WORKING PAPER **314**

Deepening Democracy in the UK: Rhetoric and Reality

Diana Conyers
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Institute of
Development Studies

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Summary

Increasing concern about the quality of democracy has prompted efforts in many countries, 'developed' and 'less developed', to 'deepen democracy' by increasing the opportunities for citizen participation. One such country is the UK. Over the last decade, the government has introduced a number of policies designed to promote greater participation. However, research in Moulsecoomb, a relatively deprived area of Brighton, raises doubts about the capacity of these policies to have a significant impact on the quantity or quality of participation, and in particular about the chances that they will bring about the change in the balance of power between citizens and the state that is implicit in the concept of 'deepening democracy'. Similar findings emerge from studies in other parts of the country.

The gap between rhetoric and reality appears to be due to a number of inter-related factors, notably inadequate political motivation, the high degree of government centralisation, the inherent limitations of the 'invited spaces' for participation that are central to such policies, and lack of pressure from below. Underlying all these factors are fundamental issues of power, including not just 'visible' power, but also 'hidden' and 'invisible' power. Invisible power appears to be particularly important, since many of the obstacles to effective participation are deeply embedded in the UK's 'institutional culture', which affects state and citizens alike.

In many respects, the UK experience is not unusual. Attempts to deepen democracy in less developed countries have encountered similar problems. However, because of the 'cultural' obstacles, the prospects for deepening democracy in the UK appear to be particularly bleak, at least at present. This does not mean either that the current policies are pointless or that one should not continue to strive for more citizen participation in the UK. However, it does suggest the need to be realistic about the nature and extent of change that is currently possible.

Keywords: democracy; participation; local governance; democratisation.

Diana Conyers is a Research Officer in the Governance Team. She is primarily engaged in teaching on the MA in Governance and Development Programme. Her research interests are in decentralisation, local governance and citizen participation. She has many years of practical experience in these fields. Although most of her experience has been in 'less developed' countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa, she has recently become involved in research on participation and local governance in the UK.

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Preface

This paper is a by-product of a joint research project, involving IDS, the Health and Social Policy Research Centre (HSPRC) at Brighton University, the East Brighton New Deal for Communities, Novas-Scarman, and some residents of Moulsecoomb – a relatively disadvantaged Brighton neighbourhood. The project, which was known as *Moulsecoomb: Being Heard! (MBH)*, documented Moulsecoomb residents' experience of participating in various ways in activities designed to improve the quality of life in the neighbourhood. The study was funded by Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange (BSCKE) and the findings were published in May 2008 as an HSPRC research paper entitled *Moulsecoomb: Being Heard!*. The purpose of this paper is to relate the findings of the BMH study, and of some additional IDS research in Moulsecoomb, to the wider international literature on citizen participation, and in particular to contribute to a growing debate both about the lessons that the UK can learn from experience in 'less developed' countries and about the wider contextual factors that determine the scope for deepening democracy in any society.

The paper is the result not just of a piece of empirical research but also of a personal journey of intellectual exploration, in which I have sought to make sense of my observations in the UK and to relate them to my experience in other parts of the world, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the people who have helped me on this journey. First, I would like to express my gratitude to all the people who contributed to the research in Moulsecoomb. I owe particular thanks to members of the MBH Project Group, especially to Dee MacDonald, without whose help I would not have had the courage to tackle the vast literature on citizen participation in the UK, and to Mary Funnell and Jannet Cook, two Mouslecoomb community activists who were involved in both research projects and were sources not only of information but also of inspiration and friendship. Thanks are also due to those IDS students who, as participants in the 2007 and 2008 *Empowering Society* courses, not only collected much of the data but also helped me to relate the Moulsecoomb situation to that in 'less developed' countries; special thanks are due to Arthur Larok, Ed Griffiths-Jones and Katherine George. I would also like to express my thanks to all the Moulsecoomb residents and other stakeholders who gave up their time to be interviewed, and to BSCKE for funding the MBH study.

Thanks are also due to a number of colleagues at IDS. I would in particular like to express my thanks to John Gaventa, Andrea Cornwall and Alison Dunn, who shared their own experiences and contacts in the UK with me, to Jethro Pettit, who as co-convenor of the *Empowering Society* course, introduced me to much of the theoretical material on which the paper is based, and to Fiona Wilson and Robin Luckham, who provided encouragement and guidance at a point when I was losing both enthusiasm and direction. Finally, I would like to thank John Gaventa, Marilyn Taylor, Marion Barnes and Mike Holdgate for commenting on the final draft of the paper.

Diana Conyers
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Acronyms

BSCKE Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange

CLG Department of Communities and Local Government

CVSF Community and Voluntary Sector Forum

GOSE Government Office for the South East

HSPRC Health and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton

IDS Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex

LAA Local Area Agreement

LAT Local Action Team

LGA Local Government Association

LSP Local Strategic Partnership

MBH Moulsecoomb: Being Heard!

NDC New Deal for Communities

NHS National Health Service

1 Introduction

> With equal measures of political will and good fortune, denizens of British society may be able to construct the social and political institutions necessary for a Citizen Society. Those institutions would allow ordinary people to understand the bewildering and complex political challenges facing society, participate in the most important decisions facing their lives, hold politicians and elites accountable, and help to solve complex social problems.

(Fung 2007: 1)

> Many people believe that current policy developments in the UK represent a unique moment in the history of citizen and community participation, yet more must be done to translate the opportunities presented by these new initiatives into reality.

(Zipfel and Gaventa 2008: 1)

Increasing concern about the quality of democracy in both 'North' and 'South' has spawned a growing literature on the concept of 'deepening democracy'. This literature is of particular interest to students of development studies because of its comparative nature. It not only compares experiences in the North and South but, in some instances, actually suggests that countries in the North may be able to learn something from experience in the South. This paper is a contribution to this literature.[1]

The paper examines attempts to 'deepen democracy' in the UK under the current New Labour government. In 2006, two significant policy documents were published in the country. One was an independent inquiry into public attitudes to governance (Power Inquiry 2006) and the other a government 'white paper' called *Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper* (CLG 2006). Although their approaches were very different, both emphasised the need to review the relationship between citizens and the state and, in particular, to increase citizen participation. The following year, the government introduced a number of measures designed to implement the proposals in the white paper, including amendments to local government legislation and the publication of an *Action Plan for Community Empowerment* (CLG/LGA 2007). Then, in 2008, it introduced another white paper, entitled *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power.*

How significant are these moves? As the above quotations indicate, some students of deepening democracy in the South have suggested, albeit cautiously, that they provide the potential for significant 'deepening' of democracy in the UK

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1   IDS has already played a major role in promoting such comparative studies (Cornwall 2004, 2008; Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2004, 2007; Dunn *et al.* 2008; Gaventa 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Goetz and Gaventa 2001; Zipfel and Gaventa 2008).

(Fung 2007; Zipfel and Gaventa 2008). This paper argues that such optimism is unfounded. It concludes that these reforms provide some scope for improving the quantity and quality of interaction between citizens and the state, but are unlikely to result in any significant change in the balance of power between them. This conclusion is based on an analysis of some of New Labour's earlier attempts to increase citizen participation, including the findings of research undertaken in the Moulsecoomb area of Brighton in 2007–08 and a survey of relevant literature. The paper also explores the reasons for this. Comparing the UK experience with that in 'less developed' countries, it concludes that the scope for deepening democracy in the UK is limited by four main factors: insufficient political motivation, the centralised nature of government, the inherent limitations of the 'invited spaces' that are being promoted as channels of participation, and lack of public pressure. It goes on to suggest that, underlying all these factors are fundamental issues of power, including not just 'visible' power, but also 'hidden' and, in particular, 'invisible' power. It maintains that many of these obstacles are deeply embedded in the 'institutional culture' of British society, which limits the 'room for manoeuvre' not only of citizens but also of the state, and that, in some respects, this makes the process of deepening democracy more difficult in the UK than in many supposedly less developed countries.

The argument is developed in seven sections. Sections 2 and 3 set the scene. Section 2 provides a brief review of the concept of 'deepening democracy'. It concludes that, if participatory reforms are to 'deepen' democracy, they must result in a significant change in the balance of power between citizens and state. Section 3 describes the rhetoric of deepening democracy in the UK under New Labour, including an analysis of the main policy statements and an overview of the specific strategies that are being used to implement these statements. The next three sections provide the evidence to suggest that the reality is rather different from the rhetoric. Sections 4 and 5 describe the context and present the findings of the Moulsecoomb research, which constitutes the main source of information. Section 6 then uses the findings of similar studies in other parts of the country to argue that the Moulsecoomb situation is by no means unique. Section 7 discusses the reasons for the gap between rhetoric and reality. It looks at the lessons learned from other countries, particularly those in the 'South', about the conditions necessary for deepening democracy and considers their relevance to the UK. It concludes that it will be difficult to deepen democracy in the UK because the obstacles are deeply embedded in the country's 'institutional culture'. Finally, Section 8 summarises the main findings of the study and considers the implications for policymakers and practitioners.

The paper is intended for both UK and international audiences. For the former, the aim is to add to the wealth of existing literature by providing an overview of the UK scene from an international perspective, together with additional case study data. For the latter, the intention is to show that a relatively wealthy country like the UK experiences many of the same 'development' problems as poorer countries and, in some respects, faces even greater challenges. And for both audiences, the paper seeks to demonstrate the need to discuss issues of participation and democracy within the wider theoretical context of power and institutional culture.

2 Deepening democracy: concepts and approaches

The concept of 'deepening democracy' has emerged in the international development literature over the last decade or so. Although Amartya Sen is renowned for claiming in 1999 that 'democratisation' was the most important achievement of the twentieth century (Sen 1999: 3; cited in Santos and Avritzer 2006), there have been increasing concerns about the 'quality' of democracy in many countries, and the term 'deepening democracy' has been coined to describe measures to address these concerns. However, like so many social science terms, it covers a wide range of concepts and approaches. This section provides a brief overview of the various dimensions of deepening democracy.

2.1 Concepts of deepening democracy

At the risk of some oversimplification, one may identify three main interpretations of 'deepening democracy', corresponding to three different types of concern about the quality of democracy. One interpretation is related to the use of the term 'democracy'. As Santos and Avritzer point out, 'democracy has changed from a revolutionary aspiration in the nineteenth century to a universally adopted, though empty, slogan in the twentieth century' (Santos and Avritzer 2006: xxxiv, summarising Wallerstein 2001: 1). They are referring to the 'neoliberal' concept of democracy, which consists of little more than the holding of regular multi-party elections and is often forced upon countries through aid and other conditionalities. In this context, deepening democracy is seen as a process of 'revolutionary' change from 'token' democracy or 'elite' democracy', to one in which there is a real change in the balance of power between rulers and ruled. Harris, Stokke and Tornquist (2004: 26) make a similar point when they refer to 'the need to bring the political back into democratisation'. This concept of deepening democracy is implicit in much of the literature from Latin America (Avritzer 2002; Santos and Avritzer 2006) and, although the term 'deepening democracy' is less often used, in some writing on democratisation in Africa (Abrahamsen 2002; Ake 2000; Bastian and Luckham 2003; Salih 2001; Conyers and Larok 2007).

The second interpretation also questions the definition of 'democracy'. However, it differs from the first in that it accepts the basic 'institutional' character of the neoliberal concept of democracy. Its concern is with the way in which the concept has been manifested in many of the countries that adopted democratic systems in the so-called 'third wave' of democratisation that occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The main concern is that many of these countries are 'democratic' only to the extent that they hold regular multi-party elections; in other respects they have retained strong authoritarian characteristics (Carothers 2002). In this context, 'deepening democracy' means strengthening the basic democratic institutions that underpin the 'neoliberal' concept of democracy, such as improving the quality of elections, institutionalising freedom of speech and association, strengthening opposition parties, and increasing the role of civil society. This interpretation of the concept is typified by UNDP's 2002 *Human Development Report*, which focuses on deepening democracy (UNDP 2002).

The third interpretation is more obviously different in that it focuses on a particular aspect of democracy, namely the extent to which democratic systems provide effective channels for citizen participation. It reflects a growing concern, in countries of the 'North' as well as the 'South', that conventional representative systems of democracy do not provide adequate opportunities for citizens to influence the affairs of the state. John Gaventa, one of its principal advocates, describes this concept of 'deepening democracy' as 'the political project of developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the political process than what is normally found in liberal representative democracy alone' (Gaventa 2006a: 7). In this context, therefore, the objective of 'deepening democracy' is to change the balance of power between citizens and the state through the promotion of direct citizen participation in governance.

Because of the emphasis on participation, this concept of deepening democracy is often intertwined, especially in the international literature, with wider debates about participatory approaches to development. For the purposes of this paper, the main relevance of these wider debates is that they expose the complexity of 'participation' and, in particular, the fact that participatory approaches can be used to disempower as well as empower citizens. This point is well illustrated by two complementary sets of case studies, one called *Participation: The New Tyranny?* (Cooke and Kothari 2001), which documents some of the disempowering effects, and the other, *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation* (Hickey and Mohan 2004), which demonstrates how it can be empowering. Perhaps the important lesson to be learned from this debate is that, as Gaventa (2006a: 23) emphasises, 'to be meaningful, participatory processes must engage with and change political power'.

The third interpretation of deepening democracy is most obviously relevant to this paper, since the focus is on citizen participation. However, the first interpretation is also relevant, since the concern is not with participation *per se*, but with the sort of participation that has an empowering effect. In other words, the concern is with participation that 'deepens democracy' by changing the balance of power between citizens and the state.

2.2 Approaches to deepening democracy

Gaventa (2006a: 16) identifies four different, but 'by no means mutually exclusive', approaches to this type of deepening democracy: 'civil society democracy', 'participatory democracy', 'deliberative democracy', and 'empowered participatory democracy'. The first three approaches are relatively easy to differentiate. In civil society democracy, citizens participate through membership of civil society organisations, which then influence or put pressure on the state. In participatory democracy, citizens are directly involved in the activities of government through a variety of participatory structures or forums. Deliberative democracy focuses on the 'quality' of participation; the aim is to create a situation where 'citizens address public problems by reasoning together about how best to solve them' (Cohen and Fung 2004; quoted in Gaventa 2006a: 17).

