Giving a ‘voice’ to the local community?

Interpreting the perceptions of community and voluntary activists as to the efficacy of the SPCs as a participation mechanism at local government level in Ireland

by

Patrick Fitzgerald

Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration
Giving a ‘voice’ to the local community?

Interpreting the perceptions of community and voluntary activists as to the efficacy of the SPCs as a participation mechanism at local government level in Ireland

A Final Year Project Presented

by

Patrick Fitzgerald

09001575

to

The Department of Politics and Public Administration

In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration

in the subject of

Public Administration

Internal Supervisor: Dr. Chris McInerney

Date: February 2014
Dedication

I dedicate this body of work to my luminary, young Andrew (Andy) Fitzgerald (RIP), a ten-year-old boy, tragically taken all too soon from his Mom and Dad. Your short life enriched and continues to inspire me.

Cherished memories,

Dad
Abstract

Local governance across Europe is changing, involving greater civic participation and engagement levels as a feature of decision-making at local level. To facilitate these changes, structures within government have been altered including those in Ireland. The Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) were subsequently introduced in Ireland in 2001, however the actual level to which they allow engagement and full consultation has been questioned in research such as the findings of the IPA (2004), by Callanan (2011) and McInerney and Adshead (2010), who question the efficacy and the actual participation levels of these participatory mechanisms. From here this body of research using Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (1969) seeks to explore the level of “voice” which the Community and Voluntary sector have in terms of influencing decision-making in the SPC mechanisms of local government. Nine interviews were undertaken with respondents from across three different local authorities. Their experience as presented in this body of work largely indicates an inadequate level of interaction between the elected councillors, council officials and themselves. The results also indicate that there is a discernable lack of balance, value and respect in terms of how the SPC processes presently function. In concise terms, the results ultimately reveal that participation levels of the Community and Voluntary members on the SPC processes examined are in fact at the low to tokenistic level of Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Participation.
# Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ........................................................................................................ VIII

DECLARATION ...................................................................................................................... IX

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND IRISH TERMS .................................................................. X

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES ......................................................................................... XII

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................. 1

1.1 RATIONALE, AIM, HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTION .................................... 1

1.2 APPROACH TAKEN TO THIS RESEARCH ..................................................................... 2

  *Recurring Theme - Governance* .................................................................................. 3

  *Recurring Theme – Participation* .................................................................................. 4

  *Methodology* .................................................................................................................... 5

1.3 OUTLINE OF SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS ..................................................................... 6

CHAPTER 2 - ENHANCING LOCAL DEMOCRACY, THE VALUE OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION ......... 7

2.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 7

2.2 DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATION WITHIN DEMOCRATIC THEORY .......... 7

2.3 DEMOCRACY, PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT .................................................. 9

  *Participatory Voice* ......................................................................................................... 14

2.4 FRAMEWORKS OF PARTICIPATION ............................................................................ 15

2.5 BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION .................................................................................... 18

2.6 DIFFICULTIES FOR PARTICIPATIVE MECHANISMS WITHIN THE DEMOCRATIC STATE .. 20

2.7 TRANSITION FROM GOVERNMENT TO GOVERNANCE ............................................. 23

2.8 CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................... 28

CHAPTER 3 - IRELAND: ITS MOVE FROM GOVERNMENT TO MORE GOVERNANCE PRACTICES .... 30
Finding 1 - “just a talking shop” and we are “rubber-stampers” ............................................................... 63
Finding 2 – It’s the “illusion of inclusion” ........................................................................................................ 65
Finding 3 - “We have absolutely no say at all” .................................................................................................. 66
Finding 4 - “we are bombarded with paperwork” and given “meaningless answers” .................................... 69
Finding 5 - “the SPCs meetings don’t really achieve anything for us” ............................................................ 72
Other Findings .................................................................................................................................................. 74
6.3 Analysis of Findings .................................................................................................................................... 75
Non-participation Element ................................................................................................................................ 76
Tokenistic Participation Element ....................................................................................................................... 76
Citizen Power and Participation Element .......................................................................................................... 77

CONCLUSION ....................................................................................................................................................... 79

OVERVIEW OF TOPIC EXPLORED .................................................................................................................. 79
OVERVIEW OF APPROACH TAKEN .................................................................................................................... 79
MAIN FINDINGS .................................................................................................................................................. 79
RECOMMENDATIONS ......................................................................................................................................... 80

REFERENCE LIST ................................................................................................................................................ 81

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................................... 96

APPENDIX 1. ......................................................................................................................................................... 100
Acknowledgement

I would like to, first and foremost thank my supervisor Dr. Chris McInerney whose patience, expertise, knowledge and wise council helped inordinately to ensure that my presented work is the very best that I am capable of producing. Chris, it has been an absolute pleasure to work with and under your direction. Thank you.

To Dr. Bernadette Connaughton and Dr. Brid Quinn, two outstandingly dedicated educators, your help, kindness and guidance during my time at the University of Limerick is most greatly appreciated.

Thank you to all the staff of the University of Limerick, in particular the lecturers from the Departments of Politics and Public Administration, Sociology and Law who have not only inspired, but encouraged the desire within me to continue my lifelong learning ambitions.

To Dr. Mark Callanan, thank you for your help, support and advice.

I would like to sincerely thank my informants, who gave so willingly of their time and experience to inform this body of work.

To Mary Gallagher whose kind words of encouragement and prayers made all the difference in my desire to further my educational knowledge.

Thanks to Damien Bolger Kerr for your most valued friendship. Your influence in convincing me to return to education and to never cut me an inch of slack or credit has always stood me in good stead during my time at the University of Limerick.

Finally and most importantly I would like to thank my wife Miriam for availing to me this opportunity to return to education. Her support and understanding over these past years is incalculable and without whom my continuing journey of discovery would be unthinkable.
Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified and fully referenced both (in-text) and in my completed reference list / bibliography. This body of work has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit / grade. I fully understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirements of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Signed.....Patrick Fitzgerald.............................

Date........1\textsuperscript{st} February 2014.............................
## List of Abbreviations and Irish terms

### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABP</td>
<td>Area Based Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLG</td>
<td>Better Local Government-A programme for Change 1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEB</td>
<td>County Enterprise Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COR</td>
<td>Committee of the Regions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPG</td>
<td>Corporate Policy Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPMR</td>
<td>Committee for Public Management Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;V</td>
<td>Community and Voluntary Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoELG</td>
<td>Department of the Environment and Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoEHLG</td>
<td>Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DTLR</td>
<td>Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (UK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDI</td>
<td>Foreign Direct Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAPP</td>
<td>International Association for Public Participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBEC</td>
<td>Irish Business and Employers Confederation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICTU</td>
<td>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA</td>
<td>Institute of Public Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRD</td>
<td>Integrated Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JPC</td>
<td>Joint Policing Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADER</td>
<td>(French Acronym) European Union initiative for Rural Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSP</td>
<td>Local Strategic Partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LTACC</td>
<td>Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESC</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESF</td>
<td>National Economic and Social Forum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD    Progressive Democrats (Former Irish Political Party)
PESP  Programme for Economic and Social Progress
PNR  Programme for National Recovery
PPF   Programme for Prosperity and Fairness 2000-2003
PPFP  Putting People First-Action Programme ‘Government White Paper 2012’
P2K   Partnership 2000
SPC  Strategic Policy Committee
TAC  Taskforce on Active Citizenship
TASC  Think-tank for Action in Social Change
T16  Towards 2016
UCI  Urban Community Initiatives

Irish Terms

Bunreacht Na hÉireann     Constitution of Ireland
Dáil Éireann              Lower House of Parliament
Fianna Fáil (Irish Political Party)  Soldiers of Ireland
Fine Gael (Irish Political Party)  Irish Race
Oireachtas                Irish Parliament (both houses)
Seanad Éireann             Senate of Ireland (upper house of parliament)
Tánaiste                  Deputy Prime Minister
Taoiseach                  Prime Minister
Teachta Dála (TD)           Elected Member of Dáil Éireann
List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1:

A Ladder Typology of Participation: What is Participation? (Sourced from the Representation by Prieto-Martin 2008).......................................................................................................................... Page 17

Table 1:

Number of Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Sectoral Members by Category:

(DoEHLG 2004)................................................................................................................................. Page 47

Table 2:

Operational Research Indicators; Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation:

(Arnstein 1969: 2-12)................................................................................................................................ Page 60
Chapter 1 - Introduction

This dissertation considers local government participation mechanisms established across Ireland following the 2001 Local Government Act. The Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs hereafter), provide an institutionalised setting for the involvement of local actors/stakeholders in local policy. Key to this study is the perspective of the community based representatives on the SPCs, their experience and opportunities to transfer their ‘voice’ into local policy, through these mechanisms.

Understanding these participative structures, requires an understanding of the influences, past and present on approaches to participation in Ireland. This study details the experience of Community and Voluntary members of three Local Government SPCs in Ireland. This is explored from an understanding based in governance and participation and through a qualitative methodology. This chapter introduces these elements; the focused research question and hypothesis, the key themes, methods applied and provides an overview of the subsequent chapters in this study.

1.1 Rationale, Aim, Hypothesis and Research Question

Historically, local government in Ireland has remained institutionally weak and undervalued. Despite a consistent focus on reform since Barrington (1991) through to the recommendations made by Putting People First (2012), it would seem that the predominant status quo prevails. However, some reforms packages have attempted to re-balance the value of local government in Irish public administration. Better Local Government (BLG) 1996 introduced a number of significant changes, including the introduction of formal participative mechanisms for local government. Created in 2001, the makeup of these formal committee-
style consultative fora (Strategic Policy Committees or SPCs) has included actors from the elected membership of County Councils, local business and agricultural arenas, and significantly actors from the Community and Voluntary sectors. These fora aim to ensure contributions by a range of stakeholders in informing policy at a local level (Government of Ireland 2001). In theory, SPCs provide an arena within which participation in policy is open to all local stakeholders equally. However in practice, it is not clear if the reality of equal participation is experienced by all actors whilst they are involved in the process.

The aim of this study is to explore the experience of the Community and Voluntary sector actors in the expression of their “voice” within the SPC fora. This group has traditionally been under-represented and undervalued in the policy making arenas at both a national and local level. Evidence of this is apparent by the late inclusion in 1996 of the sector in National Social Partnership agreements, a full ten years after the initial Social Partnership process had begun (Kirby 2010: 176). In responding to this assertion, the following research question arises; “How effective are the Strategic Policy Committees as a participatory mechanism to give a ‘voice’ to local community actors?” The hypothesis presented in this research is: “The SPCs as a participatory mechanism in local governance are of little value in providing a ‘voice’ for local community actors. To answer this research question, and prove or disprove the hypothesis, this research explores the experience of Community and Voluntary actors in putting forward their ‘voice’ within SPCs across three local authorities in Ireland.

1.2 Approach taken to this Research
The recurring themes of this study revolve around Ireland’s adoption of a more governance approach to policy making, where partnership and collaboration across sectors of society have combined to inform policy making and delivery at national level (Kirby et al. 2010). Within the governance framework, participation embodies a new feature of democratic interaction by the citizenry in the state and across state institutions.
Recurring Theme - Governance

The concept of governance affects how we understand the state, its institutions, its governing traditions and the people within it. The OECD and the European Commission provide an appropriate rationalisation of this concept. They contend that governance encompasses;

“the role of public administration and the institutions of the state, including both its methods and instruments of governing. It further incorporates the relationships between government and the citizen (which includes both business and other citizen groupings) and the role of the state”

(OECD 1995: 158)

The European Union’s ‘White Paper’ on European governance states that five principles underpin the governance concept; “Openness, Participation, Accountability, Effectiveness and Coherence” (Commission on European Governance 2003: 5). These principles reflect the nature of governance across political institutions in European society. John argues that governance is best understood as a more flexible approach to government, where decision making within the polity takes place across a wide policy environment encompassing both individuals and organisations located across the strata of civil society (2001: 9). Rhodes (1997:13-15) suggest that governance is best understood as newer processes of governing, identifying a move to a “differentiated polity” (Rhodes 1997: 7) which centres its focus on the ever-increasing costs associated with service demands and service delivery with which the politico-administrational establishment and governments now have to contend. Governance now forms the new reality both in the provision of public services, the shaping of policy and of decision making in many countries (Rhodes 1997: 15; Stoker 1998: 19; John 2001: 12; Denhardt and Denhardt 2007: 84; Bovaird and Löffler 2009: 215-217; Osborne 2010: 24).

Kooiman (2003: 11) notes that with a visible shift to governance practices it also becomes apparent that the state is reliant on non-governmental actors in the policy process.
Governance mechanisms allow new non-governmental stakeholders, actors and agencies to enter the policy arena. The effect of governance is the creation of new decision-making and service provision structures that seek to find solutions to complex societal issues, while prioritising wider participation and bye-in as a means to achieving these aims. Arising from this is the issue of a greying of accountability and indeed the devolution of power outward into the hands of non-elected stakeholders. This is offset by discussions on the approach to solving the evident democratic deficit that occurs both at national and local level. This study focuses on the inclusion of stakeholders, as members of civil society, in participative mechanisms of decision making at a local level, and thus embodies the evolution of public administration as it is influenced by the features, principles and values of the onset of governance.

Recurring Theme – Participation

Held (1984) argues participation is as old as the idea of democracy itself forming a fundamental basis of thinking within the discipline of politics. Held reiterates the works of Bentham and Mill in linking the accountability of “the governors to the governed” (Held 1984:42). Liberal democrats regard individual participation in democracy as sacrosanct, arguing that it creates a direct interest and investment in the efficacy of legitimate government (Kymlicka 1990: 198). Held et al. argues that a society based on a participation ethos rather than the more traditional representative democracy cultivates;

“a sense of political efficacy, it nurtures a concern for collective problems and contributes to the formation of a knowledgeable citizenry, capable of taking a sustained interest in the governing process”

(Held et al., 1984: 269)
The importance of participation was similarly prioritised by Dahl (1956) in his theoretical ‘pluralist or ‘polyarchy’ (rule by the many) argument. He emphasises the importance of fair and equal access among organised interests or groups in seeking voice in decision-making.

In contemporary political thought both neo-liberalism and new-institutionalism dominate the political discourse on participation in civil society. Chhotray and Stoker (2010) assert that these political theories see participation shaped by collective and individual approaches which resonate in decision making. Ackerman (2004) highlights that this conceptual understanding of the market and the concept of community participation, which both reduces the cost of government and its responsibilities to the citizen, are extensive, noting:

“Governments can now off-load service delivery to non-governmental organisations and community groups or convince local residents to donate volunteer [sic] labour and material.”

(Ackerman 2004: 447)

In summary this dissertation focuses on participation within the democratic institutions of local government. Participation, regardless of the political context under which it is defined above is founded on belief that the individual within a democracy can reasonably expect to influence the decision-making mechanisms within the social-political and administrative organs of the state. Local democracy has moved from adult suffrage as a keystone of modern democracy, to seeking wider and deeper participation. Participation will be discussed further in chapter three, where the origins, influences and features of participation are explored.

