

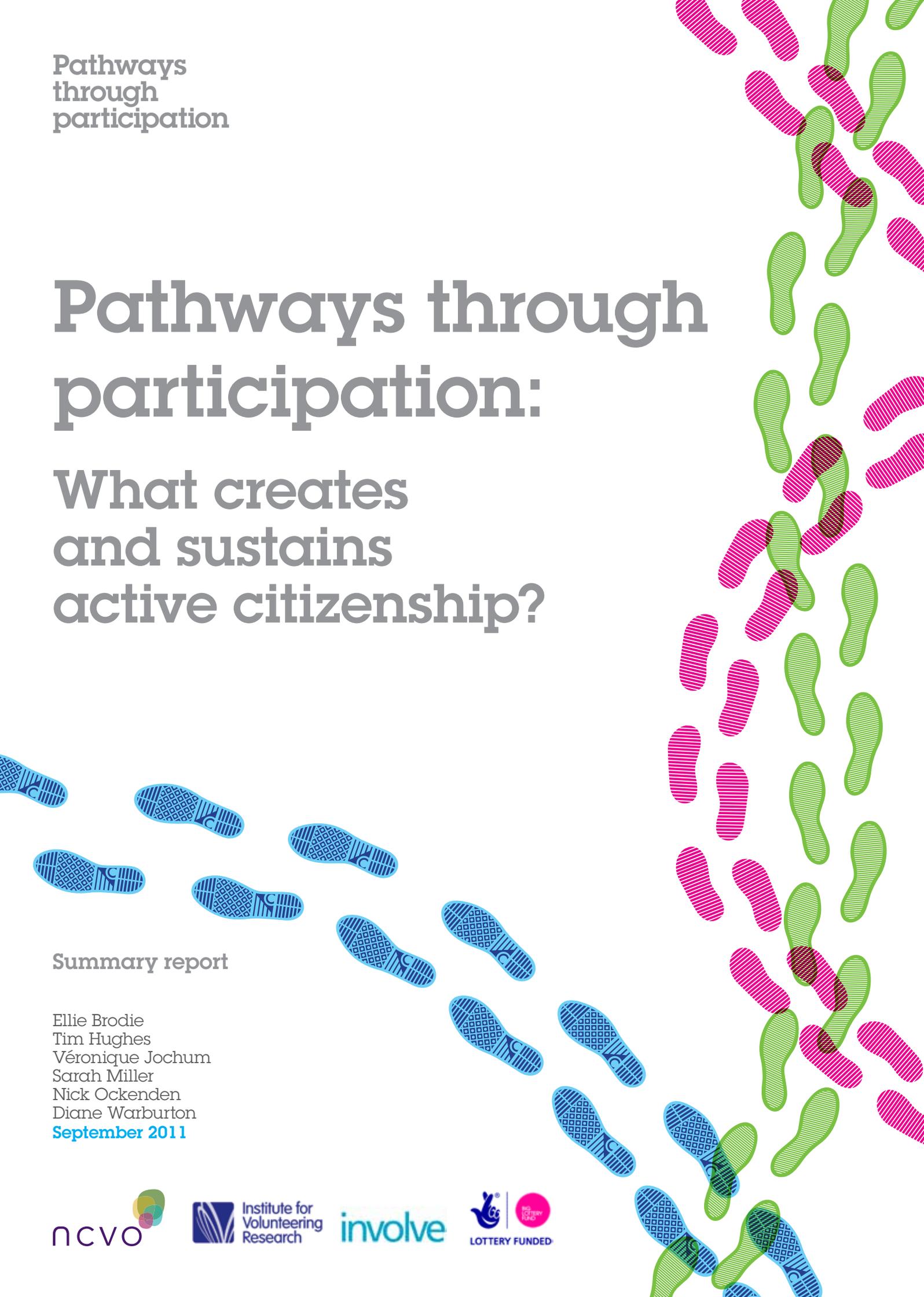
Pathways  
through  
participation

# Pathways through participation:

## What creates and sustains active citizenship?

Summary report

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## Summary report

This report summarises the key findings from the Pathways through Participation project and our recommendations for future policy and practice<sup>1</sup>. It considers the following questions in turn:

- What is participation?
- How and why does participation begin, continue and stop?
- Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?
- What connections, if any, are there between different forms and episodes of participation and what triggers movement between them?
- What are the implications for policy and practice?

## 01 Introduction

Pathways through Participation is a two-and-a-half year qualitative research project funded by the Big Lottery Fund and led by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in partnership with the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) and Involve. The project aimed to improve our understanding of how and why people participate, how their involvement changes over time, and what pathways, if any, exist between different activities.