'Empowered participatory democracy' (also known as empowered participatory governance) is rather different, since it is, in effect, a combination of participatory

and deliberative democracy. The term was coined by Fung and Wright (2001, 2003) in their comparative study of four attempts to deepen democracy: neighbourhood governance councils in Chicago, conservation planning under the US Endangered Species Act, participatory budgeting in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, and *panchayati raj* governance in the Indian states of Kerela and West Bengal. Fung and Wright suggest (2003: 15) that these four reforms 'share surprising similarities in their motivating principles and institutional design features' that 'warrant describing them as instances of a novel, but broadly applicable, model of deliberative democratic practice'. They argue that all four involve collaboration between 'ordinary people' and 'officials close to them' to find solutions to 'specific, tangible problems' through a process of deliberation (2003: 15–16; 23). They conclude that their success is dependent on three 'design principles': 'the devolution of public decision authority to empowered local units'; the fact that these local participatory structures are an integral part of, rather than external to, the state, and are formally linked to higher levels of authority; and that they involve 'significant transformations' of those institutions so that there is sufficient 'balance of power' between participants to enable meaningful deliberation.

Another way of classifying different approaches to deepening democracy is the distinction between 'invited spaces' and 'claimed spaces', which emerged from an IDS research project on 'spaces for change' (Cornwall 2004, 2008; Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2004, 2007; Gaventa 2006b). The concept of 'space' is used here to refer to a means by which 'ordinary' people can participate in the process of governance. 'Invited spaces' are spaces created by the state or some other kind of authority (including non-government organisations and international agencies), 'into which people (as users, citizens or beneficiaries) are invited to participate' (Cornwall 2002, quoted in Gaventa 2006b: 26). 'Claimed spaces' (also called 'created spaces' or 'popular spaces'), on the other hand, are attempts to influence the state initiated by citizens themselves. Gaventa defines them as 'spaces which are claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them' (2006b: 26). The distinction between invited and claimed spaces is particularly useful for this paper, for two reasons: firstly, most of the policies designed to increase citizen participation that have recently been introduced in the UK are invited spaces; and secondly, the research undertaken in Moulsecoomb deliberately compared participation in some of these invited spaces with that in some community groups, which constitute examples of claimed spaces.

3 Deepening democracy in the UK: the rhetoric

Citizen participation in local governance and area improvement in the UK has a long history. However, this paper focuses on the period since 1997, when the New Labour government came to power. This section of the paper provides a brief overview of citizen participation during this period. Section 3.1 describes the policy environment, including the increasing concern about participation and the

government's main policy statements, while section 3.2 discusses the specific strategies that have been adopted to promote participation.

3.1 Policy environment

Although citizen participation has been a feature of New Labour's policy throughout its term of office (Clarke 2005; Imrie and Raco 2003), in the early years it was only one of many issues pursued and was most obvious in the field of urban policy.[2] However, since 2005 it has become a major policy concern and attention has spread from urban policy to a wide range of issues related to local governance and area development. This is reflected in the large number and range of reports and policy statements produced over the last few years.

The first major policy document was a Local Government White Paper entitled *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (CLG 2006), which was published in October 2006 and provided a framework for much of the subsequent policy debate. The white paper represented a significant attempt both to clarify the government's policies on citizen participation and to accelerate the process of change. Its main focus was the relationship between citizens and the state in the field of service delivery. It acknowledged that 'local public service providers spend too much time meeting the demands of central government rather than those of citizens and communities' (CLG 2006: 16) and described its main objective as that of 'rebalancing the key relationships – between central and local government; between local government and its partners; and between local government and citizens and communities' (*ibid.*: 18).

The white paper was closely followed by the reports of two separate enquiries into local government: the first, published in March 2007 by the government (Lyons Inquiry 2007), and the second, published in December 2007, by the Councillors' Commission (2007). Meanwhile, in the last three months of 2007, many of the proposals made in the white paper and some of those made in these other two reports were incorporated into the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act and two related policy documents, *An Action Plan for Community Empowerment* (CLG/LGA 2007) and a set of proposals related to auditing entitled *Comprehensive Area Assessment* (Audit Commission *et al.* 2007).

In March 2008, the government announced that it intended to prepare another white paper, this time on community empowerment, and published a set of consultative documents related to this, on which it invited comments. The paper was published four months later, under the title *Communities in Power: Real People, Real Power* (CLG 2008a). It adopts a broader view of democracy than the 2006 white paper, which focused on service delivery, and addresses many of the issues and concerns raised in the Power Inquiry report, particularly the lack of political participation. Its stated aim (2008a: 12) is 'to pass power into the hands of local communities so as to generate vibrant local democracy in every part of

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2   See in particular the 2000 Urban White Paper (DETR 2000).

the country and give real control over local decisions and services to a wider pool of active citizens' and it plans to achieve this 'using every practical means possible' (2008a: 21). It focuses on the role of the citizen and looks at seven different ways in which citizens can play a greater role: voluntary activity; having better access to information; influencing government decisions; holding government to account; complaints and redress; standing for office as a councillor; and ownership of community assets.

There have also been a number of independent reports on citizen participation during this period, two of which warrant specific mention. The first is the report of the Power Inquiry, an independent inquiry into the state of Britain's democracy, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Trust (Power Inquiry 2006). The report, entitled *Power to the People*, was published in March 2006, just before the Local Government White Paper. The purpose of the inquiry was to investigate the reasons for the high degree of 'disengagement from formal democratic politics' (Power Inquiry 2006: 15), which was reflected in, among other things, low voter turnouts, declining membership of political parties and lack of 'trust' in elected politicians. It concluded that this disengagement is due not to political apathy but to the failure of the political system to adjust to societal changes resulting from 'the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society' (Power Inquiry 2006: 18) and recommended radical political changes, including strengthening the role of parliament and local government *vis-à-vis* the executive, more responsive electoral and party systems, and more direct citizen participation.

The second is a report entitled *Power and Participation in Modern Britain*, published by an independent organisation, Democratic Audit, in February 2008 (Democratic Audit 2008). The report, which provides a comprehensive review of the various ways in which citizens can participate in governance, was commissioned by the Carnegie Trust, as part of a wider inquiry into the future of civil society in the UK, which aims to 'move beyond' the Power Inquiry (Democratic Audit 2008: 5).[3] It concludes that 'participation in the UK is a buoyant and diverse phenomenon that involves a wide range of people', but that it is 'as unequal as is the distribution of power and resources in what is an increasingly unequal society' (*ibid*.: 11). Its main recommendations are designed to strengthen the role and authority of democratically elected local governments.

3.2 Participation strategies

The New Labour government has adopted a variety of strategies to achieve its objectives of increasing participation and bridging the gap between citizens and government. This section provides a brief overview of these strategies. At the risk of some oversimplification, they are divided into seven main types: participatory service provision structures; 'local strategic partnerships'; 'area improvement' programmes; 'community empowerment' measures; accountability mechanisms; parish and neighbourhood councils; and *ad hoc* public consultation.

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3   The report of the wider inquiry had yet to be published at the time of writing.

1   *Participatory service provision structures:* Direct citizen participation in public service delivery is perhaps the most obvious participatory strategy, and one which began before New Labour came to power. It is particularly common in the many public services that are no longer provided directly by central or local government agencies, but by 'arms-length', 'quasi-government' organisations. Since these organisations are not directly responsible to elected bodies, the government has had to find other means of making them accountable to service users. This has resulted in a plethora of participatory structures, in which citizens have varying roles and degrees of influence. For example, in the national health service (NHS), citizens participate both in the complex (and constantly changing) network of local NHS trusts that are responsible for service delivery and in advisory bodies that monitor the performance of these trusts. Similarly, in the police service, they participate in a management capacity as members of local police authorities and in an advisory capacity as members of community-based 'local action teams'. And in the case of education, citizens are members of school boards, which have been given a wide range of powers once held by local authorities.

2   *Local strategic partnerships:* Local authorities are required to establish formal structures, known as 'strategic partnerships', to facilitate coordination between the various government, quasi-government and non-government agencies involved in local economic development and service provision within their areas. These partnerships are required by the 2000 Local Government Act to prepare 'sustainable community strategies', which set out the 'strategic vision' for their area, and by the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act to prepare 'local area agreements', which determine how the strategies will be implemented. The local area agreements (LAAs) include a set of results-based targets, which are negotiated with the central government and provide a basis for determining the level of government funding. According to the 2006 Local Government White Paper, this system of local planning is designed to 'focus on the things that really matter to people every where, guaranteeing national minimum standards, but leaving room for local innovation and local priorities' (CLG 2006: 5).

3   *Area improvement programmes:* Soon after it came to power, New Labour launched two related programmes designed to address problems in the country's most deprived urban neighbourhoods in an integrated and participatory manner. One was the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, which involved massive injections of funds into 39 of the most severely deprived areas. The funds were in most cases channelled through local authorities but administered by semi-autonomous management bodies, on which citizens were represented. East Brighton was one of the areas covered by the programme and the East Brighton NDC was a major focus of the Moulsecoomb research described in Section 3. The other programme was the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, which was directed at other less deprived areas and involved smaller amounts of money, administered by local authorities but in conjunction with neighbourhood committees on which residents were represented. At the time of writing, both programmes were drawing to a close and it was not entirely clear what form future area-based funding will take. However, the publication of a consultative document entitled

Unlocking the Talent of Our Communities (CLG 2008b) and the establishment of a new Working Neighbourhoods Fund both suggest that a major focus will be the reduction of unemployment in deprived areas. Moreover, any such funding is likely to be closely linked to LAAs.

4   *Community empowerment measures:* The government is supporting and promoting a variety of local efforts to increase direct citizen participation in local government, details of which are spelled out in the *Community Empowerment Action Plan* (CLG/LGA 2007) and 2008 Community Empowerment White Paper (CLG 2008a). Eighteen local authorities (including Brighton and Hove City Council) were designated 'empowerment champions' in October 2007 and are receiving financial and technical support to pilot these empowerment measures. From an international perspective, one of the most interesting initiatives that is being promoted is participatory budgeting. The concept was introduced to the UK by Bradford City Council, following a visit to Porto Alegre by some councillors. There are currently ten local authorities engaged in pilot participatory budgeting exercises and others are considering joining them. Support is provided by a Participatory Budgeting Unit, which is located in Bradford and partially funded by the government. The 2008 white paper also includes plans to strengthen multi-purpose, community-based organisations, including the provision of £70 million to support for such organisations through a 'Communitybuilders' scheme (CLG 2008a: 3).

5   *Accountability mechanisms:* A number of measures designed to make local authorities more accountable and responsive to their constituents have either been introduced or are planned. These include:

●   The establishment of 'scrutiny committees', composed of councillors from all political parties, which review the performance of council services and programmes;

●   A provision in the 2007 Act giving councillors the power to refer matters of concern in their ward to the appropriate council committee, thereby enhancing their ability to address residents' concerns;

●   A new system of external audit, known as 'comprehensive area assessment', outlined in the 2007 Act and elaborated in a supporting policy document (Audit Commission *et al.* 2007), which is designed to make it easier for the public to find out about 'the quality of life in their area; how local services are working together to improve it; and how well key public services are performing' (*ibid.*: 29), and includes an assessment of the extent to which service providers are consulting and involving the public; and

●   The intention, announced in the 2008 white paper to 'place a duty to promote democracy' (CLG 2008a: 24) and a 'duty to respond to petitions' (CLG 2008a: 5) on all local authorities; the former would include a number of requirements, including providing information, involving citizens, promoting democracy, and encouraging people to stand as councillors.

6   *Parish and neighbourhood councils:* The 2007 Local Government Act includes measures for strengthening parish councils, which constitute the lowest tier of the three-tier local government system in rural areas.[4] At present, parish councils have very few functions and in some areas do not exist at all. The Act gives local communities where there is no parish council the right to demand that one be established and those that do exist the right to negotiate with the next tier of local authority (district councils) to take over additional functions. This was followed in 2008 by an announcement in the Community Empowerment White Paper that the government will also promote the establishment of neighbourhood councils in urban areas, where there is a 'unitary' system of government with no mandatory structures below the council level.

7   *Public consultation:* In addition to the various specific participatory structures and programmes outlined above, there is increasing pressure on government and quasi-government agencies to engage in more general public consultation. For example, the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act requires local authorities to 'inform, consult and involve' citizens in all aspects of service design and delivery, including the production of LAAs. Similarly, the 2007 Sustainable Communities Act, which gives local authorities the power to bring matters of concern in their areas to the central government's attention, requires them to involve local people in the identification of such issues. There is also a national code of conduct on consultation that all government agencies are expected to follow with regard to the publication of policy documents.[5] These consultations take various forms, but there is increasing emphasis on 'modern' methods, such as focus group discussions and the use of the internet. The central government itself prepares consultation documents on all major policy innovations and publishes these on the internet.

3.3 Rhetoric versus reality

Will these strategies really increase citizen participation and, in so doing, change the balance of power between citizens and the state? Corbridge *et al.* (2005: 1), in a book on India entitled *Seeing the State*, point out that 'all democratic governments are tempted by the fruit of exaggeration'. The next three sections of the report seek to find out whether this is the case with the UK government's participatory reforms. Like Corbridge *et al.*, the aim is 'to learn about the state not simply through an analysis of its published technologies of rule ... but also through the ways it works in the trenches' (Corbridge *et al.* 2005: 83). The main source of information is research undertaken by IDS in the Moulsecoomb area of Brighton, in which residents' experience of participating in some of the government's 'invited

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4   The three tiers are country councils, district councils and parish councils. In urban areas, like Brighton and Hove, there is only one level, the city council.

5   The code of conduct can be accessed online at: http://bre.berr.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/consultation_guidance/index.asp

spaces' was compared with that of participating in their own 'claimed spaces'. Sections 4 and 5 describe this research. Section 6 then compares the findings of the Moulsecoomb research with those of similar studies in other parts of the country and draws some tentative conclusions about the likely impact of the strategies.

4 Research in Moulsecoomb: the context

This section of the report introduces the Moulsecoomb research. It is divided into three parts. Section 4.1 provides a brief introduction to the Moulsecoomb area, Section 4.2 describes the East Brighton New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme, which has dominated the participation scene in Moulsecoomb for the last ten years, and Section 4.3 explains the research objectives and methodology.

4.1 Moulsecoomb

Moulsecoomb, which has a population of approximately 8,000, is located on the north-eastern edge of Brighton. The area was developed by the state between the two world wars to house people displaced as a result of slum clearance in the inner city. About 65 per cent of the houses are owned and managed by the local authority. Most of the remainder were originally also part of the local authority's housing stock, but, as a result of a national 'right-to-buy' policy introduced in the 1980s, are now privately owned. Many have been converted into multiple dwellings, which are let to private tenants, including an increasing number of students from the nearby Brighton and Sussex Universities.

