on governance (Bevir and Richards, 2009).

On the level of local practice various approaches suggest a move towards a more participatory governance approach (Hertting, 2019). This approach has been given many names over time, including network governance, interactive governance and local participatory governance. The issues associated with 'governance' at local level were identified as a major concern for councillors. Thus, the concept of governance is an overarching theme identified for consideration in the thesis, with a focus on network and participatory governance at local level. The introduction of more direct forms of participation challenge or even contradict basic ideas about democratic accountability within representative democracies (Hertting, 2019). Pressures on democratic representation are perceived to be compounded by the growth of partnerships and networks.

The first waves of European consolidation reforms took place in the 1950s, 1960s, and the 1970s and were rooted in the economy of scale paradigm, stressing that local services may be delivered more cost effectively and with better quality in larger local government units. Reforms took place in several Western European countries but were also visible in Central and Eastern Europe where it was implemented without any democratic debate (Pawel Swianiewicz, 2010). In the English context, service sectors within local councils

were unable to achieve their objectives without creating networks with private and voluntary sector organisations. During the 1980s and 90s the narrative suggested that if local government was to succeed in its endeavours it must work in partnership with others. The narrative goes on to suggest that public sector management should primarily be concerned with 'getting things done through other organisations' (Copus et al., 2017). For a satisfactory understanding of contemporary political processes the concept of 'government' should be replaced by the notion of 'governance' in which public decision making concerning local issues increasingly involves multi-agency working partnerships and policy networks which cut across organisational boundaries in other words – local governance (Leach and Percy-Smith, 2001). From the 1980s onwards the narrative of network governance had a major impact on local politicians and council employees, collaboration across organisations and partnership working became common practice in some areas of local authority activity (Copus et al., 2017).

Much of what we know about councillors their roles and the activities they undertake, comes from a number of single-council cases. A common theme running through such studies is this idea of councillors being typical, common place citizens of their communities, whilst at the same time being holders of a unique political position. Councillors are granted by their citizens the right to make decisions on their behalf about their particular locality or at least the locality they represent and possibly beyond (the councillor may for example be politically involved at a level above their locality, perhaps at regional level). Thus the traditional notion in which 'local government is "what the council does"' has to be replaced by a conception in which public decision making concerning local issues 'increasingly involves multi-agency working, partnerships and policy networks which cut across organisational boundaries' (Leach and Percy Smith 2001 p.8 in Denters and Rose, 2005).

Critics of network governance suggest it fails to take account of embedded power relationships, long standing structures and institutionalised practices which are unlikely to allow actors the freedoms for networks to become self

organising. There is also the suggestion that the notion of organisations coming together to solve local issues is nothing new, elite actors working together in terms of self-interest as opposed to altruism, has always been an essential part of local politics and local government. If local political actors can narrate that they are improving the lives of the people they represent by working together with other elite actors they are more likely to stay in power. It is important to consider this issue in respect of councillors and their position both in local government terms and in terms of their relationships with non-elected decision making, influential actors within their locality and beyond. Consideration needs to be given over as to how within this arena of governance, they are able to fulfil their role as the elected representative within their locality.

Councillors and leading councillors in particular increasingly act within multi-layered governance networks, where councillors must interact in networks of different size and scope to exert pressure, pursue influence and use local political diplomacy to attempt to shape the decisions and policy of a vast range of organisations. It is not uncommon today to claim that external unelected bodies are better able to make key decisions about public policy than are elected councillors. But these bodies, unlike councillors, are not directly accountable to the communities through the transference of democratic legitimacy. Indeed, the Sovereign Council narrative argues that councillors and council employees should not give up power to self-governing networks that have no democratic mandate or accountability and only antagonise the democratic deficit. Nonetheless network governance prevails and councillors therefore, in representing their electorate must find ways to shape the actions of a number of public agencies (Copus, 2015).

Local political leaders and bureaucrats cannot now claim that they alone can and should make authoritative local decisions, nor is local government able to respond to the challenges of policy-making as effectively as it did before. In the past the legitimate forms of political participation created a central role where elected representatives organised into competing groups of political parties. Now other forms of political participation and the delegation of political authority

to micro-agencies suggest a challenge to local representatives to find ways of adapting to the new forms of politics, rather than replicate the patterns of the past.

In *Territorial Consolidation Reforms in Europe* Swianiewicz (2010) and his collaborators describe and analyse the experiences of individual countries in respect of the introduction of local government reform which in the main focuses on the fragmentation or consolidation of local government. The scholars seek to address questions related to all stages of the policy process: policy making, decision making, implementation and assessment of the outcome in relation to government reform. One question relates to whether there was any consultation with local government and the general public in terms of the process of implementation of the reform. They conclude that that very little consultation took place. Although debates over local government reform are almost perpetual tending to involve upper level and central state politicians as well as the media and specific interest groups, local councillors are in essence ignored in this debate and, their views are not sought nor their voice heard. It is noted that reform agendas that more directly concern local councillors are changes in democratic mechanism and in the local government power triangle: mayor, elected council and senior bureaucracy (Razin and Hazan, 2014). In their paper *Attitudes of European Councillors towards Local Governance Reforms: A North-South Divide*: Razin and Hazan (2014) suggest that Europe's North-South divide is found to be meaningful in respect of understanding the variations in attitudes towards local government reform (Razin and Hazan, 2014). The main argument presented here is that the national context has a major influence on attitudes of councillors towards local government reform. Notwithstanding the differences in attitude in respect of the impact of national contexts however, there is broad agreement that councillors are marginalised in reform discourse.

Returning to the narratives in respect of councillors, they are frequently referred to as posing problems in the democratic reform agendas rather than being a fundamental pillar of local decision-making. Moreover, it may well be the case that in some northern European countries such as the UK councillors are

already weary of substantial reforms that have taken place in recent decades and are sceptical about their outcome. As such they are not eager to further change the democratic nature of their local governments (Razin and Hazan, 2014).

All the member states within the EU are themselves unique, with differences in detail that are important for understanding the processes of local politics and government in each country. In modern European municipalities councillors are but one factor amongst many. They increasingly operate within a web of multiple local players who exert influence on the policy processes in various forms. In our globalised world a multiplicity of factors are becoming increasingly important in the municipal decision-making process. Such a governance network is defined as being a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependence where autonomous actors interact through negotiation which ultimately contributes to the production of public purpose (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007).

The EU itself has a vague character, a hybrid form neither political or international organisation, but something in between (Rosamond, 2000). Multi level governance in this context, as a metaphor used to depict the mature stage of the EU polity, in which authority is no longer vested within the nation state. Rather, authority is divided among various types of actors, involved in the decision making that simultaneously takes place within several levels. Multi-level governance at the EU level as an approach to the study of EU politics emphasises the interaction of many different actors who are able to influence European policy outcomes. Thus, across the EU member states, formal authority has been dispersed from central states both up to supranational institutions and down to subnational governments. Correspondingly decision making is taking place beyond core representative institutions and public/private networks of diverse kinds have increased at every level from the smallest to the largest scale (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

The traditional use of governance and its dictionary entry define it as a synonym for government. Yet in the body of literature on governance there is a



redirection in its use and import. Rather governance signifies 'a change in the meaning of government referring to a new process of governing; or a changed condition order, rule recall on all the new methods by which society is governed' (Rhodes, 1996, pp. 652 – 3 cited in Stoker, 1998). The processes of governance however lead to outcomes that parallel those of the traditional institutions of government. In essence governance is concerned with creating the conditions for collective action and organised rule. The outputs of governance therefore are not different to those of government. Rather, it is a matter of processes:

“to presume the presence of governance without government is to conceive of functions that have to be performed by any viable human system..... among the many necessary functions, for example, other needs wherein any system has to cope with external challenges, to prevent conflicts among its members... to procure resources... and to frame goals and policies designed to achieve them”, (Rosenau 1992,p3 cited in Stoker, 1998).

Though governance relates to changing relationships between state and society and a growing reliance in less coercive policy instruments, the state is still the centre of considerable political power. It is therefore appropriate to view governance as processes in which the state plays a leading role. Hooghe and Marks (2001), discuss the notion of two types of governance, type I governance dominates thinking in international relations among those describing the modification, but not elimination, of the Westphalian state. The nation state is not about to be replaced as the primary instrument of domestic and global governance, instead, the nation state is being supplemented by other actors, private and third sector, in a more complex geography (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

In type 2 governance, multiple, independent jurisdictions fulfil distinct functions. This leads to a governance system where, citizens are served not by the government but by a variety of different public service industries including the police industry, fire protection industry, welfare industry, health services industry, transportation industry, and so on (Hooghe and Marks, 2001).

Governance in different guises stands in contrast to older concepts that the state is monolithic and formal. In essence theories of governance typically open up the 'black box' of the state.

Though there is little consensus on the concept of governance, most scholars have reached agreement on the idea that participants in government and governance are different, and that the term governance is used in a variety of ways and has a variety of meanings (Rhodes, 1996; Stoker, 1997). Many researchers assume that governance refers to a set of institutions and actors, drawn from and also beyond government, focusing on the increased involvement of the private and voluntary sectors. The shift from government to governance has generated an increasingly important role for non-governmental actors.

There does appear to be some agreement amongst academic scholars that governance refers to the development of governing styles in which boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred. New forms of governing and the re-allocation of authority have gained the attention of a large and growing number of scholars in, political science and sociology. On the one hand, decision making has spilled beyond core representative institutions. Public/private networks of diverse kinds have multiplied at every level. On the other hand, formal authority has been dispersed from central states both up to supranational institutions and down to subnational governments. The process has been broad and deep (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Governance has a dual meaning; on the one hand it refers to the empirical manifestations of state adaption to its external environment, whilst on the other hand, governance also denotes conceptual or theoretical representation of coordination of social systems and, for the most part the role of the state in that process (Pierre, 2001).

The alternative theoretical view on governance looks more generically at the coordination and self-governance of various forms of formal or informal types of public-private interaction, in the main on the role of policy networks. Arguably therefore in the first approach which might be considered more state centric, the

main research problem is to what extent the state has the political and institutional capacity to 'steer' and how the role of the state relates to the interests of other influential actors. In the second approach, which is more society centred, the focus is on coordination and self-governance as such, manifested in different types of networks and partnerships (Pierre, 2001). Much of the debate in respect of governance refers to sustaining coordination and coherence among the variety of actors who have different purposes and objectives, actors such as political institutions, corporate interests, civil society, and transnational organisations.

Network styles of governance according to various differing perspectives are seen to be incompatible or complimentary to democracy, or part of a transition to a new settlement (Hoppe, 2011). Networks reflect complexity and interdependence amongst multiple actors, involve many none-elected actors with differing claims of legitimacy, play havoc with pillars of representative democracy like accountability, and have a relationship to representative democracy which is unclear. The traditional, hierarchical model of democratic accountability is challenged. On the other hand the democratic potential of networks is seen to lie in their inclusion of more stakeholders, the blurring of the liberal democratic distinction between state and society, and the opportunity to generate more direct participation from citizens (Sørensen and Torfing, 2007). The increasing prevalence of policy networks, calls into question conventional notions of what constitutes a representative and responsible political institution. To govern then, changes from acting through vertical chains of command and accountability in a variety of institutions to becoming a facilitator or regulator of what goes on in the public space in order to try to solve problems. Governance suggests collective problem solving in the public realm.