Methodology

The methodology applied in this study aligns to the constructivist/interpretivist model (Creswell 2009: 181). The analytical framework is shaped by the Arnstein ‘Ladder of Participation’ with the data being located and gathered from sources through semi-structured interviews. These sources range from rural, urban/rural cross and urban settings and provide data which encompasses the experiences encountered by the respondents in these settings.
Details of the approach and a description of the experience of the researcher in the field is provided in chapter five.

1.3 Outline of Subsequent Chapters

While this chapter has delivered a brief overview of the rationale, aims and objectives which this research explores, it has also presented two important themes: governance and participation which are consistently reflected on in this research. Chapter Two explores participation and democracy. The new understandings of governance are reflected in this discussion which centres its focus on the relationship between power and participation as key to providing a framework for this research. Chapter Three explores the nature of governance in Ireland; in effect it looks at the change in political mood, where government expanded its policy making arena to facilitate partnerships in decision-making. Chapter Four examines the Strategic Policy Committee structures, processes and membership established to formally institutionalise local democratic and participative decision-making. Chapter Five describes the methodology employed, operationalising key indicators in this research particularly reflecting on Arnstein ladder typology of participation. Chapter Six provides a focus on the results of the research and analyses the data in terms of the indicators as set-out in the analytical framework which concludes this body of work.
Chapter 2 - Enhancing Local Democracy, the Value of Local Participation

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a number of academic arguments to discuss how the concepts of integrative, deliberative and associative democracy translate from the theoretical into the political reality as forms of democracy which induce different forms of participation. From here frameworks for participation, facilitate a classification of participation, importantly providing indicators for participatory “voice”. This chapter describes Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Participation in providing indicators to assess the participatory structures within Irish local government level. Finally, this literature review examines the significance of the transition by governments to more governance practices in order to cope with the demands emanating from both within the state and on a global level. The literary evidence as provided in this chapter, will allow for a subsequent critical examination of the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) structure in Irish local government.

2.2 Differing Perspectives on Participation within Democratic Theory

Schumpeter’s (1942) “leadership democracy” or “competitive elitism” theory generally rejects the importance of meaningful participation. He confines participation purely to the capacity of individual citizens who possess adequate social capital to partaking in the political process. He believes participative input, other than through the competitive election process from ordinary citizens, is un-necessary and generally detracts from the formal decision-making processes in liberal democracies.

In concise terms Schumpeter argues, democracy should be understood as a political means in which the voting public participate only to choose their desired leaders, therefore competitive elitism within a democratic society is the best method in achieving this aim. Schumpeter’s
argument disregards the efficacy of societal or other citizen advocacy organisations. He moderates against their actual necessity in peoples’ lives. His argument fundamentally ignores how intermediary, advocacy or religious groupings allow for the development of an institutional structure within the state as a means to providing citizens with another medium to exercise their agency. Schumpeter’s elitist theory sees each individual citizen as a separate entity without the need for other consuming social or political interests, essentially competing for space and recognition within a world dominated by other contesting elites (Schumpeter, in Held 2006: 155-158).

Alternatively Dahl’s (1956) argument on the merits of pluralism runs contrary to Schumpeter’s elitist theory. The pluralist position or ‘polyarchy’ primarily considers the distribution of power within the democratic state. Other significant considerations have to be taken into account within the pluralist position, such as resources, not merely in financial terms, but also in the effective strength and political agency of dissenting opinion. This includes its ability to openly advocate for change within the political dynamic and institutional structure of the democratic state. Pluralist’s equally recognise that inequalities exist across society, and that individuals or groups may not have equal access to resources. However they argue that well organised and motivated advocacy or interest groupings can effectively promote and influence political change within a receptive and open democratic process (Dahl 1956, cited in Held 2006: 160).

Dahl’s ‘polyarchy’ perspective on the democratic state proffers a position that differs fundamentally from Schumpeter’s elitist democratic theory where both politics and decision making are essentially the preserve of a small but privileged elite cabal. Coppedge and Reinicke (1990: 51) note that Dahl’s polyarchy is tightly bound to the open democratic political principles which exist within the core of democratic theory and centre on a number of key institutional prerequisites.
These prerequisites include:

- The freedom of expression
- Eligibility of all for public office
- The freedom to form and join organisations and advocate for shared and common ideals
- Open suffrage in a free and fair electoral system
- The right of political leaders and parties to compete for support
- Multiple sources of information
- The need for decision making institutions to be at least accountable if not wholly dependent on popular vote or other expressions of preference within the state.

(Held 2006: 160)

These prerequisites are important from the pluralist perspective. These traits could realistically exist in an elitist orientated democracy, however what unequivocally sets Dahl’s polyarchy apart from elite theory is the belief that power is “non-hierarchical and competitively arranged” (Held 2006: 160). Held (2006) notes that the pluralist perspective centres on a process of continuous bargaining, where interest and advocacy groups, political parties, business organisations, trade unions, religious groupings and other societal collectives essentially representing all interests enters into a mutually inclusive-styled consensus seeking discussion fora. The function of both political decision-making and government including its departments is re-oriented more towards a mediation and adjudicative role between competing societal demands for resources, with no overpowering or dominating centre (Held 2006: 161).

2.3 Democracy, Participation and Empowerment

While the last section drew on understandings of democracy in so far as the competing ideas of elitism and pluralism can be described, this section explores different forms of democracy, describing their distinct qualities and linking between the fundamental aspects of the theories presented above.
Many commentators; Young (2002), Dryzek (1990), Habermas (1996), Bohman (1998), and both Fung and Wright (2001) identify a number of distinct modes of democracy which permeate through contemporary political thought. They identify the integrative, the deliberative and the associative models of democracy (Dryzek 1990: 17-22; Habermas 1996: 11-19; Bohman 1998: 403-407; Fung and Wright 2001: 17-18). Young (2002) argues these models are clearly distinct in form, however she asserts that all three are basically conducive in their shared assumptions; theoretical frameworks premised on citizen participation, universal suffrage, freedoms of speech, association, and assembly, a codified rule of law, and where the processes of decision-making are well founded within an institutional political structure, and centred around an open democratic process (Young 2002: 16-19).

Dryzek (1990), Habermas (1996) and Bohman (1998) the integrative model champions competition between differing policy demands, where the democratic institutional structure actively allows competing political, financial or social interests to campaign or advocate for individual and personal interests across the political spectrum (Dryzek 1990: 19; Habermas 1996: 14-15; Bohman 1998: 405). Both Mansbridge (1980) and Miller (1993) crystallise understandings on the integrative democratic model. They argue that the competitive nature of the integrative democratic process is predicated on a politically open and fair polity. Political parties and their representative members overtly contest and candidly attempt to entice voters with their political ideologies as a means to represent and best satisfy public policy demands. Within this dynamic model, participating citizens with similar interests often coalesce into interest groups to influence policy makers or elected officials. They collectively argue the integrative model is pre-disposed to the belief that individuals are strategic rational actors, who adjust or modify their orientation to maximise their approach in influencing political outcomes against that of competing rival coalitions. In concise terms the integrative
model is distinctly reflective of the most robust or resilient held preferences within the populous (Mansbridge 1980: 17-18; Miller 1993: 76-79).

Cohen (1996) argues that the deliberative model of democracy centres round the principles of political justification, equality, consensus and inclusion. He contends this deliberative form of democracy is premised on equality, where public deliberation is conducted within an institutionalised structure and among equals. Cohen (1996) further refines his contention, stating that in practice deliberative democracy institutionally creates meaningful and inclusive fora for citizens in society; participating as equals to deliberately, scrutinise and question institutional structures and policy decisions that others have considered reasonable (Cohen 1996: 99). Chappell (2012) notes that deliberation within the political sphere can only be regarded as democratic if it encompasses “all substantially affected citizens and all relevant arguments to a sufficient degree and it does so by guaranteeing at least minimal equality between them” (Chappell 2012: 7). Dryzek (2000: 68; 2009: 1399) notes that the deliberative process is time consuming and can be a protracted process, but it is authentic and inclusive and as such forms the fundamental base-line in understanding the process of democratisation. Young (2002) commenting on Dryzek’s (2000) assertion argues, the very essence of the democratic process involves inclusive debate, where open fora must exist to discuss problems and resolve conflicts. In addition she argues, the democratic process provides an openly transparent means to citizens in promoting their own personal or communities’ interests and where claims of need are made, others within the process can either test or challenge these claims with reasoned argument. Young (2002) argues, that where such processes exist, the deliberating process allows open participative and inclusive dialogue, where all concerned can reach, refine, or reject proposed solutions to problems. Deliberative democracy allows participants to make decisions for the correct reasons by
collective agreement and not based on the weight of arithmetical preferences as evident in the aggregate model of democracy (Young 2002: 20-23).

The third model, associative model, is somewhat a divergent form of governance within the theoretical discourse of representative and participatory democracy. Hirst (2002) argues the associative model of democracy is inherently linked to the reform of political structures and institutions across several countries. Hirst (2002) contends the principle objectives of the associative model is the belief that as many social activities as possible should be delegated or entrusted to governing voluntary associations (Hirst 2002: 409; Sørensen 1997: 560-561). This he claims will permit representative governments to concentrate more firmly on larger national and global state issues, while at the same time reducing the need for complex sub-national governing bodies and agencies by replacing existing hierarchical structures with more adequately resourced and financed self governing local participatory associations (Hirst 2002: 410). The associative doctrine questions how little control or effective voice citizens have in relation to the agency and governing of these institutions, whilst similarly underpinning the argument; that with the continuing growth of quasi-autonomous institutions a visible and distinct blurring of the divisional lines between the public and private spheres continues (Hirst 2002: 210-211).

Cohen (1995) constructs a more concise version of associative democracy. He argues its primary basis lies within a set of basic economic, regulatory and welfare policies. He notes that society cannot function without a number of stable institutions, where citizens can feel confident and where the indigenous population can ideally seek to fulfil a number of reasonable expectations, but importantly where a degree of trust between the state and the citizen exists (Cohen 1995, cited in Young 2002: 193). Cohen (1995) contends; that within the democratic state, interest groups help to ensure that political equality, the addressing of social and regulatory inequality and in promoting the common good are normalised. He
warns however, that tensions within the state can surface when the state in seeking to meet the principles of participation cultivates governance roles for specific or traditionally well embedded groups (Cohen 2006).

By prioritising certain groups or ‘social partners’ gifted by government with the ability to enter the decision-making processes, while other groups remain functionally restricted and essentially outside the state institutional structure, remains both problematic and indeed symptomatic of modern approach to participative governance. Cohen (1996) suggests these public arenas provide the potential of newer possibilities to exist where the inclusion of different or what he terms “non-traditional stakeholders” (Cohen, cited in Benhabib 1996: 112) in the construction of clearly defined process dedicated to addressing common public concerns. These inclusive style processes more specifically designed for addressing shared societal concerns by means of open and deliberative fora (Cohen 1996).

Schumpeter’s elitist argument is dismissive about the need for government to contend with, or consider, any representative societal / sectoral organisations other than from individuals and institutions which elite theorists deem most suited. These include the state’s bureaucracy or its professional politicians in promoting and managing the interests and resources of the state. Partnership and citizen participation as argued in both the ‘deliberative’ and ‘associative’ models by empowering and informing citizens, strongly contrasts with Schumpeter’s strong government and strong executive argument. However these participative ideals adhere to Dahl’s (1956) polyarchy, where institutional structures within the democratic state promote meaningful citizen participation. As an all encompassing process where citizens have access to decision making and governance alongside the traditional institutions, accountability and legitimacy may increase alongside an increased level of participation.
Participatory Voice

In terms of ‘participatory voice’ which is at the centre of this body of work, it is important to widen our understanding as to why participation now forms one significant element of newer forms of governance practices. Peter John (2001) quoting J. S. Mill (1861) one of the originating minds behind the pluralist ideology who stated;

“local democracy offers citizens the potential to exercise their freedom and to express their local identities in a manner that is different from and complimentary to higher tiers of government”

(John 2001: 2)

Conscious of the progressive developments in the democratic process since the latter part of the twentieth century, John (2001) argues these developments are pivotal from the national perspective in the promotion of suffrage, citizen rights and constitutionally elected governments, have tended not to be expressed or valued in the same manner in respect of local government. John (2001) notes that national governments along with their hierarchical institutional structures have generally failed to consider the importance of local government as a devolved means to supply public goods and services to local citizens. More importantly he argues national governments have continually underestimated and generally ignored the potential of local government as an effective representative and participative medium to meaningfully engage with local democratic practices and as a policy making mechanism until more recently (John 2001: 2-3).

In exploring participatory voice at a local level in Ireland the above discussion provides a foundation from which to understand participation, local governance and how governments decision-making and implementation roles have altered. The next section explores frameworks for participation which emphasise and corral many of the conceptual prerequisites heralded by Dahl (1956). Importantly Arnstein’s ladder of participation indicates
a number of features of increased participation which reflect Dahl’s treatise. It is to these frameworks that we now turn.

2.4 Frameworks of Participation

In attempting to understand what participation actually means and how best it is represented in a tangible context, Arnstein’s (1969: 217) participation ladder typology is seminal. Arnstein’s eight-stage ladder as shown in (Figure 1) classifies citizen participation, spanning the spectrum of non-participation, on the lowest ladder rungs through varying degrees of interaction, to the top termed citizen power. Arnstein recognises that any group within the runged matrix can hold a myriad of different points of view, and that rival interests can be recognised across its structure (Arnstein 1969:217). This being said, she argues that the basic ladder design fundamentally allows for the examination of the divisions that exist between powerful elites, institutional decision-makers and ordinary citizens (Arnstein 1969: 218).

Building on Arnstein’s work, the International Association for Public Participation (IAPP) and the Organisation of Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) have re-configured the laddered structure to reflect to a more contemporary perspective on citizen participation. As depicted in the Prieto-Martin (2008) representation in (Figure 1), and in line with both Arnstein (1969) and the OECD (2001) contention; the basis for any citizen participation framework begins with informing citizens of their rights, their options and their responsibilities. Arnstein notes the significance of this ‘informing stage’, but cautions that rather than a familiar ‘top-down’ (official to citizen) process, this dynamic must allow for the passage of information in both directions, where citizens are provided with an opportunity to voice their concerns and influence decision-making. The ‘consultation’ and ‘involvement’ stages are similarly prioritised as an effective means to engage with citizens or concerned representative groups. However token attempts to involve or consult are merely derisory if
accountability and a fair balance of representation are not achieved within any participative process (Arnstein 1969: 219-220; OECD 2001: 11-14).

