Generating new insights into an old organisation: a strategy for researching the Country Landowners'Association

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1. Introduction: the aims and scope of this paper

Over the last thirty years, much research effort has been devoted to the study of political organisations commonly known as 'interest groups,' 'pressure groups', or 'lobbies'. As Smith (1995) has explained, these terms are often used interchangeably. All such groups seek to represent the interests of particular sections of society in order to influence public policy making. This research has tended to focus upon:

- why such political groups emerge and remain as key players in the political arena,
- the strategies they formulate and the tactics they deploy,
- the actions they take as they engage in political struggles,
- and the relationships they develop with the political authorities in order to influence the policy process.

The objective of this paper is to show how this same research tradition can be developed by offering an alternative to the established theoretical perspectives and conceptual tools that have underpinned the vast majority of studies carried out to date. This objective is pursued by focusing upon the *Country Landowners' Association,* (the CLA). This organisation has become well known as a principal representative of the interests of 'the land' and 'the rural' in British politics since 1949. Nevertheless, like all organisations, the CLA cannot be conceptualised as an organisation with a clearly defined beginning and end (Lowe 2001). There is a marked continuity as regards the aims, objectives, and strategies deployed by the CLA and the two political organisations that spawned it, notably the *Central Land Association* formed in 1907 and the *Central Landowners' Association* that replaced it in 1918. Similarly, even though the CLA re-launched itself as the *Country Land and Business Association* in January 2000, its long established political agenda has been incorporated into the stated objectives of this new interest group (CLA 2001)[1]. In essence the principal raison d'etre of all four organisations has been to promote and defend the institution of private landownership and the rights and interests of those who own land in rural localities. Coupled with this, all these organisations have a normative conception of 'the rural' where private property rights should be the cornerstone of economic, socio-cultural and political relations.

In order to pursue this objective, the paper is organised into two principal sections, each with its own specific aims.

The first takes the form of a critical review of the literature that has examined the CLA both directly and indirectly. It examines a number of articles that have appeared in the *Country Landowner* (the CLA's 'in house' journal) and numerous other reports produced by this organisation over the last ten years. These provide an invaluable insight into how the CLA has portrayed itself. In contrast, the review also examines a number of academic papers in order to highlight the research questions that have been raised and pursued, and the debates that have emerged about this organization in the light of case study findings. In addition, matters that have received little (or no) attention and may therefore warrant investigation will be identified. Overall, it will be argued that, compared with other organisations involved in rural politics (especially the National Farmers' Union), the CLA has been under researched.

Building on the literature review, the second section outlines a number of theoretical constructs that have been developed recently in those branches of the social sciences that inform studies of rural politics. Particular attention is paid to those developments that have emerged following the move towards post structuralist ways of thinking where emphasis is placed upon the role of discursive practices in giving meaning to the world that political actors inhabit. It will be argued that this new perspective can be drawn upon to develop a more nuanced conceptualisation of interest groups as a whole and hence the CLA in particular. This section also highlights new research questions that should be asked relating to the origins and development of groups such as the CLA, and outlines an appropriate methodology for pursuing them.

2. The Country Landowners' Association: a review of the literature

2.1 Origins

The CLA was formed in 1949 to defend the interests of those holding private property rights in rural localities. It took over from the *Central Landowners' Association*, an organisation that had been in existence for some thirty years. A change of name and a re-thinking of political objectives came about as a response to two inter-connected

threats to landowning interests. First, capitalist property rights and relations were coming under the scrutiny of a Labour government that favoured the public ownership of the means of production, including land (Douglas 1976). In this political climate, some rural landowners feared that their land might be nationalised. Prominent members of the landowning community were determined to recruit all landowners, both large and small, into a cohesive collective body in order to develop a bulwark against what was regarded as an unwarranted ideological attack by the state upon their legitimate interests (Self and Storing 1962). Second, rural landowners became increasingly concerned about their financial well-being. Many derived part (or all) of their income from farming but feared that agriculture would become marginalised under a Labour government that seemed likely to bow to pressures from 'urban' commercial and manufacturing interests.

However, the CLA was not the first organisation formed to respond to political challenges emanating from groups in society ideologically opposed to the principle of private property ownership. Equally, it would be a mistake to assume that the post-war era was the first time that landed proprietors felt obliged to organise in order to protect their financial interests. In the mid/late nineteenth century a concerted philosophical and political challenge to "… functionless, irresponsible property, not justified by some kind of service to society" was mounted by idealists, utilitarians, and socialists (Perkin 1989, p.123). At this same time, groups such as the Freehold Land Society, the Land Law Reform Movement, and the Land Nationalisation Society aimed to dismantle the institution of private landlordism through legislative change (Offer 1981; Winter 1996; Short 1998). Faced with such formidable threats to their interests and rights, a number of defensive organisations were formed by private proprietors in both town and country. Well known examples are the Liberty and Property Defence League, the Leasehold Franchise Association, the Land Restoration League, and the National Federation of Property Owners (for full details see, for example, Garnier 1893; Wootton 1975; Ward 1976; Offer 1981; Beckett 1984; Horn 1984; Cannadine 1990; Fforde 1990; and Howkins 1991).

For many rural landowners, however, these ideological challenges were compounded by mounting difficulties in the sphere of agricultural production. Indeed, the period 1870-1900 saw the emergence of 'the land question' as agriculture entered a

pronounced depression. While 'the land question' was concerned with the causes and consequences of the declining economic position of farmers and appropriate policy responses to their predicament, it also raised questions about the leadership of agriculture and rural communities more generally. Estate proprietors in particular were gradually facing up to the fact that their political, social, and economic leadership was becoming increasingly tenuous (for a full explanation see Mingay 1976; Offer 1981; Horn 1984; Beckett 1984). They responded by promoting a coalition of all whose interests lay in agriculture, namely landowners, farmers, and agricultural labourers. Nevertheless, it was envisaged that proprietors would remain firmly in control. Their ideals of an alliance of agriculturists became reality when a number of new organisations were formed in the late nineteenth century, including the short lived National Agricultural Union and the more enduring Agriculture Organisation Society and the Central Chambers of Agriculture (Matthews 1915).

By the early twentieth century, however, a number of leading actors in these organisations had become disillusioned with the lack of progress that they were making. Together with a number of proprietors who had remained aloof from rural politics they formed the *Central Land Association* in 1907 to mount a vigorous defence of the causes of the land, agriculture, and the rural. They were also instrumental in re-launching this organisation as the *Central Landowners' Association* in 1918 when it became clear that their task should be to defend and promote the 'rights' of private proprietors to speak 'of' and 'for' the land. The decision of the leadership of both organisations to work as an extra-parliamentary force is highly significant. It reflects long standing doubts over whether those once regarded as the 'natural' allies of the landed classes occupying positions of power (chiefly landowning Conservative politicians and their sympathisers in Whitehall) could be relied upon to support their interests in mainstream politics (Cannadine 1990; Fforde 1990).

2.2 Aims, activities, and achievements

According to Wootton (1975) and Newby (1985) when the CLA was formed its objectives were principally defensive, namely:

- To safeguard the legitimate interests of the owners of agricultural and other rural land so far as is consistent with the interests of the nation.
- To safeguard and develop the capital invested in the ownership of agricultural and other rural land [….] and to secure an appropriate return from these assets.

In one sense, the next fifty years must be regarded as a period of continuity as the CLA remained steadfastly determined to defend the material interests of those possessing landed assets. Indeed, the CLA has frequently mobilised its membership around specific matters relating to income and taxation and has made policy demands relating to them.