The public realm is described as a domain of strategies, techniques and procedures through which different forces and groups attempt to render their programs operable. In essence therefore governments steer rather than row. (Meehan, 2003). Local self-government however, through the electoral chain of command is impacted on when non- elected groups and individuals are

involved in public policy decisions. In respect of the EU, the shift from hierarchy and formal procedures to networking and informality, whilst allowing for extensive input, undermines political equality and control. In the EU multilevel governance system, democratic representation and political accountability become deficient when they are organised through territorial bound parliaments (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger, 2007). Some scholars who study the EU as a system of multilevel governance applaud the potential for participation, and the informality of multilevel governance (Majone, 2009; Moravcsik, 2002). However the selectivity of representation and the deficits of democratic accountability typical of local network governance are aggravated by the multilevel character of governance in the EU (Marks et al., 1996). Thus local government has the task of attempting to reconcile the myriad of levels and layers that constitute the arena of governance.

The ability for citizens to hold policy makers accountable is a basic assumption of democratic government. The greater the accumulation of power the greater the need to establish accountability. There appears however, to be little agreement as to how accountability can be achieved (Berg and Rao, 2006). A number of suggestions are put forward in the quest to provide the environment for achieving accountability, including open and competitive elections, a free press, public meetings and methods to ensure effective communication and information sharing. These approaches as well as mechanisms for imposing sanctions on policy makers can all be regarded as important pre-conditions for accountability. If however governance requires calling together of the resources and purposes of different institutions, an accountability deficit can be experienced at two levels: with the individual elements of the network and by those excluded from any particular network. Even if all members of the governance group are satisfied with the arrangements for the group to operate, a problem of accountability can still arise since all networks are to a degree exclusive. They are more likely to be driven by the self-interest of their members rather than a wider concern with the public interest or more particularly those excluded from the network.

Although the networks have a significant degree of autonomy, government, while not occupying sovereign position in this context, can indirectly and imperfectly steer networks (John, 2001). Broader networks defuse the lines of command and control so that it is not easy for citizens to identify who makes decisions. Local government on the other hand, for all its defects, make it easy for the citizen to identify decision makers. Governance recognises the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority. It sees government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide. Translating this notion of being able to 'steer and guide' to the level of the EU presents a significant challenge for local government and councillors.

When confronted with the complexity and autonomy of the system of multilevel network governance, there is a strong tendency for political leaderships to seek to impose order and issue directives. Tensions and difficulties with the institutions of civil society, as well as inadequacies in the organisations that bridge gaps between public, private and voluntary sectors may lead to governance failure. Failures of leadership, differences in timescale and horizons among key partners, and the depth of social conflict can all provide the seeds for governance failure (Stoker, 1998). Though there are differing theoretical perspectives in respect of governance from a normative viewpoint, public sector institutions in most advanced democracies have undergone unprecedented transformation in modern times and no settlement of the process yet appears in sight (Bevir, 2013). Thus, at local government level councillors are challenged by the ability of unelected actors to make decisions on public policies and resource expenditure within their locality.

The governing capacity of the councillor and council is defined as the ability to: focus resources (including legal, moral and political resources) and activity to transform their own political and public potential and strengthen it so as to bring about political action. The capacity to govern is either employed individually by the councillor or collectively through the council as a political and bureaucratic structure (Copus, 2015). Councillors however are also required to adapt to

changed societal expectations and modes of service delivery where citizens expect to be more engaged in the delivery of services. When local governance is inherently functionally fragmented however and this is exemplified by how different organisations developed and formed, concerns are raised as to whether local democracy can survive governance. Thus, Burns (2000) suggests:

“it is essential that the local governance system has built into it the capacity to integrate and mediate different fractions and to ensure that it has the organisational structures within which strategy can be developed. If these issues are not addressed, then the idea of local democracy as it has been advanced over the past two decades must be fundamentally altered” (Burns, 2000, p.970).

The significance of local government form is not always direct, intended and uniform, and specific forms of local government cannot maximise all the important concerns of local democracy at same time. Rather, each local government form carries certain risks and opportunities which need to be taken into consideration when designing and reforming local democracy (Berg and Rao, 2006). Some of the risks are associated with the implications for local government when established institutions are transformed. Moreover, it is important to understand the reasons for the reform in the first place and to question whether reform will bring about the desired effect on the democratic process or risk unintended consequences. Reform that involves the establishment of unelected agencies with decision making powers in respect of public policy and monies provides the opportunity for councillors to employ their mandate to hold disparate and potentially chaotic elements to account (Berg and Rao, 2006).

The goal of government is to maintain public order, provide public service and facilitate collective action (Stoker, 1998). Government refers to formal procedures and institutions which societies have created to express their interests, to resolve disputes and to implement public choice. The idea is that political systems have rules about political behaviour and mechanisms to

protect the rights of minorities and to ensure that the supply of public and other goods and services reflects the preferences of citizens (John, 2001).

Local democracy offers citizen's the potential to exercise their freedom, to express local identities in a manner that is different from complimentary societies. The idea here is that local political institutions can be closer to citizens than national government, and can offer the benefits of diversity. Elected local government was a key element to the consolidation of democratic rule in European states. Yet, it no longer has such an automatic and legitimate role when so many citizens and experts question representative institutions (John, 2001).

The deregulation of financial markets and the increased volatility of international capital have resulted in the nation state being less able to govern its economy. In addition, the introduction of managerialism into the public sector and the creation of semi-autonomous agencies replacing the more traditional governmental centres of command and control functions, appear to deprive the state of many of its traditional sources of power, policy capacity, institutional capabilities, and legitimacy (Pierre, 2001). Government has long been characterised by its ability to make decisions and its capacity to enforce them. In particular government is understood to refer to the formal and institutional processes which operate at the level of the nation state. In terms of traditional political theory, government refers to all institutions of the state and their monopoly of legitimate power. Governance on the other hand emphasises the role of non-state actors and reflects shifting pattern in styles of governing. Governance is a more flexible pattern of decision making by networks of individuals. The concept conveys the notion that public decisions no longer rest within hierarchically organised bureaucracies, instead lie with key individuals located in a diverse set of organisations, located at various territorial levels (John, 2001). Theoretical work on the notion of governance contemplates a shifting pattern in the move from government to governance.

This shift from local government to local governance, however, by no means suggests that governance takes place without government. Rather, it means a

redefinition of local government's role in local public affairs not wholesale retreat of local government. In modern democracies however, no one has exclusive decision making authority. This implies that everybody should be offered the opportunity to express his or her needs and concerns. Thus, the decision making process should be accessible for representatives (of any kind) as well as the non-activist, nonaligned citizens (Hertting, 2019). Arguably the right to participate in collective decision making is a vital element of democracy. In mature representative democracies however, the introduction of a more participatory approach to democratic governance is proving to be a challenge within a representative democracy. Thus, even where politicians may be willing to promote participation in decision making, this is 'tricky' in that it poses fundamental questions about the procedures and institutions of representative democracy (Hertting, 2019).

From the normative perspective, the core value of any democratic system is not mass participation in decision making, rather it is a focus on who has the mandate to make political decisions. Moreover, modern democratic political systems are not only representative but combine with a hierarchically arranged implementation structure for carrying out political decisions. Such an arrangement connects the input side of democracy to government output. The challenge therefore in relation to participatory governance is one of negotiating different ideas and perceptions about the role of citizens in terms of their interactions and accountability relations. If participatory governance is to be pursued with any level of serious consideration, it will challenge the organisational norms and current roles that are rooted in the idea of representative governance. During the interviews for this research, many of the councillors expressed their concerns as to the dilemmas associated with the trend towards unelected individuals and groups being able to make public policy decisions. As one councillor stated;

*Let me put it this way, when I was part of nine wards across, having my say was not too difficult, I was able to influence decisions going forward. Now with shared services I am involved in ninety- four*



*wards all trying to access services for their area, at least I am dealing with elected members but even so my voice has become very small in that crowd. Now, add to that situation all the non-elected bodies that have decision making power on public services, it's very difficult to have much influence on the decisions taken.*  
(Deputy Leader, Labour Council).

What the comment illuminates is the view among councillors that in the world of governance, the public official is required both to fulfil the formal mandate of office and to create cooperative, collaborative, and quasi –market arrangements with other state and non-state actors. What is also summarised in the quote is that councillors must now navigate a myriad of organisations, external to the council, in an attempt to influence, rather than control what they do. A new role in being an influencer of others has emerged within the governance orientation of the traditional structure of local government which goes hand in hand with a limitation of authority for municipalities as political institutions of local self-government (Hansen, 2002).

No other body or institution than the elected council can fulfil such a guardian role and accepting this role has become ever more important because of the inherent tendency towards particular and exclusive self and user interests in a local governance structure. As elected representatives, the councillors are, more important than ever, for ensuring and developing a democratic form of governance at the local level thereby carrying out their role as representatives of citizens. Moreover, if councillors are able to assert themselves in governance networks at local level, they may be able to counteract the issues of accountability associated with self-governing networks. Certainly, as the thesis shows, some councillors at both local and EU level are successfully actively involved in multi-level networks.

What follows is a series of comments made by councillors that illuminate the dilemmas many councillors experience when trying to exert their influence both inside and outside of the council, these dilemmas are compounded when working alongside a myriad of organisations that are in a position to make

public policy decisions that impact the areas the councillors represent. Citizens look to the councillor to be accountable for the decisions that affect their daily lives, regardless of whether the councillor can influence the decisions taken. Councillors acknowledge however that some policy decisions made both locally and at EU level may be beneficial to their local areas and the council overall if those policies are in line with what the council wants to achieve anyway.

*I got a bit of a shock when I realised officers and lay people on the Health and Wellbeing Boards are able to vote on decisions alongside councillors'. (Labour Councillor.)*

*If anybody is making decisions about spending public money they should be accountable to elected members for that area, but some of them think they don't even have to come to scrutiny to answer questions, problem is they don't have to come. (Labour Councillor).*

*It was bad enough when we got scrutiny, for a long time the only way back benchers could really have a say was in the group, now we are in meetings where we are the only elected members. The good thing is we are still at the table, and use the chance to put the council's point over, and many of these professionals haven't got a clue about local people half of them don't live here. (Conservative Councillor).*

*We don't do enough to support peoples understanding about the connection between the EU directives and the impact on local government, lots of people think it's all bad but it isn't and we should be better at explaining the benefits we get from the EU. To be fair though, it is easier to be positive if the policies coming out of the EU are broadly in line with our own thinking, then its fine we can use the directives to our advantage. (Cabinet Member Labour Councillor).*

*There are bound to be lots of different factions to deal with in the EU, it couldn't be any other way with so many countries involved. I*

*see that as an advantage, obviously different cultures have different ways of doing things but there are some things we can agree on. Because of the EU targets on environmental issues especially waste and waste management on recycling we were able to go from 4% to 41% in no time at all. It was brilliant; I doubt I would have got all that through without the EU. (Cabinet Member Labour Councillor)..*

*We have enough problems trying to influence our own Cabinet never mind all the different organisations we are involved with. I can't see anyway whatsoever we would be able to influence anything that the EU does. I suspect our MEPs' struggle if they are trying to influence twenty seven other countries. And our MEPs' are from different political parties I doubt they are able to influence each other. Local councillors have no chance. (Conservative Councillor).*

What these comments show us is the level of frustration felt by many of the councillors taking part in the research that arises from the particular arrangements structure and organisation of local government in England. Moreover, those frustrations are magnified by the complexity and multi-level nature of governance networks and the complex multi-level nature of the EU. Whilst European local government is confronted by a similar set of contemporary problems, its ability and resources to address those problems differs across the continent. Further, stark differences that exist in European local government systems and the variety of powers that municipalities hold, presents each nation of Europe with a separate set of institutional arrangements for addressing policy, political, economic and social issues. Therefore, the role of local government is specific to its national context, whilst sharing characteristics across Europe (Copus, 2013). Nonetheless though there are differences between states the institution of politics in most modern European states share some fundamental similarities. In the main modern European states are almost always run according to the principles of parliamentary government, a set of institutions that gives a particularly important role to political parties and parliamentary elections.