The project emerged from a common desire across our three organisations to create a fuller picture of how people participate over their lifetimes. It builds on work completed at NCVO on active citizenship, adds to IVR's research into volunteering by exploring it in relation to other forms of participation, and extends Involve's research and practice in empowering citizens to take and influence the decisions that affect their lives.

How to encourage people to be more active citizens is a challenge that national and local governments have grappled with for decades. Recent policy developments around localism, the Big Society, outsourcing public services, encouraging charitable giving and the role of the voluntary sector have made questions about participation more topical than ever.

## 02 Our approach

Previous research<sup>2</sup> has tended to look at participation within a particular type of activity (such as volunteering) or issue (such as housing), usually from an institutional or organisational perspective and at just a snapshot in time. This project builds on the existing evidence base by taking a much broader definition of participation, focusing on people's experience of participation over the course of their lives, and looking at the connections between different participation activities. By adopting this approach, the project was able to explore the complexities and dynamics of how participation works in practice.

Our approach placed the individual at the heart of the research: in total, we conducted 101 in-depth interviews with people, who reflected on their life story of participation. However, we recognised that participation needs to be looked at in its wider context because people do not operate in a vacuum; their participation is situated in time, place and space. We therefore chose three different areas from around England in which to carry out the research to provide a range of contexts for participation, and enable us to interview a broad range of people. The three fieldwork areas were Leeds (inner city), the London Borough of Enfield (suburban) and Suffolk (rural).

National and local stakeholder engagement was embedded in the project to help guide the research design and to identify links to local and national policy-makers and practitioners. A national Advisory Group and Local Stakeholder Groups were established in each of the three fieldwork areas to provide this role. In each fieldwork area, we ran three mapping workshops at the start of the project to identify sites of participation where we could find some of our interviewees, and also organised participatory workshops to discuss the local implications of the emerging research findings.

<sup>1</sup> The full report for the project is available at: [www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/finalreport](http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/finalreport)

<sup>2</sup> For a review of literature about participation, see Pathways through Participation (2009) *Understanding participation: a literature review*. London: NCVO, IVR and Involve. <http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Pathways-literature-review-final-version.pdf>

## 03 What is participation?

We wanted to capture people's own experience and understanding of participation and therefore deliberately adopted a very broad definition of participation<sup>3</sup>. We found that people's participatory activities fell into three main categories (although there are clearly many overlaps between them):

- **Social participation: the collective activities that individuals are involved in**, including being involved in formal voluntary organisations (e.g. volunteering for a charity shop or being a trustee), informal or grassroots community groups (e.g. a tenants' and residents' association or a sports club), and formal and informal mutual aid and self help (e.g. a peer-support group or a community gardening group).
- **Public participation: the engagement of individuals with the various structures and institutions of democracy**, including voting, contacting a political representative, campaigning and lobbying, and taking part in consultations and demonstrations.
- **Individual participation: people's individual actions and choices that reflect the kind of society they want to live in**, including buying fair trade or green products, boycotting products from particular countries, recycling, signing petitions, giving to charity and informal helpful gestures (such as visiting an elderly neighbour).

### 3.1 Participation is widespread

The research uncovered a huge number and variety of participatory activities and places where people participated. Everyone we interviewed had participated in some kind of activity at some point in their life. We were able to identify past participants who no longer participated, but were unable to identify any genuine non-participants (i.e. people who had never participated in their lives).

Even people who thought of themselves as non-participants or who were described by others as non-participants often turned out to have been involved at

some stage when probed. Our findings add weight to other studies which suggest that participation is widespread<sup>4</sup> and is centrally important to people's lives and the communities in which they live.

### 3.2 Participation has some common features

Across the range of activities that people told us about, we concluded that all forms of participation have some common features. Participation is:

- **Voluntary**  
Participation can be encouraged, supported and made more attractive, but it is inherently about a free choice to take part (or not) without coercion. People get involved because they want to.
- **About action**  
People are moved to action for a range of different motives and their involvement may be limited in time and scope, but all participation requires an action of some kind. Even a relatively passive form of participation such as signing an online petition involves an opinion and a degree of activity and effort.
- **Collective or connected**  
Participation means being part of something. Even when the action is of an individual nature, such as giving a charitable donation or buying fair trade foods, there is a sense of common purpose and the act itself has a collective impact or ambition.
- **Purposeful**  
All participants want to do something that is worthwhile in their own terms, and every participatory act has, and is intended to have, consequences. At the very least, participation makes a difference to the individual participant; at most, it also helps change the world around them; and sometimes it does both.

### 3.3 Perceptions of participation are contradictory

People perceive their own participation and that of others in different ways. Such perceptions often influence how and why they choose to get involved.