As illustrated in all three ladder representations ‘partnership’, ‘collaboration’, ‘citizen control’, ‘empowerment’ and ‘active participation’ are primary indicators of redistributed power, which is achieved through dialogue and negotiation between formal institutional structures and citizens. Open participatory mechanisms now surface as joint policy boards, planning committees or take the form of other jointly agreed problem solving mechanisms (Arnstein 1969: 224). Importantly these mechanisms are pre-established as fora where unilateral decisions are neither sought nor accepted. Citizen engagement through partnership is most effective when it is community orientated, with an organised power-base and structure, where community leaders are accountable and where adequate financial state resources exist to provide the necessary expertise in enabling citizens to engage with public officials on an equal basis. Arnstein (1969: 213-214) contends, in framing her argument, that citizens seek greater control, open and meaningful participative fora within a state structured framework, and mutually inclusive decision-making to address societal concerns without any attached or limiting pre-conditions.

Callanan (2005: 913), researching Irish participation in policy making draws directly from the Ståhlberg model (1997), argues that much of Ireland’s local government reform programme would reside within the liberal and managerial approaches to policy making. However, he contends, the SPC framework, with its emphasis on deliberation within a participatory forum could effectually be recognised as being somewhat closer in nature to the communitarian spectrum within this model.
Figure 1: What is Participation?

Sherry Arnstein, Ladder of Participation (1969)

Citizen Power
- Citizen Control
- Delegated Power
- Participation

Tokenism
- Placation
- Consultation
- Information

Non-Participation
- Therapy
- Manipulation

International Association for Public Participation (IAPP) Spectrum of Participation (2000)

- Empower
- Collaborate
- Consult
- Involve
- Inform

OECD Government / Citizen Relations
- Active Participation
- Consultation
- Information

Redrafted from Original Representation by Prieto-Martin (2008)
2.5 Benefits of Participation

Denhardt and Denhardt (2007) among others forward three notable reasons why an active and engaged citizenry is beneficial in a democratic society:

- A politically active or engaged citizenry is most likely to lead to favourable political outcomes, which broadly reflect society.
- Through meaningful citizen participation states can fulfil democratic efficacy, achieving norms and standards which underpin and support the interests of the largest number of its citizens.
- For democratic participation; meaningful citizen engagement enhances a government’s legitimacy creating space for citizen participation within the decision making processes of the state’s political institutional structure. This provides ownership and stability, and subsequently strengthens the development of a democratic citizenship.

(Denhardt and Denhardt 2007: 50-52)

Universal acceptance of these general principles is found in contemporary liberal democracies as elements of a form of governance to be aspired to by other political regimes around the world (Chhotray and Stoker 2010: 9-10; McKinnon 2008: 81-84; Pugh 2008: 77-82).

It is argued that the complexities of modern living and the increasing demands placed on both the politics and the polity necessitates change. The suggestion or evidence of this change can be measured in terms of increased participation and in a wider range of knowledge input into decision making at local level (Cuthill and Fien 2005: 64; Bloomfield et al., 1998: 8). From a macro-context, both Cuthill (2001) and Crush (1995) argue that citizen participation in local governance remains problematic for two reasons; firstly it requires those ‘who have power to devolve it to those who have not’ (Cuthill 2001, cited in Cuthill and Fien 2005: 65). Secondly, the devolution or relinquishing of power to more local participatory structures can be seen to put at risk the long held views that government knows best (Crush 1995).
Participatory democracy at local level offers the real possibility of taking the role of the citizen beyond that of merely exercising their right to vote. It opens the possibility of creating a more pro-active citizenry locally, it fosters and upholds the belief that in the creation of a civic culture what should naturally emerge is the possibility of empowering local people to participate more fully in public life (Lappe and Du Bois 1994:1). Local participation in civil society, by using voluntary organisations and other social networks, actively leads to both a more informed and discerning citizen, capable of balancing and promoting the common good over individualistic self-interest (Sirianni and Friedland 1997, cited in Cuthill and Fien 2005: 65).

Aimers (1999: 3-4) and Blaxter et al., (2003: 133) argue that the ever-increasing development of local government processes which support citizen participation in local governance processes benefits not only the citizen, but the community and positively enhances local government participative structures as a viable medium for inclusive decision-making and problem-solving. Creighton (1992: 3) notes that citizen participation in local governance can increase community support for government decisions, but that it can also broaden the base of ownership for solving difficult or long-running community problems. Similarly others maintain that citizen participation in local governance participatory mechanisms provides a more stable institution for achieving more sustainable outcomes in line with the needs of the local community as a whole (Smith et al., 1999: 196; Lyons et al., 2001:1235; Cuthill 2002a: cited in Cuthill and Fien 2005: 71).

Drawing from de Tocqueville (1969), Cuthill and Fien (2005:65) assert that the role of the citizen and local associations is as equally important as the role of government in determining the strength of democracy. Therefore the building of capacity into any participatory process is essential in providing a viable means to operationalise citizen participation. The importance of capacity building within local participatory structures as stated by Eade (1997) should not
be dominated by short-term goals, or be bound up in finding the most expedient or efficient way in delivering the most popular solutions to local issues. She insists capacity building must be equally committed to developing long-term strategic approaches to development, which must involve shared commitment from all local stakeholders including the community. Capacity building within local participatory structure be should not be used by government as a tool in allowing the state to obfuscate its responsibilities onto citizens or local groups without the necessary support structures. Capacity building she contends, has to be a collaborative process where government and the community through cooperation agree and acknowledge their respective roles and responsibilities (Eade 1997: 32). Arnstein commenting in the late 1960s most adequately sets the basis for this important argument, she contends that the ‘participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of collaborative democracy’ (Arnstein 1969: 216).

Here we have discussed the broader benefits of participation while the section before presents frameworks for understanding participation. The frameworks indicate how we might understand and determine levels of participation. Usefully having explored these frameworks the above section on the benefits gives a clear insight into how participation affects the roles played by government, the citizen and civil society. However as the next section will show difficulties also arise when these institutions come together to formalise participation and interaction across the ever blurring lines of governance.

2.6 Difficulties for Participative Mechanisms within the Democratic State

Dalton (2006) notes, that declining electoral participation in Britain is largely due to the lack of trust in government. In assessing this statement Stoker (2010) maintains that this does not necessarily mean that the democratic process is damaged as perceptions of trust in politicians
have always been low\textsuperscript{1}. Dalton argues an increase in ‘\textit{citizen-initiated and policy-orientated political activity}’ where citizens are involved in policy making has led to this mistrust, as their voice is not visible in the process (Dalton 2006: 73). Both Stoker (2010) and Chappell (2012: 5-6) drawing from the findings of the Hansard Report (2009: 3-5) contend, that what is of significance is the decline in British citizens’ belief that their voice is present in the decisions politicians make, or that they can influence policy. Similarly its findings show that an overwhelming majority of the British public felt their influence in decision making was muted within their local area and likewise across the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{2} Prior \textit{et al.}, (1995) suggests that elected politicians often equate participative structures as a threat to their role, seeing their efficacy being devalued or marginalised. Prior (1995) contends that many politicians argue; citizen participation initiatives in government are not actually needed. Importantly Rhodes (1997) asks the question, do participative structures blur the lines of accountability? He argues non-elected stakeholders are not necessarily constrained by the same rules of accountability that politicians are, as they are not subject to the popular vote of the public (Rhodes 1997: 55).

From an alternative perspective, Stewart and Davis (1994: 27) question, how representative are the actual stakeholders within the participatory processes now increasingly adopted by governments. They question do these structures merely create a newer elite of chosen interests with open access to the policy process? Building on Lowndes \textit{et al.}, (2001) argument as previously forwarded; they note that clear indicators are evident suggesting that the most marginalized in society are not actually represented through many participatory

\textsuperscript{1} For additional commentary see; Chaps. 2, 3 & 5 of Stoker, G. (2010) \textit{Why Politics Matters: Making Democracy Work}, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

mechanisms which now exist sub-nationally, which is at odds to popular belief (Lowndes et al., 2001a: 212-213, 2001b: 447-448). Similarly Burton et al., (2004) writing about Area Based Initiatives (ABIs) in the UK comment, that many published reports indicate a general air of positivity with regard to community involvement as a progressive step particularly in relation to social cohesion. Imrie and Raco (2003) warn of the dangers of what they term ‘incorporation’ where once quite vocal community groups are incorporated into the participative processes they become more a more docile entity “either through the receiving of rewards or the burdens of overwork”, a point reaffirmed by Burton et al. (Imrie and Raco 2003, cited in Burton et al., 2004: 27). The strength of this claim is underpinned by Professor Kirby (2010: 176-177) who highlights the eagerness of successive Irish governments using the social partnership process to control the funding arrangements of the community and voluntary (C&V) sectors particularly in relation to service provision. Kirby (2010) argues the cynical politicisation of funding to the C&V sectors within the partnership process has not only lead to a distinct culture of dependency on the state within Ireland, but also fundamentally reoriented the process of community development towards “a more consumerist welfare provision state, rather than a developmental state with an actively engaged citizenry” (Kirby 2010: 177).

Importantly Burton et al., forwards a widely held contemporary view on the value of community involvement in the local policy process which is; it is an effective device for masking social exclusion and the continuing shortcomings of public policy in coping or tackling it (Burton et al., 2004: 27). Burton et al., notes that the literature around community involvement in elements of local participatory processes within the UK is more or less unanimous around the importance of resources. Resource provision vis-a-vis sustained and stimulated community involvement is imperative and is generally perceived to encompass a
level of funding, training and enhanced capacity to represent communities more effectively (Burton et al., 2004: 32-33).

The concentration here has been on assessing and understanding the significance of citizen participation, and how theoretical and conceptual elements are manifested as physical decision-making and participative entities within the state. The significance of political developments continues to shape and influence newer styles and modes of citizen participation. It is to fundamental alterations in how governments and the role of its citizenry interact through more governance styled practices that this chapter now turns.

2.7 Transition from Government to Governance

The OECD provides an adept rationalisation of the concept of governance. They contend that governance covers;

“public administration and the institutions, methods and instruments of governing. It further incorporates the relationships between government and the citizen (including both business and other citizen groupings) and the role of the state”

(OECD 1995: 158)

Lowndes et al., (2006) and Osborne (2010) argue that in an attempt to cope with ever-increasing demands being placed on the state, a shift has taken place away from the dominant 1980s market driven model, to a more inclusive type of neo-liberalism evident from the 1990s (Lowndes et al., 2006: 540; Osborne 2010: 22-24). Rhodes (1997) and both Chhotray and Stoker (2010) add weight to this argument, citing the questioning of neo-liberal fundamentalism, the practices of new public management, and the negative effects of globalisation provided the catalyst for this change (Rhodes 1997: 11-17; Chhotray and Stoker 2010: 103-105). From both a participatory and representative perspective, concerns for a lack of accountability, transparency within governments and a fragmented or disjointed approach to meaningful political engagement arose. This directly fed into a national sense of belief that
a democratic deficit prevailed both nationally and locally, a deficit that realistically could no longer be left unaddressed (Loughlin 2006: 49; Osborne 2010: 24-26).

Further, Denters and Rose (2005), Rhodes (1997) and Stoker (2000, 2003) among others, have plotted this political shift from the concept of ‘government’ to more ‘governance’ practices in relation to devolved decision-making across the various member state traditions notes its significance. To this political dynamic Denters and Rose (2005) combines the effects of Europeanisation and Globalisation to the substantive demands of civil society to increase local capacity for community problem solving (Denters and Rose 2005: 7-10). Indeed by conjoining these substantive elements to the participatory demands of civil society, the response of government has been the widening of the use of governance practices. Although quantifying the actual amount of change is somewhat contested; major governance reform across different state traditions sides well with greater flexibility, newer policy perspectives, new modes of operation and both structural reform combined with the reallocation of responsibilities (Kooiman 2003).

Jan Kooiman (1993, 2003) calls these new modes of governance “a differentiated polity”, where an increasing number of actors both public and private populate policy processes, and where national governments to an increasing degree devolve decision-making sub-nationally within recognised formal structures, depending less on centralised authority (Kooiman 1993, 2003). With this shift to more governance orientated practices it also becomes apparent that the state, including its bureaucratic structures relinquishes some degree of control regarding decision-making given the increasing numbers reliant on non-governmental state actors. Rhodes (1996) argues, that what society has witnessed is a shift away from the traditional ‘command and control’ type state to more of an ‘enabling state’ which he defines as “self organising interorganisational networks” which effectively blurs the distinction between state and society (Rhodes 1996: 666; Rhodes 1997: 53).
John (2001) argues that given the ever-increasing pressures on the state; change to governance practices is best recognised by what he calls a “replacement of uniformity by variation” (John 2001: 14). This variation or shift to governance practices is ideally benchmarked against four distinct characteristics which he calls;

1. **Institutional reform and Institutional restructuring;** where new levels of elected sub-national government exist, designed to represent the concerns of local and regional interests. Along with agencies, the blurring of the lines between the public and private sectors occurs, through contracting out and privatisation.

2. **New Networks;** A diverse social requirement, combined with the increasing presence and influence of the private sector sees new policy networks appear, capable of cooperative and positive interaction with other stakeholders which increases capacity in governance.

3. **New Policy Initiatives;** with the state and its bureaucracy retreating in part from its traditional decision-making role, new actors and shareholders enter the policy process, where solutions are sought arising from the increased competition between the public need and the private sectors requirements locally. The Europeanisation of public policy has allowed local decision-makers to seek solutions from other member-states.

4. **Control and Accountability;** influenced by broader networks, the complexity of both policy and public decision-making has led to the distinct chain of decision-making being blurred.

John (2001) contends that these put a strain on the accountability and the actual representative nature of the democratic system. The democratic deficit which exists is deemed reducible prioritising participation (John 2001: 15-17).

---

Sørensen and Torfing (2009) argue striking the balance between representational democracy and accountability is difficult. Similarly, they assert that efficiency when added to this dynamic further complicates the process of governance. In real terms the more democratically open the governance network is; the less likely efficiency will feature strongly as an observable output. Increasing the number of voices within the policy process reduces the likelihood of determinant outputs particularly in policy areas that have long remained controversial. Closed policy networks, although somewhat limited regarding open participation per se, exists to allow for more like-minded or knowledgeable citizens’ involvement and therefore outcomes become more achievable. The fewer participant stakeholders engaging in the local decision-making process, the more likely they are to overcome contentious issues and similarly the less likely they are to be singularly influenced by conflicting or diverging arguments (Sørensen and Torfing 2009: 252-254).