Moulsecoomb is generally regarded as one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Brighton and Hove – and in the country as a whole. According to a recent survey of inequalities in the city, the ward of which Moulsecoomb is part (which includes the somewhat less deprived neighbourhood of Bevendean and thus underestimates the extent of deprivation in Moulsecoomb itself) is one of the four most deprived wards in the city and among the 10 per cent most deprived wards in the UK (OCSI and EDuce 2007: 5). In terms of economic indicators, more than half the children live in families in which no member is in paid employment (OCSI and EDuce 2007: 41), more than half of pensioners claim pension credit [6] (*ibid*.: 130), and less than 1 per cent of businesses registered in the city are located in the area (*ibid*.: 82). In terms of social indicators, life expectancy in the ward is four years below the city average for men and three years for women (NHS 2007: 2), while 'healthy life expectancy' is three years below the average [7] (OCSI and

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6   Pension credit is a means-tested state benefit designed to supplement the income of pensioners on incomes below the official poverty line.

7   'Healthy life expectancy' is the age one can expect to reach without a disability.

EDuce 2007: 120) and more than 15 per cent of the working age population claim incapacity benefit (*ibid.*: 93). Less than 35 per cent of children obtain five or more GCSEs [8] (*ibid.*: 100) and in 2001 only 7 per cent of the population had a tertiary qualification (MBH Project Group 2008: 7).

4.2 The East Brighton NDC

In 1999 Brighton and Hove City Council submitted a proposal for funding through the government's New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. The proposal covered Moulsecoomb and another similarly deprived area in the eastern part of Brighton, called Whitehawk.[9] The bid was successful and in 2000 the East Brighton NDC was formally established.[10] The programme received a total of £47.2 million of government funding over an eight-year period, from 2000 to 2008 (MBH Project Group 2008). East Brighton NDC was, like other NDCs, an 'arms length' organisation, accountable to the City Council but with a relatively high degree of autonomy. It was governed by a 'partnership' board, composed of a mixture of central and local government representatives, residents of the NDC area, and other members of the Brighton and Hove community, and its administrative and technical staff, although employed by the Council, were responsible to the NDC Board. The programme covered a wide range of activities, from the provision of social and economic infrastructure to a variety of education and training initiatives. The basic components of this programme were identified in the planning stage and incorporated into a 'delivery plan' (East Brighton Community Partnership 1999), which constituted the basis of the funding proposal.

The NDC was initially described as a 'resident-led' initiative (East Brighton Community Partnership 1999; MBH Project Group 2008). Resident involvement took four main forms:

● Residents were involved in the initial planning stage and thus in determining the activities on which the programme would focus. Some became involved as a result of other community activities in which they were engaged and others through a community-wide consultative process, which included an 'action planning day'.

● Residents constituted a majority of the members of the NDC Board. This was a national requirement and was seen by government as 'the corner stone of the NDC' (Wright *et al.* 2006: 350). Resident members were initially appointed but during the latter part of the period they were directly elected.

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8   'Five GCSEs' means a pass level or above in five subjects in the General Certificate of Secondary Education, which is the basic school leaving examination.

9   The area also included four smaller neighbouring areas: Higher Bevendean (adjacent to Moulsecoomb and included in the MBH research), Saunders Park, Bates Estate and Manor Farm.

10   The programme has had several different names. It was initially known as East Brighton Community Partnership, but soon 'rebranded' as eb4U (East Brighton for You), the name by which most residents still know it, and then in 2007 the name was changed to East Brighton NDC.

- Residents were represented on a number of thematic Steering Groups, which were responsible for overseeing the detailed design and implementation of the various programme activities. In this case, resident members were 'self-selected'; in other words, they volunteered or were invited to join.

- Residents constituted the sole members of a body known as the Community Grants Panel, which was responsible for allocating a small untied amount of money designed to support community-based organisations in the area. These residents were also self-selected.

It was also intended to be a 'learning organisation', one that would learn 'how to use raw, undifferentiated data – what people say, feel and experience – rather than relying entirely on traditional professional ways of working' and 'how to work in more imaginative ways' (East Brighton Community Partnership 1999: 53). The extent to which it succeeded in being either 'resident-led' or a 'learning organisation' is considered in Section 4.4.

4.3 Research on citizen participation in Moulsecoomb

Between January 2007 and June 2008, IDS was involved in a collaborative research project in Moulsecoomb. The other research partners were: the Health and Social Policy Research Centre (HSPRC) at Brighton University; the East Brighton NDC; the south-east regional office of the Scarman Trust,[11] a non-government organisation that provides financial and technical support to members of local communities who are engaged in efforts to develop their areas; and Moulsecoomb residents. The project was funded by the Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange (BSCKE), a research facility established by the Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) at Brighton University to promote and support research in the community by members of both Brighton University and the University of Sussex. It was initially known as the Moulsecoomb Community Participation Research Project but, at the suggestion of resident members of the project management group, it was renamed Moulsecoomb: Being Heard! (MBH).

The immediate objective of MBH was to document residents' experience of participation in the NDC and to compare this with their involvement in four small community-initiated groups, three of which were supported by the Scarman Trust (MBH Project Group 2008: 2). In other words, the aim was to compare two different ways of promoting and supporting community participation in area-based development activities: the 'NDC approach', which involved the creation of 'invited spaces', and the 'Scarman Trust approach', in which the aim was to support 'claimed spaces', initiated and led by members of the community.

This immediate objective was seen as a means of achieving four secondary objectives (MBH Project Group 2008: 2):

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11   The Scarman Trust is now known as the Novas Scarman Group. However, the name Scarman Trust is used here, since it was known by this name for most of the research period.

- Influencing local and national policy on community participation;

- 'Empowering' Moulsecoomb residents by enabling their views to be heard;

- Documenting the impact of the Scarman Trust approach; and

- Enhancing the quality of IDS teaching by providing practical fieldwork experience for IDS Masters students.

The project was managed by a Project Group, composed of a representative of each of the four partner organisations (HSPRC, IDS, Scarman Trust and East Brighton NDC) and seven Moulsecoomb residents.[12] The main source of data was interviews with Mouslecoomb residents, which were undertaken by IDS students as part of a course entitled 'Empowering Society' taught in the spring term of 2007. The interviews were conducted in two stages. The first stage was a relatively short questionnaire-based interview, which was conducted with all residents involved in the management of the NDC and/or the four community-led groups who could be identified and were willing to take part. The second stage was a longer, semi-structured interview, which was conducted with a sample of those interviewed in the first stage. The interview data was supplemented by a sample survey of Moulsecoomb residents, conducted by resident members of the Project Group, and interviews with key stakeholders, including local councillors, NDC and council officers, and Scarman Trust staff (MBH Project Group 2008: 3–4). The research was undertaken between March and October 2007, the initial findings presented at a stakeholder workshop in December 2007, and the final report (MBH Project Group 2008) presented at a seminar in June 2008.

A second, less formal research project was undertaken in Moulsecoomb by IDS staff and students in March 2008. This research built on the original MBH project but was designed primarily to provide practical fieldwork experience for IDS students taking the 2008 'Empowering Society' course. The objective was to compare a number of different 'channels' through which Moulsecoomb residents can try to influence national and local government activities in their area. Six different channels were examined, included four 'invited spaces' and two 'claimed spaces'. The invited spaces were:

- The Moulsecoomb Local Action Team (LAT), a state-initiated partnership between the police, residents and other stakeholders, set up in 2007 to address issues of public security and safety in the area;

- The three elected councillors who represented Moulsecoomb and Bevendean ward on Brighton and Hove City Council;[13]

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12   There were originally eight resident members but one dropped out because child-care commitments prevented her from attending meetings.

13   As John Gaventa and others have pointed out to me, this is not a conventional 'invited space', rather an example of traditional representative democracy. However, from the residents' point of view, it has many of the characteristics of an 'invited space', since it is a state institution in which they are 'invited' to participate, both through elections and through the various consultative fora that the councillors provide.

- The Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF), an umbrella body for non-government organisations, which, since it was represented on the Brighton and Hove Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and related structures, provided a channel through which community groups could participate in the governance of the city; and

- Moulsecoomb Inclusion Project, a one-year project funded through the NDC, which included efforts to integrate Bangladeshi women residents into the Moulsecoomb community.

The two claimed spaces were:

- Moulsecoomb Community Forum, a community-wide organisation which was one of the community-led groups included in the MBH research; and

- Brighton and Hove Defend Council Housing campaign, which was part of a nationwide campaign to prevent the sale of council housing and, in 2007, successfully organised council tenants in Brighton and Hove to vote against the City Council's proposals to sell its housing stock to an 'arms length' housing corporation.

The information was collected through a variety of means, including secondary data, attendance at meetings and stakeholder interviews. Two resident members of the MBH Project Group helped to organise the research and attended the formal 'Empowering Society' classes.[14]

5 Research in Moulsecoomb: the findings

The main findings of the two pieces of research (MBH Project Group 2008: 5–22; Empowering Society 2008) are summarised in this section under four broad headings: the amount of resident participation; the quality of that participation; the factors affecting the level and quality of participation; and future prospects for resident participation in Moulsecoomb. Most of the information is drawn from the MBH research, since this was the more extensive and rigorous of the two projects. The student research is used to support or supplement the MBH findings, as and when appropriate.

5.1 Amount of participation

The research found a wide range of resident involvement in activities designed to improve the quality of life in Moulsecoomb. Residents participated both through

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14 Both residents were particularly active members of the Moulsecoomb community and three of the students studied their role as 'community activists'. Their participation in the formal classes was intended primarily to expose them to wider theoretical and practical material on community empowerment in order to enhance their work – an objective that was very successfully achieved.

partnerships with the state, such as the NDC and LAT, and through a wide range of community initiatives that received little or no state support. Moreover, they participated in many different ways: they voted in council elections and in referenda such as the one on the sale of council housing; they took part in *ad hoc* community projects and events; and they were involved in the organisation and management of both state- and community-led activities.

The research focused on those residents who were involved in an organisational or management capacity. It found that these residents were highly committed and devoted a great deal of time and effort to such activities.[15] They became involved because they were concerned about issues in the area and they believed that residents have both a valid contribution to make and a right to be heard. For some, such as the two community activists who took part in the second research project, it had become the focal point of their lives.

However, the research also found that the proportion of residents that participated in this way was small and that there was a tendency for the same people to be involved in many different types of activity. For example, in the MBH research, the number of interviews conducted in Phase 1 was 32, but the number of inter-viewees was only 21, since many people were involved in more than one group and so were interviewed more than once. Of those interviewed, 88 per cent were involved in at least one other group and 75 per cent were involved in both the NDC and a community-led group. Furthermore, of the 131 residents interviewed in the door-to-door survey, 68 per cent did not belong to any group other than a social or sports club and only one (0.8 per cent) belonged to an 'area improve-ment' group. Both research projects found that this put a heavy burden on the few residents who did get involved and made it difficult to keep some community groups operational.

It was also found that the people who became involved tended not to be typical of the population as a whole. For example, MBH interviewees were on average older, more highly educated and more likely to own their own homes than the general population of the neighbourhood. This raises issues of representation, exacerbated by the fact that most of the residents involved were 'self-selected'. In the case of the NDC, the decision to elect rather than appoint resident members of the Board was designed to address the issue of selection. However, since turnout in the elections was generally low, it was only partially successful.[16]

Similar representational issues were found in relation to local councillors. Although councillors are elected, the turnout in council elections in Moulsecoomb has tended, as in the country as a whole, to be low.[17] Furthermore, Moulsecoomb

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15   The average amount of time spent by those interviewed in Phase 1 of the MBH research was 2.7 days per month, and some spent as much as seven days.

16   There were three elections; in the first election turnout was close to the national NDC average of 23 per cent (CRESR 2005: 25), but by the third it had dropped to less than 10 per cent.

17   57 per cent of those interviewed in the sample household survey said that they voted in a recent council election. However, this is relatively high when compared with national figures, according to which the average turnout between 1990 and 1999 was 36 per cent (ODPM n.d.), and so it should probably be treated with caution.

residents have seldom stood for election as councillors. There appears to have only ever been one councillor for the Moulsecoomb and Bevendean ward who actually lived in Moulsecoomb, and that was in the 1970s. In all other cases, the councillors have lived either in the more affluent Bevendean part of the ward or, more often, in other parts of the city.

Another significant finding of the research was that community participation was hampered by a high degree of fragmentation within Moulsecoomb. This fragmentation had several dimensions. The most obvious one, which was emphasised by resident members of the MBH Project Group, was the physical fragmentation of the area, which was due partly to its physical layout but also to variations (past and present) in the social structure of the population from one locality to another. Another dimension was the increasing heterogeneity of the population owing to the sale of council housing, which had resulted in three main population groups: council house tenants, those who own their own homes, and private sector tenants – many of whom are students. A third, and more complex, type of fragmentation was more personal in nature. It took the form of suspicion, resentment, jealousy and, at times, open conflict, between individuals and groups. Moreover, it occurred not only among residents, but also among 'outsiders' working in the area, such as councillors and public officers. The result was a network of 'cliques' or 'factions', each involving both residents and 'outsiders', which were competing with each other to win the support of the general population – and of the state.

5.2 The quality of participation

Most of the residents interviewed in the MBH research made positive comments about their participation. These comments were of two main types. The first related to what the residents felt they had achieved. Twenty-five of the 32 Phase 1 interviewees (78 per cent) said that the groups in which they were involved had achieved either 'much' (47 per cent) or 'something' (32 per cent), and 26 (81 per cent) said that their involvement had benefited the people of Moulsecoomb. The second type of comment concerned the personal benefits to the participants. Eighty four per cent said that they had benefited personally from their participation, 56 per cent saying that they had gained 'much' and 28 per cent 'something'. The personal gains included the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, particularly management skills, and an increase in self-confidence and assertiveness.

However, there were noticeable differences in the level of satisfaction between those involved in the NDC and those engaged in the community-led groups. Eleven of the 13 community group interviewees (85 per cent) said that the group had achieved 'much', compared with only four of the 19 NDC interviewees (21 per cent). Similarly, 12 (92 per cent) of the community group members said that their involvement had benefited the people of Moulsecoomb, compared with 14 (78 per cent) of the NDC members. And in terms of personal gain, ten of the 13 community group interviewees (77 per cent) felt that they had benefited 'much', compared with only eight (42 per cent) of the eb4U interviewees. However, among the NDC participants, there was a noticeable difference between those involved in

the Community Grants Panel and those involved in the Board and Steering Groups, with the members of the Panel being generally more satisfied. The reasons for these differences in levels of satisfaction are discussed below.

5.3 Factors affecting participation

The research identified five main factors that appeared to influence the level and quality of participation: the extent to which residents were able to influence decision making, the form that their participation took, the way in which the participatory structures operated, group dynamics, and the amount and type of external support provided. These are discussed in turn below.