For example, many interviewees suggested that they did not see themselves as political and did not want to be associated with such activity. Stereotypes of people who participate were also evident, with interviewees saying they did not like or want to be seen as 'do-gooders':

*'You're very easily mistaken for being a goody two-shoes and that's what I'm saying, it's not all altruistic, it isn't. I get a big kick out of seeing other people made better from what I've done. You could say that that's selfish because it makes me feel better...'*

People's perceptions of themselves, of other participants and of different types of participatory activities did not always match reality. A reluctance to being associated with political activity was, for example, often inconsistent with the reality of the frequency of people's engagement in this field: the vast majority of respondents voted, and many people had contacted their local MPs or been involved in some kind of campaign. Furthermore, while some interviewees referred to the negative stereotype of the 'do-gooder', they were such active participants that they could easily have been described in that way themselves.

### 3.4 Participation impacts on people and places

We found many examples of the impacts of participation: on the individuals that participate through to wider societal and global impacts. Impacts on individuals were both instrumental (e.g. developing new skills and networks) and transformative (e.g. greater confidence, satisfaction, and sense of purpose and self-worth).

We heard compelling stories about the impacts of participants' activities on other people and places. Often this was through making or preventing change in the local environment, for example by being designated a conservation area or by providing community facilities or protecting them from closure. People's stories also demonstrated how their participation supported and enriched the lives of individuals and groups in a community, from providing sport, arts

<sup>3</sup> NCVO (2005) *Civil renewal and active citizenship: a guide to the debate*. London: NCVO, p. 25-28.

<sup>4</sup> Mohan, J. (2010) What do volunteering statistics tell us about the prospects for the Big Society? TSRC/NCVO Big Society Evidence Based Seminar 11 October 2010

and cultural activities and education for children and young people, to providing opportunities and skills such as IT training or work experience.

We also found many instances of how the impacts of participation created and supported wider change, for example through:

- advocacy and raising awareness of issues
- changing legislation
- promoting international causes by providing support, campaigning and fundraising for international charities
- environmental impacts such as reducing carbon emissions at the level of individual behaviour change and through local and national campaigning via environmental organisations.

### 3.5 Conflict and tension are an integral part of participation

Policy-makers and practitioners have tended to portray participation as a good thing, to focus on the positive impacts of people's involvement and on how it can benefit society, organisations and the individuals involved. However, this is only one side of the story: participation can also have a less positive side for communities and participants and it frequently involves conflict and tension.

We found evidence of the difficulties caused by clashing or dominant personalities within groups, the development of cliques, and disagreements over how to achieve the mission of an organisation. Furthermore, some people we spoke to had become burnt-out at especially stressful or busy periods within the organisations they had been involved in or their personal relationships had been put under considerable strain. Such experiences had led some people to stop their involvement. We also heard examples of conflict being an intended consequence of participation with people in direct opposition to the state or other forms of authority, either locally or nationally, seeking or resisting change, enacted through lobbying local MPs or taking part in marches.

## 04 How and why does participation begin, continue and stop?

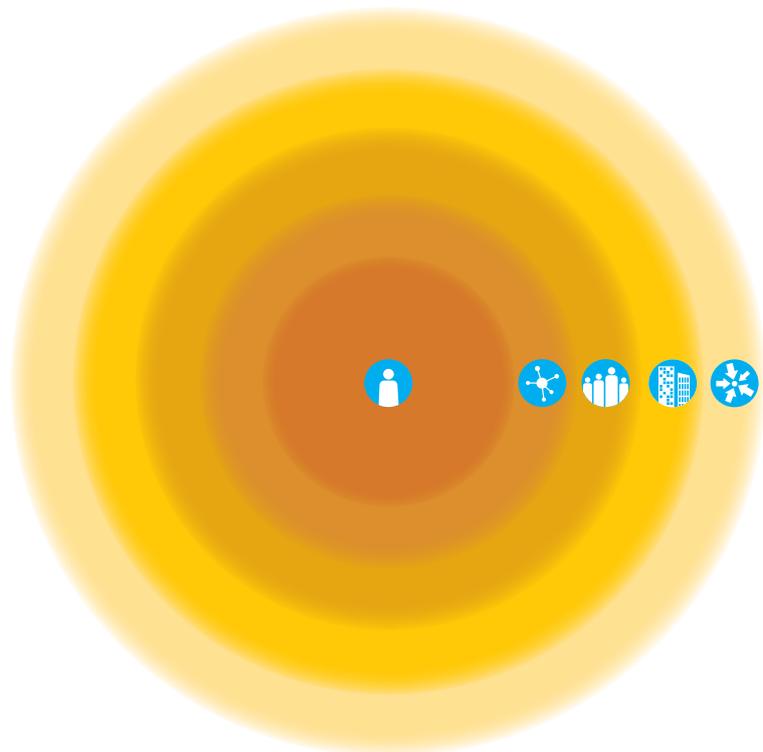
The reasons why people start, continue or stop participating are shaped by a multitude of factors that shift in significance over time and are in turn shaped by the impact of participation itself. These factors are:

- **individual factors**, including motivations, personality, identity and resources

- **relationships and social networks**, including with an individual's family, friends, neighbours and colleagues
- the **groups and organisations** through which people participate, and the particular structures, processes and culture of those groups;
- the **local environment and place**, including local spaces, events, institutions and politics
- **wider societal and global factors**, including national events, social movements and long-term societal and global trends.

