



## Progress report May 2010 - Situated practice: Initial reflections on the organisation of participation

### 1. Introduction

The Pathways through Participation project explores how and why people get involved and stay involved in different forms of participation over the course of their lives. The research seeks to address a gap in knowledge and understanding of people's pathways into and through participation, and of the factors that shape their participation over time. The project started in April 2009 and will finish in September 2011.

'Participation' means different things to different people. Our understanding of participation in this project covers a broad range of participatory activities, including voting, fundraising, campaigning, volunteering and ethical consumption<sup>1</sup>. The project is concerned with the individual, and how individuals move through different types and experiences of participation through their lives. However, participation cannot be understood by looking at the individual alone; we also need to look at participation in context and how it is situated in time, place and space.

This report describes some of the observations and reflections emerging out of the initial stages of the project, focusing on how participation is organised and the roles and understandings of the institutions and facilitators of participation. These emerging reflections will be explored

further in the next stages of the fieldwork.

The structure of the report is as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Grounding our thinking: an emerging framework of participation
3. Participation in context: the policy environment
4. Participation in context: the case study areas
5. How is participation organised?
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7. Emerging questions for next stages of the research
8. Next steps

### 2. Grounding our thinking: an emerging framework of participation

This section outlines the development of the project in its first year, and explains the way the project is interpreting the term 'participation'.

To ground our thinking about participation, we carried out a literature review which brings together different bodies of literature that have often been viewed in isolation. The review built on current understandings of participation and shaped our thinking about participation, covering literature from the volunteering, public participation and community development fields, as well as social

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<sup>1</sup> For more on defining participation, please refer to our briefing paper *'What is Participation? Towards a round-earth view of participation'* which can be found [here](#).

movements, ethical consumption and everyday politics<sup>2</sup>.

In the review, we have grouped participatory activity into three categories: public, social, and individual. Public participation includes activities involving the interaction between individuals and the structures and institutions of democracy; social participation includes collective activities and associations; and individual participation includes the types of everyday actions people take to reflect their vision of the type of society they would like to live in<sup>3</sup>. The project places the individual at the heart of the participatory experience. However, participation is best understood as 'situated practice'; it cannot be understood by only looking at the individual; we also need to look at the broader context and how participation is situated in time, place and space.

The initial literature review for the project shows that people's experience of participation depends on numerous factors, including their life stage, where they participate, and the type and nature of the activity in which they participate. The conclusions from the literature review shaped the development of our emerging framework for participation which reflects our understanding of what participation is and how it needs to be viewed in the context of our project. The framework reflects the key conclusions from the literature review which highlight that an individual's experience of participation is shaped by features such as: relationships (who else is involved?);

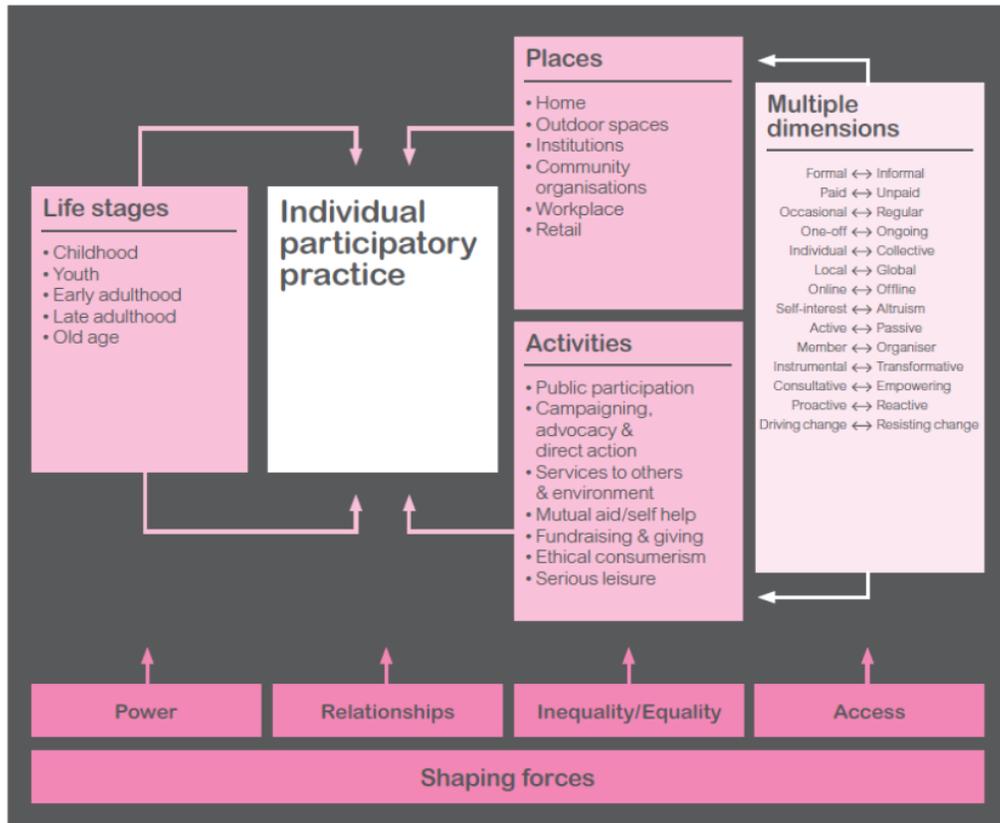
power (who makes decisions?); levels of equality (does everyone get to participate on equal terms?); and access (does everyone hear about opportunities for participation and get a 'seat at the table'?). The framework, illustrated in Figure 1 on page 3, will be tested through the subsequent stages of the research and refined on the basis of our research findings.