Reforms have an impact on the status of councillors particularly when opting for more personalised electoral systems, offering councillors new management tools, or conversely introducing more direct moulds of citizen participation less than the significance of representative democracy (Kersting and Vetter 2003) supporting a regime of formal rules and procedures to help shape positive interactions between individuals and groups which does not always play out as intended, and this is explained by a councillor in the research, thus:

*We have what we call Area Action Partnerships, it's a bit of a nightmare to be honest, local people are on the Partnership with us. What happens is Cabinet allocate a budget for the local area. We don't always agree on what needs doing, the members have been accused of not caring about our area because we won't do what these people on the partnership want. They keep telling us their job is to hold us to account. Now other community groups are getting involved, turning up at the partnership meetings. Now they are telling us we are not close enough to the people to know what they want but this bunch are, chokes me up. (Labour Councillor).*

## **Conclusion**

What previously were clearly the roles of government are now increasingly seen as more common, generic, societal problems which can be addressed by political institutions but also by other actors. Governance, in this context is how to maintain the steering role of political institutions despite the internal and external challenges to the state at central and local level. The chapter clearly illustrates the complex interdependent political landscape within which councillors enact their roles as local elected representative. We have shown that multi-level governance at the EU level emphasises the interaction of many different actors who are able to influence policy outcomes, which in turn impact on local government.

The research reveals that a small cohort of councillors are able to operate successfully within the multi-level governance arena of the EU, indeed embrace

the intergovernmental nature of EU activity and recognise the opportunities presented to the local authority in terms of improving the quality of life for their citizens. This group of councillors are active in terms of EU activity other councillors however, choose different priorities, moreover they may not be in a position to be active in EU matters or they may have little interest in EU matters. Rather, they prefer to concentrate on the work within their communities whilst leaving the responsibility for interaction with the EU institutions to councillors who hold that responsibility as part of their portfolio or indeed are simply more interested in pursuing the opportunities the EU offers to local authorities. The larger group of councillors are of the belief that it is not part of their role to be actively involved with EU matters thus they abdicate responsibility in respect of interaction with the EU. In respect of local governance activity however, many of the councillors struggle with the developments of different types of 'governance' including multi-level, network and participatory.

The complexity of interactions that now occupy the local political space does not suggest that local government no longer matters rather local government no longer dominates the local political policy arena. As the chapter shows, local government and councillors now operate within intergovernmental networks and within tiers of multi-level governance. The council however is the only electorally legitimised body. Thus, councillors have the opportunity to exercise their mandate and exert influence in governance interaction and take part in the only game in town (Copus, 2015).

Councillors, as elected representatives are confronted by the challenges of influencing the decisions and actions taken by independent actors within a web of relationships (Klijn and Skelcher, 2007). As illustrated through the interviews however, councillors are clearly deeply frustrated about the lack of power and influence both in relation to the EU and the plethora of other external bodies, public policy networks, and indeed as one councillor stated their lack of influence within the council itself.

"We struggle to influence what goes on in the council never mind anything else" (*Labour Councillor*).

Getting, maintaining and utilising political power and influence however requires a major and important skill set at many levels in the modern political landscape. Councillors must seek to develop relationships, build alliances and employ diplomatic skills in order to secure influence with their unelected colleagues. Councillors taking part in the interviews described the frustrations relative to their inability to influence decisions and exert power over decision makers who exist both outside of the council and indeed in respect of the EU, outside of the nation state.

The theme of the following chapter considers the concepts of political power and influence and crucially in addressing the research question, considers the strategies councillors employ to influence policy decisions and actions taken at EU level, impacting on local government.

## **CHAPTER 8 - POLITICAL POWER AND INFLUENCE**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on the issues associated with multi-level governance and governance networks, exploring the issues for local government and councillors within governing systems that address public problems in a complex context. As outlined in the chapter public decision making increasingly involves multi agency working partnerships and policy networks where councillors are less likely to be the only decision makers but with whom they must interact and seek to influence.

The concepts and characteristics of power and influence are pertinent to local political actors given the way in which local governments share a complex network of interactions with a range of private and public organisations, many of whom have different policy objectives, geographical boundaries and many of which are single service focussed unlike the multiplicity of services over which local government has a say. Therefore, in seeking to achieve some shared vision for their locality, councillors, and leading councillors in particular, must work by negotiation, compromise, coalition and alliance building and above all by exerting as much influence as possible over those organisations which, as we have shown, operate through complex multi layered organisations.

The chapter is in three parts. Part one briefly explores the concept of political power through consideration of academic literature with a view to considering the impact of power relations on local government and councillors. The second section of the chapter examines in some detail the concept of political influence. Considering how influence works is particularly important to the thesis given that though local government and councillors may be limited in respect of power relations in respect of the legal-formal arrangements, they may be able to persuade, negotiate and influence the decisions and actions taken by the bodies that are in a position to impact on local government.

By 'influence' is meant ability to get others to act, think or feel as one intends (Banfield, 2003). The issues relating to the concept of influence are particularly

important in respect of local political actors who, as we have shown, need to operate in a more multi-level governance environment, where councillors seek to secure influence within unelected networks who are engaged in developing public policy.

The final part of the chapter explores influence through a consideration of the strategies that actors employ in trying to achieve their goals. The focus here is on the resources that actors draw upon in attempting to shape present realities. The focus of this section of the chapter considers the notion of social and political capital and considers whether councillors utilise this particular resource to get things done.

Power has always been the most fundamental concept in the study of politics and arguably is absolutely central to any understanding of society. The power debate during the seventies when a singular perception of power was the accepted view however challenged the received wisdom. (Lukes 1974 p.6, cited in Clegg and Haugaard, 2013) argued that power is essentially a contested concept and many interpretations exist. Essential contestation refers here to issues that cannot be agreed empirically. Concepts become essentially contested when normative evaluations are disguised in what appear to be empirical statements. For example if we suggest that a set of political institutions are legitimate the latter is an essentially contested concept because it is an implicitly normative evaluative statement supporting certain political arrangements rather than simply an empirical statement. Nonetheless, the concept of power has been a core concept for as long as there has been speculation about the nature of social order (Clegg and Haugaard, 2013).

The assessment of both political power and influence in complex processes of decision-making is an important but also a difficult issue. Difficulties arise because power and influence in addition to being contested concepts are difficult to measure objectively, especially in multi level non hierarchical complex decision making (Arts and Verschuren, 1999; Clegg and Haugaard, 2013). The assessment of power and power relations relating to local government has historically been considered in respect of central local relations. In the first



instance, vertical power relations, that is between municipalities and upper level governments and secondly, horizontal power relations between the council executive and other political and administrative leaders within the municipality.

In respect of vertical power relations, the comprehensive review undertaken by Goldsmith (2002) suggests that central control of sub-national government has generally weakened. There has at the same time in some European countries been a strengthening of an intermediate tier of government between central and local government. Although the rise of regional government seems to be a general tendency across Europe, there are differences across countries. As we have seen throughout the thesis however, sub-national government in the English context remains subordinate to the centre. Elsewhere in terms of power relations, developments at regional level have little significance in that the municipalities remain relatively weak. Moreover, in spite of recent initiatives towards devolution in the United Kingdom the centre does not trust the local areas to manage their affairs (Bäck et al., 2006).

The concept of power seems to be one of the most unclear and controversial (Clegg and Haugaard, 2013). There have been numerous attempts to define power more precisely and conclusively and the complexity of power has long been acknowledged in the discussion of power. While the abundance of the accounts of power is complex the complexity is one of requisite variety. Moreover, though the normative perception of power is one of dominance, increasingly the conception of power as one of coercion represents a minority view. More recent articulations challenge this thinking, moving away from the 'common sense' view towards more systemic, less agent specific, perceptions of power that see it as more generally constitutive of reality (Clegg and Haugaard, 2013).

In their analysis of local government structures (Mouritzen and Svava 2002) consider the impact of horizontal power relations. In essence, they suggest, the political arrangements in any specific country are a compromise between three organising principles: layman rule, political and professionalism. Whereas layman rule means that citizens elected by the people should be involved

effectively and intensively in decision making, political leadership implies the concept of promoting value choices and energising policy systems, professionalism rests on the crucial distinction that where politicians respond to demands, professionals respond and seek to address needs (Bäck et al., 2006).

The key issue here is how political power is obtained, maintained, exercised and shared. Importantly however political leadership is the starting point for the development of a type of government. The scholars above suggest that political power is determined by the extent to which the council is controlled by one or more political actors and to what extent those actors have control over the executive. They distinguish four ideal types;

- *The strong mayor form, the elected mayor controls the council; this particular form may not work well in all English councils given that the full council is still the budget and policy making body. If the mayor is not part of a particular political party and cannot get majority agreement on decisions, though he or she has been elected by the people, power is reduced.*
- *The committee leader form, this is where the leader is chosen by the members, in the main by the majority political party or through agreement where a majority is not in place.*
- *The collective form, where there is an executive committee, similar to the leader and cabinet model as in England, however the leader can choose the cabinet members which implies that control is maintained;.*
- *The council manager form, where all executive functions are in the hands of a professional administration. The mayor in this case is the civic head involved in ceremonial functions only.*

Not only formal structures but informal institutional rules and norms are important in building the four types. Each of the types outlined above exist

within European countries and in some countries more than one of the types is in place. Regardless of their internal power relations however, as the thesis shows European local governments occupy a subordinate position within national state polities. Their authority is limited by upper levels of government, the nature and extent of those limitations differ over time, resulting in a variety of constraints with which they need to comply in addition to the potential for opportunities to expand their freedom to act (Bäck et al., 2006). Local governments however are vitally important for spreading power and for establishing authoritative organisations with a focus on local issues whose leaders are aware of the wishes of local groups. Thus, the power and authority to act on behalf of a local community, as put forward in the European Charter of Local Self Government, which establishes the right for municipalities 'to regulate and manage a substantial share of public affairs under their own responsibility and in the interests of the local population' (Article 3.1) it should be allowed to do so (Chandler, 2009).