Figure 1:  
*Factors shaping participation*

-  Individual
-  Relationships and social networks
-  Groups and organisations
-  Local environment and place
-  Wider societal and global influences



## 4.1 Why participation begins

Our research showed that participation starts when four elements are present: a personal motivation, a trigger, resources, and opportunities.

### Personal motivations

Participation is about individual motivations and personal preferences. People got involved in activities that had personal meaning and value and that connected with the people, interests and issues that they held dear. We identified six categories of meanings that motivated interviewees to participate:

- helping others
- developing relationships
- exercising values and beliefs
- having influence
- for personal benefit
- being part of something.

People often have multiple motivations for participating – some linked to a belief system or moral code, for example the 'greater good' – and others more self-interested. We found that people gain as well as give when they participate. This is not to suggest that participation lacks altruism, but rather that if there is not some mutual benefit then people's involvement may falter. Interviewees often spoke about gaining from participating (in terms of friendship, satisfaction, influence, support, confidence, skills and recognition) as much as they gave (in terms of time, money, compassion, care and energy).

Individuals often participated in activities and groups because of the people they knew, liked, enjoyed being around and cared about. A desire to make and/or embed social connections, meet new people and combat isolation or loneliness led many people to get involved in a collective activity. The human desire to be with others in a joint endeavour, and the strength and quality of the relationships between fellow participants that grow through belonging to a group, came through vividly in our research.

We found that people's values, beliefs and world views are closely linked to their experiences, social connections, cultural and social norms, and perceptions of community (of place and interest), as well as life spheres (the different elements that make up an individual's life – for example, family and work). All these elements are integral to people's identity and self-image and are crucial to understanding their motivations for participation.

### Triggers

An individual's conscious decision to participate is prompted by a trigger. We found that the main triggers for participation were:

- **an emotional reaction** such as anger at a decision, a response to a threat, or wanting to improve something locally;
- **a personal life event** such as a new relationship, retirement, ill health, moving area or having children, and
- **an external influence** such as a natural disaster, hearing about something for the first time, or just being asked.

For some, these triggers are just a passing influence; for others these emerge as critical moments in their lives – turning points for their future as well as specific motivations for how they participate.

### Resources

Our findings show that the drivers of participation (personal motivations and triggers) were tempered by people's access to resources. We found three types of individual resources:

- **Practical resources** including an individual's time, money, access to transport and health. Critical moments, turning points or transitions in an individual's life could dramatically change the practical resources they could draw upon.
- **Learnt resources** including an individual's skills, knowledge and experience. Interviewees sometimes referred to transferring these resources from other spheres of their life, such as work.
- **Felt resources** including an individual's confidence and sense of efficacy. Lack of confidence could prevent somebody from starting or taking an active role in participation, and many interviewees spoke about preferring to be involved in activities they knew they were capable of doing from past experience.

Personal relationships and social networks were also a critical resource, providing practical and emotional support to individuals to enable their participation. Our findings highlight the importance of strong bonds within

Figure 2:  
*The participation equation – why participation starts*



groups (bonding social capital) as well as between groups (bridging social capital), to all areas of an individual's life, including their participation. Wider social networks emerged as often being important to the success of an individual's participation, providing access to resources, knowledge, connections and decision-makers.

### Opportunities

Our research demonstrates the importance of institutions, organisations, groups, venues and events in creating an environment in which participation can flourish and in providing the environment, conditions and opportunities for an individual to translate their motivation to participate into action. Groups and organisations provided opportunities for involvement through linking people with others with similar interests and concerns, bringing together resources and providing support. Spaces or sites that served as multi-purpose hubs were highlighted as a particularly valuable resource as they provide spaces for groups to meet, support neighbourhood level social networks, and link different groups, organisations and activities. Local institutions and organisations (e.g. schools, universities, places of worship) also offer opportunities and support for participation.

### 4.2 Why participation continues or stops

Continued access to the right support, resources and opportunities affects people's decision to stay involved. Critical moments and practical factors were often cited as reasons for a person to stop participating, such as moving away from an area or no longer having enough time. Apart from these factors, a good quality participation experience was the single most important reason interviewees gave to explain their sustained participation.