Over the same time period, the CLA has also continued its efforts to recruit *all* private owners of rural land, regardless of whether they are estate proprietors, owner occupier farmers, or smallholders, and has tried to persuade them to fight for their 'right' to safeguard their income and capital. The CLA's "hard sell" (Newby, 1985 p.58) has certainly reaped rewards. The number of paid-up CLA members has risen to over 50,000 and the combined spatial coverage of property owned by them amounts to 60% of all rural land. All in all, the CLA feels that its negotiating position has been strengthened.

In a number of important ways, however, the CLA's objectives have broadened. The CLA's literature shows that it has become much more than an organisation concerned primarily with the economic well being of landowners, because it has also actively promoted a range of non-material rights that it believes landowners can legitimately claim. On the basis of the skills, knowledge, experience, and wisdom that stem from 'the fact' of ownership, the landowner is considered to be the 'natural leader' of rural communities. Owners are also charged with the responsibility of protecting rural cultures that are rooted in 'the land' (Spencer, 2000). One interpretation of the CLA's support for this model of landownership is that it considers itself to be an organisation committed to protect the traditional paternalistic authority of landowners that can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Thornton, 1966; Marsden *et al*, 1993). In essence, the CLA argues that landowners have the right (and indeed the duty) to be

involved whenever decisions are made affecting rural people and places (Spencer, 2000).

Nevertheless, it seems likely that a number of conflicts will arise if the CLA continues to support a model of landowner power that may be regarded as anachronistic. All the indications are that the CLA's support for 'traditional' forms of leadership and authority will require re-examination because they are at variance with other more 'progressive' roles that it has recently become eager to adopt. These have come to the forefront since the CLA re-launched itself in January 2000 as the *Country Land and Business Association* based upon what it regards as a forward-looking political agenda better suited to the new century (CLA 2001). This re-orientation of the CLA's position reflects a growing consensus that rural land is increasingly likely to become an arena of consumption as well as production. As Ilbery (1998) and Atkins and Bowler (2000) explain, the switch away from the post-war productivist philosophy means that farmers and other producers are looking for new ways of generating income. The CLA's 'in house' journal and numerous other publications have indicated clearly that it supports business diversification. A progressive landowner should take steps to identify and promote alternative uses of rural space (provided that they are appropriate on economic, social, and environmental grounds).

Coupled with this, the CLA has worked hard to 'progress' by fostering a sense of environmental morality among its members. The key to this has been the promotion of certain conservation objectives. According to the CLA's own literature, in the post-productivist rural world the rural landowner is a 'steward' charged with the responsibility of managing the nation's most precious resource[2]. The landowner is acutely aware that s/he has a major stake in society and is uniquely able to take a long term management view of this resource. Consequently, the landowner should be left to manage the land without excessive state interference. However, critics have maintained that the recent emphasis upon stewardship is a carefully planned and executed strategy designed to undermine the environmentalist critique of the land/landscape management strategies favoured by the larger estate proprietors in particular – a fraction of landed capital that has been very well represented among the leaders and senior officials of the post-war CLA (see Newby *et al* 1978; Lowe and Goyder 1983; Cox and Lowe 1984; Brand 1992).

As the CLA has broadened its political agenda (and arguably appealed to a greater number of rural landowners), it has begun to assert itself as an authoritative 'rural voice' that does not simply speak of and for matters relating to 'the land'. Some commentators have been quick to challenge this assertion (see for example Cox *et al*, 1986; Brand, 1992). They point out that any authority the CLA may claim will remain relatively fragile as long as it is built around nebulous discourses pertaining to the pivotal role of private landownership in the vitality of 'the rural' (and indeed 'the health and wealth of the nation'). They note that, in contrast, the CLA's principal competitor – the NFU – has found little difficulty in developing its leadership credentials by deploying and disseminating practical and technical discourses that elide 'farming', 'agriculture', 'food', 'the rural, and 'the nation'. However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s the CLA has countered these criticisms by increasingly portraying itself as the legitimate mouthpiece for all rural business interests. It has recently done so in its own version of the government's *Rural White Paper* and in its full and detailed response to the Performance and Innovation Unit's report on the rural economy.

As this analysis has indicated, many members of the CLA have an interest in agriculture in so far as they operate either as rentier landlords or farm in their own right. However, in order to differentiate itself from the National Farmers' Union, the CLA has consistently tried to influence government policy in a manner that furthers the interests of its members *as owners* rather than as primary producers. Green (1975) has commented on the CLA's determination to emphasise (and capitalise upon) this distinction. In his words, the CLA's ability to promote the rights of ownership among MAFF officials and treasury ministers led to "… official recognition of the fact that the landed interest survives in politics and is not yet identical with or subsumed by the farming interest." (Green, 1975, p.148). Green (1975) notes that membership of the CLA was therefore promoted on the grounds that it will help ensure that owners *keep* any money they make, while the NFU helps them *make* money in the first place.

The tone of Green's (1975) remarks are consistent with the way in which a number of researchers have acknowledged that the CLA has developed close relationships with

Westminster politicians and senior civil servants. Although academics have not anchored their research in the typology of interest or pressure groups initially put forward by Grant (1978)[3], all the indications are that the CLA must now be regarded as a 'legitimate insider'. Its leaders have regular access to government decision makers and, in turn, are consulted by them frequently because they appreciate that the CLA can provide specialist information on certain issues[4]. Moreover, by seeking consensus through dialogue, and by showing that it is prepared to behave professionally and responsibly, the CLA has become highly regarded by successive governments. In Grant's (2000) terms, the CLA is therefore much more than a protest group. It does not adhere to objectives and ideologies that are outside mainstream political opinion, nor does it make demands in strident and uncompromising terms.

Nevertheless, a number of critics have pointed out that even though the CLA has offered advice, it has never achieved the *right to negotiate* with governments. The CLA is quite unlike NFU in this respect. As the chief representative of the agricultural interest, the NFU has come to occupy a central role in the agricultural 'policy community' that was set up during the post war period as an alternative to the cumbersome pluralistic policy making systems that had previously existed[5] (Wilson 1977; Cox and Lowe 1987; Grant 1987; Brand 1992; Smith 1995). Through the annual review of production and prices, the NFU and MAFF (with support from the treasury) were allowed to set the level of agricultural subsidies and stipulate production targets. In doing so they were under no obligation to take account of representations from other interested parties such as the CLA, the NUAW, consumer groups, and environmentalists (Lowe *et al* 1986; Smith 1995).

It is unclear whether the exclusion of the CLA from this formalised 'inner circle' of decision makers has hampered its ability to pursue its objectives. Not surprisingly, those sympathetic to the CLA have suggested that formal incorporation into the policy process can have its drawbacks. By continuing to behave as a *quiet insider* that develops and uses informal links with politicians to full advantage, an interest group can gain respect, exert influence behind the scenes in Whitehall and Westminster, and establish its own identity (for full details see Green 1975; Newby 1985; Grant 1995; Winter 1996). As Newby (1985) has pointed out, this is precisely what the CLA has done. Nevertheless, its 'insider' tactics have been regarded as stealthy and devious,

and appear to contradict the CLA's claim to adhere to the principle of 'gentlemanly conduct' when it pursues its political interests. Critics see little evidence of behaviour that is trustworthy, caring, wise, rational, and benevolent (for a full discussion of the concept of the 'gentleman' see Dawnton 1989 and Woods 1997a). Indeed, it could be argued that the CLA is an unprincipled opportunist. While the CLA is usually quick to take unilateral action when its interests are threatened, it has also forged alliances with organisations regarded as its competitors or adversaries – especially the NFU, the CPRE and, at times, MAFF itself. A case in point here is the CLA's willingness to work collaboratively in order to combat the environmentalist challenge to established land management practices that emerged in the late 1970s (see Richardson 1978; Newby *et al* 1978; Lowe and Goyder 1983; Cox and Lowe 1984, 1986; Brand 1992). Any claims the CLA may make to behave in a 'gentlemanly' manner also appear questionable given the decision made by the CLA's leadership to infiltrate other rural pressure groups when the its status was threatened. According to Milbourne (1997), some senior CLA officials have become leading members of Countryside Alliance, apparently in order to forestall the rise of a potential competitor.