Councillors taking part in the research however raised concern about their lack of power in relation to the EU, though some of the councillors believe that there are structures in place which may offer some opportunity to exert power and influence at the EU level. The findings of the research in this regard are crystalised and elaborated in the selection of comments from interviewees below and show the differing opinions about the possibility and potential for councillors to effectively influence the EU policy making;

*It concerns me that EU can override our nations policies, we don't want to relinquish power it's the same in the council we don't want to give power to all those in our area who make decisions. Councillors influence less and less because they don't know enough about stuff and there are not enough ways for them to get to know. (Liberal Democrat Councillor).*

*I feel we can influence policy coming out of the EU through the combined authorities and the LGA and other bodies. Some members from different councils do have an interest and want to be*

*involved but as I often say there are those that will and those that let them. Many of my colleagues say it's the executive's job, so let them get on with it. Most are not bothered until something happens then they complain because they haven't been involved. (Labour Councillor).*

*Councillors are very busy or may just be less interested and have lots of other things to do. We cannot influence anything that comes out of Europe. I wouldn't go so far as to say mushrooms but that roughly is where we are. We might though be able to use other bodies to influence, the LGA for example. We could go and see the MEP thing is we don't really do any of that. We just stick to the rules, that is because we are used to queuing. (Conservative Councillor).*

*Councillors have no influence no way not at all. EU policies are decided in Brussels by the Commission. Even if the MEPs' voted together which they rarely do there are twenty seven other countries different cultures different ideologies, like trying to herd cats. They can all play one off against the other and we have no say in any of it. We can't influence, we have other things to deal with and that is what we should concentrate on. (Conservative Councillor).*

The comments above illustrate the frustration councillors express in respect of power in relation to the EU and the differing views about the potential of effective influence and the differing views as to how political power is exercised. Thus the following section considers the concepts of power and authority with a view to exploring the avenues open to local government in respect of power and power relations.

### **Power and Authority**

Power is the ability to achieve one's ends in the face of resistance, often, but not necessarily, by means of physical coercion (Weber, 1978 p.215 cited in Clegg and Haugaard, 2013). Weber (1978) acknowledged that people can get

things done in a variety of different ways drawing on various resources. He distinguished between three types of legitimate authority, legal, traditional and charismatic. He defined domination or legitimate rule as authority, the capacity to get others to obey as a result of discipline. He views legal authority as impersonal and vested in organisations where the rules are respected through legal rationality. Weber understands authority as the institutionalised and legitimate exercise of power. Authority therefore presupposes a solid and empirically effective scheme of control sustained over time.

Traditional authority and charismatic authority are in different ways vested in persons, charismatic authority because the ruler is in whatever way a special person. Charismatic authority therefore is lodged neither on office or status but derives from the capacity of a particular person to arouse and maintain belief in him or herself as the source of legitimacy. Charismatic authority rests upon devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him. Power however is not a single entity, rather it represents a cluster of concepts which need to be understood in context. The following section considers how communities coming together can be politically powerful. Thus the local government community, through its various institutions as referred to by the councillors in their comments above, may offer opportunities through coming together to exert political power at the level of the EU.

### **Power and Policy Networks**

Understanding power as speaking and acting in concert Hannah Ardent (1958) suggests that power illustrates the human capacity for acting in common with others and concerns the power of a society in terms of its ability to exist, and self-empower as a community. Power is for her the counter concept to that of violence, she argues that power is present when people act together

power springs up between men when they act together... Power is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting speaking men, in existence (Arendt, 1958 cited in Arendt and Canovan, 1998 p. 200).

Arendt (1958) argued that power should be considered not just in terms of conflict but, rather as a capacity for action which individuals gain by membership of a social system. Here power is a relation people produce by acting and communicating together; it is not primarily directed at others. Arendt's approach to power, shares the insights that power is created by the social system, it is not reducible to coercive power is derived from shared social knowledge. Power in Arendt's view becomes a civic virtue, an essential element in phronesis, rather than its antithesis. Arendt suggests that all political institutions are manifestations and materialisations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them.

The assumption of consensus however, hardly begins to describe many contemporary organisational and societal situations which are far more likely to be characterised by value conflicts than value consensus. Nonetheless as we have shown, new practices of governance find political actors increasingly required to share the activity of governing with societal actors, linking plural stakeholders in complex networks (Clegg and Haugaard, 2013).

A number of scholars debate the status of power in policy network approaches which embody attempts to understand and explain new ways of governance in the context of changing interrelations between state, civil society and market. The focus of these enquiries is the power relations in interaction, with an emphasis on resource dependency.

Two kinds of network analysis is discussed. First, change within policy networks which refers to the way in which policy making involves a large number and variety of public and private actors from the different levels and functional areas of government and society. Central to this approach is the notion of interdependence among actors with more or less stable patterns of interaction between them. On the other hand, networks as a result of change are considered where processes such as globalisation, individualisation and developments in technology have deeply affected the relations among state civil society and market. From this perspective the model of the nation state appears to have lost its exclusiveness given the series of local, regional and global

networks established by actors from very different domains, crossing traditional borders of nation states and their divisions. These authors conclude that conceptions of power which combine structural and relational power provide a framework to better understand change within policy networks, not only as a result of developments within the network but also as a result of processes of economic political and social change (Goverde et al., 2000).

In respect of the power relations between member state governments and the EU, one councillor in the North of England, interviewed for this research summed up the issues relative to power relations from the wider perspective thus;

*My personal view is always positive about the EU but there are difficulties in that power seems to be devolved to the Commissioners and they take decisions for others and that does not feel democratic. But being part of a collective does give us a power base compared to others for example the United States of America and China, Russia. I believe as one voice in Europe we are better. On our own we have no influence anymore in the world, we are not as we were but the EU gives us a voice. As a power broker within the EU we should use this. (Labour Councillor).*

What we see here is a crystallising of the desire to have influence and a belief that such influence is possible alongside the reality that unelected elements of the EU - commissioners in this case-do not need to listen, respond or provide explanations or accountability. In such circumstances there is little influence in what the EU does but a vicarious influence in being a member of a body which influences even if it cannot be influenced itself.

### **Power and Democracy**

Democracy embodies a distinctive and historically unusual form of power, one in which the majority of the population living under the jurisdiction of some authority, exercise substantial collective control over how that authority behaves

(Tilly, 2013 pp. 70-87 cited in Clegg and Haugaard, 2013). Though a relatively simplistic statement it highlights the centrality to democracy of power relations between central authorities and the people nominally subordinate to them. Paradoxically, no democracy can work if the state lacks the power to supervise democratic decision making and be able to put its results into practice. State capacity is taken to mean the extent to which interventions of state agent's impact significantly on citizen resources and interpersonal connections.

There is little doubt that if we are to understand society we must first of all understand and focus upon power relations, according them epistemological priority over other conceptual issues both in terms of the broader manifestations of power, such as the constitution of society itself from above, and more diffusely in terms of the micro relations between individuals and groups from below. Whatever the perception of policy formation within the political arena it is vital to understand who makes and who vetoes decisions, how specific institutions determine the types of decisions made and the extent to which resources shape the possibilities of decision-making (Goverde et al., 2000). Arguably there will never be one theory of political power, and according to Haugaard (2000) nor should we wish for one, but convergent theorisation provides new conceptual tools which enables us better understand contemporary transformations of social order, possibly with a higher degree of sophistication than was previously possible (Goverde et al., 2000).

The thesis shows the dilemmas confronting local government in respect of the power relations between central, regional and supranational tiers of government and unelected policy networks. The thesis also suggests that in order to assert themselves in respect of public policy decisions and actions taken by those outside the council, councillors need to negotiate and influence those decision makers in the interests of their communities.

### **Political Influence**

In *Modern Political Analysis (MPA)* (1963-2003) Robert Dahl cited in (Stinebrickner, 2015) presents what he sees as the essentials of politics and political influence. He addresses and analyses seven forms of influence -



power, coercion, force, persuasion, manipulation, inducement, and authority. Essentially, Dahl declares, politics is simply the exercise of influence. Dahl's initial definition of influence (1963) argued that influence is an interaction among actors in which one actor persuades other actors to act in ways they would not otherwise act, this changes over time. His definition becomes one where influence is a relation among actors such that the wants, desires, preferences, or intention of one or more actors affect the actions, or predispositions to act, on one or more actors.

Dahl acknowledges the difficulties in attempting to define the term influence, he writes;

“although throughout history influence terms of been central to political analysis, most theorists seem to have assumed, as did Aristotle, that they needed no great elaboration, presumably because their meaning would be clear enough to men of common sense. Even Machiavelli, who was fascinated by the play of power, used a variety of undefined terms to describe and explain political life. In fact, the last several decades have probably witnessed more systematic efforts to tie down these concepts than have the previous millennia of political thought.....As a result there has been a vast improvement in the clarity of the concepts; yet it is still true that different writers do not use ‘influence’ terms in the same way: one man’s ‘influence’ is another man’s ‘power’.” (1970, pp.15-16 cited in Stinebrickner, 2015).

Dahl embodies ‘influence’ as the overarching term to denote human actors intentionally shaping the behaviour of other actors. Dahl goes on to suggest that forms of influence are said to highlight differences in the means by which influence is exercised. He goes on to argue that forms of influence distinguish among various hows and whys of influence. Considering the way in which the seven forms of influence can be exerted, inducement suggests that influencers can employ rewards; power implies that sanctions or deprivations can be employed; force includes physical pushing, shooting; coercion employs the

threat of force ; persuasion through the use of rational and truthful communication; manipulation which relies on intentionally false and misleading communication. Finally, influence can be exerted via authority where the perception by the actor over whom influence is wielded, is that it would be proper, right or morally good to obey such authority, said to stem from legitimacy and is especially efficient and attractive to influence wielders and possibly to those who are influenced as well.

Influence means the modification of one actor's behaviour by that of another. Further, influence is to be distinguished from power, though power may be converted into influence but is not necessarily so converted at all, or to its full extent. The issues associated with political influence emerged as an important issue for the councillors taking part in the research. A major issue for the many of the councillors taking part in the research relates to the role of the MEP. The comments below illustrate the perceived failure of the MEPs to communicate to local political actors as to their activities in respect of the EU.

*I don't think the council can influence anything really. I don't even know where EU stuff would sit. Possibly there is some failure on the part of the MEP to communicate. Really that is their job not the councillors. (Conservative Councillor).*

*There is no system in place to let you have any influence, I mean it's hard enough to influence at local level, never mind beyond that. The MEP has got too big an area to cover, How would I as a ward councillor be able to put the views of my residents to Europe. If it was through the MEP I would struggle I have never met my MEP. (Conservative Councillor).*

*I am not sure there is a structured role for local councils to influence the EU. Obviously I would not expect to just go straight to Europe but I have never heard anyone anywhere talking about the EU in relation to local government. I have never come across a situation*

*where local government and councillors are even considered (Labour Councillor).*

*We might be able to influence in lots of ways as a whole council through the MEP but we don't do it. As councillor I have never had any contact with the MEP, only comes around at election time looking for campaign support. At home we have to deal with LEPs (local enterprise partnerships) and CCGs' (clinical commissioning groups) and a load of other bodies. We have enough to do trying to influence them to make the right decisions for our area (Labour Council Leader).*

The comments above go some way towards illustrating the frustrations expressed by many of the councillors in respect of having any political influence in relation to the EU. Moreover, frustration extends to the role of the MEPs' and how they interact or otherwise with councillors. It is acknowledged that the MEPs' have a huge task in representing such large areas and so many of the electorate, in their representative role in Brussels. Moreover, as has been well documented, citizen turnout to elect the MEP's to the European Parliament is very poor which suggests that people are not really interested in EU affairs. The thesis shows that the majority of councillors taking part in the interviews believe that there are others best suited to interact with the EU thus abdicating responsibility for EU activity. Moreover, we need to have a greater understanding as to if and how councillors influence others and what tools, if any, they use to do that. The lack of influence however didn't diminish some councillor's enthusiasm for the membership of the EU; or that influence was not even secured vicariously.