1   *The extent of resident influence:* This was the single most important factor identified and it went a long way in explaining the differences in levels of satisfaction between the two sets of participants in the MBH research. In the community-led groups, residents were largely or entirely in control and so felt that they could achieve something. However, although the NDC was originally intended to be a 'resident-led' programme, it soon became evident to residents that the scope for them to influence decision-making was limited. Many complained that money was not being spent on residents' priorities and that in meetings they were merely 'rubber-stamping' decisions that had already been made. There was a widespread feeling of betrayal, since they had been led to believe that they would be in control. Other interviewees generally agreed and officers acknowledged that in the latter part of the period the programme was officially described as 'resident-centred' rather than 'resident-led'.[18]

2   *The form that participation took:* Levels of participation were found to be higher in activities that involved less time, effort or commitment. For example, only 7 per cent of the residents interviewed in the door-to-door survey had ever attended a meeting of the Moulsecoomb Community Forum, but 74 per cent said that they read its newsletter. Similarly, few council house tenants were actively involved in the Defend Council Housing campaign, but 62 per cent voted in the referendum. It was also found that both the level and quality of participation tended to be higher in activities that were varied and relatively practical in nature, rather than consisting merely of meetings. Residents involved in the NDC complained about the number of meetings and some of those involved in the community groups said that it was easier to get people to attend practical activities than meetings.

3   *Mode of operation:* Many of the residents interviewed in the MBH research found the NDC structures and procedures too rigid and 'bureaucratic', preferring the more flexible and informal way in which community groups tended to operate. It appeared that, although the NDC set out to 'work in more

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18   In the second research project, the students identified lack of resident control as one of the weaknesses of the LAT. However, this comment was based primarily on observation of meetings rather than the views of the residents involved.

imaginative ways' (East Brighton Community Partnership 1999: 53), it failed to do so – at least in the eyes of residents. Among other things, residents complained about the amount of paperwork, the scheduling of activities at times that did not fit in with their other commitments (such as work or child-care), and the fact that there was never enough time to discuss and debate issues adequately because they were under constant pressure to meet deadlines.

4   *Group dynamics:* The MBH research found that in both the NDC and community-led groups, the level of satisfaction was influenced by group dynamics. Participants tended to dislike situations where there was conflict within the group or some members dominated the agenda. These relational problems were of two types: problems between residents, including residents from different geographical areas and different 'factions'; and, in the case of the NDC, problems between residents and officials.

5   *The amount and type of external support:* The research looked both at support to individual participants, such as training and mentoring, and more general efforts to promote and support community participation in the area, including the role of professional community development staff. It found that, in both cases, support could play a positive role, but that it needed to be responsive rather than directive. Thus, support to individual participants tended to be more effective if tailored to meet individual needs rather than provided through standard training packages, while community development workers tended to be most effective when they worked with existing organisations, supported existing efforts and responded to existing concerns, rather than when they established new organisations or agendas. Another important finding was that, in partnerships between residents and service providers, officers often needed as much support as residents.

These five sets of 'primary' factors appeared in turn to be dependent on another four 'secondary' variables: the type of activity concerned, the scale of the activity, the amount of control from higher level authorities and, in the case of partnerships, the relationship between officers and residents. The findings with regard to each of these were as follows:

1   *The type of activity concerned:* Both research projects suggested that one cannot expect to achieve the same level or quality of participation in all activities or programmes because some provide better opportunities for participation than others. Not surprisingly, the potential for effective participation was higher in activities that were of immediate relevance or concern to residents, and in situations where it was mutually beneficial for the participants to work together. Thus, there was a relatively high level of satisfaction in the community-led groups, since they met perceived needs shared by all members. Similarly, the Defend Council Housing Campaign obtained a lot of support (at least when it came to voting) because it addressed an obvious area of concern to the majority of Moulsecoomb residents. Similarly, in the case of invited spaces, partnerships between residents and the police (such as the LAT) appeared to be easier to establish than some others because security was a major concern among residents and there were clear mutual benefits to both parties.[19] In the NDC, however,

participation was more difficult because the programme addressed a wide range of issues, only some of which were of major concern to residents, and the benefits of resident participation to programme staff were less evident, because it added to the complexity and cost of operational structures and procedures and slowed down the rate at which decisions could be made and implemented.

2   *The scale of activity concerned:* The MBH research concluded that one of the main reasons for the difference in the quality of participation between community-led groups and the NDC was the difference in scale and complexity. In the NDC the scope for adapting administrative structures and procedures to suit the needs and preferences of resident members was limited, because both the amount of money involved and the number of different programme components necessitated the adoption of complex administrative and management procedures. In contrast, in the community-led groups the amounts of money involved were relatively small and the range of activities more limited, and so there was less need for formal bureaucratic procedures.

3   *The extent of control from higher level authorities:* All the 'primary' factors that affected the level and quality of participation were influenced by the amount of flexibility that programme officials had in determining the nature and course of the activity or programme concerned, which in turn depended on the amount of control exerted from above. One of the main findings of the MBH research was that, in the NDC, there was relatively little room for manoeuvre at the local level because of controls imposed by the central government through its regional office, the Government Office for the South-East (GOSE). The main instruments of control were the determination of priority issues and concerns, which made it difficult to meet residents' perceived needs, and the imposition of targets and deadlines, which limited the scope for adapting the mode of operation and, in particular, put pressure on everyone concerned to move as fast as possible, rather than at a pace that would allow maximum resident involvement.

4   *The relationship between residents and officers:* Another major finding of the MBH research was that, although there was much talk about residents and officers being 'equal partners' in the NDC, the reality was rather different. Some resident interviewees suggested that it was difficult, if not impossible, for it to be an equal partnership because there were fundamental differences between the two groups of participants. They differed in their objectives, in the types of knowledge and expertise that they possessed, in their modes of operation and, above all, in the fact that officers were salaried employees while residents were unpaid volunteers. In relation to the last point, they suggested that residents should be remunerated for the time and effort they spent but felt that this would only partially address the problem.

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19   For the residents, the benefit is increased security, while for the police the benefit is that it is easier to prevent and solve crime if they have the cooperation of the community (e.g. if community members provide rather than conceal relevant information).

5.4 Future prospects for participation

One of the topics explored in the MBH research was residents' views about the scope for citizen participation in area improvement activities in Moulsecoomb when the NDC came to an end. The second research project, which was undertaken nearly a year later and looked at a wider range of participatory channels, explored this issue further. The findings were not encouraging. They suggested that, although the NDC had many shortcomings in terms of the extent and, in particular, the quality of resident involvement, the opportunities for participation in the future could be even more limited.

The main reason for this was that, in line with national policy, the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was increasingly becoming the focus of all 'development' effort in Brighton and Hove, and the scope for resident participation through the NDC was limited. From a participatory point of view, there were a number of problems associated with the LSP at this time:

1   There was very little scope for direct resident participation in the LSP and its related structures. There were two main ways in which residents could participate: through membership of community-based organisations that were in turn members of the Brighton and Hove Community and Voluntary Sector Forum (CVSF), which was represented on the LSP and many of its related partnership structures; and through membership of neighbourhood-wide organisations (such as neighbourhood action groups), which were represented on the LSP through a body known as the Stronger Communities Partnership.[20] In both cases, participation was indirect rather than direct and, given the problems of representation discussed above, it would be difficult for the few individuals who were involved to effectively represent the neighbourhood as a whole. The scope for participation was particularly limited in Moulsecoomb, since very few people belonged to community organisations, very few of these organisations were members of the CVSF, and there was no neighbourhood-wide organisation that would qualify for membership of the Stronger Communities Programme. The MBH research explored the possibility of establishing a neighbourhood-wide organisation, either by designating an existing organisation or by creating a new one, but concluded that it would be very difficult because of the high level of fragmentation in the neighbourhood.[21] The main advice to community representatives was to try to bridge these gaps in order to facilitate the establishment of such an organisation.

2   The LSP was even larger and more complex than the NDC, since it covered all the activities and organisations involved in service provision in the city. Consequently, there was little scope for simplifying or adapting its structures and procedures to make them more 'user friendly' for resident participants. In fact, the research found that not only residents but also many non-resident participants were not entirely clear how the system works.

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20   This is a new body and, at the time of writing, it was not clear exactly how it would operate.

21   This would also make it difficult for Moulsecoomb to benefit from the Communitybuilders fund announced in the 2008 Community Empowerment White Paper.

3   Although the government's intention was to reduce the amount of control on local authorities, it appeared that the LSP would continue to be severely con strained by the imposition of priorities, targets and deadlines from above. The main change heralded was the reduction in the number of targets from over 600 to 198 (CLG 2006; CLG 2008a: 17), and it remained to be seen how much difference this would make.

4   At the time of the research, it was unclear how much money would be made available for area-based development initiatives, in place of the former NDC and Neighbourhood Renewal Grants, and how any such funds would be managed. However, the initial impression gained was that such funds would be limited and, since Moulsecoomb had received large amounts of money though the NDC, the chances of it benefiting from these funds in the immediate future were slim. There also appeared to be little chance of Moulsecoomb receiving significant funding as a result of Brighton and Hove's designation as an 'empowerment champion', since the Council had selected two other neighbourhoods as pilot areas for implementing the programme. Moreover, the amounts of money were likely to be small.[22]

5   Although the government recognised the need for representative and participatory democracy to go hand-in-hand, there appeared to be little evidence of this in Brighton and Hove at the time. There appeared to be no clear role for councillors in the LSP structure, apart from the fact that, as members of the full council, they were responsible for approving key policy documents produced by the LSP, such as the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement. Moreover, any increased powers that ward councillors might gain through the provisions of the 2007 Local Government Act (for example, the 'councillors' call to action') could be counterbalanced by another provision of the Act, which required councils like Brighton and Hove, which had previously operated a committee system of government, to switch to a cabinet system.[23]

6 Deepening democracy in the UK: the reality

What conclusions can be drawn from the Moulsecoomb research regarding the prospects for increasing citizen participation in the area, and thereby changing the balance of power between citizens and the state? And is Moulsecoomb's experience typical of that in other relatively deprived parts of the country? This section addresses these questions.

22   For example, according to information gained from informal discussions with council officers, the participatory budgeting pilot projects are unlikely to be able to access more than 1 per cent of the Council's budget.

23   The announcement in the 2008 white paper that urban authorities will be encouraged to establish neighbourhood councils could have some impact in this respect.

6.1 Lessons from Moulsecoomb

Five tentative conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the Moulsecoomb research:

1   *Amount of participation:* Very few people appear to participate actively in 'area improvement' activities in Moulsecoomb. Those who do participate devote a vast amount of time and energy, but they are mainly 'self-selected' and tend not to be typical of the population as a whole. Participation is also hampered by complex divisions and conflicts within the area.

2   *Factors affecting participation:* Moulsecoomb residents appear more likely to find the process of participating worthwhile, and thus to participate more, when:

   ●   Participation is related to specific issues that are of direct interest or concern to them;

   ●   Residents feel that they are having an impact;

   ●   Their participation is respected and acknowledged and they are treated as equals;

   ●   Participatory activities are varied and enjoyable, and not constrained by unnecessary 'red tape', or external procedures and deadlines;

   ●   Participatory mechanisms recognise community strengths and weak-nesses and build on existing structures; and

   ●   Participants receive adequate support, tailored to meet their individual needs.

3   *Claimed spaces:* 'Claimed spaces', such as small community-led groups providing services that meet specific identified needs and 'one-off' campaigns like Defend Council Housing, meet most of these requirements. However, the scope for increasing or expanding such activities appears limited because:

   ●   Most areas of service provision are the responsibility of the state and so there is little or no room for independent citizen action;

   ●   The number of people who actively participate remains low and there are limits to the amount of time and effort that these people can be expected to devote to such activities, especially since they usually work in a voluntary capacity; and

   ●   Even if participants provide their time for nothing, some financial resources are required and it is difficult to access such resources without becoming dependent upon, and subject to the conditions imposed by, the funding agency – which more often than not is the state.

4   *Partnerships between state and citizens:* In 'partnerships' between the state and residents, like the NDC and LAT, it appears to be difficult to meet these requirements because:

- Local officials seldom have sufficient autonomy or flexibility to be able to respond effectively to residents' needs and priorities;

- There is little room for adapting the mode of operation because such partnerships are subject to the demands and constraints of government bureaucracy; and

- It is very difficult for residents and officials to operate as equals because their status is very different.

Moreover, in large programmes, like the NDC, these problems are exacerbated by the scale of the operation.

5   *Local strategic partnerships:* The LSP provides limited scope for direct resident participation because:

- It is not a partnership between the state and residents, but between the state and other service providers; consequently, residents can only participate indirectly, through membership of a participating organisation;

- Like the NDC, the LSP is subject to a high degree of central control and is an integral part of state bureaucracy; and

- The scale and complexity of the LSP structures is such that it is difficult for ordinary residents to even understand how they work, let alone participate in them.

The above conclusions suggest that in Moulsecoomb there has been a significant gap between the government's rhetoric and the reality on the ground and that this gap is likely to continue despite the most recent reforms. However, the conclusions are based on a limited amount of data and Moulsecoomb is only one small part of the UK. Therefore, in order to test the validity and wider applicability of these conclusions, the next section compares the findings of the Moulsecoomb research with similar studies in other parts of the country.

6.2 Is Moulsecoomb's experience typical?

There is a vast amount of recent literature on citizen participation in local governance and area improvement in the UK (see, for example: Balloch and Taylor 2001; Barnes, Newman and Sullivan 2007; Barnes *et al.* 2008; Burton *et al.* 2004; Carley *et al.* 2000; Clarke 2005; Creasy 2006; Democratic Audit 2008; Dinham 2005; Imrie and Raco 2003; NCF 2006; Power Inquiry 2006; Russell 2001; Skidmore *et al.* 2006; Taylor 2003, 2007; Taylor *et al.* 2004; Wright *et al.* 2006). The paper does not attempt to provide a detailed or comprehensive review of this material; it merely highlights the findings and conclusions most obviously relevant to the discussion. It presents these under five headings, corresponding to the five conclusions drawn from the Moulsecoomb experience.

1 The amount of participation

There is substantial evidence to suggest that the situation in Moulsecoomb appears to be fairly typical. Creasy (2006: 11) points out that 'most people are in favour of increasing opportunities for participation through measures such as neighbourhood forums, but the evidence shows that few actually take part'. Skidmore *et al.* (2006) conclude that one cannot expect more than 1 per cent of the population to participate actively in area improvement activities, a figure remarkably similar to the 0.8 per cent found in the MBH door-to-door survey. They maintain (2006: xiii) that 'no matter how hard people try, existing forms of community participation will only ever mobilise a small group of people' and they suggest that, 'rather than fighting against this reality, the solution lies in maximising the value from the existing small group, while also looking at longer-term approaches to governance that would create a broader bedrock of support for governance activity'. They call this the '1 per cent solution'.

Both the report of the Power Inquiry (2006) and the review undertaken by the Democratic Audit (2008) suggest that participation rates may be somewhat higher than those cited by Skidmore *et al.*[24] However, the basic argument about low levels of participation remains valid. The Democratic Audit (2008: 41) notes as a 'vital consideration' the fact that 'three quarters of the population [are] "non-joiners"', and both reports maintain that a radical reform of the political system is necessary in order to increase participation significantly.