With considerable justification, the CLA can claim to have successfully provided highly valued professional services for its members. Landowning and farming communities have come to acknowledge and respect its expertise in financial affairs, especially its specialist knowledge regarding the economics of land management and the taxation regimes that have a direct bearing on landowners' income and capital. In addition, the CLA has developed a reputation for its grasp of the legal intricacies relating to the vexed issues of the inheritance of landed property and land planning regulations. On both counts it has successfully advised members who have found themselves in unforeseen difficulties. The enthusiasm with which the CLA renders and promotes these services supports Olson's (1965) contention that the attractiveness of an interest group stems as much from its ability to expand (and retain) its membership by offering a number of 'selective incentives' as the collective political goals that are pursued[6].

The preceding discussion indicates that the CLA has developed a wide range of political skills and successfully deployed them as it has interacted with government

officials. However, in order to do so it has been essential for the CLA to become highly adept at identifying and articulating its interests, and representing them in a manner likely to impress the rank and file membership, other organisations, and the political authorities. Unfortunately, academics have failed to investigate how *representations* of interests have been constructed, communicated, and (especially) *politicised*. Nor does the CLA's own literature offer any clues. Any mention of 'politics' is restricted to 'statements of fact' regarding ongoing dialogues with state agencies and other extra-parliamentary groups and how CLA members should ultimately gain from these discussions. Moreover, all the indications are that the CLA subscribes to a narrow conception of politics. While the CLA's leaders openly admit to pursuing a 'political' agenda they steadfastly insist that the CLA is politically 'neutral' in so far as it is free from any party political ties. In reality, however, the CLA has always been closely aligned with the political 'right'. Many of its most prominent members have tended to be Conservative MPs, while the CLA has also commanded considerable support in the House of Lords (Brand, 1992). Indeed, some years ago Green (1975, p.149) described the Lords as the "… upper house of the CLA …", while in a similar vein Newby (1985, p.58) regarded the upper chamber as "… the CLA's political arm".

2.3 Critique

The material discussed above has offered a number of important insights into the CLA's objectives, resources, tactics, strategies, actions, and achievements (primarily between the 1970s and late 1980s/early 1990s). Nevertheless, the over-riding impression is that the level of understanding that has been developed is relatively sketchy because research has lacked depth in a number of key respects.

First and foremost, the CLA has never been placed 'centre stage' by academic researchers. This is particularly noticeable in relation to the ways in which other groups representing 'rural' interests in politics have been treated. The NFU in particular has received in-depth treatment, principally because it has featured in a number of *dedicated* studies as well as featuring in broadly based accounts of rural politics (see, for example, Self and Storing 1962; Wilson 1977; Grant 1983; Cox *et al*

1986, 1991; Lowe *et al* 1986; Brand 1992; Winter 1996). The same *cannot* be said for the CLA. When the CLA *does* receive attention, it tends to be examined as one of a number of actors competing to represent their version of rural problems and policy solutions to the appropriate political authorities rather than as a potent actor worthy of being subjected to intensive critical study in its own right. This deficiency is particularly marked in the way the literature treats the future of private landownership, strategies for environmental management, and systems of rural governance.

Second, there has been little critical engagement between academics sympathetic to the CLA and those who view it less favourably. Nor has the CLA appeared eager to respond to its academic critics (through, for example, its own publications). Given this reluctance to challenge claim and counter claim, what is 'known' about the CLA has made little progress for some time. As the literature review has shown, research has tended to raise as many questions about the CLA as it has answered. The literature reflects a consensus on some matters, although these are mainly basic factual issues (especially the CLA's commitment to upholding private property rights; its development into a high profile organisation on the political 'right'; its ability to 'deliver' to its membership; its determination to be regarded as an alternative to the NFU; and the degree of respect shown to it by governments and senior civil service officials). In contrast, the literature review has also uncovered long-running uncertainties. Unfortunately, these relate to more fundamental concerns. These include the CLA's political agenda; its relationship with other organisations and individual actors supporting 'rural' political causes and interests; how it politicises its interests; several matters relating to its strategic conduct; and how much power and influence it enjoys.

Third, while reasons *why* the CLA has sought to occupy a particular political niche have been advanced, there is no indication of *how* it became deeply immersed in the complex web of interactions that are part and parcel of political decision making. It is not clear *how* the CLA became embroiled in the highly complex, dynamic, and ever changing activities over time that relate to the selection of goals, and the allocation of values and (ultimately) resources. Winter (1996, p.9) regards these as the hallmark of

the 'policy process' with its three key stages or elements - initiation, formulation, and implementation.

Fourth, the research that has been conducted to date lacks theoretical rigour. The material that has been consulted indicates that researchers have leaned towards positivism with its over-riding concern for charting observable behaviour and documenting the tangible outcomes of political action. While it is possible that a number of studies *may* owe an allegiance to political scientists' concerns with pluralism and corporatism, their theoretical roots have never been made explicit[7]. There has been no attempt to operationalise the key concepts and theoretical axioms that have characterised these particular perspectives on organised groups in politics (for recent reviews see Smith 1990, 1995; Jordan 1990; Judge 1995; and Grant 2000).

Finally, the treatment of the time dimension lacks analytical and conceptual sophistication. The investigations that have been carried out tend to take the form of the 'cross sections' once favoured by historical geographers (dating from Darby, 1936). They have the disadvantage of being no more than 'snapshots' of the CLA's political stance and relationships with other actors over a relatively short time span. Moreover, in Gregory's (2000, p.133) words, the construction of cross sections must be regarded as a "… complex and contentious manoeuvre …" because researchers are dealing with "… multiple temporalities …" that challenge the very notion of linear or chronological sequences. Researchers have tended to regard each cross section as a period of equilibrium when in reality each may be marked by tensions between elements of residual, contemporary, and emergent processes (Gregory 2000). Similarly, researchers have taken the CLA as 'given' as they tap in to specific political conflicts that emerged at particular times. In essence, the academic literature has failed to acknowledge an important observation made by (among others) Lowe (2001), namely that all groups, even newly emerging ones, 'have a past'. There is a strong probability that leading actors are likely to have emerged from pre-existing networks of social relationships characterised by a 'culture of political participation'. In addition, they may well have experienced political engagement as members of other organisations promoting similar (or related) causes and interests. Moreover, as Marsden *et al* (1993) have emphasised, interest groups may be re-made periodically, especially if the political context within which they operate changes. Landed interests

appear adept at re-constituting themselves when faced with severe political or economic difficulties. Unfortunately, however, the role of the CLA in fashioning and re-fashioning new identities for landed interests and politicising them over the medium-long term has never been explored.

2.4 The way forward

All in all, there is a pressing need to develop a research programme with a historic focus where the CLA must be subjected to intensive scrutiny. Above all, this research must be grounded in contemporary (as opposed to well worn) theoretical principles in order to ask more penetrating questions and to put forward more incisive interpretations and explanations than has been the case to date. The aim must be to broaden deepen what is known.