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<sup>2</sup> The full review '*Understanding participation: A literature review*' can be found [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the briefing paper '*What is Participation? Towards a round-earth view of participation*' which can be found [here](#).

**Figure 1: Framework for understanding individuals' pathways through participation**



**3. Participation in context: the policy environment**

As we have emphasised, people's experience of participation is greatly influenced by the wider context. Central government policy and statutory requirements have brought many changes to the way in which participation is organised and the institutions of participation. This section gives a brief overview of the national and local policy context for participation, in order to set the scene for the way in which participation is organised at a local level.

**National policy context for participation**

There have been some significant national policy changes over the last 10-15 years that have affected the

operating environment for participation at both local and national level. A key driver for these changes has been the government's stated desire to enhance democratic accountability, improve public services and contribute to social justice through involving citizens more directly in decisions that affect their lives. This desire is reflected in a range of initiatives around participation, including: citizenship education; volunteering; active citizenship; community empowerment; user involvement in the design and delivery of public services or 'personalisation'; tax relief on charitable donations (Gift Aid), and a remarkable growth in government consultations at all levels.

## **The local government policy framework**

The government's aim to re-engage directly with communities as well as individual citizens is also evident in changes in the statutory and legal framework for local government. For example, since 2001, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have brought together key public sector agencies, community and voluntary organisations and private companies, with the aim of driving forward change and developing joint strategies including through Local Area Agreements (LAAs). LAAs include a number of performance indicators, several of which relate directly to participation, for example 'civic participation in the local area' (NI3) and 'participation in formal volunteering' (NI6). By bringing together local partners to create their own local priorities, a key aim of the LSP, and of partnership governance in this form, is to give communities a bigger say in the things that matter to them. Alongside the voluntary and community sector's (VCS) role in partnership governance, has been a sustained emphasis on the role of the voluntary and community sector in public service delivery.

Building on the 2006 Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, the 2008 White Paper, *Communities in control: real people, real power*, focused on the range of new and existing tools that citizens could use to access and lever power at local and national levels. It also paved the way for the establishment of an Empowerment Fund to support voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) in turning empowerment proposals into practical action, support for volunteering, encouragement of participatory budgeting and supporting local communities in developing local events.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act of 2007 set out a duty for all local authorities to embed a culture of empowerment and engagement - the 'Duty to Involve' which came into force in April 2009. The Sustainable Communities Act was also introduced in 2007, and was intended to improve channels of communication on issues relating to community sustainability between individuals, local authorities, and central government.

These policy drivers have contributed to changes in the local operating environment for participation, and the way in which individual opportunities for local participation are structured and offered.