In considering government as patterns of influence Banfield directs attention beyond the legal –formal arrangements in respect of how things are supposed to be done, to the much more complicated arrangements to how they are “really” done (Banfield, 2003). Power and influence is like capital it can either be consumed or invested. Nonetheless the more kinds of power and influence an

actor has, the greater the probability that he can secure control in a given case. The probability of agreement tends to increase as the correspondence improves between the kinds of power that power holders have at their disposal and the kinds to which actors will respond.

### **Councillors and Political Influence**

Any civic conflict to be managed, if it is to be settled at all, is managed by the politicians not some shadowy power elite. One example is where in this case, the political leader, allowed every interest to have its say, postponed decisions until some common ground could be found and then 'encouraged' those involved towards that direction (Banfield, 2003). Therefore, the outcomes were less the result of decisions than of protracted exercises in political influence. Banfield (2003) also concluded that, politicians, because of the time they spend evaluating the probable consequences of an action, tend to improve the outcome, even if that means that they decide nothing needs to be done. The workings of government are best understood by considering the difference of opinion and interests that exist and the issues that stem from these differences, and at the ways that institutions resolve them (Banfield, 2003).

As we have shown, given the multi-level nature of government and governance councillors need real opportunities to influence strategic decisions about the way in which those decisions impact upon their communities. Therefore, consideration of whether councillors believe they have or have not got political influence is a significant matter

Drawing on their work concerning the perceived influence of different local actors over local politics, local authority activities and influence on the Municipal Council, across a range of European countries, Pluss and Kubler( pp 203-219 in Egner et al., 2013) found that leading public actors have substantially more influence than do civic actors. In every participating country however, the perceived influence of municipal councillors (non-executive) occupies an average position regarding influence in local politics and local authority activity. Moreover, there is no apparent pattern concerning geographic location, the type

of local government system or the party system. Most of the countries surveyed belong to the 'welfare –state' model where, emphasis is placed on efficient service delivery and local politicians are expected to be good managers. Thus, according to Goldsmith (1992) it is not the principal duty of politicians to promote the interest of the local community

The results of the investigation show that, according to the councillors surveyed, public actors occupy a dominant position in local politics. However, it is relevant public actors, such as the mayor and leading councillors who are most influential in respect of local authority activity and local politics. With a focus on the issues associated with community governance, the writers conclude that in most cities and countries surveyed, the role of municipal councillors appears to remain unchanged. Local councillors stick to their traditional representative role by aggregating preferences via their parties and looking to control the activities of the municipal administration. Thus, those councillors not in leading positions do not regard the task of influencing and co-ordinating community governance as an essential competence in the councillors' repertoire. Thus raising questions as to how councillors, in their representative role, are willing and able to influence policy decisions on behalf of their communities (Egner et al., 2013).

Research carried out by Rysavy (pp. 161-180 in Egner et al., 2013) in respect of similarities and differences between executive leaders and councillors, in this case mayors, suggests that mayors themselves declare that they are much more influential than individual councillors do. These executive leaders, irrespective of the local government regime consider themselves to be more influential in local matters than any of the other actors within the local political arena. The perception of influence , and even more so the perception by one of the key actors, is not necessarily a valid indicator of actual influence patterns (Denters 2006 pp 271-285 in (Bäck et al., 2006).

On the other hand, results of Dutch research indicates that perceptions of influence by key local actors matched the outcome of more sophisticated analysis, indicating that mayoral perceptions relating to influence provide us with information on the actual influence patterns.

For our purpose however and in addressing the research questions as to what strategies do councillors employ to influence or mitigate the impact of EU policy decisions on local government? The following section considers the concepts of political and social capital with a view to exploring the strategies councillors employ in attempting to influence both at EU and local level.

### **Resources for Influence**

Considering the many and varied ways in which humans, whether individually or collectively, attempt to achieve their objectives and to assist or obstruct others in the achievement of theirs. Citing Wong's (1997 p.23) definition of power as 'intended and effective influence' Jenkins (2009) suggests that rather than attempting to differentiate different kinds of influence, we should seek to explore the different kinds of resources that people utilise to get things done. (Richard Jenkins pp. 140-156 cited in Clegg and Haugaard, 2009). Classifying and distinguishing types or forms of power and authority appear not to be the best way forward. Rather, work with a broad category of power as efficacy, essentially how people achieve their ends and fulfil their purposes. Whilst adopting this position however it is important to acknowledge that efficacy comes in many guises and speaks with many voices: regardless of the context, there are many ways and means that people can apply to the pursuit of their ends. Further, resource in one context, or for one person, might be a disadvantage in another, or for another: a reputation for dishonesty, for example may facilitate some transactions and prevent others, as might being tidily turned out and well presented.

Evidence suggests that in seeking to achieve their ends, people routinely improvise, using whatever resources are hand. This is not to suggest that what counts as a resource is universal, or that the local mores which influence the definition and treatment of resources are irrelevant, but it does mean that maximising, husbanding and investing are recognisable in the basic human strategic repertoire, not least because resources are always in uneven, and imperfectly predictable, supply. Many of the councillors taking part in the research demonstrated that they are well aware of the need to identify the

resources they have to hand in order to enable them to act effectively for the benefit of their communities.

Whilst acknowledging the spectrum of variation in individual physical or intellectual competencies and the impact of psychological capacities, Jenkins(2009) nonetheless concludes that these variations, however, and in part are emergent products of interaction and institutions. They are socially constructed. Therefore, rather than asking why some individuals rather than others come to exercise power and influence his focus is on the collectively defined and shaped resources that individuals may bring to bear on achieving their objectives.

What is viewed as a resource and what can be done with it is locally and contextually defined. Further, it would appear that in order to exercise influence, an actor must have the potential power or ability to influence decisions and control resources. The outcome of much of the research referred to above clearly concludes that councillors in leading positions perceive themselves to be more influential than municipal councillors. There are however contextual issues to be taken account of, it may be that 'back bench' councillors are influential, not necessarily in respect of higher tiers of government but at the level of their communities, in addition to those in leading positions influencing at higher levels of government.

It is therefore, important to consider what tools councillors may have in their repertoire which might support them to have some influence on decisions made by both the designated decision makers within the municipality, unelected policy and decision makers and those operating at the level of the EU, whose decisions impact on the communities represented by the councillors.

As we have shown in chapter six of the thesis, a number of councillors in describing their activities within their community leadership role, demonstrated that they were influential in getting things done to support the people they represent. They were able to achieve success in the particular endeavour through their ability to build relationships with others both within the council

including officers and members and within the community. In other words, are influencing through the use of political and social capital. In essence, some of the councillors are telling us that whilst they are not influential in respect of EU activity and many describe a level of frustration in relation to governance networks comprising unelected decision makers, many are influential in achieving outcomes which impact positively for the people in their local ward areas.

One of the councillors commented thus about the importance of communication with people in his local area and when it is needed he is able to harvest the good will he has built up through his genuine care and concern for the people he represents;

*I don't think it would matter what political complexion I am well known in my area. I take time out to talk to people, show them some respect I do the same in the council. Then when something crops up that needs sorting we are able to sort it because the good relationship is there (Conservative Councillor).*

Another councillor reinforced the importance of building relationships with officers of the council and ensuring respect for others, which results in effective working relationships which benefits the councillor and in turn benefits the community that is represented;

*I make sure I know everybody in the council. I try not to bother officers but I know I can contact them if I need to and they always help me. That's because I take the bother to get to know them, some members are disrespectful to officers, daft that is, you get nowhere by being unfriendly or thinking you can lord it over people. (Independent Councillor).*

In other words, councillors are investing their political capital, drawing it down when there is a need to utilise it for the benefit of their communities.



It is generally accepted that capital is a resource, and that there are different kinds of capital, notably capital relating to economics where the notion of investment, maximisation and husbanding are familiar concepts. Moreover, capital can be increased and decreased. The notion of capital, without losing its original monetary sense has been taken up in a range of settings and in pursuit of a range of intellectual and political projects.

In terms of resource management, words such as maximisation, husbanding and investment sit easily alongside a word such as capital, in particular for our purposes the notion of social and political capital to which we now turn.

Social capital is understood, albeit with different emphasis, as a resource to which individuals and groups have differential access and which they can use. Social capital is a way of considering social connections and the character of communal life as resources upon which people draw, which along with other kinds of resources, may be a means by which people can improve their lives and develop their neighbourhoods and communities (Jenkins, 2009 pp. 140-156 in Clegg and Haugaard, 2009). However, access to resources is as much a matter of exclusion as inclusion. Individuals, groups and categories of people can be said to have more or less social capital. Further questions are raised as to how social capital can best be utilised in the pursuit of political objectives.

Although not the originator of the concept of social capital, Robert Putnam (2001) has been its chief publicist. For Putnam 'social capital' refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and co-operation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 2001). For Putnam, by analogy with the ideas around physical capital and human capital- tools and training that strengthen human productivity, the idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value. Putnam's argument is that the most important factor in explaining good government is the degree to which social and political life within a region approximates the ideal of a civic community. People learn to trust one another through face to face interaction in associations and informal social networks; norms of trust and reciprocity 'spill over' into society at large (Lowndes and Wilson, 2001). The role of political capital is understood in the

context of a two-way relationship between civil society and government. Governments and local governments in particular shape the conditions in which social networks thrive. Moreover, whilst the governance of an area is affected by social capital, it is also an important influence upon political capital. The thesis shows that councillors are expected to navigate and make sense of diverse groups within their localities, including civic and community networks. The interviews with many of the councillors taking part in the research illustrate their ability to accrue social capital which often provides the opportunity to capitalise on political capital.

### **The Relationship Between Social and Political Capital.**

Social capital is typically reflected in the standing a person has in organisations, network partners and communities, and the concurrent ability to draw on the standing to influence actions of others. Social capital becomes the social grease of interpersonal relations that provides co-operative support to help ensure the success of endeavours

A complimentary set of actions that needs to be undertaken by local councillors both in respect of their role in designated leadership positions and in their community leadership role, involves the building of political capital. One of the council leaders interviewed for the research explained things thus;

*I have always believed that the best way to achieve anything is through developing proper relationships with people. Getting to know them, putting the time in. When I became Chairman of the Regional Board I visited all twenty two Authorities, met all the Leaders and Deputy Leaders on their own ground regardless of party politics. I talked to them about the issues in their areas and pledged to wherever possible, suspend party politics in the interests of the people of the region. It didn't work all the time but most of the time it did. I also met with the various Fire and Police Authority Chairman. I was able to develop really good relationships with the politicians involved in various EU programmes. Initially the*

*politicians were not involved in any meaningful way. It was mostly officers that ran things. I changed all that purely through developing relationships with both the officers and the politicians.(Labour Council Leader).*

A non –executive councillor summed up her strategy for getting things done thus;

*I am a good communicator , can speak with everyone in the group, we are a diverse group of councillors who in normal life would not mix, so myself and my husband who is also a councillor set up various social events which members got involved in , it really works, getting together outside the group , sorting stuff out. I have also worked to develop good relationships with the opposition. I know everybody and want to work well with other people. (Liberal Democrat Councillor).*

What we see from both a leadership and non-leadership role is that councillors recognise the importance of communication-particularly with a ‘hands-on’ approach to communication. Network building and seeking to develop alliances or coalitions around specific issues, to enhance political capital, can have benefits for leaders and for councillors who seek to reach out to their communities.