Given that the CLA tends to portrayed as an organisation without a past, research must problematise the origins and evolution of the CLA. For a number of years, prominent researchers have stressed that longitudinal enquiries are essential in order to demonstrate how far (and in what ways) the past lies in the present (see, for example, Richardson 2000) and research into the CLA must heed their advice. A longitudinal analysis will show how far objectives, actions, and achievements observed at any point in time reflect the opportunities and constraints brought about by the decisions, strategic conduct, and reflexive monitoring that was an integral part of previous 'rounds' of political engagement. Unravelling the role of the CLA's leading actors in making and re-making the CLA is likely to be the key to understanding this.

Clearly, therefore, the two organisations that pre-date the CLA should be examined in depth. But to do so would be a considerable task. Research should therefore take some preliminary steps towards a longitudinal enquiry by focusing initially upon the *Central Land Association*. Like the post war CLA, little attention has been paid to this organisation. In fact, the literature contains *only six accounts* of its formation and political behaviour. Moreover, in five of the six publications (namely Self and Storing 1962; Green 1975; Offer 1981; Moore 1991; and Winter 1996) its genesis and

early activities are treated very sketchily. Indeed, only one account can be described as a 'comprehensive' study, namely Walker's (undated) 'official' history[8]. However, an initial reading of this document indicates that this is a self-congratulatory account written for CLA members and cries out to be challenged.

All six accounts agree over a number of factual matters: the political affiliation of the Central Land Association ('right' of centre); the source of its leadership (drawn exclusively from the larger estate proprietors); and the tactics it deployed (described in all accounts as 'gentlemanly' and/or 'dignified'). In contrast, these studies reveal disagreement over some basic facts, including the name and life span of both organisations that pre-dated the post war CLA.[9] Disagreement is also apparent over more fundamental matters, including the Central Land Association's agenda and objectives, who/what this organisation was representing, its strength and coherence, the commitment and calibre of leadership, and its achievements.

Such a project must therefore be designed to *'get inside' the Central Land Association*. Unlike research conducted to date with its emphasis upon external relations, there is a need to draw upon theories and methodologies developed in the social sciences to penetrate the 'world' of political groups/organisations/institutions. Such an 'organisational' focus derived from sociology would not be an end in itself, nor would it be seen as a means of balancing the 'pressure group' perspective that prevails in political science. It is essential in order to develop an understanding of the *reciprocal* nature of the links between internal and external relationships that are the hallmark of all political organisations.

Such a study would accomplish a great deal. It would:
- Broaden the coverage given to CLA to date by introducing the time dimension, while simultaneously leading to more penetrating insights into the legacy of the past than have appeared in the literature to date.
- Help reflect on the origins and maturation of interest groups *per se* in politics by critically reflecting on how collective action commences and is sustained through the ways in which actors establish identities, credentials, build relationships etc.

- Contribute to the literature on capitalist property rights and relations. The need to do so has often been voiced by researchers such as Massey and Catalano (1978) and Whatmore (1986). It should do so by revealing how, at critical junctures (such as in the Edwardian era when the very institution of private property was under attack) those whose interest lay in reproducing or sustaining it felt obliged to articulate claims, represent them as 'truths', and politicise them.

- Stimulate a critical reflection on the politics of land and rural matters in the Edwardian era. As Moore (1991) has argued, this has received insufficient attention. Short's (1998) analysis of political opposition to Lloyd George's determination to re-distribute property rights between individuals and groups in order to resolve the 'land question' in the Edwardian era is a case in point[10]. It is a highly partial account that makes *no mention* of the Central Land Association even though it represented a determined effort by more conservative landed interests to organise and act decisively at a time when their political, economic, and socio-cultural position was threatened by the Liberal party's reforms[11].

3. Researching the Central Land Association: harnessing recent theoretical developments

In the previous section it was argued that if what is 'known' about the CLA is to be strengthened, a research programme must be constructed that adopts a historical approach firmly anchored in contemporary theory. The focus should be upon the genesis and activities of the Central Land Association (1907-18). In this section, attention turns to a number of relevant developments in the social sciences associated with the emergence of post structuralist thinking. It will be argued that these have profound implications for studying organised groups in politics in general (and hence the Central Land Association in particular).

3.1 The sociology of management: organisation theory

In a recent review, Philo (2000) notes a growing dissatisfaction with positivist conceptions of institutions and organisations that regard them as visible and tangible entities anchored in a single location (or site). He applauds the fact that different

understandings of 'institution' and 'organisation' are beginning to emerge as organisational theorists develop a 'new' focus to their studies of social and political power that harnesses post structuralist approaches.

This 'new' focus is based upon a number of theoretical propositions, three of which are particularly relevant to a study of the Central Land Association.

First, as Del Casino *et al* (2000) have emphasised, organisations should not be considered as 'objects' in the sense that identifying and studying them is unproblematic or a matter of common sense. In essence, organisations are *socially constructed entities* held together by discourses relating to rules, procedures, practices, and identities. Moreover, organisations should be conceptually separated from institutions[12]. Organisations exist at the 'meso' level; they occupy a space lying in between individual actors and the institutions of economy, politics, and society. In essence, they are the 'combined effort' of individual actions, and can be probed in order to reveal aspects of the wider institutional context or 'social field' of which they are a part.

Second, according to post structuralists, organisations are *relatively fluid entities* and are only *contingently* stabilised. While they may *appear* to be 'fixed' they are essentially fragile accomplishments because the regulation processes that are deployed by leading actors to give solidity to rules, procedures, and practices will be contested and/or re-evaluated from time to time. Organisations are therefore marked by periodic struggles where leading actors strive to maintain internal 'order', partly to strengthen their own authority, and partly in order to articulate (and ultimately disseminate) particular conceptions of interests, rights, and responsibilities to those actors located on the 'outside' of the organisation. However, this is not to say that the boundaries of any organisation can be regarded as unproblematic. Del Casino *et al* (2000) point out that from a post structuralist perspective there is unlikely to be any clearly defined 'inside' or 'outside' because organisations are intrinsically linked to wider constellations of power[13] (see also Massey *et al* 1999). Social power 'flows' *through* organisations as actors deploy various discursive strategies to pursue their interests.

Third (and coupled with the second point above), researchers argue that a focus on 'organisations' runs the risk of ignoring the very processes that bring about the precarious accomplishments that are of interest. Building upon the work of actor network theorists they advocate a shift of emphasis from 'order' to 'ordering', and from 'structures' to 'structuring'.

Clearly, this newly emerging perspective differs radically from pluralists' concerns with charting observable group behaviour and documenting inter-group competition in the political arena. It therefore has profound implications for researching the Central Land Association. This particular interest group should be theorised as a political organisation. Studies should be designed to reveal how the Central Land Association was brought into existence, and how it was created and re-created through (for example) 'everyday' actions, practices, and intuitive understandings. It must be regarded as a dynamic (but fluid) achievement that once existed in time and space, an organisation continually in the process of being 'made' through the dissemination of knowledge and the propagation of identities. In addition, following Del Casino *et al* (2000), the temporal and institutional boundaries of the Central Land Association should not be seen simply in 'common sense' terms even though it was characterised by a formal membership, written rules/constitution, paid officials etc. In essence, the Central Land Association's ever changing 'contours' should be acknowledged; they cannot be taken as self evident and will only be contingently stabilised.

3.2 The sociology of scientific knowledge: actor network theory

As noted in the previous section, some organisation theorists have drawn upon actor network theory in order to develop (and refine) their theoretical constructs. In this section, the key characteristics of this particular perspective on actors, agency, and power relations will be examined in some detail in order to ascertain the contribution that recent advances in this field can make to the development of a theoretical framework within which the Central Land Association can be examined.