## **4. Participation in context: the case study areas**

### **4.1 Selecting and understanding the case study areas**

The project was conceived with the intention of exploring participation in areas that differ both geographically and demographically because research has shown that rates of participation (from voting to volunteering) vary according to geography<sup>4</sup>. Three case study areas in England – one rural, one suburban and one inner city – were selected in order to provide the broadest possible range of contexts for participation.

Three contrasting case study areas were selected according to a number of criteria, including: its Office for National Statistics classification (as suburban, rural, urban, etc); key population and demographic information; political control and structure of the local authority; accessibility by public transport, and

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<sup>4</sup> Communities and Local Government (2010) 'Our Nation's Civic Health: Main report' CLG: London.

the extent and nature of the local voluntary and community sector. The areas selected are: Leeds (inner city); Enfield (suburban) and Suffolk (rural). These contrasting case study areas will enable the study to identify a wide range of participation activities, and to explore the implications for individual's life stories of participation. In this report, these will be called the '**case study areas**'.

A key factor in the selection of case study areas was the willingness of the major local stakeholders to engage with the project, including the local infrastructure organisation for the voluntary and community sector (the Council for Voluntary Service, or CVS) and the local authority. The support of the local CVS and the local authority was particularly important for the next stages of the project, a series of informal interviews with key stakeholders, and establishing a 'Local Stakeholder Group'.

#### **Gaining an understanding of the case study areas: area profiling**

Following the selection of three case study areas that would be suitable for the project, the team then carried out a number of informal, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in each area to begin exploring the local participation landscape. Stakeholders included representatives from across the voluntary and community, statutory and private sectors, as well as community activists. Alongside these interviews, the team carried out desktop research, and read policy documents, local survey data, organisational literature and local media.

#### **Ensuring local relevance and meaning: establishing Local Stakeholder Groups**

A 'Local Stakeholder Group', chaired by the chief executive of the local CVS was established in each area in order to provide ongoing local guidance for

the research, act as local advocates for the project, and help identify and address potential issues. Each group took part in an interactive mapping workshop to explore understandings of participation and identify local sites of participation.

#### **4.2 The case study areas at a glance**

In the area selection process, as outlined above, secondary, quantitative data were used to identify areas that could offer contrasting perspectives on participation. Table 1 on page 6 illustrates some of the key data that were explored so that the case-study areas contrasted not only geographically but also politically, culturally and physically.

**Table 1 – The broad case study areas**

	<b>Enfield</b>	<b>Leeds</b>	<b>Suffolk</b>
<b>ONS classification</b>	Suburban	Urban	Predominantly Rural
<b>Political control of Local Authority</b>	Conservative	No overall control	Conservative
<b>Local Authority Structure</b>	London Borough	Metropolitan area	Two-tier authority (District and County)
<b>National Parliamentary Constituencies</b>	Enfield Southgate (Cons) Enfield North (Lab) Edmonton (Lab)	Leeds Central (Lab) Leeds East (Lab) Leeds North East (Lab) Leeds North West (Lib Dem) Leeds West (Lab)	West Suffolk (Cons) South Suffolk (Cons) Bury St. Edmunds (Cons) Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Cons) Ipswich Borough (Lab) Suffolk Coastal (Cons) Waveney (Lab)
<b>Area</b>	82.2 km <sup>2</sup>	552 km <sup>2</sup>	3,802 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Population size</b>	287,600 (2008)	729,100 (2001 census. Now believed to be over 750,000)	715,700 (2008)
<b>Population density</b>	3457/ km <sup>2</sup>	1304/ km <sup>2</sup>	188/ km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Ethnicity (2001 census)</b>	White British 61% White Other 12.9% Mixed 3.0 % Asian or Asian British 7.8 % Black or Black British: 10.4 % Chinese or other 1.7%	White British 89% White Other 2.7% Mixed 1.4% Asian or Asian British 4.5% Black or Black British 1.4% Chinese or other 1%	White British 93.7% White Other 3.5% Mixed 1.1% Asian or Asian British 0.6% Black or Black British 0.6% Chinese or other 0.5%
<b>Religion (2001 census)</b>	Christianity 63% Muslim 9.6% Hindu 3.4% Jewish 1.9% Buddhist 0.5% Sikh 0.3% No religion 12.4% Not stated 8.1%	Christianity 68.9% Muslim 3% Jewish 1.1% Sikh 1% Hindu 0.6% Buddhist 0.2% Other 0.2% No religion 16.8% Not stated 8.1%	Christianity 74% Muslim 0.4% Buddhist 0.2% Hindu 0.1% Jewish 0.1% Sikh 0.1% Other 0.3% No religion 16.6% Not stated 8.2%
<b>Deprivation (according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007<sup>5</sup>)</b>	Enfield ranked 57th of 149 counties in England	Leeds ranked 63rd of 149 counties in England	Suffolk ranked 116th of 149 counties in England
<b>Participation in regular volunteering</b>	22%	19%	27%