The relationships that are built in groups are a crucial sustaining factor in people's participation. The boundaries between people's participation and their social lives and friendships are often blurred. When groups and organisations work well they provide individuals with fun, friendship, companionship, a social life and a greater sense of (shared) efficacy. But bad experiences led some of our interviewees to reconsider and sometimes entirely stop their participation.

*'I didn't want to be a part of it because it all just seemed a bit bitchy and backstabby'*

Participants spoke negatively about two interconnected elements of participation in groups:

- **Negative relationships within groups**, including groups that are unwelcoming, insular or cliquy and feeling unappreciated, disempowered, disillusioned, frustrated or cynical about their involvement.
- **Poor group structures and processes**, including meetings that are poorly run, tedious and do not result in any action, and the absence of support (including training, access to opportunities, emotional or psychological support).

We identified considerable evidence that people participated specifically in order to achieve something, whether this was preventing a housing development or seeking funds to build a new sports club. Some people demonstrated seemingly endless energy and commitment to the cause, but they also frequently showed their dissatisfaction and frustration when barriers were encountered or change was not possible.

Some interviewees spoke about evaluating the impact of their participation and adapting their engagement accordingly: they wanted to assess how they could best make a difference. Participation needs to fulfil the meaning an individual ascribes to it; they want to see that it is having the impact they desire, for themselves, their networks and communities, or further afield.

Figure 3:  
*The participation equation – why participation continues or stops*



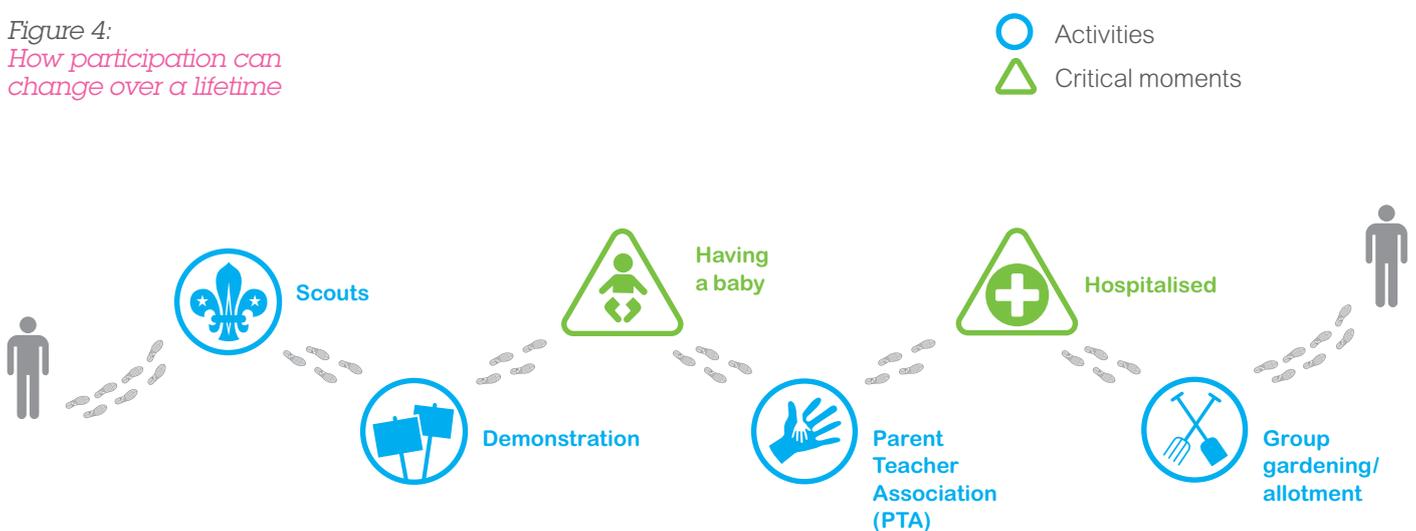
## 05 Can trends and patterns of participation be identified over time?

People's participation has tended to be conceived by researchers and policy-makers as a static activity at a single moment in time; rarely has people's involvement been placed in the context of what has come before, the other activities they are involved in, or what their future plans are. Our research confirms that people's participation is dynamic and constantly evolving. The activities they are involved in and their specific roles and responsibilities shift over time. Almost everyone we spoke to had experienced some degree of fluctuation in the levels of intensity and frequency of their involvement, depending on what was happening in their lives. Participation was characterised by ebbs and flows, starts and stops, a mix of one-offs, short- and long-term commitments, and experiences that ranged from the undemanding to the intense and all-consuming.

We identified some broad patterns of how people participated at different life stages (childhood, youth, early to mid-adulthood, later adulthood, and old age). Childhood was often described as a period when parents instilled values and beliefs that provided models for participatory behaviour and guided participation later in life. School-based citizenship and community service programmes were also common entry points to participation for interviewees during their youth. Early to mid-adulthood was often characterised as a time for focusing on career and relationships, rather than participation; while later adulthood was often a time where people had more time and inclination to participate (especially on retirement). Wider societal and global trends or events such as fears of the impacts of climate change or the accessibility of the internet also influenced if and how people participated.