Most writers and concerned actors who invoke the term political capital assume that its meaning is understood. It is inferred to be an entity which political actors possess, build up and spend. However, a definition of “political capital” is typically never stated—the reader or observer is left to determine their own definition based upon the politician’s or journalist’s usage of the term. The subjectivity is not reflective of what political capital conceptually means in and to the political arena.

Some attempts have been made to clarify the concept of political capital. The dimensions of individual political capital include: having reputational capital, in

that the individual is known across their political arena; as having the political skill for getting things done; representative capital; reflecting the constituent support and or legitimacy that the individual may acquire/ be granted using his/her reward; positional, expert legitimate and referent bases of power (López, 2002). Political capital is not the same as the 'social grease' attributed to social capital but is a capacity that rests within individuals remove obstacles to co-operation due to their political goodwill as perceived by others.

Considering political influence, political leadership invests in political capital. the political head gets his stock of influence by "buying" a bit here and a bit there from the many small owners who are endowed with it by the constitution makers (Banfield, 2003). Thus the individual might consume rather than invest influence, but if he/she consumes it for very long, he/she would be out of business (Martti Siisiainen, 2000). Political capital is a form of symbolic capital, it is credit founded on credence or belief and recognition, or, more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credits by which agents confer on a person the very powers that they recognise in him. Much of the research in respect of political capital is linked to political leadership. Leaders however, can be found in any number of arenas. Individuals at the helm of trade unions, churches, social movements, community organisations and even business companies are widely thought of as important public leaders. Although they do not have the power of office and may be politically motivated, they very often do have the power vested in them by supporters. They also have ideas, access, and moral authority to shape public problem solving in important ways (Rhodes and Hart, 2014). Moreover, from the perspective of local government there is an expectation that councillors will have a distinctive leadership role enabling them to weave and knit together the contributions of the various local stakeholders in the context of local governance. They may be aided in this endeavour through the utilisation of social and political capital. Local political leadership is said to be the art of circulating political capital (Kjaer, 2013). The findings from the research show that, through their ability to build relationships and utilise their contacts built up over time through their own efforts, councillors are able to improve the lives of individuals and groups within their communities.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has considered the concepts of power and influence and introduced the notion of resources as a means of power and influence. The level of frustration experienced by the majority of councillors with regard to the lack of power and influence around the decisions taken at EU level was highly evident within the data. The chapter also shows the level of frustration felt by a number of councillors directed towards the MEPs and what is viewed by the councillors as their lack of communication and interaction with all councillors at local level about EU matters. Moreover, many of the councillors who participated in the interviews are clear that responsibility for EU matters lies with the MEPs on behalf of the EU and to greater extent, with leading Councillors from within the council. Thus, they (study participants) themselves abdicate any responsibility for EU activity. It is however acknowledged by these councillors that the size of the geographical area and the number of people represented by the MEP is a barrier to any worthwhile intercommunication between local government and the MEP.

Conversely, there are clear examples where councillors are active and influential at their local ward level, where they utilise the reputational capital they are able to build through their willingness and ability to develop effective working relations with the people in their communities and in the council. Thus councillors are achieving effective outcomes for the people in their localities.

## **CHAPTER 9 - FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **Introduction**

The thesis explored the councillor role in respect of interaction with the EU in respect of the EU impact on local government. The focus of the research was on how councillors have responded to the impact of the EU on local government in order to enhance their and their councils influence in European wide policy development towards local government. The study also considered what strategies do councillors employ to influence or mitigate the impact of European wide policy decisions on local government and further which councillors are more likely to be engaged in EU activity and how do they utilise the opportunities this presents. There are numerous studies on local government and the role of the councillor which over time have gleaned deep and rich narratives from councillors about their role as the elected representative of their communities as demonstrated throughout the thesis. The thesis drew both on the studies of local government and councillors by academic scholars and the author's long history and experience as a senior manager in local government, working closely with councillors.

The thesis provides, for the first time, a four-fold classification of councillor behaviour in respect of councillor response to the EU. The classifications are identified and highlighted through the comments made by councillors during the research process. First are the active councillors. The analysis of the data shows that a small number of councillors respond proactively to the EU and employ strategies which enable them to utilise the opportunities that interaction with the EU presents in improving the quality of life of the citizens in their communities. The analysis shows that this specific group of outward looking councillors are in leadership positions within their councils. The analysis also shows that the majority of non-executive councillors are not active in relation to the EU choosing instead to concentrate on their role within their communities taking a more inward focus, thus abdicating any responsibility for EU activity suggesting that the responsibility for EU interaction lies with those in leadership positions and other elected politicians, namely the MEPs. The third category is

one which shows that a small number of councillors are anti EU whilst the fourth category identifies an equally small number of councillors who are ambivalent towards the EU demonstrating that they have no interest in EU matters.

As discussed in depth in chapter two, the investigation suggested an approach that is qualitative in nature and, one that is underpinned by a constructivist-interpretivist ontology. The outcome of three councillor focus groups helped to frame the research question. After consideration and exploration of the methodological approaches to research, the decision was taken to gather data through the use of semi-structured interviews. The method of analysis chosen for the study was a qualitative approach of thematic analysis.

The chapter reports the findings from the research and is organised around the four overarching themes and the two sub- themes interpreted from the data by the author. The author played an active role in identifying themes, selecting those of particular interest to the study, thus interpreting the data and creating the links as they are understood by the author throughout the research process. The themes are as follows;

- *Democracy & Sovereignty & the EU*
- *Councillor Role & the EU*
- *Governing and Governance & the EU*
- *Political Power and Influence & the EU*
  - *Sub-themes Community Leadership; Political Capital.*

The final section of the chapter draws conclusions relating to the research.

## Theme 1 - Democracy & Sovereignty & the EU

As we have seen from the literature review in chapter five, there are those who argue that the EU does not have a democratic deficit and in contrast, others who cast doubt on the EU's democratic credentials. This approach is divided between those who view the democratic deficit as insurmountable given the inherent limitations in the EU democratic capacity, and those who suggest that it can be resolved through constitutional engineering. Through the various narratives of the participants there was implicit and explicit reference to the concept of democracy in relation to the EU. The comments from the councillors fitted into the debates on the notion of the democratic deficit of the EU as discussed in chapter five. Moreover, the literature review and comments from councillors also reveals the different understandings about the underlying assumption that the EU somehow goes against the sovereignty of the nation state. One councillor summarised this view thus:

*I am pro-Europe but I do have some concerns about our ability to make decisions for ourselves as a nation. As I see it the country is the sovereign body and we should hang on to that (Conservative Councillor).*

Whilst another councillor summarised a different view of thinking thus:

*I have no involvement in the EU. I don't know anybody who is involved to be honest. It is too big and too complicated to make any sense of I don't know who is in charge. I thought when we first went in it would be a trading block. Now there are all sorts of daft regulations. You see one rule for all doesn't fit everybody; there are different circumstances to take account of (Labour Councillor).* The view expressed here was reinforced by another councillor, thus:

*It is just a minefield, the remoteness detachment it's too far away. National government seems miles away. My personal view is that the relationship with the EU has been difficult, an awful lot of feeling*



*we don't seem to get a fair crack of the whip. It's too unwieldy, too high too complex. The info about it might be there but we don't have the expertise here in the council. Besides we get lots of information about lots of stuff, difficult to sort it al. (Labour Councillor). Yet another councillor commented:*

*I think we should have had a common fiscal policy and that in my view will happen. One should ask from time to time what the EP (European Parliament) is for, Angela Merkle is supposed to be the most powerful person in the EU seems to me like one country is dictating the rules. There is a problem with democracy in our country just in the EU it's wider. And the MEP relationship again, MEP's the only thing I see as a link with them is where we might be interested in funding, I don't really think there is a serious link. Might be a link with the business community I don't know (Conservative Councillor).*

The theme of distant and confused decision making was echoed by a Labour councillor, thus:

*I don't think people; including me have any understanding about the EU and how it works, even though we have benefited from it with EU funding. I think the problem is we don't really know how decisions are made (Labour Councillor).*

The comments above elaborate the findings of the research that the majority of the councillors believe that decisions taken at EU level are made by remote and unelected bureaucrats over which MEPs and politicians at other levels of government within the member states have little or no control. Thus, from the perspective of the majority of the councillors taking part in the research, as displayed by the elaborative comments above, the EU does not operate democratically. Given that the majority of the councillors believe the EU is undemocratic, a surprising number nonetheless concluded that it is better to be a member of the EU than not. Few of the councillors suggested that it would be

better to leave the EU. Moreover, although professing to know little about the EU, councillors identified what they saw as the benefits from membership of the EU. Primarily that perceived benefit was for the nation states overall, especially in relation to the superpowers, rather than to local government. They also highlighted health and safety and environmental and employment policies as benefits. In addition, many of the councillors identified what they perceived as benefits at local level citing access to funding which is used to improve and often regenerate local areas as well as support for training and education, especially for young people.

The findings also reveal that a number of councillors have a particular view of citizen participation in respect of contribution towards policy decisions, in line with the studies carried out by a number of scholars. The view expressed by some of the councillors is that citizens can let them know what they want but that it's the councillors' 'job', having weighed everything up and then on balance, make the decisions. Whilst others believe there should be more public involvement in decision making. A councillor interviewed for the research elaborated this point, thus:

*Most councillors now don't make decisions, the Cabinet do. We should open up more to the public if there is an important issue we should be helping people to lobby (Labour Councillor).*

The link between the notion of democracy in respect of the EU and the concept of sovereignty of the nation state becomes clear here and was further highlighted by a number of the councillors though there were differing views as to the impact on sovereignty of EU membership As one councillor commented;

*There isn't really such a thing as sovereignty anymore, not the way people understand it anyway. I'm sure most countries think they are sovereign but what they think doesn't matter if somebody decides to invade them. I think it's a waste of time talking about sovereignty. (Liberal Democrat Councillor).*

Whilst another posed an entirely different view of sovereignty;

*We have been arguing about the EU for donkeys' years, and we will keep arguing about it, is it taking over? Who is in charge? Are we losing sovereignty? Well I think that will never happen. We are very proud to be a sovereign nation and we always will be (Conservative Councillor).*

Thus, competing views of sovereignty were displayed by councillors in the research which reflects differing approaches, explored in the thesis about the way in which democracy offers a foundation for tolerance, where different identities, cultural forms and interests can be discussed and negotiated (Held, 2006). Moreover, the thesis also shows that the debates about the democratic legitimacy of the EU, reflects a wider discussion challenging advanced industrial democracies, about which local government and councillors can make a considerable contribution to resolving.

The findings from the interviews, cited throughout the thesis, showed that the more proactive, innovative and politically ambitious councillors engage with the EU to ensure that every opportunity to uplift their communities through support from the EU is utilised; to develop effective working partnerships with other like minded local government organisations; to increase their political status, influence and power base; to work wherever possible outside of party political lines whilst at the same time gain political advantage at levels above their political position.

## **Theme 2 - Councillor Role and the EU**

Chapter six captures much of the debates relating to what the councillors' role might be and how councillors might best carry out their role in a representative democracy (Bäck et al., 2006; Barnett, 2013; Barron et al., 1991; Copus, 2015b; Denters and Klok, 2013; Groot et al et al., 2010). As is pointed out in the chapter however many of the roles put forward for councillors vary according to their source. Moreover, as discussed in chapter three, trends developments and changing organisational contexts in local government appear to have been

introduced with little consideration of the implications for the councillor role. As reviewed in the literature in chapter four, the notion that European integration and Europeanisation impacts at local level, thus, potentially has implications for the councillor role.