Studies elsewhere also suggest that, as in Moulsecoomb, the few who do participate tend not to be typical of the population as a whole. At a general level, Creasy (2006: 12) notes that 'there is a growing "participation gap" with fewer people taking an active part in the public realm, whilst those who do are less and less representative of the population as a whole', while the Democratic Audit (2008: 52–3) reports that 'the poorest members of society, manual workers, and those with fewer years in education are more likely to be politically inactive'. Looking more specifically at citizen participation in local governance-related activities, Barnes and colleagues (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan 2007; Barnes *et al.* 2008) find situations very similar to those in Moulsecoomb. Barnes *et al.* (2008) suggest that, in many participatory fora, participants should not be seen as 'representatives', who are there to speak on behalf of the community as a whole, but as people who have relevant local knowledge that can contribute to policymaking – a view expressed by several MBH interviewees. They emphasise (2008: 4) the need for both 'those designing and managing citizen-centred governance' and those 'citizens and users who are involved' to recognise the difference between these two roles.

There is also evidence to support the Moulsecoomb findings about the burden placed upon those who do participate. Carley *et al.* (2000: 38) report that 'expectations of the commitment of residents of regeneration areas to participation, often night after night and weekends, is far in excess of what most

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24   This is hardly surprising, given the difficulties of measuring levels of participation and lack of
      methodological consistency between surveys.

people will tolerate, which shows when the same few people turn up again and again', while a participant at the 2007 Champions of Participation Workshop, organised by IDS in conjunction with the government, asks: 'How can we avoid turning energetic volunteers into overwhelmed and unpaid quasi-bureaucrats?' (Ardron, quoted in Dunn *et al.* 2008: 20). According to the 2008 White Paper (CLG 2008a: 3), 'the Department for Work and Pensions are exploring how those on benefits can be supported in taking up volunteering opportunities'. However, although this could ease the financial burden for some volunteers, it would only address part of the problem.

Divisions and conflicts within 'communities' are also common elsewhere. At a general level, Taylor (2003) provides a detailed analysis of the complexities of the issues underlying the concept of 'community', while Russell (2001: 40) warns that 'communities are as much subjective as objective. They can be sources of social support but, equally, they can be oppressive as well or divisive.' More specifically, Dinham (2005), in a study of an NDC in East London, shows how, as in Moulsecoomb, these divisions may be exacerbated by external initiatives such as the NDC. He reports (2005: 308–9) 'a growing factionalism ... within the area, which belies the notion of "community"'. And Taylor (2003: 186–7) warns that some 'community leaders who have struggled against the odds to have a say in the decision-making process may not find it easy to cede control to others'. There are many examples, she says, of leaders who 'have climbed up Arnstein's famous ladder of participation ... and then pulled it up after them.'[25] Both Taylor (2003) and Imrie and Raco (2003) discuss the implications of this for current government policy. Imrie and Raco (2003: 33–4) point out that, 'in order to gain access to limited resources', communities are required to 'restructure themselves internally and demonstrate that they are capable of self-government'. As experience in Moulsecoomb and elsewhere shows, in 'real life' communities, this is easier said than done.

2 Factors affecting participation

There is widespread agreement about the factors that affect the quality of participation. Moreover, the New Labour government cannot claim ignorance of this, since it has commissioned a number of reports on the subject. In 1999, for example, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which was then responsible for area-based regeneration programmes, commissioned the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to prepare guidelines on community involvement (JRF 1999, cited in Russell 2001: 41). More recently, in 2004 the Home Office published a report on *What Works in Community-Based Area Initiatives* (Burton *et al.* 2004), and in 2006 the National Community Forum (a panel of residents and officials involved in area improvement programmes) produced a report entitled *Removing the Barriers to Community Participation* on behalf of what is now the Department of Communities and Local Government (NCF 2006). In all cases, the reports have drawn very similar conclusions to those of the Moulsecoomb study.

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25   Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein 1969) is discussed in Section 7.1 below.

The basic principles underlying effective citizen participation are aptly summarised by Dinham (2005: 310), who maintains that 'renewal depends upon the sustained involvement and ownership of local people at their own pace and in their own ways'. And, as Dinham points out, these principles are consistent with the basic tenets of what is widely known as a 'community development' approach.[26] In Dinham's words: 'community development approaches aspire to work both to develop and empower participants, starting from where they are and travelling at their pace' (Dinham 2005: 303). These basic principles also underlie the approach of the Scarman Trust (Pike 2003).[27]

The MBH research found that 'there are very obvious differences between the Scarman Trust approach and that of the NDC – and most government-funded programmes, and there are many similarities between this approach and the views that residents expressed about the factors needed to promote effective resident involvement' (MBH Project Group 2008: 22). And recent policy documents suggest that the government's understanding of community development is still very different. For example, the *Action Plan for Community Empowerment* refers to the 'wealth of experience in how to, and not to *do* community empowerment' (CLG/LGA 2007: 12; emphasis added), while the Community Empowerment White Paper praises the efforts of community development workers but then goes on to say that 'we are keen to encourage other frontline workers to *do community building*' (CLG/LGA 2007: 3; emphasis added).

Finally, there is also support for the finding that the quality of participation affects the quantity. Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007: 203) find 'evidence of a large number of individuals losing trust or becoming further distanced from the political process as a result of negative experiences'. And both the report of the Power Inquiry (2006) and that of the Democratic Audit (2008) maintain that the current low levels of public participation are due not to public apathy *per se*, but to a feeling that there is no point in participating.

3 Claimed spaces

As the Democratic Audit's report notes (2008: 58), there is not much recent information about the operation of 'claimed spaces'. However, the evidence that does exist suggests that it is not uncommon for residents to find participation more rewarding in claimed spaces than in invited spaces. Barnes, Newman and

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26 There is some disagreement about what constitutes a 'community development' approach, and in particular about whether it can be 'empowering'. Because of its colonial heritage, some writers (for example, Hickey and Mohan 2004), distinguish 'community development' approaches from 'empowerment' approaches to participation. However, most people would probably agree with Dinham that community development approaches do at least aim to be empowering.

27 It could be argued that the Scarman Trust approach differs from more conventional community development approaches because it provides support to individuals rather than groups. However, it does so only because it recognises the important role that individuals play in communities. Furthermore, and of key importance here, it follows the traditional community principles of starting 'where people are' and supporting them to do what they want in their own way and at their own pace.

Sullivan (2007: 184), in their review of a wide range of participatory modes, find only a few cases where 'successful outcomes … led to a wish among citizens to continue to be engaged' or where 'new channels of communication' have opened up and 'new understandings' have emerged between actors, and these tend to be claimed spaces. They conclude (2007: 204) that the types of participation necessary for 'the process of political renewal' are 'more likely to occur in forums that had their roots in social movements, community activism and service user struggles', than in the 'invited spaces' created by the government.

There is also evidence to suggest that invited spaces tend to be more effective if participants are drawn from claimed spaces. Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007: 202) suggest that 'where groups with a prior existence ... were invited to participate as stakeholders … deliberation was more likely to produce challenges to the status quo and some element of transformation', while the Democratic Audit (2008: 61) concludes that 'people participating in official "invited spaces" have a stronger voice when they are also part of an autonomous collective group'.

Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007) found particularly high levels of participant satisfaction and achievement in campaigning and lobbying activities – like the successful Defend Council Housing Campaign in Moulsecoomb. Similar findings are reported by the Power Inquiry (2006) and the Democratic Audit (2008), both of which use the relatively high incidence of such activities to support their argument that low levels of participation cannot be blamed simply on public apathy – a point also accepted by the government in the 2008 Community Empowerment White Paper (CLG 2008a: 21). However, the Scarman Trust's experience suggests that high levels of satisfaction and empowerment can occur in other types of claimed spaces; the key is 'building people's power to do what they want – *can do* – and their ability to become the people they want to be – *can be*' (Pike 2003: 4).

On a less positive note, there is also some support for the conclusion, drawn from the Moulsecoomb research, that the scope for expanding the role and influence of claimed spaces is limited. For example, Pike (2003: 96) admits that 'every one of the thousands of people whom the Scarman Trust has supported has faced immeasurable odds'. Moreover, as he goes on to point out, these individuals are few and far between, since only about 'one out of ten of society at any one time has what it takes to be a cando-er'. Similarly, the Democratic Audit's report acknowledges (2008: 23) that many national campaigns and protests are unsuccessful because 'the government and the House [of Commons] can generally ignore and ride out public opinion on a given issue, however weighty and informed public opinion may be (as with the invasion of Iraq)'; and the same is true at local level.[28] It is difficult to see how the government's proposal to impose a duty on councils to 'respond' to petitions (CLG 2008a: 5) will change this situation, since 'responding' to a concern is not the same thing as taking action to address it.

Evidence also suggests that, although community-based groups can be effective participants in invited spaces, they often find such participation difficult. Two main

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28   Defend Council Housing is one of the few recent public campaigns in the Brighton/East Sussex area
      that has been successful.

types of problems arise. One is the difficulty of maintaining their autonomy. For example, Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007: 187) note that, although some of the groups they studied 'managed to remain rooted in autonomous action', others 'became partly captured by professional and organisational fields of power'. The other problem is capacity. Russell (2001: 40) maintains that 'participation is hard for community groups … because their resources are over-stretched and accountability to their "constituency" entails more time and greater exposure', while Taylor (2003: 61) suggests that the basic principles of 'mutuality and informality', which are the strengths of community-based organisations, 'are also their weaknesses'.

Finally, some commentators suggest that broader societal changes have had an impact on the nature and role of claimed spaces. For example, the Democratic Audit note (2008: 29–30) that, although technological change has opened up new participation channels – such as the internet, neoliberal reforms have reduced the power of some traditional claimed spaces – such as trade unions. They also point to changes in the nature and role of political parties, particularly the end of the 'era of the mass party', which in the past was one of the means 'through which citizens could seek to exercise political power' (Democratic Audit 2008: 42).[29] And on a rather different note, Barnes, Newman and Sullivan suggest (2007: 204) that the rise of 'consumerism' has made community organisation more difficult because citizens 'are increasingly constituted as individuals' rather than as members of 'communities'.

4 Partnerships between state and citizens

There is a wealth of evidence to support the Moulsecoomb findings about partnerships between citizens and the state. The most obviously relevant evidence comes from the experience of other NDCs. Wright *et al.* (2006: 258), in an evaluation of the NDC programme as a whole, conclude that 'if the NDC is a "bottom-up community-led" programme, it is community led in the sense that government decides how the community will be involved, why they will be involved, what they will do and how they will do it'. They demonstrate how the room for manoeuvre was constrained by the need to operate within the existing norms and structures of the central government. This included accepting 'the government's analysis of the causes of deprivation', following its 'what works system of policy development', and adopting its 'performance management self-assessment technique' (Wright *et al.* 2006: 349). They also emphasise the pressure to 'spend money within the government's timeframe' (2006: 358).

At a more specific level, Dinham (2005), in an account of residents' experience of the first few years of an NDC in East London, reports a very similar situation to that in Moulsecoomb. As in Moulsecoomb, there were some positive elements. For example, the NDC 'enjoyed an exciting and promising beginning with much expectation and support amongst local people' and it resulted in 'real growth in

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29   Views differ as to whether or not political parties should be seen as civil society organisations;
       however, their role as channels of political participation is undisputed.

people's individual confidence and self-esteem' (Dinham 2005: 309, 310). However, there was also much dissatisfaction, particularly as the programme progressed. Dinham warns that 'there may be a danger that NDC becomes just another layer of process and bureaucracy' (2005: 308). As in Moulsecoomb, residents were particularly critical of the mode of operation. He notes that:

> An apprehension of formality was much reported. Many reported feeling 'put off' by styles of meetings and the venues in which they are held and some said they did not feel able to attend meetings and groups because they did not know what to expect and felt intimidated by what they might find. In addition there is frustration with practical arrangements for participation, for example with time-scales for engagement.

> (Dinham 2005: 306)

Similar experiences are reported in other types of partnership. Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007: 184), in their review of a wide range of partnerships, find many cases where 'attempts to foster [citizen] engagement ... seem to reinforce, rather than to challenge, entrenched forms of power'. In such cases, they report (2007: 190):

> Public bodies managed to retain and even enlarge their power. This was evident in the power of public officials to constitute their public in a way that best fitted their needs (rather than to engage with pre-existing and more potentially troublesome groups); the power to set the rules and norms of engagement; and in many cases to set the agenda of what issues were, and were not, to be opened up to public deliberation. They also had the power to decide what legitimacy to afford to different voices and different modes of expression; and ultimately, of course, the power to decide whether or not to take account of the views expressed.

They emphasise the importance of the mode of operation – 'what happens in the deliberative process' (2007: 189) – and, in particular, the need for citizens to be 'engaged in setting the rules' (2007: 192). However, they also note how difficult it is to achieve these fundamental changes. It 'is not just a matter of introducing new techniques of participation and citizen engagement,' they say (2007: 201). It depends on 'the capacity of public voices – including lay publics, but also the voices of some of those leading change within public service organisations – to challenge dominant rules and norms and to question the ways in which the rules of the game are defined'. Further evidence of these difficulties emerged from the 2007 'Champions of Participation' Workshop, where it was found that even the most successful examples of citizen engagement in the UK had experienced similar problems (Dunn *et al.* 2008).

Of particular concern, perhaps, is the fact that these problems are not new. Mayo and Taylor (2001), in a study of community participation in earlier regeneration programmes, find a very similar situation to that later experienced in the NDCs. They describe residents' frustration due to 'the experience of not being listened to' (2001: 42), their feelings of inequality in relation to officials, the sense that agendas had already been set, and the tight time-schedules to which they had to adhere, and they emphasise that officials need just as much support and training

as residents. Mayo and Taylor's findings were not an isolated study. They were part of a wider review of 'partnership working' (Balloch and Taylor 2001), which concluded that the 'most serious' challenge was 'the inability of agencies involved in partnerships to address, or even be prepared to address, issues of power'. According to Taylor (2003: 124), it was initially thought that the NDC programme 'had taken on board many of the lessons of past partnership programmes'.[30] However, more recent evidence suggests that, even if this was the intention, the reality has been rather different.

5 Local strategic partnerships

A detailed review of the operation of LSPs is beyond the scope of this paper. Moreover, the situation is complicated by the fact that there are major variations from one local authority area to another (LGA 2006: 2). For example, Barnes *et al.* (2008: 68) report that many LSPs hold annual 'community conferences', a practice not observed in Brighton and Hove. And, closer to home, Brighton's neighbour, East Sussex LSP, operates an area-based, 'bottom-up' approach to planning, in which the county's sustainable community strategy is based on those its component districts, and the district strategies in turn incorporate those of town and/or parish councils (East Sussex Strategic Partnership 2008).

Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that, although there are many positive aspects of LSPs, the problems related to community participation experienced in Moulsecoomb are common elsewhere. The Democratic Audit (2008: 34), in a damning critique of the overall 'local governance framework', maintains that:

> The trend towards greater participation is taking place not within a comprehensive framework of elected local *government*, but within the wider, more diverse and often opaque structure of regional local *governance*. The most significant decisions will take place at the higher reaches of a governance structure of strategic partnerships and will be negotiated in between the larger local authorities, the major official 'delivery partners' and the government – in day-to-day practice, the Government Office for the Region, a largely invisible but highly influential institution. These complex structures by their nature make participation more difficult for citizens.

They recommend a substantial devolution of power to local government, including the abolition of many quangos.

The concern about the weakness of elected local government in LSPs is shared by the Local Government Association. In a formal submission to the government (LGA 2006), they suggest that the present LSP structure, in which the local authority is merely 'one partner among equals', undermines the role of elected local representatives, prevents effective citizen participation, and makes it impossible for the local authority to be accountable for the LSP's activities and outcomes. They recommend structural changes, referred to as 'embedding

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30   This claim is supported by some of the early documents produced by the East Brighton NDC (see Section 4.2).

political accountability', which would give councillors more control over key LSP structures and make ward councillors the key link between the LSP and the community.

Taylor *et al.* (2004: 74) also report a 'tension' between representative and participatory democracy. They maintain that 'not enough thought has gone into the relationship between the two, with the result that many politicians are no longer sure of their role and feel threatened by the power that they feel is being given to community representatives'. Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007) go further. They suggest (2007: 203) that 'we may be witnessing more and more public participation but the neo-liberal programme of state reform means that such participation relates to an ever-shrinking public sphere'.

Barnes, Newman and Sullivan also emphasise (2007: 29) the fact that in LSPs citizens are expected to participate through community and voluntary sector organisations, rather than directly. Russell (2001: 40–5), in a report on the lessons for LSPs from earlier regeneration efforts, warns about the difficulties that LSPs will face in developing effective means of community participation, including the limitations of the larger voluntary sector organisations as effective channels of participation and (as already indicated in the discussion on claimed spaces) the difficulties that smaller, community-based organisations have in participating in such partnerships. Similar concerns are expressed by Barnes, Newman and Sullivan (2007) and Taylor *et al.* (2004).

6.3 Mind the gap!

Two main conclusions emerge from this section of the paper. The first is that there appears to be a significant gap between the rhetoric of the government's policy on citizen engagement and the reality on the ground – not only in Moulsecoomb but also in many other parts of the country. The evidence presented here suggests that, although recent reforms have created new opportunities for participation, they have not had a significant impact on the level or quality of citizen participation or changed the balance of power between citizens and the state. Moreover, in some cases they have created new problems. The situation is aptly summarised by Barnes *et al.* (2008: chapter 5), who characterise the reforms as: 'new opportunities, but greater confusion'; 'more flexibility, but less transparency'; 'making a difference, but depending on others'; and 'experimenting with governance, but maintaining oversight'.

The second conclusion is that this experience is not new. Similar problems were experienced in earlier efforts to engage citizens and the lessons about what works, what doesn't work and why, were well known – to the government as well as practitioners and social scientists – when the current policies were formulated.

These conclusions raise three interrelated questions: What are the reasons for the gap between rhetoric and reality? Why have the same mistakes been repeated? And what are the chances of bridging the gap?

7 Why the gap?

This section of the paper attempts to answer the above questions. In order to do so, it draws on experience in other parts of the world, especially – but not only – experience in 'less developed' countries. As already indicated in the introduction, this is not the first attempt to compare the current UK experience with that of less developed countries and to draw lessons from the latter. However, it differs from most of the other material (see, for example: Cornwall 2008; Dunn *et al.* 2008; Fung 2007; Zipfel and Gaventa 2008) in that the main aim is not to make policy recommendations but to understand the nature of the policy process. In other words, the aim is not to recommend how to bridge the gap but to understand why the gap exists and whether there is any realistic hope of bridging it. The distinction is subtle but significant.

Given this objective, the experience with international development is particularly relevant. The history of post-war 'development' efforts is, in effect, the history of the design and implementation of policies intended to bring about radical societal change[31] – policies like New Labour's attempts to enhance citizen participation – and gaps between the rhetoric of policy pronouncements and the reality of their implementation on the ground have been common phenomena in this history. Consequently, much thought has been given to the reasons for these gaps. One of the main conclusions to emerge from such analyses is the need to understand the complexity of factors underlying policymaking processes. In 1984, Clay and Schaffer concluded that 'the whole life of policy is a chaos of purposes and accidents' (1984: 192). Twenty years later, Keeley and Scoones (2003), although not quite so pessimistic, agree that policymaking should not be seen as a simple, linear process, but rather as the 'continuous interplay of discourse, political interests and the agency of multiple actors' (2003: 39). Like Clay and Schaffer, they emphasise the need for in-depth analysis of any policymaking process.

This section of the paper attempts to provide such an analysis. In order to understand the problems and prospects of the UK's current citizen participation policies, it considers the experience of similar efforts to 'deepen democracy' in other parts of the world. It looks at four main factors that have hampered efforts to increase citizen participation elsewhere and appear to be of particular relevance in the UK. These are: insufficient political motivation; the highly centralised structure of government; the inherent limitations of 'invited spaces'; and lack of public pressure for change. The section concludes with a more general analysis of the critical relationship between participation and power, which underlies all these factors.

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31   The term 'development' is being used here in its 'imminent' rather than 'immanent' sense; in other words, it is being used to refer to conscious attempts to change society change rather than general processes of change.

7.1 Insufficient political motivation

One of the main lessons from attempts to introduce radical policy reforms in 'less developed' countries is that governments must have sufficient 'political motivation' to bring about the desired changes – and that such motivation is often lacking. The term 'political motivation' is used here instead of the more common expression 'political will', since the latter suggests that all that all that is needed is for political leaders to make a personal commitment to do something. The term 'political motivation' is intended to imply that the situation is more complex, since politicians are motivated by a number of different factors, many of which are beyond their personal control.

There are two main reasons why governments frequently lack the political motivation to implement reforms. Firstly, policies are usually intended to achieve a number of different objectives, only some of which are publicly stated, and since these often have conflicting implications in terms of the nature and extent of reform, it is difficult to achieve all of them. As Griffin (1975: 2; quoted in Clay and Schaffer 1984: 2) once suggested: 'Rather than assume that governments attempt to maximise social or national welfare but fail to do so, it might be more suitable to assume that governments have quite different objectives and generally succeed in achieving them'. Secondly, policy implementation is often hampered by the need to meet other, competing objectives or political interests. In some cases, these objectives emerge after the policy is introduced, while in other they already existed but were ignored. Brunsson (2003) actually suggests that, in many cases, governments (and other organisations) consciously play one set of political interests against another: policies are announced in order to satisfy one interest group but then not implemented in order to satisfy another.

Recent research on 'invited spaces' in both 'North' and 'South' suggests that it is very common for the agencies that invite participation to have multiple and competing objectives (Cornwall 2008; Cornwall and Coelho 2004, 2007). As Arnstein's (1969) much-quoted (and sometimes misquoted)[32] concept of a 'ladder' of citizen participation, makes clear, 'participation' can be a means of achieving anything from cooption to empowerment. And in cases where the objectives are near the bottom of this ladder, participation can, as Cornwall (2008: 26) notes, actually 'close political space by compromising those who take part and disable them politically'. This is what Cooke and Kothari (2001), in their damning critique of many participatory programmes, refer to as the 'tyranny' of participation.

Analyses of the motives underlying New Labour's participation policies suggest that the UK is no exception in this respect (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan 2007; Clarke 2005; Dinham 2005; Imrie and Raco 2003; Wright *et al.* 2006). Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, citing government policy, state (2007: 22) that these policies 'were directed at supporting the achievement of the government's overarching objectives of improving local services and outcomes and achieving

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32   An interesting example of misquoting is in the government's Community Empowerment White Paper, which interprets her 'ladder' to mean different forms of participation – 'from individual acts of good neighbourliness through to taking on formal civic responsibility' (CLG 2008a: 30).

democratic renewal'. They then 'unpack' these broad objectives into four more specific sets (improved services, improved outcomes, institutional democratic renewal, and individual/community democratic renewal), each of which has very different 'design' implications, especially in terms of the role of citizens (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan 2007: 22–3).

Clarke's (2005) analysis focuses on the concept of citizenship. He suggests that New Labour's policy is trying simultaneously to create four different types of citizen: 'active' citizens (that is, citizens who play an active role in improving their own wellbeing rather than being passive recipients of state services); 'empowered' citizens (citizens who are able to influence the quality of service provision by exercising either 'voice' or 'choice'); 'responsible' citizens (who accept responsibility not only for their own wellbeing but also for the more general wellbeing of society); and 'abandoned' citizens (citizens who have to survive on their own as a result of neoliberal reforms and the dismantling of the welfare state). For the purposes of this paper, Clarke's analysis has three important implications. First, like that of Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, it demonstrates that the government actually has a number of interrelated but very different objectives. Second, only the second objective ('empowerment') provides scope for any change in the balance of power between citizens and the state. And thirdly, this scope is limited because New Labour's concept of 'empowerment' is limited; as Clarke points out (2005: 449–50) it is concerned not about political power but about citizens' power as consumers of social services.

Imrie and Raco's (2003) analysis is similar, but takes the argument further. They suggest not only that New Labour's main aim is to create 'active' citizens, but also that the policies adopted to achieve this aim are likely to create 'new social divisions' (2003: 6). By targeting particular geographical areas and particular groups within these areas, they are creating divisions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' groups, and between 'those considered to be competent (or active) citizens' and those who are not – a criticism that has long been levelled at targeting and labelling strategies in the international development context (see, for example, Lamb 1985).

Similar ambiguities underlie the concept of 'community' (Taylor 2003; Imrie and Raco 2003). Taylor (2003: 2) warns that 'the rediscovery of "community" over recent years', not only in the UK but internationally, must be treated with caution because '"community" and the terms that surround it ... have been invested with a variety of meanings, depending on the perspectives of the people and institutions that have espoused them'. Imrie and Raco (2003: 5–6) maintain that urban policies are 'associated with particular discourses of community' – discourses that regard 'the community' merely as 'an *object* of policy', 'a policy *instrument*', or 'a thing to be created'. Moreover, they claim that this has always been the case. In fact, they conclude (2003: 31) that New Labour's approach to urban regeneration is no 'radical departure from previous policy'.

A closer look at some of the recent policy documents supports these observations. For example, although both the *Action Plan for Community Empowerment* (CLG/LGA 2007) and the Community Empowerment White Paper (CLG 2008a) talk about 'empowering' citizens, they are equally if not more concerned with the other concepts of citizenship. The white paper, for instance, proclaims that 'we

recognise and celebrate the role of individual *active* citizens' and 'our civil society is defined and energised by hundreds of thousands of *decent people, performing acts of altruism and selflessness*' (CLG 2008a: 12; emphasis added). It also clearly states that 'the state's role should be to set national priorities and minimum standards, while providing support and a fair division of resources' (2008a: 1). Both documents also suggest that the government's concept of 'empowerment' is limited and that, as already indicated in Section 6.2, its approach to 'community empowerment' is very different from the well-established community development principles propounded by Dinham (2005) and others. It sees communities as things that can be 'built' and community empowerment as a process that can be 'managed'. Meanwhile, the negative impacts of targeting are illustrated by the consultative document entitled *Unlocking the Talent of Our Communities*, which is clearly targeting certain neighbourhoods, and certain groups within these neighbourhoods (notably the 'workless'), which have not 'responded' to previous government efforts and thus continue to be 'problems'.

7.2 Centralisation of government

There is a great deal of literature on the relationship between decentralisation and citizen participation in 'less developed' countries (see, for example: Apthorpe and Conyers 1982; Conyers 1999, 2007; Blair 2000; Fung and Wright 2003; Gaventa 2004; Oyugi 2000; Ribot 2003, 2007). Two main conclusions emerge from this literature. Firstly, although decentralisation does not guarantee more effective participation, all other things being equal, decentralised systems of governance provide more scope for participation than centralised systems. Fung and Wright (2003: 20–3), in their study of 'empowered participatory governance' identify three main preconditions for such governance, one of which is the devolution of sufficient power to the 'local units' of government in which citizens are expected to participate. Without such devolution, they argue, there is insufficient scope for citizens to significantly influence decision-making.

The second conclusion is that the impact of decentralisation on participation depends on the type of decentralisation (Conyers 1999). As the wording of Fung and Wright's precondition suggests, it is particularly important that decentralisation take the form of *devolution* (i.e. that powers are decentralised to semi-autonomous, representative bodies) and that these powers are transferred to the *local* level (i.e. the level at which citizens interact with the state). However, the literature also demonstrates the difficulty of achieving such decentralisation, and in particular the complexity of the concept of *representative* local governance. For example, Ribot (2003, 2007) emphasises that local representatives must be not just *elected* but *accountable*, while Conyers (1999, 2007) maintains that elected representatives are not necessarily more effective channels of participation than those who are appointed or self-selected – it depends on the nature of their power base, their mode of operation and their personal integrity and commitment.[33]

The evidence presented in Sections 5 and 6 suggests that the nature and extent of decentralisation in the UK is inadequate to provide the basis for effective participation. As already indicated, research in Moulsecoomb and elsewhere suggests that the NDC programmes did not have sufficient autonomy to respond

to citizen demands and that this was part of a more general problem of the centralisation of government as a whole. It is widely recognised that the structure of government in England and Wales has become increasingly centralised over the last half-century (Budge *et al.* 2001; Power Inquiry 2006; Lyons Inquiry 2007; Democratic Audit 2008). Local governments have lost power in two ways. One is through increasing central control over their activities. Local authorities have become increasingly dependent on central government funding and this funding is tightly controlled.[34] As Taylor *et al.* (2004: 70) point out, 'central government's emphasis on performance management now means that control is being increasingly centralised through national targets and performance management systems'. They go on to suggest that this has 'reinstituted central control in less visible forms and this threatens to take the politics out of the public sphere'. The other way in which local governments have lost power is through the transfer of functions to other bodies, including both semi-autonomous 'arms-length' bodies or 'quangos' and, through privatisation and 'contracting out', the private sector. In relation to the former, the Democratic Audit notes (2008: 34) that 'the local unelected quango state often has more power over resources than elected local authorities'.