Lowndes et al., (2001a) argues that with regard to the individual or the situational framework where participation is either desired or sought that other impediments may exist that limit its actual effectiveness (Lowndes et al., 2001a: 212-214). Communication and the way it is interpreted, or indeed the ability to disseminate information at an individual level or between citizens can be a significant barrier to meaningful participation. Similarly, Lowndes et al (2001a) notes the importance that certain people or elites within the community may tend to try and dominate the agenda. However, Lowndes et al., (2001b) contends that people can be encouraged to participate through community development programmes where capacity building is prioritised, and as argued by Cuthill and Fien (2005) capacity building can only be achieved when the state invests itself in its people, its organisations and local networks (Lowndes et al 2001: 448; Cuthill and Fien 2005: 66). Fung argues that irrespective of the possibilities that have emerged with regards to participation since the embracing of more governance style practices by the state, there still remains a difficulty as to how participatory
structures are actually manifested as a viable means to include or best represent other and differing views (Fung 2006). Smith (2005:17) concurs with this argument and notes that for greater / deeper participation to take place an inclusionary element has to be present within a participatory structure which allows civil representatives to be in such a position to actually influence the decision-making process. Smith (2005) argues that deepened participation is only achievable when the inclusionary and decision-making elements are conjoined with the ability of citizen participants to be able to influence the agenda setting stage of the policy cycle within the local arena (Smith 2005: 18).

Importantly, Stoker (2011: 20-23) like Peter John (2001: 15) contends that, since the shift towards governance, local government in reality now offers a viable platform to both build and sustain local participatory processes. He argues that irrespective of the administrative state tradition which exists across developed western economies that one of the most established functions of local government is that of its expression of identity. In essence local government matters, it now plays a far greater role in peoples’ lives.

Citizens’, Stoker (2011: 21) argues increasingly see local government as a significant enabling tool, in expressing a regions identity and providing the means to access a wider variety of goods and services. Madden (2010: 177) notes the complexities and increasing demands on local government, suggesting a newer leadership role has emerged for local government across state traditions as one important means to cope with these demands. Both John (2001) and Madden (2010) argue this role is not intended as command and control type model but is akin to a more leader-follower style arrangement. In real terms it can be defined as a discernable feature within the now wider democratic gambit of local government where “leadership through partnership” (Madden 2010: 178) has seen the development and growth of different collaborative arrangements such as Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP’s). The reality is that a myriad of local actors from the public service, elected public officials,
business organisations, the community and voluntary sectors including other concerning parties increasingly participate under the auspices local government by means of consultative fora within the sub-national arena.

2.8 Conclusion

This literature review provides the reader with two significant but fundamentally differing theoretical political perspectives of democracy within the state. Both Schumpeter’s (1942) hierarchical elitist ideas, which essentially confines citizen participation to that of mere suffrage and Dahl’s (1956) pluralist or polyarchy contentions, where the state is receptive towards more open democratic principles were discussed. For the purposes of this research Dahl’s (1956) central argument, of power based in pluralism is key to exploring the voice of the wider civil society in policy and public administration. Further the integrative, deliberative and associative models of democracy are outlined as likely arenas where citizen participation could plausibly succeed. In support of this statement, this literature review links the different qualities of these models vis-a-vis an inclusive society, where citizen participation is both an observable and discernable feature of democracy.

Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation is presented as a key model regarding the varying levels of participation which can exist within the democratic state, while Ståhlberg’s (1997) categorisation framework for participatory models existing across a number of state traditions is highlighted as an important yardstick in understanding and determining actual levels of participation. Both models provide significant categorisation as to the changing nature of the relationship between the state and the role of the citizen.

The benefits and difficulties of citizen participation within the state are discussed next, reflecting the worth of local government as a viable participative medium. Likewise the importance and the need for capacity building within local government is explored, whilst the
efficacy of local government both as a collaborative local medium, and its possible viability as a credible fora for constructing a more informed and engaged citizenry, capable of balancing and promoting the common good, over that of self-interest is discussed. The literature reflects the wider local government landscape, informed by perspectives which question if participative structures are simply used to co-opt local dissent and simply pacify or confine community activists to mere ‘talking-shop’ styles of political engagement.

Notably, the shift from government to more governance styled practices in relation to decision-making and policy implementation has been both a catalyst and driver for participation. The literature, highlights the broader political developments stemming from the increasing complexities, costs and challenges which national governments now have to contend with, and which directly affects both the sub-national and the supra-national political arenas. This includes the ever-increasing service demands from a more discerning citizenry. Responding to this shift has been the attempted widening of traditional approaches to governing, within which a larger number of actors have gained access and influence with regards to policy-making. From here, we can now explore and assess the participative nature from the community and voluntary sectors perspective of the SPC structures which resulted from Ireland’s move from government to more governance practices.
Chapter 3 - Ireland: Its move from Government to more Governance Practices

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the origin of Ireland’s shift from its more traditional centralised
government structures, to what are considered more ‘governance’ forms of policy-making
and administration. From late 1980s, the significance of ‘Social Partnership’ and its effects
on both the socio-political dynamic and the economic character of Ireland spanning the
period for 1987 to 2009 is considered. This chapter examines the wider implications of social
partnership from the national perspective, and considers the influence of the social
partnership project on sub-national government. This chapter identifies the relatively new
participatory processes that resulted from this shift, their representative make-up including
their local statutory remit and function. This chapter concludes with a brief review of the
most recent government policy document regarding local government reform in Ireland
namely, ‘Putting People First’ 2012 and its subsequent ‘White Paper’ published in October
2013. This policy document accepts the continuing local democratic deficit in relation to
meaningful citizen participation, whilst equally reflecting on the governments’ best attempts
in addressing this deficit.

3.2 National Agreements, National Understandings and Social Partnership

Connaughton (2010) describes Ireland as an “island behind an island”. This description is
seminal in understanding and correctly situating Ireland from both an economic and a
political perspective (Connaughton 2010: 110-111). Ireland’s thrust towards industrial
modernity since gaining its independence in the early 1920s is framed by national agreements
and national understandings. The first national agreement dates back to 1948 when unions and employers were forced by government to accept a pay restraint pact. This type of agreement was again used in the late 1960s and again in the early 1970s where on a bipartite basis; agreement was reached with government intervention to constrain pay. By the mid 1970s and up to the early 1980s pay bargaining between unions and employers was more habitual. The involvement of the Irish government became somewhat more discernable within these negotiations however the government remained hesitant to fully participate wishing to remain pro-active and avoid hindering the precarious position of the state’s economy (McCabe 2011: 89-94; Hardiman 2002: 7).

Changes in industrial relations terminology around this time saw the introduction of the terms ‘national understandings’ and ‘social partnership’ being directly linked to negotiated pay settlements (Collins and Cradden 2004: 87). In practical terms both Roche (1997) and O’Riaain (2010) question the effectiveness of these early agreements. They contend that instead of the positive economic outcomes hoped for, the country suffered due to external economic forces, combined with a domestic lack of political foresight, most particularly in relation to economic strategy (see also Adshead cited in O’Malley and MacCarthaigh 2012: 173-174).

The National Economic and Social Council (NESC) established in 1973 under the auspices of the Department of An Taoiseach, essentially comprising employers organisations, trade unions, farming bodies, and state representatives was seen by many commentators as the “most important institutional progenitor for national social partnership” (Adshead in

---

O’Malley and MacCarthaigh 2012: 179). NESC published a report in 1986 entitled ‘A Strategy for Development’. This report essentially formed part of the socio-economic catalyst for the incoming Fianna Fáil party in 1987 to re-ignite the talk’s process between ‘the social partners’ (Kirby 2010: 42-43). These inclusive talks built on a consensus or partnership approach featured business organisations, the trade unions and the government who successfully negotiated the first three year ‘Programme for National Recovery’ (PNR). The PNR saw broad agreement from all sides on wages levels in the public and private sectors from 1987 to 1990. With increasing prosperity, six more social partnership agreements followed from 1991 onwards, with each subsequent agreement a widening occurred to encompass other socio-economic issues such as tax reform, pay increases, social spending, and welfare payments. Later agreements like ‘Partnership 2000’ (P2K) in 1997 witnessed the inclusion of representatives from the community and voluntary sectors, where a stronger visibility was placed in dealing with larger societal problems such as long term unemployment, social exclusion and inequality (NESF 1997).

Adshead (2009) comments, that although these tripartite consultative processes were evident elsewhere across Europe, their appearance in Ireland was significant. She argues, since the foundation of the Irish state this type of neo-pluralist/corporatist or consensus approach previously held no appeal within the Irish political dynamic nor had any of the larger Irish political parties to this point demonstrated a willingness to engage with the rudiments of neo-liberalism (Adshead and Tonge 2009: 185). House and McGrath (2004: 29) argue that social partnership in Ireland went far beyond other familiar corporatist arrangements in Europe. Underpinning this argument they contend, that the nature of its inclusivity was expansive, growing over time to encompass a large array of social interests. Secondly, the strategically focussed nature of social partnership allowed no room for ambivalence or dissent in its policy intent or policy output. Thirdly, the firm institutional embeddedness of the social partnership
structures rested easily with the majority of mainstream society. O’Donnell (2008) suggests that new modes of governance are clearly evident in Ireland since the adoption of social partnership where, “institutional innovations for creative, dynamic and self reflective governance for social and economic development” are prioritized as the intended direction of future state policy (O’Donnell 2008: 73-74).

Kirby (2010: 43) also notes the socio-political significance of these developments. He argues that with returning growth and prosperity in the Irish economy from the early 1990s, these newly embraced ‘governance’ approaches became institutionalized as the flagship for Ireland’s new governance structures. The last social partnership programme ‘Towards 2016’ (T16) was negotiated in 2006 and as its name suggests it was expected to run until 2016, however amidst the current financial crisis facing Ireland, this agreement collapsed in 2009, owing to the rigidity of earlier compromises committed to within the partnership process (Cradden 2004: 89-90; Hardiman 2012: 214)\(^5\).

### 3.3 Local Government and Governance through Partnership

**Background and Development of Local Partnership in Ireland**

Bridging the gap between the apparent success of social partnership at the national level to encompass both the regional and local governance structures in Ireland was somewhat a natural progression. Callanan (2003: 7-8) notes the ever-expanding nature of the agreed social partnership programmes such as the ‘Programme for Prosperity and Fairness’ 2000-2003 which firmly cemented previous ventures by governments into regional and local

---

\(^5\) Commenting in 2012 on the collapse of social partnership, Adshead makes two key observations in relation to various understandings of the significance of the social partnership arrangement in Ireland. She argues that after two decades of social partnership as the standard bearer for ‘new governance’ in Ireland, that it has not “irrevocably changed the architecture of the state or of government” (Adshead in O’Malley and MacCarthaigh 2012: 189). She also contends, that in light of the financial crisis facing Ireland since October 2008, the requirement by the executive to take tough budgetary decisions, without having the aid of, or the need to consult the social partners was re-established and that the balance of power that formally resided with the Department of the Taoiseach during the social partnership era was quickly subsumed back under the more familiar surroundings and traditional control of the Department of Finance (ibid).
government. Outside of the normal nationally agreed issues such as taxation, public service reform and infrastructural requirements, this programme included a wide range of commitments at both regional and local level such as; housing, regional development, the environment, rural poverty, urban disadvantage, childcare provision, local government and supporting voluntary action⁶.

Although somewhat earlier but firmly founded within the partnership principles, the first pilot area programme for Integrated Rural Development (IRD) was put in place from 1988-1990. This programme was run by the Department of Agriculture and it was locally coordinated comprising a group of 8 to 10 members of local representative groups. This pilot area programme had two objectives, the first was to develop ways of raising income levels in rural areas, and secondly to develop policy learning among isolated rural groups (Loughlin 2001: 75). The second Social Partnership agreement; the Programme for Economic and Social Progress (PESP) led to the creation of Area-Based Partnerships or ABPs as limited companies in 1991. These ABPs comprised a board with members drawn from statutory agencies and government departments, the social partners and other prominent community sectors. Similar partnership arrangements although not strictly community based such as ‘RAPID’ and the ‘Local Drugs Task Forces’ appeared in later years. Initially narrow in focus, but coming from a social inclusion perspective, these partnership arrangements broadened to encompass educational disadvantage, unemployment and other concerning local issues (Loughlin 2001: 78).

County development teams as originally setup in the 1960s were superseded by thirty-five city/county enterprise boards or (CEBs) in 1993, each CEB has a chairperson and the board is

---

⁶ Kirby (2010: 44-45) notes that the principles of partnership particularly from 1996 onwards was extended by government to other temporary or expert groups and bodies such as the Housing Forum, the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities, the Task Force on the Travelling Community and the Commission on the Family. In regional terms, bodies such as County Enterprise Boards, the Urban Community Initiative, and the Territorial Employment Pacts also appeared which included members of local authorities in their makeup. These bodies at this time operated independently of local government and were concerned with the social and economic development in specified county regions, cities and towns.
comprised of thirteen members. Its board contains four local authority representatives.

Importantly both Meade (2005) and Loughlin (2001) argue that many of these sub-national and local initiatives mimicked the national structures of the national social partnership process (Meade 2005: 357-358; Loughlin 2001: 77).

Other European Union developments such as the EU LEADER Programme commenced in Ireland in 1992 with seventeen groups identified to take part. LEADER II began in 1994 and was expanded to include thirty-four individual groupings. These partnerships were legally constituted companies; they comprised local actors and community groups but not representatives from local government with funding provided from EU structural and social funds (Loughlin 2001: 75). Importantly, that these early initiatives developed largely outside the regulatory environment which local government operates. McInerney questions the wisdom of central government policy in allowing two divergent systems to co-exist sub-nationally, where local government is functionally constrained by regulation and a miscellany of financed partnership networks are evident with minimal accountability (McInerney 2008).

Reforms – Towards Policy Partnership and SPCs

The influential Barrington Report of 1991 presented a comprehensive examination of local government and recommended that constitutional recognition be prioritized (Achieved through referendum, 1999). Barrington also recommended greater devolved powers should be given to local government, combined with both sure-footing the financial independence of local authorities and providing a more policy orientated role for elected councillors. The Local Government Act of 1991 gave effect to some of Barrington’s recommendations. In essence the 1991 Act provided more general powers of competence to local authorities, by relaxing the restrictive ultra vires doctrine, which in essence granted a greater freedom to perform duties and functions not previously allowed. Hence the 1991 act conferred a limited degree of potential for some elected councillors to exercise more effective and policy
orientated decision-making through the establishment of the ‘Committee of the Regions’ (Quinn 2003: 452; Loughlin 2006: 74).

The Devolution Commission which was setup by the Rainbow Coalition government comprising Fine Gael, Labour and Democratic Left in 1995 to consider a strategic approach to local government renewal and to make recommendations as to the possible functions that could be devolved to local government. The Devolution Commission’s ‘Interim Report’ in 1996 recommended a consolidation and simplification where possible of shared interests between local government and other local development initiatives involving local stakeholders and community groups. Importantly, the Commission’s ‘Second Report’ of 1997, building on the findings from the ‘Barrington Report’ of 1991 recommended that other functions be devolved to local government particularly in relation to local infrastructural development, transport, local environmental controls, including social and economic development. Importantly this report also highlighted the need for local authorities to gain access the national decision-making process comparable with the position afforded to the social partners, which was never acted upon (Devolution Commission 1996, 1997 cited in Loughlin 2001: 71, 76; Devolution Commission 1997 cited in Callanan and Keogan 2003: 87).