As well as describing their understanding of their councillor role during the interviews, many of the councillors were keen to point out what their role and indeed local government's role did and did *not* entail particularly in respect of the EU. The following comments from councillors taking part in the research, provides an insight as to the way in which councillors view their role as the mandated representative of the people in their communities. One of the councillors shared his view of the role and his concern about how the councillor is perceived, which neatly crystallised an important current of thinking uncovered by the thesis:

*I see being a councillor as public service. I don't think the people see it like that. Bit down on the role, it's near impossible, public don't know what you do don't know what we are for. I don't know what we can do about it. I don't think politicians are the right people to talk to people. Politicians are not at all popular. Many people would abolish politicians tomorrow. We have lay people as councillors, why do people take it on. Professional on £100,000 a year councillor on £10,000 who is in charge? Its councillors who have to explain about cuts in services and staffing. So plenty of reasons why a person wouldn't do it (Labour Deputy Leader).*

Another councillor reinforced the comment above in relation to the way in which the public perceive councillors as not being able to effectively represent them. The comment below also illustrates the tensions experienced by many councillors in trying to represent diverse and competing views amongst the community whilst at the same time attempting to represent their ward, the council and the wider community.

*I was involved in a planning application, my ward colleagues didn't want it, the community doesn't really want it but I really supported it. There are a group of very active residents against the proposal. One of them said I was not properly representing him, but I took the wider view and believe I supported the majority. That is my role, to work in my ward, to stand by my view. That is hard enough without taking more on (Liberal Democrat Councillor).*

Another councillor interviewed for the research elaborated the views of many of the councillors taking part in the research as to the weakening of their role in the council, especially given the executive/scrutiny arrangements in place at local government level in England.

*We are very ineffective as ward councillors now, over the years our role has got weaker. Cabinet don't have to even consult with anyone, and of course they are briefed by officers. We can do little more than litter picking around our wards never mind get involved in matters to do with Europe (Labour Councillor).*

The findings show that many of the councillors' taking part in the research were concerned about their inability to make a meaningful contribution in respect of decision making within the council. The notion of being involved at EU level in terms of their role was for them too far removed. The following quotes from councillors illuminate their views that there is a lack of clarity about what the EU does and how and that the MEPs don't work with councils to fill that gap. The councillors illustrate how matters relating to the EU were never viewed as part of the councillor role and indeed were unlikely to be discussed;

*I think the council does not have any real understanding about EU work; we have never discussed it as councillors together. I have no idea about any plans we might have to do with the EU but if we did it would be played down because of UKIP. They were very strong in the local election and majority's' were cut (Labour Councillor).*

*I had been a councillor then something happened which I was very unhappy about so decided not to stand again. Later our ward member resigned and I thought this is my village I will stand so got back in. I didn't leave politics though I got a job with the MEP so learnt a lot about EU. No one in the council is involved with the EU nobody sees it as part of their role A few years ago we drew down the biggest ever derelict land grant which brought masses of jobs into the area. I think members just aren't bothered. I think the party should do more to help councillors understand about Europe and help people to see the EU as a friend not a foe (Labour Councillor).*

*To properly represent your residents, they have elected you so that is what you do. I think it is part of my role to be up to date on stuff. I have asked for clarity on who is responsible for all the EU stuff, I get most of my information from the LEP We get no information in the council and in my view the MEP is totally detached I cannot recall any examples where they have had anything to do with us (Liberal Democratic Councillor).*

The findings of the research and as illuminated above, reveal that the majority of councillors taking part in the research expressed the view, that they as councillors have no role to play in respect of EU activity and a number of councillors suggested that neither does local government have a role to play in relation to the EU. Of the interviewees, only those councillors in leading positions believe and were able to demonstrate their activity and involvement with the EU. Two of those in leading positions however, were not involved with the EU. Their councils had in the past been active but were no longer actively seeking involvement with the EU. One of the reasons put forward was that cuts in funding to councils meant that only essential services could be funded, thus time, travel and accommodation expenses relative to the EU and other bodies was either greatly reduced or stopped.

### Theme 3 - Governing, Governance & the EU

The thesis shows there has been a shift from more traditional systems of local government to new forms of local governance (Denters and Rose 2005:253). According to the government to governance thesis; local state apparatus is considerably more complex and fragmented than it once was (Rhodes 2008). Municipalities operate in a system of multi-level and local governance, and work alongside a large number of quasi-public and private organisations. Arising from these trends and developments the role of local councillors as elected representatives of their locality may be under strain.

Councillors may be unable to influence decisions, and exert power over decision makers who exist outside of the council chamber. For councillors, uncertainties arise around the activities of governance networks. Writing of the English experience (Barron et al., 1991), suggests that the post-war consensus concerning the intrinsic value of local government is no longer in existence. In essence local authorities have been subjected to a very large volume of legislation which seeks to define, delegate, contract out, privatise and hive off the activities of local councils (Barron et al., 1991). During the interviews councillors made the link between what they view as the undemocratic nature of the EU with the equally undemocratic nature of unelected bodies being able to make public policy decisions. A number of councillors summarised this finding for our understanding, thus|:

*Everyone and everybody is involved in making decisions that we should be making about our local area. Decisions about public spend are being made by people who are not accountable like we are (Conservative Councillor).*

*Talking about unelected people making decisions at the EU, it's happening here all the time. The rot set in years ago, the council used to get funding to train lads in trades, we had a great apprenticeship scheme, but then government decided that some*

*other body could dole the money out. To be honest, we've probably had more control over the funding from the EU (Labour Councillor).*

*We used to have the RDA (Regional Development Agency) and that was in the public sector but that went and now we have LEPs' (Local Enterprise Partnerships) which are led by business people, I think some members are on the Boards but it feels again like people who are not elected are making decisions about massive amounts of public money (Conservative Councillor).*

*Some members are very knowledgeable about all the different groups that are operating now, I think the Leaders get together to try to sort stuff out but most of us don't know much about how all these different groups work (Conservative Councillor).*

*I go to some meeting these days and I am the only elected person there and these meetings are about our local area, and we are asked questions out and about and on the doorstep about why this is happening and why that decision has been made because people expect us to know it all because we are the councillors (Labour Councillor).*

The findings of the research, as illuminated in the comments above show that councillors can struggle to make sense of their role vis-a-vis the role of the myriad of different organisations that make up the political landscape at all levels of government. That struggle was summarised by a councillor, thus:

*I feel sorry for new councillors' I wonder sometimes how they make sense of it all (Labour Councillor).*

In contrast however a relatively new councillor noted that:

*I never knew the old systems, I have arrived and things are already in place so I don't have to make adjustments, other councillors go*



*on at length about how it used to be and according to them it was all better (Conservative Councillor).*

*Some councillors are really good working with different organisations, but I am not sure they could do the same with the EU it is too far removed (Labour Councillor).*

The comments above elaborate the findings of the research that councillors have differing views about the structure and organisation of local government and how it impacts them depending on whether they have experience of previous arrangements. As is recognised and articulated by many of the councillors taking part in the research, their view is that they must maintain their representative role in the best interests of the people in their communities. What we see from the comments is that councillors whilst acknowledging the complexities of differing arrangements for public policy decision making, many councillors are able to make sense of and work with non-elected organisations that operate locally.

The thesis demonstrates that in a local governance structure, local councillors have, as elected representatives of the citizens, to become guardians of the all encompassing public concerns of the municipality. The Councillor needs to ensure that the plurality of opinions and interests are voiced and that no one is excluded from the de centralised processes of public opinion and decision-making. Considering the EU and the impact of policy decisions taken at that level on local government, raises the bar in respect of what councillors are expected to be able to achieve in terms of ensuring that no-one is excluded from decision making.

## Theme 4 – Power & Influence and the EU

In modern society local political actors engage with their counterparts across the EU member states and seek to influence the decisions of supranational institutions. In the past the apex of political systems was the nation state and at local level, local government, now many decisions lie elsewhere both in the institutional mechanisms of the EU and in local policy networks.

Councillors face a struggle for engagement and influence in a complex series of networks that ripple outwards from the council and the immediate locality into a far wider geographical and political framework' (Copus, 2015)

Thus, councillors need to be able to negotiate with and exert influence over a complex, interdependent political landscape. Chapter eight considered the concepts of political power and influence which were highlighted as important issues for the councillors taking part in interviews. Though the EU was the focus, councillors also referred to the difficulties of trying to influence local policy networks involved in decision making affecting the councillors' local areas. The councillors expressed differing view about their own and the council's ability to have any influence as to the policy decisions coming from the EU, which as the thesis shows have an impact at the local government level. A Cabinet councillor said;

*I think we can influence what comes out of the EU if we get together, there are opportunities, the network is there, but we need to access it. The EU countries see themselves as Europe not as individual countries, but here we barely see ourselves outside where we live. (Labour Councillor Cabinet).*

Whist another councillor occupying a leadership position expressed a different view:

*The best way to influence is to sit around a table, if I didn't think we could influence I wouldn't be going to Brussels, best inside the tent. Never resign on a principle because if you resign you cannot*

*influence anything at all you are then outside with your nose pressed up against the window. People look to the leaders if they are committed they will bring others with them, but across the political spectrum many of the leaders haven't got the commitment (Conservative Deputy Council Leader).*

A number of suggestions are put forward by councillors as to how they might be able to influence and contribute towards the decisions that impact at local level, including through the MEP, the different associations councils are involved e.g. the Local Government Association, the Combined Authorities. There is however little evidence that these access avenues are actually utilised to exert power and influence at the level of the EU. Moreover, not all councillors in leadership positions believe they are able to influence what comes out of Europe.

The thesis shows how it is notable that much of the academic debate in respect of exercising power and influence in political matters refers to the role of political leaders. The thesis confirms the view that some local political leaders are skilled at utilising the resource available to them to achieve outcomes which impact positively both at the level of their own local authority and beyond the dimensions of the locality. These active more enterprising councillors in leadership positions are more likely to be outward facing and have both the personal capacity and willingness to engage in EU affairs. The thesis also demonstrates however, that not all councillors in leadership positions are motivated and or have the capacity to become involved with matters to do with the EU preferring instead to focus both on council matters, and on the issues relating to the more local governance and policy networks with which they have to interact on a daily basis. There were some examples where councillors were less interested in EU matters. As one councillor suggested;

*I believe that our MPs and MEPs have little power and influence in Europe. Citizens are probably more knowledgeable about outcomes but have little knowledge about the mechanics. I cannot really see a conversation that would stimulate my interest in the EU (Labour Councillor).*

*We could influence the EU through the party but the majority of councillors don't follow that route, they probably just do not have the time (Labour Councillor Cabinet).*

*Local councillors have very little influence about the EU they might be able to have a little over the MEP but that would be very unusual (Liberal Democratic Councillor).*

The findings reveal the way in which a number of councillors have a level of frustration as to the role of the MEPs both in relation to what appears to be an inability on the part of the MEPs to be able to influence the policy decisions taken at the EU. Moreover, Councillors also reveal their frustration at the lack of contact from the MEPs, with some councillors suggesting they have little or no contact, have never seen them in the council and indeed are not even sure what they do. There is some acknowledgement that MEPs' have a very wide brief and have to represent large numbers of people which is likely to impact on their ability to be in touch with councillors other than through information leaflets about what they are doing. Councillors however, receive an abundance of information about a variety of issues to do with council business which they believe takes priority over the EU. Thus, information to do with the EU and the MEPs is likely to take a back seat in relation to information about local issues.