Strictly speaking, actor network 'theory' (abbreviated as ANT) is not a coherent body of theory. It is part of an ongoing critical dialogue between a variety of social science

perspectives, including post structuralism, organisational analysis, and the sociology of knowledge. It was originally developed in the 1980s by Latour (1986), Callon (1986) and Law (1986), and entered into mainstream social science in the 1990s although many of its chief proponents are now engaged in a process of critical self-reflection. In human geography, it has been subjected to critical review by (for example) Thrift (1996), Allen (1999), and Whatmore (1999). ANT has been deployed in the study of rural issues by human geographers in particular, including Marsden *et al* (1993), Murdoch and Marsden (1994; 1995), Woods (1997a; 1997b; 1998; 2001), and Bowler (1999).

Actor network theory is 'subject centred' in so far as it regards the actor as the locus of decision and action (Latour 1986). Coupled to this, it regards actors as knowledgeable subjects capable of formulating and reaching decisions and generating strategies to act upon them. Theorists also maintain that although individual actors may recognise an interest and have the desire to act upon it, they tend to lack the powers of agency to do so. Any capacity to exercise power is more likely to be realised if an individual joins together with like-minded actors and thus becomes a member of an actor network. However, whether an individual can be persuaded to contribute their resources to a wider cause and act collectively depends upon how successful a group of leading actors are in enrolling them as they attempt to consolidate and 'lengthen' a pre-existing network.

Actor network theory is grounded in a model of associational or collaborative power where the emphasis is upon generating 'power with' (Murdoch 1995). Power is thus a composition; it is 'made' by many actors but usually attributed to a small number of leading actors. Associational power is frequently regarded as a pre-requisite to achieving instrumental power, or 'power over' others (Allen 1999). In this model, power is not something that actors 'possess'; it is an outcome (or effect) of situated practices (Marsden *et al* 1993). It is exerted when a particular group of actors deploy strategies of negotiation and inducement (rather than coercion or control) in order to persuade others to carry out tasks on their behalf.

Actor network theory is also a contextual theory. Networks exist *only in relation to other constellations of power,* that is in relation to other collectivities held together by

their own internal resources and discourses. To paraphrase Woods (1997b p.336), an actor network will be particularly concerned with the perceived pre-existing power of other entities as actors appropriate the power of others in order to support their goals (and, if appropriate, to make up for their own lack of power).

Hindess (1986) places considerable emphasis on the role played by interests in actor network theory. This is particularly important in the context of political organisations. Unfortunately, the literature discussed in section 2.2 tends to take an organisation's interests as 'given' as opposed to problematising them. According to Hindess (1986), however, interests can be regarded as a conceptual bridge between action and structure. They are *connected* to the attributes of the wider social structure but are not *reducible* to this. Actors have interests by virtue of the social circumstances in which they find themselves, such as members of a particular class, occupation, or gender or age group. In addition, interests provide human subjects (and collectivities) with reasons for action whenever actors can identify and ascribe interests to themselves and distinguish them from interests that they can associate with others.

Some researchers have come to regard ANT as an extension of post structuralism, because its architects have placed considerable emphasis upon the role of language and discourse in holding a network together. 'Messages' flow within and between networks; they are conveyed through all manner of human actors and non-human entities including texts, technical devices and instruments. In the eyes of many researchers[14] ANT must, therefore, be a hybrid theory in which human actors should not necessarily receive privileged treatment. In this variant of ANT, non-human 'actants' are important because they act as 'intermediaries' participating in the 'performances' that bind together the disparate elements that comprise a network (Whatmore 1999; Davies 2000). In Massey's (1993) terms, such actor networks take the form of 'power geometries'; actors and all manner of actants are bound together across time and space. However, Massey (1993) emphasises that these geometries take the form of inherently unequal relationships where (for example) struggles can be discerned between actors at the 'core' of an organisation and others at the 'periphery' (see also Davies 2000). Networks are therefore characterised by unrelenting attempts by leaders to impose 'order' onto the entities upon which they are built at the same

time as they pursue their goals by negotiating with others (Murdoch 1995; 1997). ANT must also be regarded as a relational theory in so far as it maintains that any 'ordering' within and among entities stems entirely from the interactions between them. None of these relationships are 'prior'; they cannot be 'read off' from knowing the location of a given actor or entity in the wider socio-economic structure.

The theoretical principles and conceptions of power developed by actor network theorists are highly significant for the proposed study of the Central Land Association. They are consistent with, and indeed embellish, many of the recent developments in organisation theory summarised in the previous sub-section. While the Central Land Association could be conceptualised as an organisation or an entity that undertakes processes of ordering and structuring, it is more than that. To paraphrase Davies (2000 p.541), the Central Land Association is *a pool of order* comprising an intricate (and hybrid) web of human and non-human actors and intermediaries.

Actor Network Theorists have also provided clear methodological guidelines for undertaking the kinds of empirical research questions outlined above. The aim must be to construct the 'performances' through which an actor network was erected, stabilised, and (if necessary) dismantled and re-built (Davies 2000). Researchers must do so by *following the actors* as they build and consolidate their 'worlds' and, through this, pursue their interests. In the case of the historical study that is necessary in order to examine the Central Land Association researchers must *retrospectively* reconstruct the interactions, identities, and positionalities that were the hallmark of the Central Land Association as it gradually came into being and worked to consolidate its position in rural politics. As Allen (1999) has argued, emphasis must be placed upon how 'leading actors' harness resources such as discourses, tools, and techniques, and deploy them in forging particular patterns of power relations as they pursue their own conceptions of their interests and participate in the policy process. Research must assess how actors come together to pursue a common purpose, how they develop 'power to' in order to harness resources, and how the possibility of collective action is enabled by acts of association. It is likely that associational power mobilised through networked assemblages was ultimately utilised to serve instrumental ends. As Allen (1999) has emphasised, 'power with' is frequently used as a collective endeavour to

bend another's will and thus to gain at his/her expense. Researchers must look back to times before the era when the Central Land Association was a relatively stable entity in order to reconstruct the processes of 'ordering' that brought the network into being. In doing so, they will be acknowledging that "… order is not treated as given but as the historical outcome of many different and negotiated processes of ordering" (Davies 2000, p.542).

3.3 Human geography: representation and the politics of identity

The theoretical developments discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.2 are clearly of value in providing alternatives to mainstream approaches to researching interest groups in general and hence the case of the Central Land Association in particular. As Davies (2000 p.542) succinctly explains:

> "By combining the insights of actor network theory with a
> 'postmodern turn' in organisational analysis, institutions
> can be viewed as heterogeneous networks, created
> through reflexive and recursive modes of orderings,
> enabling as well as disciplining, but always in a process
> of becoming."

Nevertheless, ANT must be regarded as deficient in so far as it gives no indication of *how* actors' interests (once they are acknowledged as such) are socially constructed and communicated. The key issue here is how interests are *represented* in a particular light to (for example) members of an actor network, other sympathisers, adversaries, competitors, sceptics, and critics. Recent theoretical developments in cultural studies in general (and human geography in particular) have led to a growing consensus that the kinds of relationships between people/organisations and between people and place discussed throughout this paper must be considered as processes of representation (see, for example, Duncan and Ley 1993; Gregory 1995; Pile and Thrift 1995; Cresswell 1996; and King 1996). Attention now turns to the task of assessing the significance of theories of representation for a study of the Central Land Association.

According to Holloway and Hubbard (2000 p.144) representation occurs through "… a vast array of artefacts and forms which people use to interpret the world around

them and present themselves to others." It is a process through which people communicate their ideas and feelings about the world and share information with others. It implies the development and dissemination of shared systems of meaning; a particular view of the world that can bind actors together and be drawn upon in order that one group of actors can communicate with others.