*'Just as part of your lifecycle that perhaps other things happen in your life. So it might be having children, moving away, different job, moving house, those sorts of things, means that within your lifecycle change happens and certain things stop, other things begin.'*

Figure 4:  
How participation can change over a lifetime



Our research challenges the notion of participation as a progression, or something that gradually becomes more intense and more committed. We did find that people were involved to different degrees over the course of their lives in terms of the time spent participating, and level of responsibility they held. Some people took on more complex and responsible roles as they grew in confidence and developed skills over their lives but this tended to be the exception and not the rule. While participation did sometimes develop and grow, that development was not necessarily linear; it didn't automatically deepen, intensify or become more formalised over time.

Some people participated consistently and intensely over the course of their lives; others had peaks and troughs in their participation that often mirrored their life stage and critical moments or turning points in their lives. Some people were never involved heavily – they may have participated consistently over time but in a light way, for example by having a standing order to give to charity, while others were involved in a piecemeal and irregular way, for example by doing a fun run or voting.

## 06 What connections, if any, are there between different forms and episodes of participation and what triggers movement between them?

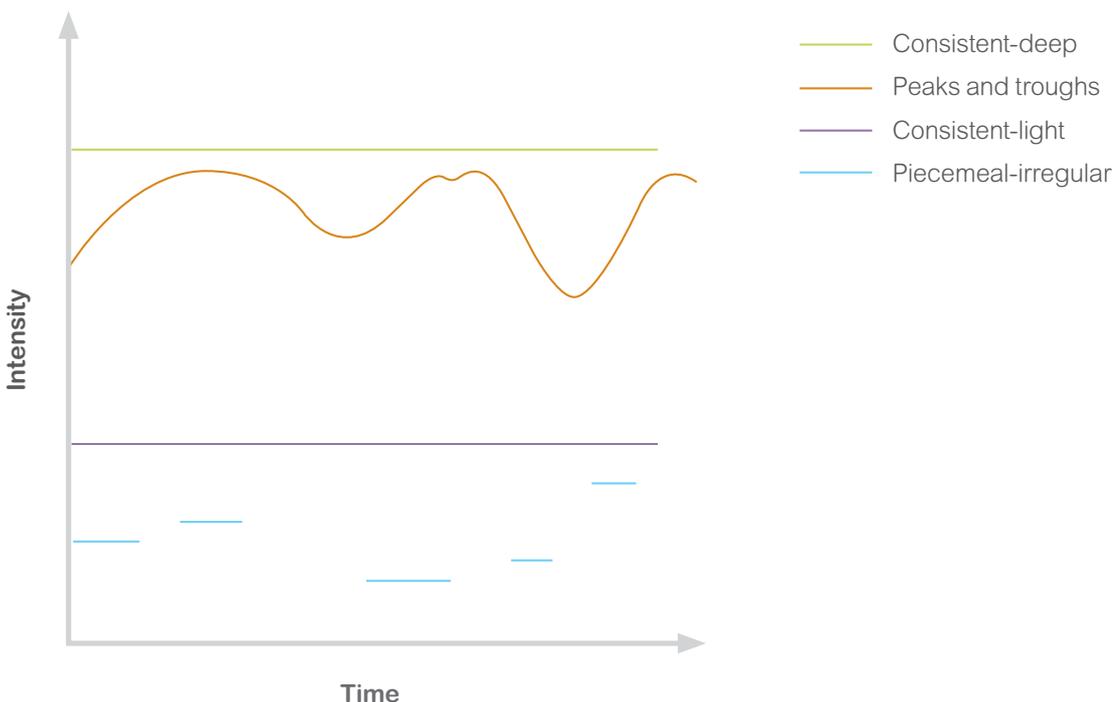
We found that there were often connections between the different activities people get involved in. We observed how people followed a range of pathways to move between different types of activity, with one form of engagement often prompting or leading to another.

Some people's involvement in a range of activities was consistently and consciously joined up: their participation was integrated into their lives. For other people, their involvement is better described as a series of one-off involvements, which were off-shoots of their core involvement (e.g. lobbying to save a service for which they were volunteering). Our findings challenge the notion of spillover, whereby people

who are involved in one type of participation, such as volunteering, inevitably get drawn into another type of participation, such as going to a local consultation. There were examples of this happening, but it was neither systematic nor automatic.