Building on the perceived successes of the social partnership model at national level, and in response to some of the issues identified by both Barrington in 1991 and the Devolution Commission in 1996, the rainbow coalition government through the Department of the Environment and Local Government published a White Paper ‘Better Local Government- A Programme for Change’ (BLG) in 1996.

This White Paper outlined four core principles of better local government through:

7 Attempts to ascertain the actual reports in print or electronic format as presented by the Devolution Commission to government in 1996, and 1997 were unsuccessful, therefore the information as presented to the reader is taken and referenced from other academic sources such as Loughlin (2001), Callanan (2003) including Callanan and Keogan (2003).
• Serving the customer better;
• Enhancing local democracy;
• Providing proper resources for local government;
• Developing efficiency  (Callanan and Keogan 2003: 88).

Callanan (2003) draws reference to two noteworthy statements in this document,

Firstly;

“Local government in Ireland has rarely been accorded the status of its actual democratic mandate or accepted fully as an authoritative partner in the process of government”

Secondly;

“that local authorities as directly elected bodies, are marked out as distinct from other organs of the state, sectoral interests, community groups or voluntary associations. ‘Better Local Government’ acknowledges that no other body at local level has such direct public accountability to the entire local population”

(Government of Ireland 1996a: 14).

In considering the content of these statements, and the credit similarly awarded by BLG to the social partnership process both at national and local level where it contends partnership has enabled local communities; “to take responsibility for their own affairs in an important exercise in participatory democracy” (Government of Ireland 1996a: 29). It can be argued that BLG essentially broadened the possibilities of a process of devolved decision-making from the centre to local governments being implemented, particularly now with constitutional recognition assured. However, this is currently not the case, and central government still controls decision making with regard to local government to a large extent. Both Adshead and McInerney (2010: 66-67) contend that the prevailing tradition of centralisation in Ireland is not particularly conducive in the promotion of local participatory initiatives. A similar vein of thought is forwarded by Callanan (2011) drawing from Page’s (1991) description of ‘administrative regulation’, where he notes; central government is involved in all aspects of setting the legislative framework of local service providers, including also a supervisory role.
in the day to day decision-making processes at local level (Page 1991, cited in Callanan 2011: 15). Callanan (2011: 15) argues Ireland’s administrative tradition with its autocratic preponderance for detailed regulation and supervision of local delivery mechanisms aptly embodies all the hallmarks of Page’s (1991) argument. The changes recommended by BLG\(^8\) were subsequently solidified in law with the enactment of the ‘Local Government Act 2001’, which saw a measured reform of the committee system in conjunction with measures designed to strengthen the role of the elected councillor in policy-making with the introduction of Corporate Policy Groups (CPGs) and the Strategic Policy Committee (SPCs) at local level. These SPC structures mirror not only the major functions of the local authority, but in governance terms, the introduction of SPCs within local authorities for the first time saw the inclusion of non-elected actors however limited into local government (Callanan 2003: 496-497).

The statutory basis for the Strategic Policy Committee process was provided for in section 48 of the Local Government Act 2001\(^9\). McInerney and Adshead (2010), and Forde (2005: 138-139) argue that although somewhat limited in scope, the SPC process in itself is important. BLG facilitated the SPC process as a shift away from local authorities solely as a provider of services to encompass a more active policy role as both a facilitator and co-ordinator of local governance practices. Similarly reinforcing Callanan’s (2003) earlier contention, both McInerney and Adshead (2010: 66-67) argue with the introduction of these local governance participative structures, that SPCs represent a direct link between representative and participatory processes in terms of local democracy, where community representatives and elected officials can engage with the policy process.

---

8 BLG created the atmosphere in which other partnership initiatives could be attempted. Participative structures which now operate alongside the SPC process in local government include the Joint Policing Committees (JPCs) and the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC). These participative structures are intended to provide a consultative forum for elected councillors, the local authority including other sectoral interests to engage in areas of concern most particularly anti-social behaviour alcohol and drug issues, housing and halting site amenities (Considine and Dukelow 2009: 434-435).

9 A more detailed breakdown and analysis of the SPC process is provided in the chapter that follows.
3.4 Taking the Next Step: Putting People First 2012

In October 2012, the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government published a new policy document called ‘Putting the People First-Action Programme for Effective Local Government’. This policy document aims to achieve the most far-reaching changes to local government since it began in Ireland in the 1890s. The ‘White Paper’ in October 2013 proposes to streamline and strengthen local authorities in light of the current financial difficulties facing Ireland with targeted savings of up to €480 million euro (Government of Ireland 2012). In brief overview this ‘White Paper’ (2013) has two overarching objectives;

(1) the significant reorganisation of local government structures
(2) the strengthening of governance and accountability in local government through the re-balancing of powers between the executive and the elected council

(Government of Ireland 2013)

It initially proposed a reduction of five hundred councillors nationally with the integrating of one hundred and fourteen local and municipal authorities into thirty-one (renamed under Sections 20 and 23 and defined under Section 22A of this Bill) municipal districts and county councils. However, the recent ‘White Paper’ under Section 21 sees the reduction of elected council seats from 1,627 to 949 which represents a total reduction of 678 elected county councillor positions in Ireland. Section 24 of the 2013 Bill provides the legislative provision to dissolve existing municipal town councils. This Bill under Section 21 subsections 16-18 also provides the legal basis for the merging of six city and county councils in Limerick, Tipperary and Waterford into three local authorities and similarly the replacement of the existing regional structures with new consolidated regional assemblies (Government of Ireland 2013: 24-25).
In relation to the SPC and CPG processes this policy document accepts that a modicum of success has been achieved by these structures regarding policy development and monitoring. This ‘White Paper’ outlines that in light of the intended restructuring, a re-evaluation of the SPC process is required to strengthen where necessary its effectiveness with an “effective role in policy setting and in the oversight of the executive actions of the local authority” (Government of Ireland 2012: 133-134; Government of Ireland 2013: 1). Under Section 40 of this Bill, the SPC process will be expanded to include an economic development SPC structure, focusing on both local development and local economic policy initiatives (Government of Ireland 2012: 135; 2013: 8). Training has also been highlighted as a priority for elected councillors. Guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2010 are to be prioritised with each elected councillor having to adopt an annual training and development programme. Newly elected councillors will have to complete an induction programme. Training within the SPC process will be further coordinated with the Institute of Public Administration where comprehensive training will be provided to all ‘key stakeholders’ (importantly however the key stakeholders are not identified in this document) and on a phased basis (Government of Ireland 2012: 150-151).

Despite the establishment of the Community and Voluntary Fora in 2000 as part of a nation-wide County Development Board strategy to give collective voice to communities within each city and county, the Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007: 16-21) concluded that a democratic deficit still exists at local level. ‘Putting People First’ (2012) referring directly to this report, notes that citizen engagement can only be maintained at local level if people believe their input can influence decision-making. With these concerns in mind ‘Putting People First’ (2012) argues these measures could (not will) include more responsive and effective local authority service provision with an input by citizens as to how better outcomes may be delivered for society at large. Greater participation and engagement by the public can
lead to greater local authority efficiency where outdated service provision practices can be eliminated and processes improved to meet the needs of a modern society. Likewise greater participation can lead to an increased sense of local identity (Government of Ireland 2012: 158).

Regarding new forms of public engagement ‘Putting People First’ (2012) proposes to further improve citizen participation and increase participative democracy at local level by considering additional engagement mechanisms. In aiming to improve the citizens’ ability to interact and engage with their respective local authority and better empower local communities, measures such as participatory budgeting, petition-related rights, local plebiscites, and increased town / area meetings will be explored. Other collaborative measures proposed will see the role of the Community and Voluntary sector enhanced at the district level with the development of local and community plans for each city and county area. These development plans are to be formed and based on a collaborative process of engagement, where all local and community stakeholders in conjunction with the local authority design using an innovative approach aimed in providing bespoke solutions to the local communities needs.

It is envisioned in this document that these collaborative processes combined with the creation of Socio-Economic Committees will bring an enhanced focus to the Community and Voluntary area by providing a more defined process of community involvement, strengthen relationships and provide an enhanced element of capacity building with these areas particularly in relation to understanding and meeting the communities future needs. Interestingly all of the collaborative processes recommended in ‘Putting People First’ (2012) are seen to merely complement the process of representative and participative democracy and any views / recommendations elicited from citizens or sectoral organisational representatives within the proposed new participative fora, particularly any input toward inclusion in the
decision-making process remains restricted and fully at the discretion of the local authority and the elected council. Similarly also the role and powers of the elected members of the local authority will remain unchanged, other than somewhat indistinct role or process for elected members aimed at improving community / citizen engagement in local government (Government of Ireland 2012: 157-162).

3.5 Conclusion

The historical importance of early national agreements and national understandings are outlined here framing the dynamics between government, business and the unions and consequentially how these earlier interactions influenced and shaped later partnership developments nationally. The significance of the social partnership process is directly linked to newer governance practices sub-nationally, specifically within the arena of regional and local government. This chapter notes the impact of ‘Better Local Government’ (BLG) underpinned by the Local Government Acts of 1999 and 2001 which in essence facilitated other local stakeholders to enter the local public policy realm, manifested by the SPCs. Finally this chapter reviews the most recent government policy document regarding local government reform in Ireland, ‘Putting People First’ 2012 and its subsequent ‘White Paper’ published in October 2013. This noted the continuing local democratic and included including recommendations and proposals to address this issue. Chapter 4 explores the make-up of the Strategic Policy Committee SPC participative structures, their components and features within the Irish local government landscape.
Chapter 4 – Ireland: Description, Membership, Role and Assessment of the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) structure in Local Government

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by providing a detailed description of the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) structure within local government as a tangible representation of this governance shift sub-nationally. This chapter will also outline the purpose of these participatory SPC structures, what they are comprised of and how these mechanisms operate. Finally, the chapter from existing literature will assess the operation of the (SPC) structures in local government as a participatory mechanism that allows its participants to engage in the policy process.

4.2 Strategic Policy Committees: Their Role and Composition

Callanan (2005) notes that the most significant change which occurred arising from the BLG policy document was the pro-active stance taken with regard to enhancing local democracy. By encouraging and giving elected councillors a more discernable input in policy making and policy matters, alongside the creation of participatory structures, local democracy can be enhanced. These structures were to include non-elected local stakeholders or sectoral interest within the policy process. These new policy focussed committee structures were to be established in all county and city councils and called Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) (Callanan and Keogan 2003: 88, 148-149, 496-497; Callanan 2005: 916; Loughlin 2001: 76-77).

Statutory consultation obligations as laid down both in section 127 of the Local Government Act 2001 and in Article 28A of the Irish Constitution necessitates local authorities having to undertake a public consultation process in making decisions, particularly in relation to
planning and environmental matters. In relation to Ireland Callanan (2005) makes two interesting observations regarding public consultation. Firstly; that local authorities in general terms receive little expressed interest or reaction from the public regarding the local authorities proposed five-year development plans. However, secondly, when a planning application for an extensive development is lodged for appraisal by the local authority it is not unusual to receive a substantial amount of observations. He contends, the Strategic Policy Committee departs from tradition, providing instead for a consultative and participatory framework, where their inclusive nature provides the opportunity to consult more widely with a broader variety of participating interests in building long-term development and policy plans (Callanan 2005: 917).

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) in mid-1997 circulated guidelines on the SPC structures to the local authorities in Ireland. A more refined policy document was issued by the Department of Environment and Local Government (DoELG) in 1999, entitled Strategic Policy Committees: Guidelines for Establishment and Operation, which more accurately outlined the recommended configuration and role for the participants within the SPC process.

The SPC configuration as recommended:

1. Economic Development and Planning Policy;
2. Environment Policy;
3. Transportation and Infrastructural Policy;
4. Housing Policy, Social and Cultural Development.

(Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1999)

This policy document provides some clarity regarding the role and function of the SPC process. However it states; “that the council is and remains the decision making authority” (DoELG 1999: 3). The role of the SPC process is to ‘advise and assist’ the council in its work. The control over setting the policy agenda and the ultimate direction of policy still
remains firmly within the control of the full council (DoELG 1999: 3-4). This policy
document further outlines the primary role as intended for the SPCs, namely to assist local
authorities in statutory policy areas such as; in the preparation of the county development and
waste management plans, the water quality management plan and if requested, in the
preparation of any other statutory requirement that the individual local authority may be
engaged in. Importantly this policy document states; that SPCs would have a functionary role
in other non-statutory policy areas, such as urban and village renewal plans, policy areas
related to the development of work programmes, in the establishment of certain other services
like the needs of people with disabilities and in the strategic monitoring of the local authority
(DoELG 1999: 4-5). Arguably, if the SPC process is to be meaningful and effective within its
operational framework, that it must be involved at the preliminary stages of policy
preparation within the local authority.

4.3 Composition of the Strategic Policy Committee structures in Local Government

Each individual SPC process is comprised of two-thirds elected councillors from the local
authority and one-third sectoral interests. The sectoral interest grouping comprises
representatives from the social partners, community and voluntary groups and other relevant
local stakeholders (Callanan 2005: 918). The Chairperson of each SPC is an elected member
of the council, and is nominated by the council, in practice all councillors are members of a
least one Strategic Policy Committee. Subject to organisational or ‘standing order’ decisions
made by the council, each individual SPC should be competent to organise and regulate its
own concerning interests and proceedings. It is recommended that each SPC process must
meet quarterly at a minimum, and that the full council meet with the collective sectoral
interests’ membership annually.
Municipal boroughs and urban district councils (town councils)\(^{10}\) can nominate its members to represent their interests within the SPC framework. Town council nominees are in addition to the minimum recommended number of nine people that comprised each SPC process (DoELG 1999: 13). The DoELG 1999 guidelines provide assistance to both local authorities and representative organisations which must be considered when populating the sectoral interest portion of the SPC processes. Each individual SPC is comprised of nominees as appropriate from the following sectors (For a breakdown of Numbers see Table 1 below);

1. Environmental/ Conservation/ Culture;
2. Development/ Construction;
3. Business/ Commercial;
4. Community/ Voluntary/ Disadvantaged;
5. Trade Union;
6. Agriculture/ Farming. (not a requirement for urbanised local authorities)

In more concise terms, sectoral interest appointment to serve on SPCs is achieved either through nomination by their respective national organisation as is the case for business, trade union, agriculture and construction nominees. Appointments to SPCs from the community/voluntary and the environment/cultural sectors are made through the local community forum. These fora were established in 2000 as part of a nation-wide County Development Board strategy to give collective voice to communities within each city and county. The local community forum is essentially open to all local community groups and is an established platform in each county and city area. Membership of the local community forum is premised on the understanding that groups should be active in their respective area and community, they must be open to accept new members, hold regular meetings, and be broadly representative (DoELG 1999: 11-12, 16-18).