Hall (1997) argues that there are three ways of theorising representations and the ways in which they are communicated. Of particular importance here are constructivist approaches. Meanings are culturally constructed, and produced by (rather than through) communication. Representation is therefore involved in understanding both the material and conceptual worlds. It is the representation of people and places (through whatever medium) that will affect how actors relate to these same people and places, regardless of the 'reality' of a place or group of people. As Holloway and Hubbard (2000 p.148) explain, representations "… speak to a particular cultural group in a way that leads them to be accepted as a common sense view of the world. Representation is far from innocent, then, being part of a complex cultural struggle for certain views and opinions to be accepted as normal and correct."

Clearly, such socio-cultural representations are potentially powerful tools that political organisations in general (and hence the Central Land Association in particular) can deploy. From the Central Land Association's perspective, they can be harnessed in order to help bring about rural change or, indeed, to offer resistance to forces that threaten the interests and/or causes with which they are aligned. Because representations can be regarded as contingent and subjective knowledge and understandings of people, space, and place, they can be conceptualised as *imaginative geographies* (Gregory 1995; Ploszajska 2000). In essence, the Central Land Association must be regarded as an organisation that has worked to construct such imaginative geographies and to transmit them through (for example) social and cultural practices and its printed texts. As Massey *et al* (1999) explain, such imaginative geographies are not "… a licence to endorse fanciful representations of place or to accept without reflection the boundaries drawn by one person in relation to others" (p.43). Equally, they are not cursory or fleeting representations in the sense that they are simply conjoured up and discarded at will. In essence, they are *asserted spatial truths* (Massey *et al* 1999, p.43-4).

As far as the Central Land Association is concerned, these 'truths' must be considered to be:

- *Potent* because they can help legitimise claims made by the Central Land Association to speak on behalf of (or act for) particular 'rural' spaces and their inhabitants.

- *Robust* if it eventually becomes difficult for other groups to think outside of a frame of reference based upon 'truths' that the Central Land Association has successfully disseminated. Leading actors can make it difficult for others to evaluate (or make sense of) rural matters in ways *other* than as represented. If 'what is' is represented successfully with an air of authority (without provoking disbelief) it becomes difficult for competitors, adversaries, and sceptics to imagine certain rural places or spaces in any other way.

- *A source of identity* for Central Land Association members that enables them to differentiate themselves from their competitors and opponents. Imaginative geographies will enable the political, social, and cultural 'distance' between group members and others to become enlarged. Identity is therefore an important source of collective self-awareness for the Central Land Association. Nevertheless, Valentine (2001) warns that identities must be regarded as fluid, contested, and therefore unstable. Her words resonate with the theoretical propositions that lie at the heart of organisation theory and actor network theory.

The very notion of representation is closely linked to the theory of associational power that is the cornerstone of the network approach (section 3.2). Representations may be deployed to build networks; indeed, they are an integral part of the processes of *translation* and *displacement* that actors set in motion as they create and consolidate constellations of power (Latour 1986; Marsden *et al* 1993; Woods 2001). In the case of the membership of the Central Land Association, their shared *experiences* of (for example) the difficulties confronting agriculture, and the threats posed by radical solutions to the 'land question' may be translated into 'facts' to buttress a political argument. Translation may require metaphysical displacement

from one medium to another (from verbal discourse to written texts, and *vice versa*). However, translation may also occur from one scale to another. Questions concerning estates or farms may be represented as broader issues concerning land, agriculture, nation (economy), food, and empire. As Marsden (1995) has argued, translation may also take the form of spatial displacement, especially between the 'periphery' of an organisation and its 'core'. Matters are frequently raised by local organisations and communicated to the national leadership. Conversely, in entities organised along more centralist lines, information may be transmitted from core to periphery and back again.

All in all, through processes of representation, the Central Land Association's chief actors can therefore 'produce' spaces, not as tangible entities but as imagined spaces, and create imagined geographies of 'the rural'. Such spaces are potentially very powerful political/ideological devices; they can be communicated as shared systems of meaning which, in turn, can be the basis of identity for actors and indeed the reasons for action. It is therefore legitimate to regard the Central Land Association as an organisation immersed in a 'politics of identity' centred upon particular claims about (representations of) certain rural spaces and places.

3.4 Political science: the 'new institutionalism' and decision making processes

According to Robertson (1994), March and Olsen (1998) and Olsen (2001), one of the aims of the 'new institutionalism' is to explore and develop alternatives to established ways of theorising political actors, institutions, and processes of change. Researchers have become particularly concerned with developing alternatives to approaches that are grounded in the notion of 'bounded rationality' with its focus upon the utilities that those who engage in political struggles hope to achieve. As part of this theoretical project, the importance of re-thinking the ways in which actors make decisions has come to the forefront. Of importance to this paper and its proposal for a longitudinal study of the Central Land Association is the argument that *time* is implicated in all decision making. Leading actors are likely to be affected by the temporal linkages between problems, solutions, choice opportunities, and the decision makers themselves (Olsen 2001, p.193).

There are important implications here for a longitudinal study of the Central Land Association where (as sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 have shown) the focus is on the unfolding of successive acts of agency through time as actors struggle to give this organisation 'order' and 'stability' and represent it in a particular light. Far from being a smooth or uninterrupted process, the 'flow' of agency is likely to be impeded at critical junctures. The 'progress' of an organisation such as the Central Land Association towards achieving its goals may well have been periodically arrested because the past, in all its multifarious manifestations, acted as an indelible template that conditioned subsequent action. Actions and events in the past are likely to have offered opportunities to actors, while simultaneously imposing constraints on the range of decisions that may be made and associated actions that can be undertaken. At any one point in time, the Central Land Association's actors will therefore be confronted with the legacy of the past; this in turn will help determine how they believe the Central Land Association's 'world' should be constructed, represented, and communicated.

Following Richardson (2000), the entire time scale over which the Central Land Association operated should therefore be conceptualised as an era of *punctuated equilibrium*. Although Richardson does not specify what *forms* these 'punctuations' may take or suggest how they may be theorised, previous discussion in sections 3.2 and 3.3 in particular offers some clues. They may take the form of one of two types of crisis. First, the Central Land Association may have been confronted by a *crisis of representation*. This will be precipitated when claims and 'truths' (that is the 'everyday' or 'common' knowledge that the Central Land Association had worked to propagate) were no longer regarded as such by actors that this particular organisation was seeking to influence (both 'within' and 'outside' its formal boundaries). Periods of *relative* ease of decision making could therefore be ruptured as a result of challenges to the imaginative geographies that Central Land Association leaders had erected. Second, the Central Land Association may have experienced a *crisis of political engagement*. As a political organisation, the Central Land Association may have been forced to re-appraise its objectives and re-consider its strategic conduct because the political world in which it operated was fluid. As Peele (1995) has emphasised, groups periodically form, merge, disband, and split; the Central Land Association would therefore have been stronger and more dedicated at some times

than others. Consequently, the Central Land Association may have been able to occupy the 'front line' in fighting for a particular cause or defending a specific interest at some times but not others. Coupled with this, adversaries and competitors also come and go; the Central Land Association would therefore be likely to be engaged in a constant struggle with organisations such as the Central Chambers of Agriculture (Matthews 1915) and the NFU to become the legitimate representative of a section of society, or to be regarded as the embodiment of certain values and principles. Moreover, the political agenda (i.e. the context for action) is likely to change over time, with or without the approval of extra parliamentary organised groups such as the Central Land Association. Peele (1995) also notes that the entire process of decision making may be revised, as may systems of governance. Consequently, governments may become more/less inclined to take notice of pressure group activity.