The 2006 Local Government White Paper acknowledged the need for decentralisation and claimed that the government was committed to 'radical and devolutionary reform' (CLG 2006: 17). However, it seems unlikely that the reforms that have been introduced so far will do much to reverse the trend of centralisation. For instance, as already indicated, the main example of 'devolution' to local authorities appears to be the reduction of local authority performance targets and, although this may facilitate decision-making processes, it does not indicate any significant change in attitude or approach. Similarly, rather than transfer functions back from quangos to elected local councils, as the Democratic Audit (2008) recommends, the government has merely established 'partnerships' to facilitate coordination – thereby increasing the complexity of participatory structures even further. Despite their progressive name, these partnerships are no more than glorified 'coordinating committees', and, as students of local governance in Africa learned long ago (Conyers 1999; Wunsch and Olowu 1995), such committees are a very ineffective mode of decentralisation.

Moreover, the problem is not just the relationship between central and local governments, but also that between local governments and citizens. As the Democratic Audit (2008: 12) points out, 'modern "local governance", especially in England [as opposed to other parts of the UK], is neither local nor often directly democratic'. In other words, there is need for what is commonly referred to in the UK as 'double devolution'. The government claims to have also recognised this need and to be addressing it in a number of ways, notably by strengthening the

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33   Similar conclusions emerge from work by Houtzager and others, who have compared the effectiveness of a variety of different channels of participation in several cities in Brazil, India and Mexico, as part of a study of social accountability and state reform (Houtzager, Acharya and Lavalle 2007; Houtzager and Joshi 2008).

34   Approximately 61 per cent of the income of English local authorities came from central government in 2006–07 (CLG 2008c).

role of parish councils and encouraging the formation of neighbourhood councils in urban areas, by increasing accountability mechanisms such as the power of ward councillors to bring matters of concern to the council's attention, and by involving community and voluntary sector organisations in decision-making through partnerships such as the LSPs (CLG 2006, 2008a). However, these reforms have three major shortcomings. Firstly, many local authorities are unlikely to have either the political incentive or the financial resources to introduce or strengthen local level councils, while the fact that councillors have the power to bring matters to the attention of the council does not mean that the council is likely to take any notice. Secondly, experience in Moulsecoomb and elsewhere suggests that, as in less developed countries, elected ward councillors are not *necessarily* effective channels of participation. And thirdly, as already noted, the scope for participation through community and voluntary organisations is limited because most of these organisations are neither representative of, nor accountable to, the majority of citizens. The weaknesses of such organisations as channels of community participation are well documented in the development literature (Howell and Pearce 2001; Igoe and Kelsall 2005).

Experience elsewhere suggests that the UK is not unusual in experiencing a gap between the rhetoric and reality of decentralisation. The reasons for this gap are many and complex (Conyers 1999, 2007; Shah and Thompson 2004; Smith 1985; Smoke *et al.* 2006). They include 'institutional' factors, such as inappropriate institutional design, inadequate implementation planning, and lack of technical and administrative capacity at local level. However, the main reasons are almost inevitably political. Decentralisation is about changes in the distribution of power. As Smoke *et al.* (2006: 351) point out, 'despite the efficiency and good governance rhetoric surrounding the recent wave of decentralization, there is little question that the impetus underlying it is inherently political'. Furthermore, because 'decentralisation is the result of political forces in conflict' (Smith 1985: 201), the extent to which such reforms are implemented depends on the balance of power between the various interest groups. These groups are many and varied. They include not only politicians, but also other stakeholders, such as civil servants and business interests. The evidence presented here suggests that, in the UK, the forces against decentralisation include not only the obvious reluctance of national politicians and civil servants to relinquish power, but also an 'organisational culture' of 'managerial control' that is becoming increasingly entrenched in the whole system of governance. This point is discussed further in Section 7.5.

7.3 Inherent limitations of invited spaces

The extensive literature on citizen participation in other parts of the world provides lessons regarding the potential and limitations of 'invited spaces' as a means of engaging citizens in governance (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2004, 2008; Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2004, 2007; Fung and Wright 2001, 2003; Hickey and Mohan 2004). This literature helps to understand the problems encountered in the various partnership structures in the UK and the extent to which and ways in which these problems may be addressed.

Both the potential and the limitations of invited spaces stem from the fact that these spaces are, virtually by definition, extensions of the state. On the positive side, this means that they provide a direct means of access to the process of government decision-making. Fung and Wright (2001, 2003) regard this as an essential attribute of 'empowered participatory governance'. They maintain that, in order to be able to influence government decision-making, the local organisations in which citizens participate must be an integral part of, rather than external to, the state, and that they must be formally linked to higher levels of authority. There is some justification for this argument since, as Houtzager (2003: 2) notes, there is 'little evidence' that 'the uncoordinated action of a multiplicity of local actors' can 'challenge authoritarian political elites on a scale sufficient to lift large numbers of people out of poverty and political subordination'.[35] The above analysis of claimed spaces in the UK certainly supports this position.

However, on the negative side, the link with the state limits the nature and extent of citizen empowerment within invited spaces. Fung and Wright emphasise that, in order to be effective, these spaces must 'colonise state power and transform formal governance institutions' (Fung and Wright 2003: 16). In other words, they must operate in different ways and challenge conventional power relations between citizens and the state. But, as Harris, Stokke and Tornquist (2004) point out, this is not easy to do. Commenting on strategies such as Fung and Wright's 'empowered participatory governance', they maintain that 'it is far from clear how it is possible to create those spaces in the first place, and then actually to practice "deliberation", given the balance of power in most societies' (2004: 15).

The East Brighton NDC appears to have failed to either transform traditional modes of operation or challenge existing power relations. It was initially intended (see Section 4.2) to be a 'learning organisation', which would transform 'traditional professional ways of working' by listening to what residents had to say and working 'in more imaginative ways' (East Brighton Community Partnership: 1999: 53). However, the MBH research suggests that it failed to do this. Residents complained about both the excessively bureaucratic mode of operation and their feelings not merely of powerlessness but also of inferiority in relation to NDC officials. And, as already noted in Section 6.2, experience with other NDCs reveals a similar gap between intention and achievement.

Andrea Cornwall (2008), in a publication designed primarily for a UK audience, summarises the lessons learned from IDS's 'Spaces for Change' programme regarding the factors that affect the quality of participation in invited spaces and, therefore, how far and in what ways they may be improved. She suggests that their effectiveness depends on three main sets of factors: the 'institutional design', the actors involved, and the wider political and social context. She emphasises the importance of two major factors. One is the quality of the actors involved. She notes the difficulty of engaging participants who are sufficiently representative of,

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35   It should be noted that Houtzager does not go so far as to suggest that participatory structures must therefore necessarily be incorporated into the state. He merely advocates 'a polity in which societal actors and state agents compete and cooperate ... through a combination of representative and deliberative institutions' (Houtzager 2003: 22).

and accountable to, not just the community as a whole but, in particular, disadvantaged groups.[36] The other critical factor is the political context. 'Spaces for participation are not just management spaces', she emphasises (2008: 45). 'They are *political* spaces.' She goes on to point out that, although 'the word "partnership" conjures up a relationship of mutuality', in cases 'where one partner is inviting the other, on their terms and holding the purse strings, the relationship is clearly not equal'. She concludes that 'realising the potential of invited spaces … depends on challenging and changing deeply held cultural beliefs about the role of authority, of professionals and of ordinary citizens' – and the findings of this study suggest that in the UK this is a very big challenge (2008: 48).

Similar lessons emerge from another field of international development, that of aid relations (Eyben 2006; Riddell 2007). One of the incidental findings of the Moulsecoomb research was that the relationship between central government and 'state-led' local governance initiatives like the NDCs is in many ways similar to that between donors and recipients of international aid. Two similarities are particularly relevant. One is the nature of power relations. As Riddell (2007: 387) says, 'while donors regularly articulate the centrality of recipient ownership and of partnership between donors and recipients as critical for aid to have a positive impact, in practice the relationship remains extremely lopsided, with donors remaining almost wholly in control'.

The other similarity is the constraints of established bureaucratic procedures within aid agencies, which make it extremely difficult to provide aid in a responsive manner and operate as a 'learning organisation'. The frustrations described by Conyers and Mellors (2005) in their work as international development consultants are very similar to those encountered by officials involved in the implementation of the East Brighton NDC. They include the constant pressure to spend money, the need to meet targets and deadlines, and a focus on 'output' rather than 'process' objectives. There is a sense that, as with decentralisation efforts, one is fighting against the hegemonic power of an entrenched organisational culture – in this case, an organisational culture in which the concept of a participatory learning process approach is totally alien.

7.4 Lack of public pressure

Experience in many fields of international development emphasises the need for pressure from below in order to bring about any kind of democratic reform. In the specific context of participatory governance, Fung and Wright, in their later (2003) work, suggest that 'empowered participatory governance' can only be sustained if there is some sort of external 'countervailing power', such as that provided by social movements or other civil society organisations, while Cornwall (2008: 48)

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36   As Cornwall points out, these problems are well illustrated by the difficulties of adequately representing the interests of women since, although women as a whole are a disadvantaged group, there are major differences and inequalities among women. There is an extensive literature on issues related to women's representation, which could inform the wider debate on participation and representation; unfortunately, however, it is beyond the scope of this paper.

concludes that 'without a demand from citizens … there is little chance of creating the culture of participation that is needed for genuine citizen engagement'. In a similar vein, Gaventa (2004: 27) emphasises the importance of 'working both sides of the equation' – in other words, supporting local governance initiatives from below as well as from above. 'There is a growing consensus', he says, 'that the way forwards is found in a focus on *both* a more active and engaged civil society which can express the demands of the citizenry, *and* a more responsive and effective state which can deliver needed public services'.

Public pressure is also needed for other democratic reforms, such as the transition (implicit in the first concept of 'deepening democracy' discussed in Section 2.1) from 'token' democracy to one in which there is a real change in the balance of power between rulers and ruled. For example, in the context of Africa, Salih (2001: 3) emphasises that 'democracy is not about the mechanical transfer of political experiences from one society to another. It is about political participation.' Similarly, Ake (2000: 47) argues that: 'The people cannot be truly incorporated, neither can they possess their own development by remaining apolitical or submissive. They have to assert their right to participation and to remove, at any rate minimize the authoritarian constraints of the past. Hence the call for a second independence, not from the colonial masters but from the indigenous elite.'

The lessons from decentralisation reforms are similar. As Conyers (1999: 15) notes, unless there is significant pressure from below, 'the extent and type of power which is decentralised ... is inevitably limited to that which the government is prepared to relinquish'. And finally, in the field of international aid, it is widely recognised that 'partnerships' between donors and recipients only work well if the government of the recipient country is sufficiently organised and united to put pressure on the donor to ensure that its interests are met. Unfortunately, as Riddell (2007: 357–8) points out, one of the main problems in reforming aid relations is that the countries that are most in need of effective aid are generally those least able to exert such pressure.

In the case of the UK, the evidence presented in this paper suggests that there is insufficient pressure 'from below', either for more citizen participation *per se* or for the decentralisation needed to facilitate participation. Admittedly there are many civil society organisations campaigning for more participation, both generally and on more specific issues. Examples of the former include the Democratic Audit, whose 2008 report has been extensively quoted here, and openDemocracy, which recently launched an online debate on decentralisation.[37] An interesting example of an organisation campaigning on a specific issue is Local Works, which encourages and assists people to use the provisions of the 2007 Sustainable Communities Act (see Section 3.2 above) to pressure their local authorities to address issues of local concern.[38] One could also argue, as the Power Inquiry's (2006) report does, that the large number of issue-based campaigns and demonstrations is a sign that the public is concerned to have a greater say.

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37   See www.opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/. Interestingly, an anonymous contributor to this debate specifically notes 'the lack of real "demand" from the majority of people in local government for autonomy' as one of the reasons for the current centralisation (Anon. 2008: 1).

However, this has to be weighed against the information presented in Section 6 about the low levels of participation and the weaknesses of 'claimed' spaces – including the many campaigns that fail to achieve their objective. Moreover, as also indicated in Section 6, the distribution of participation is very unequal. As the Democratic Audit (2008: 11) says, 'participation by citizens and communities in the UK is as unequal as is the distribution of power and resources'. The situation is, in fact, much like that in international aid relations, in that it is the people whose voices most need to be heard, such as Moulsecoomb, that are least likely to have the capacity to defend their interests.

The Power Inquiry (2006) concluded that low rates of participation are due not to apathy *per se* but to the nature of the political system. Citizens do not bother to participate because they 'do not feel that the processes of formal democracy offer them enough influence over political decisions' (Power Inquiry 2006: 17). It advocates radical political changes, including 'a rebalancing of power away from the Executive and unaccountable bodies towards Parliament and local government' (2006: 20). However, given the problems that have been encountered in trying to implement the relatively modest reforms promoted by New Labour, it is difficult to be optimistic about the prospects for such radical reforms. Moreover, some of the evidence presented in this paper suggests that there may also be a need to question the Power Inquiry's assumption that such reforms would have a significant impact on participation. Although the current low levels of participation are undoubtedly due partly to frustration with the existing political system, they appear also to reflect the fact that people have become accustomed to a situation where the state provides most of their needs. Consequently, although they may complain about the quality of service provision, most people not only do not *want* to get involved in improving it, but also do not believe that they *should have* to get involved.

This has interesting implications for Clarke's (2005) discussion about different types of citizen. It suggests that most people do not want to be any of the things implied in New Labour's policies. They certainly do not want to be 'abandoned'; they do not want to be 'activated' or 'responsibilised'; and they do not even want to be 'empowered'. They regard quality public services as a *right* to which they are *entitled*. This in turn has implications for a wider debate about 'rights-based' approaches to citizenship in the international literature (Dagnino 2005; Gaventa, Shankland and Howard 2002). Rights-based approaches argue that public services should be seen as a right to which citizens are entitled, since this enables people to demand better public services as part of their rights as citizens. In the UK, however, it seems that citizens now regard public services as a 'right', but this has led to a state of complacency in which they see no need to defend this right.

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38   Local Works is actually a 'project' of a more general civil society organisation called Unlock Democracy, which has grown out of a 'citizens charter' launched in 1988. For details of Local Works, see www.localworks.org.

7.5 Participation and power

The analysis in this section suggests that, although there are many reasons for the gap between the rhetoric and reality of citizen engagement in the UK, issues of power are central. Section 7.1 argued that, although the government talks about empowering citizens, 'empowerment' is only one of a number of objectives of the reforms and its concept of 'empowerment' is very limited. Section 7.2 concluded that, although the government acknowledges that decentralisation is critical to the success of the reforms, there is unlikely to be any significant decentralisation because it would mean challenging existing power structures, including not only the obvious power of politicians and civil servants, but also the less tangible power of 'managerial control' that is embedded in the organisational culture of all levels of governance. Similarly, Section 7.3 argued that the scope for participation in invited spaces is limited both by the unequal power relationship between the so-called 'partners' and by an organisational culture that prohibits participatory learning. Finally, Section 7.4 noted the lack of any effective 'countervailing power' and suggested that this is due not only to the balance of power within the political system as a whole but also to the apparent lack of any conscious desire to be 'empowered' among the majority of the population.