\(^{10}\) The DoELG 1999 guidelines provided the option for municipal boroughs and town councils to establish Municipal Policy Committees (MPCs) in their respective area. Their composition mirrored that of the SPC structures, where two-thirds of each MPC comprised of elected town councillors and one-third drawn from local sectoral interests. Section 49 of the *Local Government Act 2001* provided for the establishment of Municipal Policy Committees (MPCs) (DoELG 1999: 12-13; IPA 2004: 9).
Table 1

Number of Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Sectoral Members by Category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of Representatives</th>
<th>% of Total Representatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community/ Voluntary/ Disadvantaged</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/Commercial.</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental/Conservation/ Cultural</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental/Construction.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Union.</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture/Farming.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


4.4 Beyond the SPC

The work of each individual SPC is supported by the local authorities Director of Service, whose role is to liaise with other council officials, to provide all relevant documentation as requested and to ensure the effective running of each individual process. In addition to the operation of the SPC process, a structured framework known as the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) has also been given effective agency under sections 133, 133(3) and 133(4) of the Local Government Act 2001. The CPG provides a mechanism enabling the Chairperson of each SPC, including the Cathaoirleach or Mayor of the council to formally meet to discuss areas of common concern across the SPC processes and where appropriate co-ordinate policy to best maximise its effect. The primary role of the members that comprise the CPG group is to deal with corporate concerns, such as the corporate plan and customer service issues. The
CPG grouping has a role in the preparation of local authority budget, and its work is supported by the City or County Manager. The County or City Manager is obligated by statute to consult the CPG when preparing the corporate plans of the local authority and its draft budget. It was part of the rationale of the 1999 guidelines that this grouping would take and assume the format of a ‘cabinet style’ structure within Irish local government (Callanan and Keogan 2003: 90-91; IPA 2004).

4.5 Analysis of the Strategic Policy Committee Process

The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in 2002 and 2003 conducted a review of the SPC structures on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The review group carried out individual and group meetings, with all participants including focus groups and workshops with a number of interests, such as councillor representative associations, national social partner associations, local and national nominating bodies, local authority officials and community representatives. Secondary data was drawn from requested written submissions from the public, and information collected from a prior 2001 survey conducted in the form of a questionnaire issued to all City and County Managers by the DEHLG. The IPA also availed of a concurrent report being conducted by the Committee for Public Management Research (CPMR) on the modernisation process within local government. The purpose of the IPA review was to establish:

1. The extent to which SPCs contributed to the formulation, development and review of policy with the local authority.
2. To establish if the linkages between the SPCs and other relevant bodies and local stakeholders were working.
3. To establish or highlight any operational problems that prevents the process from carrying out its intended role as broadly outlined by BLG in 1996, and in-line with the establishing guidelines by.

4. To ascertain any recommendations that will enhance the effectiveness of the process (IPA: 2004).

The findings were based on the interviews conducted, where although the participants relayed a number of criticisms of the actual operational structure of the SPC process; they considered the participatory element of SPC structure of value. A number of sectoral interests indicated that membership of the process had afforded them a greater understanding and a new appreciation of the difficulties and constraints that local authorities have to contend with regards to the allocation of resources and decision-making (IPA 2004: 42). In more general terms, the IPA review group comment that that the SPC process as derived from Better Local Government (BLG) offers the basis for a more positive relationship and providing a more conducive arena for policy discussion between elected councillors and the sectoral interests within the local area (IPA 2004: 51).

However, the IPA reveals that a number of other concerns were highlighted during this review. Some problems were identified in getting a number of elected councillors, local government officials and sectoral interests to more meaningfully engage with the SPC process, noting that a cultural change is required amongst all three stakeholders. These problems centred-round the importance of maintaining a policy focus between both elected and sectoral members, where there was an observed reluctance on the part of some stakeholders to take ownership of policy-making, with an implied inference by the IPA (2004) that the ownership for policy outcomes could also be problematic (IPA 2004: 47–48). Logistical issues were also highlighted, particularly in relation to the levels of prior research undertaken by local authority officials as necessary to support policy initiatives within the
SPC process (IPA 2004: 21-25). The research did not uncover any active resistance to the SPC participative structures per-se from the local authorities’ bureaucracy. However, some local authority officials did not see or feel that supporting the SPC process was a significant part of their role, with the provision of services as being more important than the preparation of documentation and research findings for SPC meetings (IPA 2004: 22-23).

McInerney and Adshead (2010) note the importance the role the public administration system performs in the operation of many participatory governance processes. They jointly argue that public administration systems and the officials have become the “primary interface for community participation” even more so than the political system (McInerney and Adshead 2010: 122). Further validating this argument they make three significant observations, firstly; this situation has led to tensions between participatory and representative processes in the past. Secondly; ill-equipped or inexperienced public officials have in the past been subject to pressure to deliver results from participatory processes without proper organisational or adequate support structures. Thirdly; public officials may be indifferent to both delivering results from participative structures or believe that civil society organisations interfere with the normal functioning of the local authority (McInerney and Adshead 2010: 123).

Supporting this argument Callanan (2011) contends; that the past histories of the relationships between local government and community groups particularly in relation to decision-making is important, as they can impact future relationships. Callanan is adamant that greater support and resources are required to encourage new and innovative ways of joint collaboration and communication. In bolstering the usefulness of local participatory structures, local government officials must be able to develop skills of dialogue, listening, mediation, arbitration and cajoling if necessary along with being capable of understanding the differences between the parties concerned. It requires the moving away from the traditional bureaucratic norms of issuing and following orders. Callanan quoting Hambleton (2007)
argues, what’s needed is “a focus on people as citizens, as well as customers or consumers” (Hambleton 2007, cited in Callanan 2011: 9).

The IPA note, that despite a number of elected councillors initially admitting to being sceptical and even critical of sharing the policy-making fora with other non-elected sectoral interests, councillors later admitted that in practice the SPC process is an acceptable platform for allowing a greater number of opinions to be considered. This consideration is tempered with the fact that the SPC process is not viewed by elected councillors as a direct framework for delivering on definitive results, or as the IPA contends, that in several cases locally elected councillors were not wholly committed to policy-making within this participative structure in the first instance (IPA 2004: 25-26). Ratification by the full council was seen by many elected councillors as an effective safeguard, although Boyle et al., (2003) if policy recommendations were constantly stymied by the full council, surely it would inevitably lead to questions like if participation of sectoral interests was meaningful or meaningless (Boyle et al., 2003: 37)?

Finn (2011) calling on the primary case study research conducted notes the significance of Smith’s (2005) argument; that considerable influence can be exercised through the selection and discussion of issues. Finn argues that on the three participatory structures examined by his body of work; little evidence exists that civil society has any control over setting the agenda. Drawing directly from his primary research interviews he references a senior local authority official from a Housing SPC, who acknowledges that council management set the agenda and that other SPC members whether elected or not, are essentially not interested in contributing or engaging in policy discussion (Finn 2011: 60). Unsurprisingly Finn again returns to this official’s claim, who asserts that ‘administrative dominance’ of the Housing SPC is wholly necessary as the participants “do not have the desire or capacity to engage in high level discussion on housing policy” (Finn 2011: 62).
Particularly interesting was how sectoral interests reported back or consulted with their nominating organisation. Accountability was questioned by a number of elected councillors and council officials, and similarly questioned was how representative some of the sectoral interests actually were (IPA 2004: 54-55). Difficulties also surfaced between representatives of the community and voluntary sectors and elected councillors because of the cross-over between common local concerns, councillors were elected to represent local constituents and the community and voluntary sectors also represented concerns of local voters.

Transparency concerns were also uncovered, where ethical rules that apply to elected councillors do not necessarily apply to sectoral interests (IPA 2004: 34-35). Finn (2011) argues that the participative effort from the one-third sectoral interests is unremunerated unlike elected councillors and most often combined with the demands of other full-time employment. Similarly he notes; that the feedback of information from civil society representatives to the local community remains problematic. His research reveals that the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) is unsystematic, where Traveller representatives maintain that it can only be made effective if it was carried out in conjunction with a funded local Traveller project. Feedback from the Community and Voluntary Forum takes place through meetings of different area fora, but notes that genuine concerns exist as to how accountable these mechanisms are (Finn 2011: 69-72). Callanan (2011) makes reference to Somerville’s (2005) argument; that in the UK issues around the accountability of local government participatory mechanisms particularly in relation to non-elected stakeholder participation remains a topical issue of discussion. In relation to Ireland Callanan (2011) notes Larkin’s (2004a) argument as pertinent;

“that the same rigorous accountability and transparency requirements should be applied to both representative and participative forms of decision making, and that we should not settle for lower standards for participative structures”

(Callanan 2011: 13).
Equality in terms of participation was also highlighted as an issue given the limited number of sectoral interest places on the SPC process as against the wide variety of community and voluntary interests and others that exist in civil society. Indeed some of the community participants were viewed by both elected councillors and council officials as the best known or usual joiners who are frequent participators in public meetings or area events (Callanan 2005: 925). Table 3 in this chapter gives the reader a breakdown in actual numbers and the percentage of representation of each sectoral interest. Pointing to the arguments forwarded by Beetham (1996) and similarly Lowndes and Wilson (2001), Callanan (2005, 2011) contends that participative mechanisms must be capable of reaching beyond the ‘natural joiners’. He notes that well organised groups, generally groups from affluent areas who possess greater social or educational capital or specific demographic groupings such as the elderly display higher rates of participation. This is a point that is reinforced by Lowndes and Wilson (2001) who argue that the danger exists that the most marginalised in society are not necessarily represented in participatory structures11 (Callanan 2005: 925-926; Callanan 2011: 13-14).

In line with the academic commentary explored in this dissertations literature review, the ability to interest citizens in more participative mechanisms is continuing to be difficult. This point is emphasised by the IPA in their assessment of the SPC structures in Ireland. They contend, that there is a perception by the public that these structures are no more than tokenistic efforts to include non-traditional stakeholders, which in effect diminish the SPC process to a mere ‘talking-shop’. Indeed the IPA comment that during their research, many well established community groups confirmed that attendance at the SPC meetings was poor (IPA 2004: 44-49). Other participants confirmed that many sectoral interests did not attend if

---


the SPC meeting agenda was not reflective of concerning issues within their area of concern (IPA 2004: 15). Finn (2011) also shows evidence of this in his findings; noting the views of a senior council official that not all of the issues discussed at the SPCs are relevant to the actors involved, which the local authority official maintains can lead to an intellectual drift as some members struggle to contend with demands involved in assessing policy reports and documents around many issues (Finn 2011: 70).

The IPA, arguing in-line with Wilson (1999), conclude that people engage more readily around definitive issues, rather than abstract or long-term policy objectives. Likewise, the IPA contend that the need exists to focus the SPC process not only in delivering on medium to long-term policy objectives, but also in delivering more distinct and tangible policy on the ground in the short-term (Wilson 1999: 256; IPA 2004: 49-50). Callanan (2011) agrees that short-term goals or policy ‘quick-wins’ where possible is acceptable, if it leads to longer-term commitments, to building relationships and fostering greater cooperation within local the participatory processes of local government (Callanan 2011: 9).

In light of these findings the IPA (2004) make a number of recommended alterations to improve the SPC operational processes. They contend, that each SPC should have a discernable work programme running over a number of years, where participants could be involved in identifying the issues and concerns they would like to address. This work programme arrangement would provide continuity in terms of set policy goals and form the basis for meeting agendas for individual SPC meetings. The IPA recommended that a senior in-house local authority official should be appointed to discuss any matters between meetings if the Director of Services is un-available (IPA 2004: 54). The free flow of ideas is prioritised by the IPA, with that in mind, they emphasise that an atmosphere conducive to discussion should be encouraged. Ritualistic or other unnecessary formalities should be minimised, and all participants should be encouraged to participate by being offered a chance to give an
honest account of their beliefs pertaining to the matter in question. Documentation in relation to the agenda of each meeting should be available well in advance of all meetings, and all meeting minutes including the CPG meeting minutes should be quickly circulated to all SPC and CPG members. Research undertaken by the Director of Services should be provided in executive summary format in non-technocratic terms. Presentation style formats should be encouraged at SPC meetings where the main issue is primarily addressed and options or diverging avenues for remedied action should be initially included in an understandable way (IPA 2004: 55-57).

The IPA noted that on the part of the local authority and the full council, a more open-minded approach should be adopted to the SPC process particularly in relation to how elected members and council officials should be more attentive to the needs of the SPC structure. Elected members should take on a more pro-active stance as regards to the responsibility of decision-making. Medium and long-term policy goals are important, as is the ability for the SPC process to adapt national policy to suit local needs. Policy space should be maximised and the deliberation process should be extended where possible to include open access for both the members of the CPG and the DEHLG to explore other possibilities to broaden the policy process. This process should include that the SPC chairpersons be permitted to present policy recommendations to the full council (IPA 2004: 58).

4.6 Conclusion

BLG in 1996, underpinned by legislation which subsequently followed, provided for the establishment of the Strategic Policy Committee structure throughout local government in Ireland. The significance of these structures in terms of offering both a consultative and participatory framework within local government is outlined. Similarly outlined is the recommended composition in terms of representation, including also the make-up of each SPC and its area / scope of concerning interest. In addition a detailed breakdown of the
sectoral members by category is provided. This chapter concludes by providing a brief summary of the initial analysis and findings as carried out by the Institute of Public Administration of the SPC processes across Ireland in 2002 / 2003, which is bolstered by not only contemporary international comparisons, but by prominent Irish scholarly commentary regarding the efficacy of local participatory structures in Ireland.
Chapter 5 - Methodology

5.1 Introduction:

It is the focus of this chapter to describe the methodology employed in answering the research question arising from these earlier discussions:

*How effective are the Strategic Policy Committees as local government participation mechanisms in giving a voice to local community actors?*

From this research question the hypothesis is set out as:

*“Local governance mechanisms in Ireland are of little value in providing a voice for local community actors within the mechanisms of participation”*

To explore the question of local community voice in local governance, this dissertation assesses the Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) structures at local government level based on the evidence it derives from adopting a qualitative approach by means of both non-participant observational studies and semi-structured interviews. This primary research will be conducted across three local authorities, concentrating on the Community/Environmental and Housing pillars of the SPC process.

5.2 Research Design

In order to assess the value of the SPC process in providing a voice for civic participation, this dissertation adopts a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews as the primary method with individual actors from within the specified SPC processes gives detailed information regarding the experiences of those actors.

The qualitative design method is characterized as delivering a Constructivist/Interpretivist approach where un-structured and open-ended questions provide a holistic understanding of
the phenomena in question (Creswell 1994: 1-3; Creswell 2009: 181; Miles 1979: 594-599).

Devine (2002) contends that researchers, upon committing to this research paradigm, accept the view that actors attach subjective meanings to their own actions and secondly; they also attach interpretational meanings to their own situations (Devine 2002, cited in Marsh and Stoker 2002: 201).