<sup>5</sup> The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007 draws mainly from 2005 data. For figures, see CLG's 'Indices of Deprivation 2007' data. Available at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/neighbourhoodrenewal/deprivation/deprivation07/> [last accessed 09/04/10]

(NI 6)			
<b>Turnout 2005 general election</b>	Enfield Southgate (66.4%) Enfield North (61.3%) Edmonton (59.1%) (average: 62.3%)	Leeds Central: 46.4% Leeds East: 55% Leeds NE: 65.5% Leeds NW: 62.4% Leeds West: 53.6% (average: 56.6%)	Ipswich: 60.8% Bury St Edmunds: 66.1% Suffolk Central & Ipswich North: 66.7% Suffolk Coastal: 67.9% Suffolk South: 71.8% Suffolk West: 60.7% Waveney: 64.4% (average: 65.5%)
<b>Turnout local elections</b>	37.9% (2006)	35.8% (2008)	There is no county-level data for the 2009 local elections in Suffolk. Across 75 districts, voter turnout ranged from 28-54.5%, with an average of 38.3%
<b>Civic participation in the local area (NI 3)</b>	15.5%	11%	28.3%

Following advice from key stakeholders and local partners, 'walkarounds' the areas and further desk-based research, three smaller areas were then agreed as the focus for fieldwork. These will be called the '**fieldwork areas**', and they will remain anonymous in order to ensure that individuals involved in the research are not identifiable. The team will use the following **pseudonyms** to refer to the fieldwork areas: Inner city Leeds; Suburban Enfield and Rural Suffolk. Table two provides an overview of these smaller fieldwork areas.

**Table 2 – Pen pictures of fieldwork areas**

**Inner city Leeds**

The inner-city fieldwork area of Leeds incorporates a few neighbourhoods, each with a very distinctive character. Parts of the area are home to a relatively young, transient adult population of mainly students, typically reflecting that of an inner-urban area of a university city. Such communities often live side-by-side with families who have lived in the area for generations. There is a

sizable South Asian community, and the area is culturally diverse, with pockets of higher than average Muslim, Sikh and Hindu populations.

Physically, parts of the area are characterised by back-to-back, mixed tenure terraced housing, whilst nearby lies large 1960s high-rise and maisonette accommodation that houses a diverse population. In recent years, pockets of the area have been the focus of anti-social behaviour and parts of the case-study area are amongst the most deprived areas nationally.

**Suburban Enfield**

The suburban case study area is clustered around three major transport hubs, providing quick and regular access into the centre of London, which is 12 miles away by road. Enfield is a physically and socio-economically diverse area, with the west of the borough being considerably more affluent than the east. The fieldwork area represents a 'typical' suburban part of the borough, characterised by its good public transport links, 1930s semi-detached housing, a suburban town centre, and several large parks and open spaces.

The fieldwork area straddles a number of

wards, several of which are in the least deprived in the country, and is culturally and ethnically diverse – there is a relatively large Greek and Greek Cypriot population, as well as a sizeable Jewish population reflected in the existence of a number of synagogues. A prominent campaign of recent years surrounds the proposed reduction of services in Chase Farm Hospital, in the north-west of the borough, and two local councillors were elected under the 'Save Chase Farm' banner. The campaign remains active today.

### Rural Suffolk

The fieldwork area in Suffolk consists of two small localities with a combined population of approximately 4,500 people. Both are located on the fringe of a town with a range of amenities, including a hospital and several schools, a shopping centre, a leisure centre, and bus, coach and rail services. However, public transportation between the localities and these amenities is infrequent and can make access difficult for some.