Peele's (1995) final point is particularly relevant for a study of the Central Land Association because at the very time it came into existence the political climate was changing. A number of academics have maintained that the first two decades of the twentieth century can be characterised as a period of transition when one version of pluralist governance gave way to another. Anderson (1992) and Judge (1995) write in this vein, and discern a shift away from pluralism to corporate pluralism, and ultimately to sectoral pluralism as the interests of producers, labour, and consumers became increasingly separated and demarcated more rigidly in politics (for further analysis and discussion see Harrison 1980 and Cawson 1986). In contrast, another group of researchers speak of a more radical shift from pluralist to corporatist systems of governance. Read (1972) initially spoke of changing relationship between individuals and the state once it became apparent that there was no conflict between the needs of each. Read (1972) conceptualises the early twentieth century citizen as a corporate individual whose quest in life was for liberty but translated into (and pursued through) group organisation. Similarly Hall and Schwarz (1985) regard the Edwardian era as the 'crucible years' as the transition from Victorian individualism to a new spirit of collectivism got underway. Change occurred as a 'corporatist spirit' in society emerged. Rhodes (1985; 1997) and Grant (1995) maintain that the early twentieth century witnessed a political transition from Victorian pluralism to tripartism and (ultimately) corporatism. It was characterised by the emergence of

functional groups in politics due to a growing concern with production-related issues (especially those pertaining to agriculture and food) and an emerging imbalance between the nation's principal economic sectors (agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce). Winter (1996) argues that in the early decades of the twentieth century established relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the state were gradually transformed. Of particular significance was the ways in which the principles of state intervention and managerialsm became established, together with the principle that the main producer groups should be involved in economic planning.

4. Summary and conclusions

In broad terms, the intention of this paper has been to contribute to research in the social sciences that has been concerned with extra-parliamentary political organisations (usually labelled interest or pressure groups) and their relations with governments. It has done so by focusing upon the case of the Country Landowners' Association or CLA.

A review of the relevant literature revealed that the CLA has been relatively under researched. In particular, it has not been subjected to detailed analysis or rigorous *theoretical* scrutiny, and is represented as 'an organisation without a history' in much of the academic literature. It is simply 'taken as given' as it participates in rural politics, and any discussion of how the past might shape contemporary organisational ideologies, priorities, decisions, and actions is conspicuous by its absence. Coupled with this, there is little indication of precisely which aspects of the decision making process the CLA has targeted, and the extent to which it has made *ad hoc* contributions or immersed itself in the long term political bargaining that is a salient characteristic of the policy process is far from clear. Overall, the contribution that researchers have made to understanding the politics of 'the land' and the role of interest groups in rural politics through the case of the CLA has been very modest.

This paper has argued that a critical examination of the CLA's origins and development are one way of filling the gaps in the literature that are so evident. In particular, the question of *how* such political groups emerge and remain key players in the policy process should be addressed. Ideally, a longitudinal study that unravels

how far the past has become interwoven in the present is required. But in order to embark on what would clearly be an ambitious project, the Central Land Association (1907-18) must be the initial focus of attention. It has been argued that an in-depth understanding of the genesis of this particular political entity is a pre-requisite to casting further light on today's principal representative of the landed interest.

Much of this paper has been concerned with how the Central Land Association should be studied. In order not to be open to the charge of being a-theoretical or rooted in outdated theoretical principles, it has explicitly drawn upon recent research developments that fall within post modernist and/or post structuralist perspectives (as broadly defined). Theoretical principles and conceptual constructs have been synthesised into a framework that is appropriate to carry out a thorough examination of the emergence and development of the Central Land Association. This framework differs markedly from established perspectives on the actions of political groups on four counts.

First, it regards the Central Land Association as an 'organisation' (as opposed to a 'pressure group' with the empirical-behaviourist overtones characteristic of pluralism). As such, it must be regarded as a fluid entity that is constantly 'becoming' and only contingently stabilised as it engages in the world of rural politics. The focus upon organisational activity also provides important clues regarding the political struggles that surround attempts to reproduce and dismantle the institution of private property relations.

Second, it ascribes a pivotal role to the concept of associational power. The Central Land Association's leading actors will be primarily engaged in building, strengthening, and (if necessary) dismantling and re-erecting an actor network. They will immerse themselves in unrelenting struggles to persuade others to act in a way that will further their own political interests. This model of power also pre-supposes that all political action is contextual. The Central Land Association therefore exists principally as a political entity in relation to others: its competitors, sceptics, sympathisers, and opponents. All these entities occupy overlapping actor spaces; the task of the Central Land Association is to become the sole occupier of the political 'space' that is the legitimate preserve of 'the landed interest'.

Third, the concept of representation is harnessed in order to open up a way of analysing and interpreting the aims, activities, and achievements of political organisations that has not been pursued to date. The emphasis here is upon imaginary geographies, how they are constructed and communicated, and the practices through which the process of representation has been carried out. The political/ideological activities through which the leading actors have aimed to instil particular constructions of their 'rightful' role in politics upon actors who may/may not subscribe to their particular portrayal of problems, priorities, and solutions are also of interest.

Fourth, the temporal dimension is emphasised. Time is not taken for granted or regarded as a linear or chronological progression leading inexorably to organisational maturity. In contrast, time takes the form of continuities and discontinuities in the way the Central Land Association is likely to have represented itself in politics and fought to impose its conception of its interests. Time is regarded as punctuated equilibrium. Periods of relative 'ease' as regards organisational decision making may well be ruptured by exogenous and/or endogenous forces. These processes have the potential to reverse the Central Land Association's achievements and (possibly) lead to a fundamental questioning of its *raison d'etre*.

Finally, the implicit and explicit reliance upon actor network theory throughout the latter part of this paper must be acknowledged. An empirical study of the Central Land Association that takes account of the theoretical axioms associated with this school of thought must follow the actors, albeit retrospectively. Such an approach rejects the analytical and conceptual separation of internal and external relations that has been the hallmark of much research into pressure group politics to date. Figure 1 indicates what, in the case of the Central Land Association 'following the actors' will entail when its struggle to become the legitimate political mouthpiece of the 'land' (if not 'the rural') and to influence the policy process is charted.

Network Formalisation

Identifying and formulating interests
Building decision making structures
Establishing actor identities
Constructing imaginative geographies

Deployment of resources:
tools and techniques

re-deployment
of resources

Network Maintenance

stabilization; consolidation,
re-configuration; reconstructing actor
indentities as imaginative geographies

Network Legitimation

'Delivery' of achievements
to membership

Representation of interests as
imaginative geographies
  - Insiders
  - Outsiders
  -Thresholders

Colonising worlds:
Targetting of potential
supporters and adversaries
Association, infiltration,
displacement, etc.