*Operationalising Arnstein’s Ladder*

Table 2 highlights Arnstein’s Ladder below; while its use as a means of categorising the different levels of participation requires an operationalisation of the terms associated with each step of the ladder as they will then provide the themes from which analysis can take place.

*Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation and its Relationship to this Study*

**Manipulation Indicator:** Respondents detail experience of fait accompli in their role on the SPC and that decisions have been taken and they are there to give effect to them for the purposes of rubber stamping.

**Therapy Indicator:** Respondents detail experiences of attempts by the SPC structures to alter their positions and perspectives through council led training and information initiatives so as to affect their stance, purpose and position rather than address their issues.

**Information Indicator:** Respondents detail experiences of the one-way flow of information from council officials and elected councillors (*top-down*) to Community and Voluntary representatives, and the providing of both superficial and overly complex information only at an advance stage within the policy process.
Consultation Indicator: Respondents detail experiences of the lack of consultations within the SPC structures, where the ideas and input of the Community and Voluntary participants is confined or not sought or officially recorded regarding the issues concerning the SPC processes, in essence participation by the non-elected members is merely a window-dressing or talking-shop exercise.

Placation Indicator: Respondents detail experiences of their ineffectiveness or inability to lobby and make an impact particularly in relation to decision-making owing to their relatively small numbers. Similarly owing to their Community and Voluntary status as non-elected members of the participative structure, their effective remit is confined to that of merely making the SPC process appear an equitable forum, where in effect, no real decision-making capabilities have actually been conferred to non-elected process members.

Partnership Indicator: Respondents detail experiences of meaningful open-dialogue between the Community and Voluntary members and the other elected members that comprise the SPC processes. Where joint consensus is sought and agreed through a collaborative decision-making process predicated on a rule-guided framework which is capable of solving disagreements in an equitable and open manner.

Delegated Power: Respondents detail experiences where the elected members of the SPC processes have provided an opportunity to the Community and Voluntary sector participants to achieve a dominant or controlling position from a decision-making perspective over any policy before the SPC for discussion, or indeed where the Community and Voluntary members respective nominating bodies have been delegated the authority or responsibility regarding the implementation of an agreed policy.

Citizen Control: Respondents detail experiences where the elected officials on the SPC processes have willingly delegated full control to the Community and Voluntary sector
members and their respective organisations in relation to policy and its implementation, where no intermediaries exist in relation to the controlling or allocating of funding.

**Table 2: Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation - Indicators**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Citizen Power** | **Citizen Control** – Participants or residents can govern a programme or an institution, be in full charge of policy and managerial aspects, and be able to negotiate the conditions under which outsiders may change them.  
**Delegated Power** – When citizens achieve dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or programme. Citizens hold a clear majority of seats and where citizens hold significant sway as to be directly held accountable for the programme/plan outcomes  
**Partnership** – Power is equally shared between all participating parties, in effect decision-making and planning are joint responsibilities. Interactions are structured and ground rules exist to shape interaction |
| **Tokenism**      | **Placation** – The selection of preferred candidates on participative boards and the restriction of their numbers on those boards which in effect renders them a minority on the board  
**Consultation** – Consultation can be a legitimate step forward towards full participation, but if consultation is not combined with other modes of participation i.e. a meaningful two-way dialogue with no restrictions it renders the process meaningless  
**Information** – Meetings can be turned into vehicles for one-way communication, providing superficial information, discouraging questions or giving irrelevant answers |
| **Non-Participation** | **Therapy** – Attempting to alter the position or perspective of the participants through extensive training, which focuses on changing their modus operandi rather than addressing the issues they present  
**Manipulation** – people placed on rubber stamping advisory committees or advisory board |

(Arnstein 1969: 1-13)

**Method – Semi-Structured Interviews**

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) contend that semi-structured interviews provide a great deal of pertinent information. The selection of informants must be purposeful and not random, and can only be considered if best suited to provide information on the phenomenon in question. The researcher can clarify previously accrued information as provided by other qualitative research methods. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ascertain information
on people’s beliefs, their feelings, their motives, their present and past behaviours, and facts. Semi-structured interviews are more flexible, and likely to yield high quality results (Leedy and Ormrod 2005: 146-147). This dissertation has selected informants based on their sectoral interest membership within the community/environment and housing pillars of the SPC processes across three different local authorities. The list of interview questions is contained in Appendix 1.

5.3 Selection of Sites
In undertaking this research, the sites selected for examination were Limerick County Council, Limerick City Council and North Tipperary County Council. These choices were made pragmatically, due to the locality, availability and ease of access. However, more fundamentally, the decision to choose these sites was due to the demographic and geographic element. The Councils of Limerick City and Limerick County encompass both an urban and urban/rural demographic respectively, whilst the use of North Tipperary County Council is predominantly rural. Therefore the selection of sites within these settings brings a comparative element into the research.

5.4 Ethics Approval
Ethical approval from the ‘Ethics Board’ (ULREG) in the University of Limerick was received by (ULREG) for this body of work on 20/09/2012 – Code Number: 2012_09_04 AHSS.

5.5 Experiences in the Field
Nine semi-structured interviews in total were carried out between 14th and 27th January 2014, across three separate local authorities. Three Community and Voluntary members who currently sit on the different SPC processes from each local authority were interviewed. They were contacted for interview using either email or phone. The interviews were, carried out in
a neutral venue apart from in three cases, owing to work / personal commitments. These three interviews were carried out in their respective private dwellings. From the outset, all of the respondents expressed a preference to remain anonymous and not have their identity revealed in this research. All noted that they continue to sit on the SPC processes and likewise continue to work with and represent their respective nominating organisations. All nine respondents signed the (ULREG) consent form. Eight of the nine interviews were digitally recorded; however one participant (Interview/Respondent C) expressed a wish not to be audio recorded. The researcher noted by hand the details of interview C. The duration of all nine interviews ranged from twenty-one minutes to thirty-five minutes after formally commencing the interview process.
Chapter 6 - Data Findings, Analysis and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The underlying basis in carrying out this body of research was to question the value and participative nature in terms of ‘voice’ provided to the Community and Voluntary members of the SPC processes in local government across Ireland. This chapter presents the findings and analysis of this research, which brings the primary findings into Arnstein’s participation framework. A short conclusion summing up the whole body of work is then presented.

6.2 Research Findings and Analysis

The research findings and analysis is presented under headings which focus the readers’ attention to the direct voice of the Community and Voluntary sectoral attendees in SPCs. These headings sum up the responses given by the interviewees, and indicate the overriding perspective of the Community and Voluntary members to their role, influence and “voice” on their respective SPCs.

Finding 1 - “just a talking shop” and we are “rubber-stampers”

From the findings presented below it can be seen that from the Community and Voluntary perspective that the SPC processes are merely ‘talking shops’;

“the SPC process as it stands is just a ‘talking-shop’, councillors use it as a chance to have a go at each other about all sorts of things....because the press are there sometimes...its either that, or their slapping each other on the back for the great job they are doing....most of the time it has nothing or very little to do with the discussion taking place...very little if anything actually gets done... we have no real input at all...we sit there and listen.”

(Respondent A)

This sentiment is similarly echoed throughout the responses given by the participants:

“The SPC scheme as it stands at present is a place where a lot of talking goes on and nothing much else happens”

(Respondent F)
And,

“The SPC forum can be useful at times...but a lot of what is discussed has already been decided in other council meetings...I think it’s more of a talking shop really.”

(Respondent H)

The respondents were of the firm opinion that they had very little influence on the SPC. In effect the sentiments indicate that the SPC are merely ‘rubber-stamping exercises’, Respondent C remarked;

“The Community and Voluntary people are just there as ‘rubber-stampers’ for decisions that have already been made by the council and the councillors in other meetings that take place outside the SPC...honestly that’s the full truth of it.”

Whilst the features of participation characterising the role of the Community and Voluntary members on the SPCs as “filling seats”, Respondent E, feels that they are not listened to, that they are filling seats and they are partaking in an “official talking shop”.

These findings are similar to those presented by the IPA (2004) where elected councillors indicated that SPCs were not a direct framework for delivering definitive results and as such all decision-making should only be made by the full council and not participatory committees. The term ‘talking-shop’ is also used by the IPA (2004: 44) where they note, that there is a perception by the public that these structures are no more than tokenistic efforts to include non-traditional stakeholders in the local policy process, which in effect has diminished the SPC process to a mere ‘talking-shop’ style of participative engagement. Unfortunately, and indeed based solely on the primary research presented; this argument is also made by all of Community and Voluntary respondents interviewed within the SPC process as we can see from the selection here. This dissertations literature review presented arguments such as Fung (2006) and Smith (2005: 17), they are firmly adamant in their assertions; that for meaningful participation to take place, an open and inclusionary element
or space must be present within the participatory process. This space allows civil society representatives to be in position to actually influence the decision-making process. It can be argued this crucial element appears to be missing from the SPC processes examined by the researcher.

Finding 2 – It’s the “illusion of inclusion”

The SPC processes in local government were setup to provide a forum for local community actors to exercise their agency and ability to partake in the local policy process. From the data gathered, the evidence suggests that the Community and Voluntary representatives are of a different opinion, summed up by Respondent C;

“the illusion of inclusion...as I have said already we have no real say...no power to make any decision...what harm you know, we know as much as they do...if not more in some cases...we are the people on the ground every day...we see what needs to be done...but one thing that really frustrates me is that the councillors are constantly in and out of the meetings doing other thing.”

There is an inherent lack of value in the system with the rubber-stamping sentiment also remaining to the fore. This lack of value is manifested by the approaches to the fora by some councillors. Respondent B remarked that the SPC meetings “are a place for councillors to get some of their other work done” while continuing on to state that;

“councillors don’t take them that seriously, they come and go a lot during the meetings...it’s very distracting...and I have seen it several times that certain councillors stand up a walk out for one reason or another, or when certain other individuals start to speak...that’s all I’ll say about that...but it does happen regularly.”

The distinct lack of training also serves to underpin the idea from the Community and Voluntary perspective that their attendance on the SPCs is inconsequential (see also Finding Three). Respondents were strongly of the opinion that elected councillors do not take the SPC process that seriously, they use the SPC process time to carry out other work. Similarly it can be noted from the findings that the sentiment of the SPC process being a ‘top down’
arrangement comes across clearly. The ‘top down’ sentiment is evident even in the approach to running and organising the meetings which facilitates the council officials and councillors much more so than the members from the Community and Voluntary sector;

“the meetings are held during the working day, you know that don’t you...the council staff and the councillors have no problem attending...but I have to get time off from work to go...but I know of another person on my SPC that has to take an annual leave day because of the job they work at to attend the meetings...honestly you know, I don’t think anybody on the official side of things takes them that seriously...most things are already decided.”

(Respondent G)

These findings reflect the argument forwarded by McInerney and Adshead (2010: 123) that public officials may be indifferent to both delivering results from participative structures or believe that civil society organisations interfere with the normal functioning of the local authority. Similarly Finn’s (2011) primary research findings serve to uphold the ‘top down’ contention. The IPA in their 2004 report also recommend that they policy discussion space provided by the SPC processes should be maximised by the elected members and that both they and the council officials should be attentive to the needs of the SPC structures.

Finding 3 - “We have absolutely no say at all”

The Community and Voluntary sector representatives interviewed feel that they have absolutely no say at all. Respondent F infers strongly to the limitation of the SPCs as effective fora for the Community and Voluntary sector;

“we have no power...no say at all...the council and the councillors decide on most things...well all of the important decisions are made at other meetings...we listen to what is going on...we’re the recommendation people who are never listened to...experts are always listened to though...I have made several contributions in the SPC meetings and will continue to do so...but anything you say isn’t listened to...you do hear all the time that your contribution is of value to the meetings...but still it’s never listened to.”

(Respondent F)
Throughout the interview process the sense of frustration is quite detectable with all of the respondents indicating that they feel they are not listened to, that in fact the Community and Voluntary members have no real power;

“We have no influence...at this stage I go to the meetings just to see what is going on...what the council are doing next or planning to do...then I can go back to my organisation and tell them what’s going on”

(Respondent G),

While Respondent C stated;

“we never get a real chance to say anything and when we do, nobody listens...I have check the meeting minutes on a couple of occasions and my contributions to the meeting have been omitted several times.”

(Respondent C)

In terms of consultation, Respondent C is also critical of the process;

“the Community people never have a success on my SPC, all of the details and plans are worked out by experts or consultants...we are told about it when it’s finished...we decide nothing really...it’s always decided at the top...councillors like it that way as well...they get a chance to have their say at other meetings.”

This point is reiterated by Respondent I who feels that;

The council and the councillors do all of the thinking and deciding...we never get a chance to decide only to agree or not. If I disagree with something I do make my point...but it doesn’t matter...if it is decided to do something in other meetings well that’s the way it will go...no matter what I say.”

These sentiments are reflected across the findings and reflect a serious lack of value and influence in the participative structures, particularly in representing the Community and Voluntary sectoral ideas. The underlying current of dissatisfaction with their respective SPC process is constant in the replies given, where the respondents reiterate that elected councillors and the council staff decide everything at other meetings. Importantly all nine respondents were resolute in the fact that they see themselves and their remit as having no real or discernable role in any decision-making and that their opinions count for very little within their respective SPC process.
Similarly with regards to the lack of adequate training or indeed the fact that no training is provided in actually preparing people for their role and effective remit as community representatives on the SPCs is a cause for concern among all nine respondents.

Respondent D commented;

“we get no training...the councillors do...and so do the council employees, they get plenty of it...we could certainly do with a bit...but the way I look at it, it’s a waste of time training us...we have no say anyway...so why bother.”

Respondents F, H and I specifically highlight the deficiency in the process due to their lack of training, and the imbalance in the councillors training in the face of the lack of training presented to Community and Voluntary members. Their responses include;

“training is badly needed...I have never been offered any, I certainly would benefit from being able to make sense of how (............) decisions are made...it’s still a mystery to me...It changes all the time...I have asked for explanations about (............) decisions before...but was fobbed off...is it any wonder they don’t want to train us...then we would know as much as them...make sure you put that down in your report to the college”

(Respondent F),

“I have never been offered training...councillors get all the training because they like to decide on things and they like to keep their little bit of power, any thanks from the public they like to keep it...not that we are looking for thanks... we are rarely asked for our opinions on things...but every chance I get, I let them know what my thinking is”

(Respondent H)

And,

“we could do with training from the council...when I was nominated to sit on the SPC and it took me more than a year to try and get my head around what was going on...you know it’s not easy coming into this setup, it can be a bit intimidating...and I was afraid to ask a question in case I should know the answer...nobody tells you anything...you kind of learn as you go along”

The argument forwarded by Cuthill and Fien (2005: 65), Eade (1997: 32) including Smith et al (1999: 196) clearly demonstrates that the capacity building element which they jointly argue is most necessary in building as an effective means to operationalise citizen participation has not been prioritised or deemed necessary by the respective local authorities.
In a similar vein of thought McInerney and Adshead (2010: 122-123) backed up by Callanan (2011: 9) who jointly argue that all too often, too much has possibly been expected from these participatory processes, when consideration is given to the fact that no official training is provided or offered to one-third of the participants on the SPCs. Unfortunately the importance of capacity building through effective training mechanism seems to have yet again been missed as a significant precursor to meaningful participation from the Community and Voluntary sectors in the government ‘White Paper’ 2013 Putting People First-Action Programme for Effective Local Government. As previously discussed in chapter four, this document prioritises further training for elected councillors and other key stake-holders by the Institute of Public Administration; however the other key stake-holders are not identified in the document. Indeed one could argue that, if enhancing local democracy, by putting people first, is at the very heart of the government ‘White Paper’ Putting People First 2013, the important issue of training would have been equally prioritised for all members of the SPC processes across the country and irrespective of their representative status.