One of the communities is a village with its own parish council, and the other is a housing estate under the town's jurisdiction. The village was described as "*old Suffolk*," and "*a typical, though rather wealthy, village*." The estate was described as friendly, safe, and a good place to raise a family, but also as a place that can still be "*looked down on*" in spite of a range of positive changes in recent years. Both are attracting new residents, but the estate in particular features a mix of established residents and a significant proportion of new arrivals to the community, drawn to the area in part because of its reputation for good-quality, affordable housing, and easy access to the A12.

## 5. How is participation organised?

The different characteristics of the fieldwork areas are expected to provide a broad range of contexts for participation to help the researchers identify a wide scope of participation activities, and explore the context within which people participate over time.

The interactive activity mapping sessions, held at case study level within the Local Stakeholder Group meetings, and at fieldwork level with local residents, not only helped in understanding the local context of participation but also identified the range of places and spaces for participation in the local area (and beyond).

A real mix of places and spaces for participation were identified in these mapping exercises. Across the fieldwork and case study areas, the sites ranged from social spaces such as youth clubs, places of worship, bingo halls, parks, and schools; to public (or political) sites such as the ballot box, town hall and the MP's surgery; to individual sites such as online, the home, shops and the workplace.

These workshops informed us that the number and breadth of organisations, groups and individuals *facilitating* participation in each area is vast and that there is a huge diversity of actors that help to instigate, enable and sustain participation. This diversity manifests itself within a range of dimensions, for example:

- **Size:** from organisations with thousands of paid employees, to one individual mobilising others. For example: large international charities such as Oxfam assembling participants across the globe, to the independent activist creating a common interest group within their neighbourhood.
- **Type of activity:** from organising and encouraging voting in a general election, to facilitating and promoting ethical consumption, to co-ordinating a structured volunteering programme. For example: the Enfield Fairtrade Network, local government boundary review consultations

in Suffolk, and support groups in Leeds.

- **Beneficiaries and users:** from local residents using a neighbourhood support network, to the users of public services, to the international beneficiaries of overseas charity work. For example: residents living in 'Neighbourhood Watch' areas, users of council services, and recipients of international aid contributed by local charity events.
- **Formality:** from statutory institutions operating in 'official' spaces, to small voluntary organisations and 'under the radar' activism. For example: public meetings held at Enfield Town Civic Centre, to University groups in Leeds, to the Suffolk-wide Local Involvement Network covering social services and healthcare.
- **Funding sources:** from central and local government, to European funds, Lottery and charitable trust grants, to individual and corporate donations - the facilitators are funded in a variety of different ways, to different levels and some receive no funding at all.
- **Access:** from formally invited to informally excluded, the degrees of access and 'entitlement to participate' vary considerably. For example: from those deemed suitable to sit on council and trustee boards, to those excluded from local consultations or volunteering opportunities because of parental responsibilities or transport difficulties.

- **Sector:** participation is organised largely by (and within) facilitators in the voluntary, community and public sectors, and also, albeit to a lesser extent, in the private sector. For example: the CVS in each case-study area supports and mobilises the many voluntary community groups active in each locality, whilst councils and statutory agencies such as the NHS enable people to participate in decision making at various levels, and private companies co-ordinate employee volunteering schemes and sponsor community events.

The observations in Table 3 are from the case-study areas and illustrate the diversity of organisations and institutions involved in the facilitation of participation, and how the relationships between such groups and networks can shape participation practices.

**Table 3 – Observations on the organisation of participation from across the case-study areas**

**Leeds**  
There is a sense within the city that despite the various opportunities for participation in all its diverse forms, service organisations tend to come at participation from their own service or organisational perspective, intent on meeting their own needs. Some stakeholders believe there needs to be better communication within and between organisations to improve opportunities for local people to have their voices heard and become involved. With improved co-ordination, agencies will be better placed to support people to engage.

The increasing focus on multi-agency work is reflected in the various strategic partnership groups around the city such as the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Partnership Group, and the Leeds Infrastructure Consortium. Prominent

infrastructure organisations such as Voluntary Action Leeds (the CVS) and Leeds Voice (the Community Empowerment Network) also play an important role in the support, representation and development of VCOs. On a more 'grassroots' level, many groups and organisations have also recognised the need to collaborate and improve communication. Examples include Stop Climate Chaos Leeds, and Trade Injustice and Debt Action Leeds (TIDAL) which have both partnered with various other local organisations and individuals to facilitate cross-activist group campaigns to help achieve their objectives. It is less apparent how groups on either end of the formality spectrum and with different structures, participants and goals can better work together to create and sustain participation.