The primary connection that links different activities is a strong dominant motivating force, for example, living out certain values or beliefs, being concerned about a specific issue (like educational provision), having an interest (such as cricket or gardening), or wanting to put to use a skill (like accountancy). Almost always there is an enabling factor that sits alongside their dominant motivation, which facilitates the link. Enabling factors include existing institutions such as schools and places of worship, organisations such as tenants' and residents' associations and community centres, and key individuals acting to bridge different activities and groups. These enabling factors were all crucial in providing the space, conditions and practical support people need to participate in different ways.

Figure 5:  
*Typology of intensity of participation over time*



Belonging to a group, be it a formal organisation or a loose network, provided important links to other types of participatory activities, including connecting with local and national democratic structures and decision-makers. These connections happened through the pooling of knowledge, skills and personal links, which happened more in some groups than others: a tenants' and residents' association will more often be in contact with local councillors and officers than, for example, a local sports club, because of their respective aims and objectives. However, where a specific goal is in mind, such as securing more practice space, the sports club members can become important lobbyists and advocates to local and national representatives.

## 07 What does this mean for future policy and practice?

Three key conclusions from the research are summarised below. We hope these will contribute to a better understanding of the issues that affect people's involvement, the enablers and benefits, and the barriers and tensions. Our recommendations are aimed at everyone who is concerned with improving the reach and range of participation opportunities – including central and local government, major national charities and local grassroots groups, and individual practitioners.

### 7.1 Participation is personal and must be viewed first and foremost from the perspective of the individual taking part

Policy-makers and practitioners who wish to promote and encourage participation must view participation holistically, because trying to channel individuals into narrowly defined areas of participation is unlikely to result in more active citizens. If an individual does not identify with a particular cause or activity, reducing the barriers to them becoming involved is unlikely to make a difference. Any attempt to encourage participation must take into account the differing and multiple motivations people have for becoming and staying involved.

Participation is inherently about a free choice to take part without coercion. Our interviewees defined their own participation and made their own decisions about how and why they participated according to their upbringing, life stages, personality traits, beliefs and values, interests and personal circumstances. In contrast, government policy was never described as a motivating factor by the interviewees, and any influence was reported negatively: imposition of government agendas and intentions on people's existing activities, for example, was viewed as politicising their participation and was almost unanimously rejected.

People's negative reaction to the imposition of agendas that are not theirs has potentially been exacerbated by government's encouragement of comparatively narrow, highly formalised and structured forms of participation (e.g. public consultations, regeneration boards, health consultative bodies, formal volunteering). This does not fit easily with the variety of participation activities we identified. It can also be counter-productive: it can dissuade some people from participating and limit the diversity of people involved, or kill-off local groups through, for example, processes and demands that are too formalised, and generally inhibit less structured forms of participation.

### 7.2 Participation can be encouraged, supported and made more attractive

Our research identified a range of factors that fostered people's participation. There are many basic practical reasons why people do and do not participate that can be addressed. Our research challenges assumptions that non-participation is about apathy, laziness or selfishness. Participation opportunities need to complement people's lives and respond to people's needs, aspirations and expectations. The 'build it and they will come' approach does not work in isolation.

People juggle many competing demands for their time and attention and their priorities will vary according to personal circumstances and life stage. This has implications for the role that participation can play in local communities and wider

society. Current policy agendas that look to citizens to take control and manage community assets or deliver public services, for example, are unlikely to be attractive forms of involvement for people who want to engage in a more episodic, light-touch way.

While participation is already widespread, there is significant potential for more opportunities to participate to be made available to a wider range of people. We found that few people had a full picture of the range of opportunities available to them locally. Decisions about what to do and how to get involved tended to be almost entirely the result of personal contact (e.g. being asked by a friend) or finding information of direct personal relevance (e.g. an advert to join the parent-teachers' association of their child's school). Support bodies and other public and voluntary and community organisations also often had only a partial picture of local activities, groups and events, which limited the extent to which they could help provide access to relevant and appropriate opportunities for individuals wanting to participate.

These findings complement previous research<sup>5</sup> which has, for example, found that smaller, grassroots organisations rarely engaged with Volunteer Centres and often existed independently of such structures. However, we observed that well-run and welcoming groups, the right physical locations in which to meet and sufficient funds can create the right growing conditions for people to participate and provide a positive experience that will encourage them to continue participating.

Many interviewees highlighted how their parents and wider family had played an influential role in instilling a culture of participation and/or the values and beliefs that later framed their participation. But not all interviewees had been socialised into participation through their family; schools and youth groups (such as Scouts and Guides) also played an important role in providing opportunities for participatory activities during people's formative years.

Institutions, organisations and groups enable participation by providing resources and support, and in some cases, bridging communities through their everyday contacts with people. Places of worship and community centres provided a range of

opportunities to participate, some within their own walls and some beyond. The importance of physical spaces where diverse groups can meet, and bonds and networks are formed and maintained, was found throughout the research: without access to a hall or a room many collective activities would simply not happen. The spaces that provide access to a range of activities and people allow pathways and connections to be established that support sustained participation.