It also appears that there are a number of different types of power involved, including 'visible', 'hidden' and invisible' power (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002; Gaventa 2006b).[39] Examples of the first two types, visible and hidden, are relatively obvious and have been well documented (Power Inquiry 2006; Democratic Audit 2008). They are particularly evident in the relationship between central government and local government and in that between officials and citizens in so-called 'partnerships'. For example, 'visible' power is manifested in the direct control (such as earmarked funding) exerted by central government over local authorities and by official members of partnerships over citizen members, while 'hidden' power is illustrated by the indirect controls (such as performance targets) that central government exerts over local government and the 'agenda setting' power that officials have in partnerships.

However, 'invisible' power is, as its name suggests, more difficult to identify, and it is also less well documented. In order to explain the nature and importance of invisible power in the UK, it is useful to look at the work of writers like Foucault and Bourdieu, who maintain that both the state and citizens are subordinate to more subtle forms of power that are deeply embedded in society. For example, according to Foucault (1991a: 65), 'the state can only operate on the basis of other, already existing power relations. The state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth.' Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* is somewhat similar. *Habitus* is 'the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel

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39   The terms 'visible', 'invisible' and 'hidden' power were introduced by VeneKlasen and Miller (2002). Their work draws on Lukes' well-known study of the three dimensions of power (Lukes 1974), which was in turn adapted by Gaventa (Gaventa 1980; cited in Gaventa 2006b). The terms are used in several of the works cited here, including Gaventa (2006b) and Democratic Audit (2008).

and act in determinate ways' (Wacquant 2005, cited in Navarro 2006: 16). Foucault (1991a: 73) goes further. He maintains that 'each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.'

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that this sort of power is very important in the UK. It suggests that both the state and citizens are imprisoned in an 'institutional culture' – or *habitus* – that inhibits any substantial increase in either the quantity or the quality of citizen participation, and thus any fundamental change in the balance of power between citizens and the state.[40] Five elements of this institutional culture appear to be of particular importance.

The first is the conception of an **all-encompassing state**. Both government and citizens appear to subscribe to the idea of a society in which the role of the state is central to almost all aspects of life. Although the state's direct role in the economy has been reduced over the last three decades as a result of neoliberal reforms, its role in people's lives has undoubtedly increased. Protherough and Pick (2002), in a scathing attack on current British governance, note that, 'in the modern world there are no bounds to what governments think they can shape and manage. Modern governments now affect to be able to manage everything, from how ambitious we are, to how fat women should be' (Protherough and Pick 2002: 19). Recent policy documents suggest that, in the case of the UK government, one should add 'community empowerment' to this list. Foucault's analysis of governance helps to explain how this has happened. In his essay on 'governmentality', he maintains that modern governance 'was born out of, on the one hand, the archaic model of Christian pastoral [care], and, on the other, a diplomatic-military technique' (Foucault 1991b: 104). It appears that, in countries like the UK, the 'pastoral' element of the state has evolved first into the 'welfare state' and now into what is widely referred to as the 'nanny state'. In a country where the state is so all-encompassing, there is inevitably very little room for claimed spaces – apart perhaps from the increasingly common *ad hoc* campaigns and protests.

The second element is what Santos and Avritzer (2006: xl) refer to as the **'inevitability of bureaucracy'**. All aspects of society are governed by an increasingly complex set of rules and regulations that constrain the actions not only of citizens but also of politicians, civil servants and those in the private sector. Moreover, this bureaucracy often appears to have a life of its own. As Protherough and Pick (2002: 16) note, 'it is not uncommon for the "bureaucratic" management of an organisation to take on a life of its own and smother the organisation it is

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40 There is no simple translation of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. My decision to translate it as 'institutional culture' was inspired by Harris, Stokke and Tornquist (2004: 17), who translate it as 'the institutional and cultural context'. I have modified this to 'institutional culture' in order to emphasise the links with the concept of 'organisational culture'. The distinction between 'organisational culture' and 'institutional culture' may be seen as comparable to that often made between 'organisations' and 'institutions'.

supposedly managing'. As Santos and Avritizer point out (2006: xl), this 'power of bureaucracy' was predicted long ago by Weber, and, more recently, it is reflected in Foucault's concept of 'policing'. Foucault explains (1991b: 104) that 'governmentality' has only been able to 'assume the dimensions it has thanks to a series of specific instruments, whose formation is exactly contemporaneous with that of the art of government and which are known, in the old seventeenth and eighteenth century sense of the term, as *police*'. In terms of participation, it is this 'inevitability of bureaucracy' that causes so much frustration for those citizens and public officials who try to 'transform formal governance institutions' or adopt 'participatory learning process' approaches.

A third element is the prevailing **consumer mentality**. As Protherough and Pick (2002: 11) point out, 'there is scarcely any part of our domestic and social experience which is not now described by politicians as an *industry*, so that its problems can be presented as mere problems of production, marketing and sales'. This consumerism is a product of neoliberalism. As the Democratic Audit (2008: 11) explains, 'the free-market ideology that dominates world trade and politics has a profound effect on the economic and social policies of British governments that in turn affect the ability of ordinary citizens to govern their affairs.' Furthermore, it also has a direct effect on citizens. In terms of participation, consumerism is reflected in the way that members of the public are increasingly regarded, not only by the government but also by themselves, as 'consumers' rather than 'citizens' and as individuals rather than as members of 'communities'. It is also reflected in the fact that the government defines 'empowerment' in terms of consumer rights, talks about 'doing empowerment', and regards the concept of 'community' as 'not much more than "a key construct in the formation of a managerial process"' (Imrie and Raco 2003: 28, quoting Schoffied 2002).

The fourth element is the prevalence of **'managerial' forms of control**. Control has always been an objective of states. In Foucauldian terms, it stems from the military origins of governance and is reflected in the modern meaning of 'policing'. It has also always been a characteristic of bureaucracies. In the traditional Weberian bureaucracy, control was exercised through the combination of hierarchical organisational structures and direct supervision. These traditional control mechanisms are still evident in modern organisations and continue to have a major impact on the way in which they function. However, superimposed upon them is a relatively new set of controls, which operate indirectly rather than directly, through the related practices of 'performance management' (setting targets and monitoring their achievement) and 'audit' (checking-up on what others are doing). These controls are part of a relatively new 'managerial' approach to public administration, which seeks to 'straddle, or better dismantle, the public-private divide' (Power 1997: 10) and has resulted not in 'less government' but in 'more subtle, less visible and more diffuse methods of intervention' (Taylor 2003: 90). They have become so prevalent, and so embedded – not just in public sector management but in society as a whole, that Power (1997) refers to the emergence of an 'audit culture' and an 'audit society', while Protherough and Pick (2002: 199) suggest that 'managerialism' is not just a culture but a 'cult', by which people have become 'possessed'.

The more obvious effects of these new forms of control on citizen participation have already been noted. They are central to the 'hidden' power that central government exerts over local government, which in turn limits the scope for these institutions to respond meaningfully to citizen priorities and demands. However, they also exert 'invisible' power, by changing people's behaviour and attitudes. Protherough and Pick (2002: 12) maintain that 'modern management' is concerned not merely, or even primarily, with regulating the provision of 'tangible goods and services', but also with 'fashioning attitudes'. In other words, these controls act as a form of 'self-regulation', encouraging people to conform to particular norms and standards and thus destroying any motivation to protest or demand something different. This is reminiscent of Foucault's conception of 'a population that reproduces itself in the proper way' (Foucault 1991a: 66). Two examples illustrate the relevance of this to citizen participation. One is the way in which the central government retains control over partnerships between citizens and the state 'through the imposition and internalisation of performance cultures *that require "appropriate" behaviour'* (Taylor 2007: 314; emphasis added). The other is the Audit Commission's new system of 'comprehensive area assessment', discussed in Section 3.2. The system is designed to make it easier for the public to find out about 'the quality of life in their area; how local services are working together to improve it; and how well key public services are performing' (Audit Commission *et al.* 2007: 29). However, since it will only give people information about the aspects of life, services and performance that the Audit Commission thinks appropriate, it could end up stifling rather than stimulating public participation.[41]

The final element of the institutional culture is **institutionalised stratification.** Like most other nations, the UK has always been a stratified society and, although class structures have changed, inequality has remained. According to the Democratic Audit (2008: 47–8), income inequality is currently 'at historically high levels', the gap between rich and poor neighbourhoods has increased, and social mobility is lower than in many countries with comparable income levels. The main concern here, however, is not with these 'visible' dimensions of inequality, but with the way in which stratification is embedded in society and manifested in attitudes and perceptions; in other words, with 'the status accorded those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucauld 1991a: 73).

The most obvious example of this is the unequal relationship between officials and citizens in 'partnership working'. Many years ago, Illich (1976, 1977) demonstrated how the technical knowledge and status of 'professionals' has a disempowering (or, as he called it, 'disabling') effect on 'clients' or citizens. The feelings of inferiority expressed by many of the Moulsecoomb residents involved in the NDC suggest that this gulf between professionals and citizens is just as great today. Another, less obvious example is the implicit categorisation of people into 'good' and 'bad' citizens. As Protherough and Pick (2002: 205) point out, the

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41   Admittedly, the Audit Commission has invited public consultation on the indicators that should be included in the system. However, since the consultation document is complex and the consultation exercise is not directed only or even primarily at the general public, the input of ordinary citizens is likely to be very limited.

current conceptualisation of a 'good' citizen is influenced by the neoliberal 'work ethic', which promotes characteristics such as ambition, entrepreneurship, drive and 'work-centredness'. As already noted in Section 7.1, the concept of what the government considers to be a 'good' citizen is reflected in recent policy documents, which praise 'active', 'decent' citizens, and regard the 'workless' as a 'problem'.

In summary, therefore, the UK is a society characterised by an all-encompassing state, 'inevitable' bureaucratisation, a consumer mentality, 'managerial' control mechanisms, and institutionalised stratification. These characteristics affect all elements of society – in Foucault's words, they are both 'internal and external to the state' (Foucault 1991b: 103); and, most importantly, they all seriously impede effective citizen participation. The impact of these 'cultural' characteristics is so great that one could perhaps argue that they are the most important factor limiting the scope for increasing participation in the UK – and, in particular, for increasing participation in a way that changes the balance of power between citizens and the state. Furthermore, because many of these characteristics are the product of a relatively affluent, neoliberal, 'post-industrial' society, one could also argue that the obstacles to deepening democracy are in some respects greater in the UK than in many 'less developed' countries. For example, in the latter, both the actual role of the state and citizens' expectations of it are generally less than in the UK. Similarly, although bureaucratisation, consumerism and managerialism are spreading rapidly in less developed parts of the world, the extent and intensity of their impact tends, at least at present, to be less. The implications of this are discussed in the concluding section.

8 Conclusion

The analysis that has been presented in this paper suggests that there is a significant gap between New Labour's rhetoric of deepening democracy through citizen participation and the reality on the ground – particularly, but not only, in relatively deprived areas like Moulsecoomb. Although it is too early to assess the impact of the most recent reforms, it seems likely that they will merely add to the 'bewildering myriad of policies' (Imrie and Raco 2003: 4) that have been introduced in the last decade. There is little evidence to suggest that they will have a significant impact on either the quantity or the quality of participation, and therefore little chance that they will bring about the change in the balance of power between citizens and the state that is implicit in the concept of 'deepening democracy'. The gap between rhetoric and reality can be attributed to a complex combination of factors, notably inadequate political motivation on the part of New Labour, the high degree of government centralisation, the inherent limitations of the 'invited spaces' for participation that the policies have created, and the lack of pressure 'from below'. Underlying all these factors are fundamental issues of power, including not just 'visible' power relations, but also the exercise of 'hidden' and 'invisible' power. Invisible power appears to be particularly important, since many of the obstacles to effective participation are deeply embedded in the 'institutional culture' of UK society, which impacts upon the state and citizens alike.

The analysis has also demonstrated that, in many respects, the UK experience is not unusual. Attempts to deepen democracy in 'less developed' countries have encountered similar problems. In fact, it suggests that some of the obstacles may actually be greater in the UK than in less developed countries because many of the 'cultural' factors that inhibit participation in the UK are the product of an affluent, neoliberal, post-industrial society. In societies where these factors are less deeply entrenched, there may, at least in some respects, be more scope for change. A detailed discussion of the implications of this is beyond the remit of this paper. However, it does suggest that the potential for deepening democracy in countries like the UK might actually be enhanced if there were some sort of disaster, natural or man-made, that reduced the capacity of the state. This might force a change in the respective roles of citizens and the state, and therefore in the balance of power between them.[42]

However, and on a more practical and positive note, these conclusions do not mean that participatory policies like those introduced by the New Labour government will have no positive effects, or will be no better than the present situation. Nor does it mean that those who are directly involved in such efforts, whether they be local politicians, professionals or community activists, should give up their efforts to improve the quantity and quality of participation. Although Bourdieu emphasised the importance of *habitus*, he also recognised the room for change through individual and collective action (Navarro 2006). Experience in Moulsecoomb, and in other parts of the country, suggests that even limited increases in participation can be beneficial, both for service delivery and for the participants themselves. Moreover, it also suggests that there is scope for some, albeit modest, improvements in the quality of such participation.

This 'room for manoeuvre' is well summarised by Taylor (2007: 314). She concludes that, although the 'new governance spaces are still inscribed with a state agenda', there is some scope for communities to 'manipulate prevailing discourses to their own advantage'. However, she also warns that this requires both 'considerable sophistication' on the part of communities and the provision of 'time, flexibility and resources' by those concerned to promote participation. The many recent studies of participation cited in this paper (including those comparing experience in the UK with that in less developed countries), together with events such as the 'Champions of Participation' workshop, have a vital role to play in identifying and promoting possible ways forward. This paper merely emphasises that such efforts must be realistic about the extent to which it is possible to increase either the quantity or the quality of participation, and in particular about the chances that such participation will result in any significant change in the balance of power between citizens and the state. As Taylor (2007: 314) says, any such change would require 'major cultural shifts' within the state.

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42   In this respect, it is interesting to note that, at the 2007 'Champions of Participation' workshop, the most obvious example of empowered citizen engagement in the 'North' was the reconstruction of New Orleans following hurricane Katrina (Dunn *et al.* 2008: 11). However, it will be interesting to see whether this level of engagement continues after the reconstruction is complete and things return to 'normal'.

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