#### **Enfield**

Community House in Edmonton is a hub of activity and home to numerous voluntary and community organisations in the borough, including key infrastructure organisations such as the CVS, Enfield Voluntary Action (EVA). The Enfield Community Empowerment Network (ECEN) is one of the services that EVA provides and is based at Community House. The ECEN has a key role in ensuring involvement of the VCS in local decision-making and has representatives on the Enfield Strategic Partnership Board and thematic action groups. Whilst the ECEN has lots of members and appears to be a good model for representing the VCS in local decision-making, there was some concern by those involved in some way with the ECEN that smaller, community groups were not well represented. Encouraging community groups to become active members is a challenge locally, and was felt to be important because the ECEN is the channel through which the whole sector has a voice, and there are a huge number of smaller, informal community groups across the borough.

For specific groups and communities (of interest and of geography), there are a number of specialist groups and networks, for example the Greek and Greek Cypriot Community of Enfield (G.G.C.C.E.) and

the Enfield Fairtrade Campaign. Friends of Parks groups are very active in the borough, as is the Enfield (Conservation) Society – reflecting the importance that local residents attach to the parks and open spaces of the area. Older people, of whom there are an increasing number in Enfield, have three active and high profile local VCOs: Age Concern, the Over-50s Forum and the Ruth Winston Centre.

#### **Suffolk**

The Suffolk Association of Voluntary Organisations is the umbrella organisation for Suffolk's voluntary sector. There is no parallel organisation for the fieldwork area specifically, although there is a member-based organisation in the nearby town representing voluntary and community organisations, local businesses, local governments, and individuals. Funded by membership fees as well as government grants, this organisation covers the fieldwork area, and its mandate is to support growth and community development in the town and its surroundings. A representative of one of the grassroots community groups active in the fieldwork area sits on the Board of Trustees of this partnership. This type of formal relationship between small community groups and larger infrastructure organisations can provide access to information about funding, support with applications, and contact with potential allies and advocates, all of which are essential to grassroots organisations' capacity to facilitate participation 'on the ground.'

Informal relationships between individuals are also important features of the interplay between small community organisations and larger organisations, as well as local government in these areas. People working within the voluntary and community sector in Suffolk referred to local councillors, community development officers, and colleagues in other organisations they could count on to provide information and assistance. While these types of individual relationships are valuable, when people leave organisations or change roles, re-establishing the organisational partnership can prove challenging, as in some cases it means starting over the process of building trust

and identifying shared priorities.

## 6. Exploring understandings of participation

The project has chosen a broad framework rather than a rigid definition of participation in order to explore people's own understandings of participation. In addition to creating spatial maps of the case study areas, the Local Stakeholder Groups were also invited to share what participation means to them. Responses suggested that the term 'participation' can refer to the act of taking part in a group or activity, and the personal benefits of such involvement, but it also evokes ideas about helping others, making an impact, and building communities. Questions were raised about whether the motivations for involvement affect whether an activity or involvement is defined as participation or not (e.g. does it have to be unpaid? must it be completely voluntary? must beneficiaries be outside the individual's family? must the act have a 'positive' outcome?).

People clearly had different ideas about the function of participation. For some, participation is about fostering social justice or bringing about social change:

*"Lots of people are not engaged in mainstream society. . . Community organisations have a place to make people feel more included – if people are asked to participate more, participation is extended and a wider comfort zone is created [for individuals] – people can find their way back into society"* (Key stakeholder, Enfield).

For others, participation is a necessary feature of a shift to a more 'do it yourself' culture in which some of the responsibility for service provision and decision-making is shared

between governments, VCOs, and individuals:

*"Over the years people have increasingly expected the local authority, community services, the NHS or whoever it may be to provide and sort things out, like a form of 'municipal paternalism'...participation helps to instil that belief in people that 'I can', and leads to self-efficacy, self-reliance and resilience"* (Key stakeholder, Leeds).