### **Sub -Theme Community Leadership**

In the English context central government is clear that ward councillors should be central to working with their communities with a view to achieving community empowerment. The investigation carried out by James and Cox (2007) showed that many non-executive councillors believe that the development of multi-agency networks operating at local level have distanced councillors from decision making and undermined their position as community leaders. In contrast to the view described above, the thesis shows that the community leadership role is, for some councillors, a very important aspect of their role and indeed is alive and well, operating successfully at community level.

The findings show, that for some of the councillors, community leadership is an important feature of their role, one where they believe they can make an effective contribution to the lives of the people in their communities.

As one councillor stated;

*I see my job as supporting the people in my ward first and foremost. They elected me to represent them and that is what I do. It is harder now because we don't have decision making power, the committee system was better, we were more in touch with what goes on in the council, the system we have now doesn't work. So I put my energies into my ward, that is where it matters for me, what is important for them (Conservative Councillor). Another councillor commented thus;*

*Something happened that was out of my control and I had problems with the party. It was the people in my community that got me through. They know I have always helped them in any way I can. I got little support from the council and less from party colleagues but my ward were there for me because they know I have always been there for them (Labour Councillor).*

The comments crystallised the views of many councillors in the research by elaborating the primacy of their relationships at community level whilst also expressing a level of frustration that many non-executive councillors experience at feeling excluded from the council's decision making process.

The report written by (Randle and Dhillon, 2004), from the New Local Government Network emphasises the role of local authorities and councillors who can use their representative function to articulate the views of and lead the local community, through listening and ascertaining what they want. Only local government have an over-arching representative role in the area which no other body can provide. One councillor in describing an issue he dealt with in the ward elaborated on the community leadership role;

*We have always been community leaders, it's what we do, it's nothing new (Labour Councillor).*

The findings illustrate the willingness and ability of councillors to achieve outcomes through their positive and constructive approach. In the first instance being mindful of the people they represent in the community and secondly working to provide community leadership.

### **Sub-Theme Political Capital**

In the modern political world of multi-level governance and interconnected networks between governments, citizens business and voluntary organisations the councillor needs to utilise all the resources he/she has in order to best serve their community. On leaving the sphere based on familiarity councillors enter a world dominated by contingency, complexity and risk (see Luhmann 1998; 1991). Thus, when role expectations and relationships no longer help to anticipate the reactions of individual or collective interaction partners, people gather the harvest whose seeds have been sown in the micro interactions in the past (Martti Siisiainen, 2000). In other words, they can if they have it, they utilise political capital.

In addressing the research question as to what strategies councillors use in order to influence or mitigate the impact of EU policy decision impacting on local government the findings show that a number of councillors are able to invest political capital and where appropriate use it to exert influence. A council leader elaborated on how he achieves outcomes through building relationships.

Another councillor in a leadership position also demonstrated the use of political capital and elaborated the thinking of councillors in leading positions interviewed for this research on the importance of building relationships for taking action:

*I am a natural advocate, always been able to sort things out from a very young age, as a child I was the class spokesperson. Later I became a trade union negotiator and represented overall 80,000*

*workers. So when I went into politics I had already built up lots of contacts with people all over the country and later in Europe. I have a lot of contact with people in the EU and will always say what I think about things. I think I have some influence there I always think it is better to talk to people have discussion and try to resolve problems together (Mayor Social Democrat Party Germany).*

A non-executive councillor, again from Germany underpinned the importance of developing and maintaining relationships demonstrated in the comment above:

*I have to work very hard to develop relations with people of all the parties. We are in a minority and often we need other parties to help us get decisions made I talk to everybody explain what the problems are ask for their help and If I can I will help them. If it doesn't conflict with their party they will always help me to get things through. I believe this is because I make the effort to seek people out (Green Party Councillor Germany).*

The findings show that a number of councillors are very effective in investing and using political capital to affect positive change within their area of responsibility. As the thesis shows it is not only councillors in leadership positions that are adept at the use of political capital. The findings indicate that councillors focusing on their role at community level also employ the strategy of relationship building to exert influence to get things done. Councillors who are in a position to operate at EU level thus utilise the skills necessary to create contacts and build networks to better enable them to operate more effectively at the level of the EU. Councillors are able to employ the resource of political capital through the development of meaningful relationships with the people they come into contact with through their councillor role.

## **Conclusion**

The thesis provides an understanding of the way in which councillor behaviour and responses in relation to the EU is influenced by a variety of factors.

Attempting to elicit the views of councillors on such a huge, diverse and highly contested political body seemed to be an impossible task.

The thesis addressed this task by concentrating on the basic elements of the research question; how have councillors responded to the impact of EU on local government and how do councillors perceive their role in respect of the EU. In order to enhance their and their council's influence on EU wide policy development towards local government; what strategies have they used to achieve this and which councillors are more likely to be involved. The results give an important insight into how councillors view their representative role in relation to the EU.

The thesis has explored and analysed how councillors respond to the impact of the EU on local government in order to enhance their and their councils influence in national and European wide policy development. Moreover, this in depth investigation sought to identify what strategies councillors employ to influence or mitigate the impact of EU policy decisions on local government, and to discover which councillors are more likely to be engaged in EU activity and how they utilise the opportunities this presents.

The thesis clearly demonstrates that there are opportunities for local government to input towards EU policy decision that impact local government. Though limited in terms of power and influence the CoR nevertheless provides opportunities for local government representatives to put forward their views as to the impact of EU decisions impacting on local government.

The thesis also shows that the establishment of the EU provides greater opportunities for interaction between local governments within the member states. The thesis demonstrates how European integration creates top down and bottom up Europeanisation processes of local government which involve co-operation and exchanges of ideas and best practice through transnational networks.

The thesis clearly shows that EU policy decisions have a significant impact at regional and local level with the member states. Around 70% of directives are



implemented at levels of government below the national level. Moreover the thesis shows that though citizens believe their local representatives are much less involved in terms of decision making within the EU they have an expectation that their local political representatives are best placed to explain the workings of the EU.

The findings confirm and support the proposition that those councillors in leadership positions, but not all leading councillors, actively engage in EU affairs. *“a small avant-garde of local actors however, engage in European affairs”* (Witte, 2011 p.279 in Guderjan, 2012). This specific group of councillors are **active** in respect of EU activity are outward facing, looking for opportunities to enhance their and their councils influence with policy decision makers at EU level. The findings showed that those councillors in leadership positions who did not engage with EU activity choose different priorities based on their assessment of the needs of their communities; financial challenges, new in post or with no experience of European activity; having a more inward facing focus .

The thesis demonstrates that a relatively small number of councillors are undecided about the EU. They have mixed feeling about the EU, can take it or leave it; they are ambivalent towards issues to do with the EU. The findings showed that for them; it never comes up on the doorstep; it has never been brought up at council meetings; there have never been any conversations with councillor colleagues about it. It (the EU) has never been on any conference agendas they have attended; if it mattered to people they might be interested.

The findings showed that the majority of councillors taking part in the research believed that, despite all its difficulties we do need to be in the EU. Councillors expressed the belief that membership of the EU makes us stronger relative to superpowers like America China Russia and that being in the EU gives the nation states a stronger voice across the world stage. Only a small minority of the councillors were anti EU, believing that the undemocratic nature of the EU and the loss of sovereignty for the nation states was such that the EU is too powerful and therefore they were against the EU.

The thesis provides for the first time a classification of councillor behaviour in respect of the EU. The approach and outcome is in line with the study carried out by (Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997) in their investigation of sub-national government's attitudes towards EU integration.

The thesis clearly demonstrates that for some councillors extra council based work, in this context the EU, is central to their role and for some councillors they have reinvented their role and created a new role characterised by a more outward looking transnational networking approach. They are active at EU level contributing towards improving the quality of life for the people within their communities, strengthening the legitimacy and accountability of the council and enhancing their own political status. The thesis showed that it was those outward looking, driven, influential councillors, capable of harnessing political capital that are active at the supranational level of government.

The thesis also clearly demonstrates that the body of 'back bench' councillors interpret their councillor role in different ways in terms of representing their electorate. The thesis tells of the passion, care and industrious activity that these councillors have for their communities. The thesis showed that it is these councillors who every day, carry out the tasks necessary to support the people in their communities. The thesis demonstrates that the councillors are very clear about what their role is; to be inward facing toward their communities utilising opportunities within the Town Hall to best serve the citizens; to do whatever they can within their sphere of influence to improve the lives of their communities; to manage competing interests and to ensure that they continue to act to maintain the legitimacy and status of the elected representative of the people. Thus in respect of the EU they are clear that the responsibility for EU activity lies with others and they abdicate any responsibility for engagement with the EU. As would be expected, we hear amongst councillors the echo of the same public political debate about the value of membership of the EU which has continued since Britain joined the EEC in 1973. What is clear is that councillors view their relationships with, and the role of the EU from a number of different perspectives which reflect their own interpretations of democracy,

representation, leadership, community and accountability and the way in which they conduct and preference their various roles as a councillor. The thesis has filled an important gap in our understanding of the role of the councillor and how interaction with a supra-national body - the EU - reflects not only a political view but wider views amongst councillors about what it means to be a councillor and how the roles they undertake are preferenced, structured and conducted. The thesis shows that, as would be expected it is leading councillors who are most likely to be engaged with EU activity. Yet, the concentration of EU engagement as a role focus for the councillor among leading councillors means an important accountability gap has opened up. If leading members, and senior officers, are engaging with the EU and its various institutions and other members less so, or not at all, then holding leading members and officers to account is being insufficiently conducted because other councillors do not see engaging with a supra-national body as their role focus. Non-executive councillors have a duty, under the Local Government Act 2000, to hold the executive to account. Thus, there is a role conflict which is evident because councillors' preference for avoiding engagement with the EU means that they may fail in their accountability role. Councillors may prefer certain roles to others, but the research shows their role choice is not unrestrained.

It is evident throughout the thesis that there are a host of influences that impact councillors' actions and behaviour in relation to the European Union. A major issue underpinning the range of influences on councillors in the roles they undertake is the position of local government in relation to the centre. While the line of accountability in local government, as a democratic institution, is to its citizens, central government's power to change local government's duties, powers and financial capability acts to attenuate the links to local citizens. As the thesis has shown, local government's relationship with a supra-national body-the EU- provides an additional set of role expectations on councillors to add to the influences already existing. While some councillors resist that expectation, others embrace the opportunities to engage with the EU. Both responses have provided valuable lessons for how councillors can continue to operate in existing and new supra-national settings in the future.

## **APPENDIX 1: LOCAL AUTHORITIES INVOLVED IN THE RESEARCH**

Barnsley MBC (UK)

Calderdale MBC (UK)

Cluj-Napoca City Council (Romania)

Duisberg City Council (Germany)

Gateshead MBC (UK)

Newcastle upon Tyne City Council (UK)

Rotherham MBC (UK)

Scarborough MBC (UK)

Sunderland City Council (UK)

York City Council (UK)

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