Network Development

Enlistment (formal incorporation)
Endorsement (informal support)

Colonising worlds:
Dissemination of achievements,
capabilities, capacities, calibre
of leadership.
Lines of communication / control

overcoming resistance
challenging dissidence

Negotiating 'rules of
action'
Establishing legitimate
areas of political
participation and modes
of representation

Network Orchestration

'Reading' of intentions of compliant /
oppositional actor networks
Judging opportunities for and
constraints upon action
Mobilizing resources

Network Evaluation

Interpreting outcomes
Assessing effectiveness
Representing achievements

Political engagement: rural governance
                : the policy process
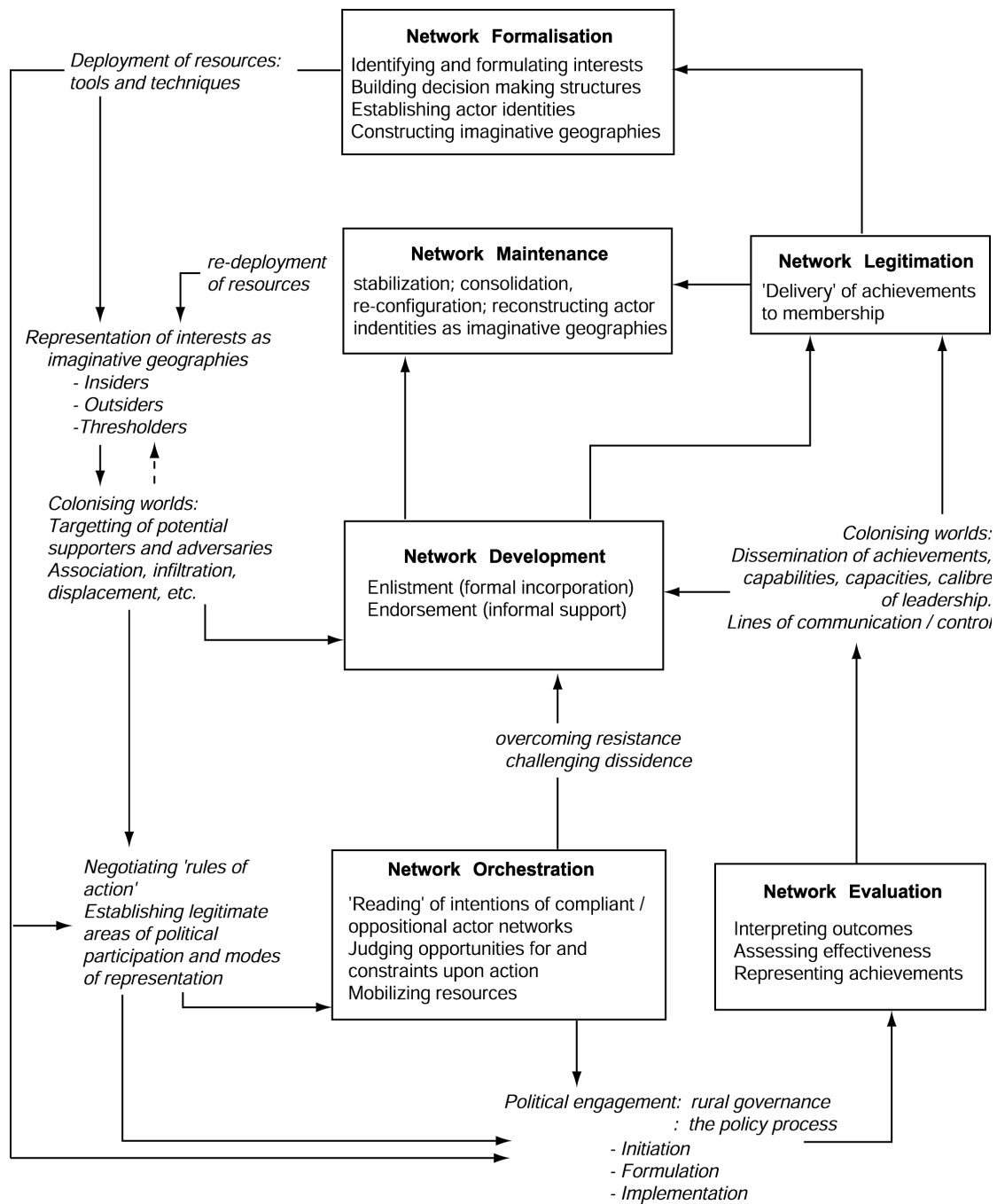 - Initiation
  - Formulation
  - Implementation

Figure 1 Researching the Central Land Association: 'following the actors'

[1] Interestingly, while the CLA's web site has been updated since it re-named itself the Country Land and Business Association to take account of the broader political agenda it now pursues it still refers to itself as the 'CLA'[12]

[2] However, the CLA's publications give no indication of which model of stewardship it adheres to. For a discussion of alternative conceptions of 'the steward' see Spencer (2000).

[3] For a recent discussion (and critique) of Grant's categorisation of 'insiders', 'outsiders', and 'thresholders' see Grant, 2000 chapter 2.

[4] At the Public Records Office there are no less than 28 substantial files showing that many post-war government ministers felt the need to consult the CLA on a wide range of issues. These include land use and 'stewardship' (MAFF 144/178); farming subsidies, farm business diversification, affordable housing, and the legal and financial position of landlords (MAFF 202/41; MAFF 36/661; and MAFF 142/630-32). The CLA has even been consulted over the way MAFF itself should be organised (MAFF 184/23).

[5] According to Judge (1995), policy networks/communities are characterised by a highly restricted membership, and entrusted with collective responsibility for identifying problems, setting policy agendas, and formulating and implementing policy solutions. Indeed, they are regarded as 'closed' in so far as they are insulated from other decision–making networks (including Parliament) and are not usually accountable to the public at large. Their members are expected to negotiate in order to reach a consensus. As Jordan (1990) has emphasised, the notion of a 'policy community' also assumes that such organisations are stable. Since the late 1980s, however, these theoretical principles and the corporatist arrangements themselves have both come under attack (see in particular Cox and Lowe 1986, 1987; Smith 1995; Richardson 2000).

[6] For a recent discussion of issues surrounding interest group membership, retention, and participation see Grant 2000, p.44-6.

[7] Furthermore, the CLA has been ignored by a number of prominent political scientists. For example, the CLA has not been mentioned in most of the most frequently cited reviews of political organisations and pressure groups operating at national level, let alone subjected to any form of critical scrutiny. Finer's (1958) widely-quoted seminal work on interest groups in post-war Britain is a case in point, as is a more recent review and assessment by Richardson (1993). Likewise, in Coxall and Robins' (1994, p.284-7) overview, the CLA does not feature as one of the main business sectional groups, nor as a principal cause group, even though it could be regarded as a prime exemplar of one (or both) of these. More recently, Grant (2000, p.6-7) has found no place for the CLA in his analysis of the range of pressure groups that now exist in the UK.

[8] Walker's paper (probably written c.1947) is held at the University of Reading's Rural History Centre. In essence, it is a romanticised version of the past, a story of 'selfless leadership'; of devotion to 'noble causes' when the political tide was turning against the institution of private landlordism.

[9] These errors have also been noted by Newby (1980) and Perkin (1989).

[10] For full details of the different conceptions of property rights that underpinned the 'land question' see Offer, 1981.

[11] Note: Strangely, however, the actions of the Land Defence League (a splinter group from Central Land Association later to become the Land Union that advocated radical solutions to the land question) are discussed in detail. Similarly, opposition mounted by the Budget Protest League – formed by Walter Long, the President of the Central Land Association – is discussed.

[12] Del Casino et al (2000) argue that in differentiating organisations from institutions they are simply following a convention that lies at the heart of organisation theory, but emphasise that this distinction must remain the subject of debate.

[13] Like Philo (2000) and Del Casino et al (2000), Massey (1993) maintains that such networks are notoriously difficult to 'pin down' given that they are constantly 'becoming'. In addition, their achievements are best regarded as fragile, and any accomplishments may prove reversible.

[14] In the literature, two variants of ANT are discernable. The 'soft' version is epitomised by Marsden et al (1993), who maintain that human subjects should be the focus of attention because non-human entities cannot make decisions. An alternative version is discussed in depth by Whatmore (1999), who advances some sophisticated arguments in favour of regarding networks as hybrid entities.

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