The distinction between 'reactive' and 'proactive' participation came up in several discussions. There is often a sense that people are more likely to take part in consultations and meetings when they are against a proposed change. This form of participation was sometimes referred to as 'negative' participation, whereas participation initiated by individuals and motivated by a desire to bring about some form of change was described as a 'positive' form of action:

*"You've got an issue that people are very interested in like the education of their children, and the County Council decides that they're going to reorganise schools...And in the areas where they're changing from three-tier to two-tier education you suddenly get an awful lot of energy generated by parents who are interested in participating in the debate, even if their contribution doesn't actually align with what is probably best for the education of their children. They're very fierce about maintaining the status quo..."* (Key stakeholder, Suffolk).

In general, people's perspectives on participation varied according to their professional perspective. Some were part of formal, government-mandated

structures such as Local Strategic Partnerships, where certain national indicators were a local priority, while others were part of more grassroots local initiatives such as efforts to offer more activities for particular age groups in a local area. In our initial interviews with local stakeholders, few made reference to the national and local policy environment when discussing participation; conversations were framed more by the specific context in which respondents work.

The need to ensure that the different mechanisms for citizen engagement and participation are meaningful and avoid tokenism was echoed across the case study areas. Several interviewees emphasised how policy might not always reflect local people's interests, and with the issue of funding becoming increasingly important, several interviewees raised questions about how policy objectives can be met with limited resources.

When asked to describe their experiences of participation in a professional capacity, some respondents described formal processes, such as council planning processes, or structures, such as Local Strategic Partnerships. Others highlighted examples of relationship-building and community development, both of which require time, trust, and sometimes an emphasis on process rather than outcome.

## **7. Emerging questions for our research**

A number of questions have emerged out of the first stages of our research, in our conversations with stakeholders and as a research team.

Unsurprisingly, the key stakeholders we spoke to are interested in increasing participation in their area, and many raised questions relating to the conditions and barriers that can influence whether or not people participate. For example, are there

common 'entryways' to participation and, if so, how can these be made as inclusive and inviting as possible? Similarly, stakeholders' critiques of the bureaucracy of some formalised participatory structures raises the question of whether these initiatives can be designed or encouraged from the 'top down', or are most inclusive when created through processes in which participants are involved from the earliest stages.

Additional questions relate to the motivations for participation, for example whether people are indeed more likely to respond to a perceived threat, in greater numbers, than to take part in proactive and sustained forms of participation, as some of the stakeholders' accounts suggest, and the extent to which one leads to another. And, as raised earlier, whether someone's motivations for involvement or activity affect whether it is defined as participation by themselves and others. These and other questions will be further explored in the next stage of our research, when we will be speaking to individuals about their pathways through participation and how their participation has been shaped over the course of their lives. This stage of the project will explore how and when individual and institutional perspectives on participation align, overlap or diverge.

## **8. Next Steps**

In the next stages of the project, we are moving beyond the more 'official', professional or academic perspectives of participation, with which the initial stages of the research were largely concerned, to identify the places and spaces in which participation takes place, and peoples' experiences of participation.

A series of participatory mapping workshops with local residents and people who take part locally took

place in March 2010 in each fieldwork area to identify the places and spaces in which participation takes place. The data from these workshops will help the team to identify and recruit research participants for the substantive part of the fieldwork: a number of in-depth interviews using a narrative life-story approach, which will be carried out between May and July 2010.

Interviewees will be selected to reflect the diversity of participatory activities in the local area and beyond, and will also include people who do not, or who no longer, participate. These interviews will allow us to consider the relationships between different forms and episodes of participation and to question what has encouraged and sustained people's participation over time.

Following the analysis of these interviews, we will facilitate participatory workshops with local and national stakeholders to present and invite feedback on initial findings; explore links between the research and local circumstances; and bring together the institutional perspectives of participation, described in this report, and the individual perspectives gathered through the interviews.

This will be an opportunity to explore the implications of the research findings and reflect on how policy and practice might be influenced in order to develop opportunities for participation in future that are better suited to people's needs and aspirations.

### Further information

For more information on the Pathways through Participation project or to subscribe to our newsletter visit the website

<http://pathwaysthroughparticipation.org.uk/>

Alternatively you can email:

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