Individuals who are bridge-builders within communities were also an important enabling factor. They brought people together and facilitated access to opportunities and routes into participation. However, sometimes key individuals were seen as a mixed blessing if they acted as barriers to the involvement of others, perhaps protecting their own positions at the expense of others, or preventing new people from taking up leadership roles.

### 7.3 Significant barriers to participation are entrenched

At present much policy remains focused on initiatives to address the symptoms (e.g. technology to promote volunteering and giving opportunities) without addressing the underlying causes (e.g. lack of confidence or resources).

We found that deeper and more entrenched issues in society are reflected in disparities in the practice of participation. Issues of power and inequality in society are critical to understanding how and why people get involved and stay involved. The uneven distribution of power, social capital and other resources means that not everyone has access to the same opportunities for participation nor do they benefit from the impacts of participation in the same way. Such persistent and structural socio-economic inequalities are clearly challenging to address and cannot be removed without profound political and societal changes.

## 7.4 Recommendations

Our recommendations are clustered around three themes:

### Develop realistic expectations of participation

An over-optimistic view of participation can portray participation as the answer to all society's ills but it is important that we acknowledge its limitations and develop realistic expectations of what can be achieved. This requires policy-makers to be clear about the purpose of the participation they want to see happening, and to recognise that almost everyone already participates in one way or another. It also requires institutions, organisations and groups to recognise that participation is dynamic and that opportunities need to be flexible; that participation should be mutually beneficial - participants need to gain something from the experience; and that people have limited time and sometimes just want participation that is sociable and enjoyable.

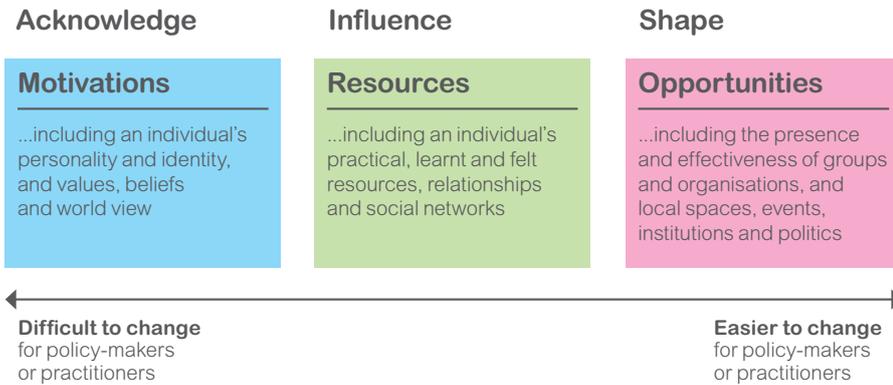
### Understand what policy and practice interventions can and cannot achieve

Policy and practice interventions can influence participation, but there are many other factors that shape how and why an individual participates, and that affect the desired impact of policy and practice decisions. Participation is more bottom-up than top-down, and does not always happen in the ways policy-makers and practitioners want or expect. Some factors that shape and encourage participation are easier and quicker to influence and shape than others.

We suggest that:

- An individual's motivations are difficult to shape in any predictable way but policy-makers and practitioners should acknowledge their importance and aim to understand them.
- An individual's resources cannot be wholly shaped by policy-makers and practitioners, but can be influenced by policy and practice decisions and initiatives.
- An individual's opportunities to participate can be shaped collectively by policy-makers and practitioners.

Figure 6:  
*Acknowledging,  
influencing or shaping*



### Improving participation opportunities

The first step in improving participation opportunities is to establish strong foundations by starting at an early age, providing appropriate formal and informal places and spaces for people to meet and join in activities, and creating links and pathways between individuals and organisations through networks and hubs.

Improving participation opportunities requires starting where people are and taking account of their concerns and interests, providing a range of opportunities and levels of involvement so people can feel comfortable with taking part, and using the personal approach to invite and welcome people in. Support is needed to enable institutions, organisations and groups to learn how to operate more effectively and therefore sustain people's interest and involvement. It is vital to value people's experience and what they do, at whatever level of intensity. Language referring to the 'usual suspects', 'NIMBYs' and 'do-gooders' is pejorative and creates a negative mood around active participation and should be avoided. The design and management of public consultations should be improved, so that participants feel it is worth taking part and that their contribution can make a difference.

Finally, organisations and government at all levels need to be aware of the benefits of participation, and use these to promote involvement. Similarly, those already involved can tell positive stories about their experience, and encourage others they know to participate. The recruitment of new participants is almost always more effective through word of mouth.

**For the full report of the Pathways through Participation project, go to: [www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/finalreport](http://www.pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/resources/finalreport)**

For more information on the  
Pathways through Participation  
project visit the website  
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