Finding 4 - “we are bombarded with paperwork” and given “meaningless answers”

All nine respondents indicated that they receive the SPC meeting minutes including the proposed agenda for the next meeting. The nine respondents also indicate how important the free-flow of information is if the SPC process is to function properly. This general free-flow of information however has and continues to cause problems for the Community and Voluntary sector members. Four respondents draw particular attention to what might be best identified as an information overload which they contend now routinely takes place;

Respondent A states that;

“sometimes we are bombarded with paperwork...hundreds of pages of reports...they are given out at the partnership meetings...we are expected to read all of this stuff in the meeting and then comment on it...or maybe if we are lucky enough we might get a chance to ask a question about it before the meeting ends...that’s unfair...a lot of the stuff we get is technical...reports on
this and that. It’s ok for the councillors they get plenty of time to read it...we don’t...it makes me very frustrated”.

Respondent C affirms this point;

“Reports are given to us in meetings...we have to digest all that technical stuff and then try to comment on it...if we don’t then that’s it... we asked to have reports emailed before the meetings...but I can’t see that happening.”

Respondent G is also critical of the amount of documentation;

“[Documents/Reports are] handed out and you are expected to read it in the meeting...that’s impossible to do...it feels like the more stuff we are given to read the less questions we can ask...and everything moves along fine...and it looks like loads of items on the agenda are covered.”

However, there seems to be some improvements as Respondent E states;

“I have to say that the flow of information is a lot freer than it was a year or two ago. The Director of Service has seen to that...and it makes it easier for me to plan if I want to say something”

The overriding sentiment here is that at each SPC meeting large volumes of often technical information is given to the Community representatives including other sectoral interests by the local authority. Respondent C gives insight here;

“a good share of the time the items that are on the agenda are fairly technical...it’s not that I don’t understand what is been discussed...but the technical people and engineers aren’t at the meeting to answer your questions...so sometimes councillors show off their technical skills in trying to answer your question. You see we are not at the meetings to ask the questions that we sometimes need answered. In fact some of the time or you could say a lot of the time, the items discussed has nothing to do with the concerns of the Community and Voluntary people and our side of things.”

All this information has to be read, examined and evaluated by the Community and Voluntary sector members while actually in situ in their respective SPC meetings, if they wish to be in a position to ask a question pertaining to the information contained in the information.

Although all nine respondents indicated that no actual impediment existed regarding their ability to ask questions on any matter pertaining to the agenda of the SPC meeting, but the answers are often fragmented, or simply not satisfactory;
Respondent H commented;

“Asking questions is not a problem...we can ask them...but replies are not always available...you can get a meaningless answer or on a rare occasion you might get something of value...the favourite one you hear is that we’ll get back to you on that.

Respondent B seems more dogged in their approach, though it seems to lead to weariness on the part of the council, than on achieving answers;

“If I ask a question and don’t get an answer...I’ll keep at it until I get an answer...it does work...if you persist...anyway it doesn’t bother me...several councillors have told me that I’m considered awkward to deal with...that I like to stirring things up and making things look bad for the council.”

Clearly the technical expertise which is freely available to the elected members is not available to the Community and Voluntary members, nor is there a level of respect for the opinions and insight between different members of the SPCs. One could also argue that members from the Community and Voluntary sector including representatives for other sectoral interests are at a distinct disadvantage to the elected members on the SPCs, who have been provided with this often technical documentation in advance of the SPC meeting, or have been in a privileged position to discuss its contents in other council meetings.

In relating these findings back to the literature, the argument forwarded by Sørensen and Torfing (2009: 252-254) where they acknowledge that a closed or selected policy network may be more conducive to producing more favourable policy outcomes, where like-minded individuals can discuss issues of policy and determine an appropriate course of action. However in relation to the SPC process, the degree of openness of SPCs is for another discussion, but what cannot be discounted is the Community and Voluntary sector members are part of deliberative / participative process in local government and their value as members is being muted by a torrent of technical documentation. Madden (2010: 178) argues that the newer public governance arrangements but particularly at local level can only be effective or
meaningful where a ‘leadership through partnership’ approach is used. Indeed Finn (2011: 70) comments in his research that because not all of the issues before the SPC for discussion are relevant to the actors involved that according to one of his primary sources ‘a senior local authority official’ that intellectual drift can take place among the sectoral interests. In more precise terms Finn (2011: 62) outlines the comments drawing from his primary research findings and notes that a senior local authority official from a Housing SPC commented, that other SPC members whether elected or not, are essentially not interested in contributing or engaging in policy discussion (Finn 2011: 60). Unsurprisingly Finn again returns to this official’s claim, who asserts that ‘administrative dominance’ of the Housing SPC is wholly necessary as the participants “do not have the desire or capacity to engage in high level discussion on housing policy”. Therefore it can be argued that the role of the local authority staff attached to the SPC processes is to ensure sectoral interests are singularly prioritised and provided with all relevant documentation well in advance of the proposed SPC meeting. Similarly the opportunity to put questions to the most appropriate professional, most capable of answering their concerns, is something which seems to be absent from the practice of the SPCs from which the respondents were derived. As discussed in chapter four, the IPA in their 2004 findings also suggest that documentation should be presented in an executive / non-technocratic format, so as to ensure all SPC member can actively and equally participate.

Finding 5 - “the SPCs meetings don’t really achieve anything for us”

The Community and Voluntary representatives interviewed indicated that they have achieved some success albeit small and strictly confined to particular local needs in their respective areas. These small successes can be looked at from different perspectives. Yes, one could argue they achieved a success in their locality, but when one reads what to date they feel they actually achieved as members of a participative structure of local government it reflects quite poorly on the SPC process in general;
I worked with a number of councillors and we managed to persuade the
council to do something...the houses really looked dreadful and we were
thinking of entering a local authority run competition... but I have to admit,
that work was done outside the SPC setup...you see I am fairly friendly with
some of them and we all went straight to the council officials after the
meeting.”

(Respondent A)

Indeed as can be clearly discerned these small local successes were achieved outside of the
formal business of the SPC process. Indeed one could argue that any persistent and civically
minded individual could equally have achieved what these two individuals managed by
lobbying his / her own local councillor;

Respondent H commented;

“The SPC meetings don’t really achieve anything for us...you see the
councillors and council officials really decide everything...so I use my time to
make councillors and officials aware of problems in our communities...I lobby
them.”

One could similarly argue that as members of the SPC process it provided the two
respondents with the opportunity to more formally engage with councillors and local
authority officials as a means to advocate for their respective communities needs;

I seek out the officials I need to see and keep annoying them to get small bits
and pieces done...it does work, if you know how to go about it right and don’t
offend people...others do it as well...it’s tedious...and money is always the
issue...I managed to get a lot...well a good few small things done...I’m not
really supposed to do this...but I feel I have achieving something.”

(Respondent H)

However what is fundamentally missing from this more positive engagement equation is the
fact that out of the nine respondents interviewed; only two people were in a position to
comment on trivial / minor successes, with no respondent attributing an achieved success for
their representative organisation from being a member of an SPC. Respondent I commented;

“SPC meetings don’t really achieve much in the line of getting things done in
the community...if I want to get something done urgently for my organisation,
then I go and see the council officials or I contact the councillors who are to be fair pretty good in my area in getting the sort of things I need to have sorted out done fairly quickly.”

In relating to these findings back to the literature as previously discussed, one has to take an overview of the functioning of the SPC process. The primary research carried out in this dissertation could do the participative structures in local government an injustice if it was to claim or suggest that there is a systematic failure present within the SPC processes across local authorities in Ireland. Therefore in examining the replies given by the respondents, one could contend that some long-running difficulties continue to exist with the participatory structures at local level as outlined by McInerney and Adshead (2010) where they also contend that ill-equipped or inexperienced public officials have in the past been subject to pressure to deliver results from participatory processes without proper organisational or adequate support structures (McInerney and Adshead 2010: 123). Callanan (2011: 9) makes a similar argument, that in bolstering the usefulness of local participatory structures, local government officials must be able to develop new skills such as listening, mediation and arbitration along with being capable of understanding the differences between the parties concerned. It short he argues it requires the moving away from the traditional bureaucratic norms of issuing and following orders to encourage the building of new and innovative ways of joint collaboration and communication in dealing with issues and concerns as they arise within the newer participatory process of Irish local government.

Other Findings

1. Interestingly all nine respondents describe similar experiences across the three different research sites despite the urban, urban/rural and rural divide chosen by the researcher. It has become apparent that the SPC process is inherently designed as a
‘top down’ process with only a minimal / if any concern shown for the opinions of the sectoral interests.

2. Somewhat contrary to the findings of the (IPA report in 2004: 44-49) whose research revealed that many well established community groups confirmed that their members’ attendance at the SPC meetings was generally quite poor, this seems from the limited research carried out by the researcher to have improved. All of the nine respondents interviewed confirmed that all of the SPC meetings are well attended by the sectoral interests but particularly well attended by the Community and Voluntary sector representatives.

3. The reporting back or the providing of feed-back from the SPC process to the relevant representative / nominating organisations was highlighted as an accountability and transparency issue of concern, as expressed by some elected councillors and council officials to the IPA (2004: 34-35, 54-55). As previously outlined Finn (2011: 69-72) who contends, that the participative effort from the one-third sectoral interests in the participative processes of local government is unremunerated unlike elected councillors and most often combined with the demands of other full time employment. Indeed from the limited research carried out in this body of work, the Community and Voluntary sector members indicated clearly that their information feed-back structures are well established and fully transparent with all of the requisite information garnered from the SPC processes being made readily available for appraisal by the public on their respective Community and Voluntary forum websites.

6.3 Analysis of findings

This dissertation’s hypothesis as outlined in chapter five is that;

‘Local governance mechanisms in Ireland are of little value in providing a voice for local community actors within the mechanisms of participation’
The research question which is derived from this hypothesis is:

*How effective are the Strategic Policy Committees as local government participation mechanisms in giving a voice to local community actors?*

This research question in turn provided the basis upon which to carry out this body of work. As indicated in the chapter five, Arnstein’s (1969) Ladder of Participation is the analysis framework used in interpreting the findings of this dissertation’s primary research. The participation categories as discussed by Arnstein (1969: 1-13) fall under three distinct headings of ‘non participation’, ‘tokenism’ and ‘citizen control’, with a number of characteristics under each heading as outlined in this dissertation’s methodology.

**Non-participation Element**

Arnstein (1969: 3-4) argues that participation at this level of interaction is merely confined to a ‘rubber-stamping’ exercise, where the participation is actually inconsequential to the outcome of the decisions made. As can be discerned from the findings of the primary research conducted and in the responses outlined above, that evidence invariably suggests that the SPC processes examined here are ineffective and directly serve to prioritise the roles of both the elected councillor and the council officials, whilst narrowly confining the role and voice of the Community and Voluntary sectors to the lowest forms of participation, merely to attend and listen at meetings.

**Tokenistic Participation Element**

Reflecting on Arnstein’s (1969: 5-6) contentions that meetings within participative processes can be turned into vehicles for one-way communication, or as a means in providing superficial information, and where questions are discouraged or the answers given are of an extraneous nature was also explored. It can be clearly seen from the evidence derived from the interviews, that although information appears to be freely available to the Community and
Voluntary participants, the information is in many cases received too late. Its content is often overly complex, considering the fact that no training is provided to the sectoral interests. This in turn serves to both hinder their ability to ask questions and to more fully partake in the SPC proceedings. In real terms, the respondents feel the only positive use the information provides is in effect to find out what is going on in the local authority. In relation to consultation, it is apparent that levels of consultation are very low or even non-existent with the SPC processes. The responses as provided and as outlined above clearly indicate that in relation to the amount of influence or “voice” Community and Voluntary members actually have is also very small and not actually a discernable trait of the SPC processes.

*Citizen Power and Participation Element*

In relation to citizen power Arnstein (1969: 9-13) argues that three attributes namely ‘partnership, delegated power and citizen control’ are the primary characteristics of an open participatory process. ‘Partnership’ she argues in best typified where power is shared equally among all of the participants which is further underpinned in a co-agreed rule guided structure, where joint decision-making is a discernable element of a mutually inclusive collaborative process. Arnstein (1969) contends that ‘delegated power’ is another observable element of an inclusive process which allows the citizens as participants to achieve a leading and determining role over decisions which affect their lives or community. Finally Arnstein (1969) in her participation framework argues that the ‘citizen control’ provides the definitive configuration or ideal conditions under which a truly devolved and citizen led participative forum can exist. The participants, she argues, are given the agency to freely govern a programme or institution, set the agenda and drive a policy or programme to a conclusion, whilst being freely able to control the demands of external influences advocating for alternative policy considerations.
In relation to citizen power where citizen participation is best described as an open participatory process, from the evidence gathered by this research, there is little to no evidence which reflects a holistic and open participatory process. Furthermore, it can be stated that there is no clear evidence of a shared balance of power, or the ability of the Community and Voluntary members to set the agenda setting or even their inclusion of their voice in the decision making processes of the SPCs examined. The evidence in fact suggests a strong reliance on the voice of others such as officials, consultants, experts and councillors. There is no clear evidence of Community and Voluntary members having any influence, any power and indeed any role other than to facilitate the passing of already agreed policy.

However, while there is a clear limitation evident, one can discern that Community and Voluntary members of the SPCs utilise their roles pragmatically, by lobbying and garnering information to take back to their respective nominating organisations, and this is seen as marginally beneficial, in understanding the councils’, their operations and the decisions taken. This benefit though, is not what was envisioned or intended when the SPCs were originally set up; in essence it further highlights the division of power and separation amongst local authorities and wider civil society, including the perpetuation of a form of clientelism inherent across the Irish political landscape.
Conclusion

Overview of Topic Explored

This dissertation has explored the concept of “voice” in relation to the non-electoral participants of the SPC processes of local government in Ireland. The concepts of governance and participation informed the background regarding this research. The historical relevance of participation and partnership in Ireland has been discussed throughout this study. Using Arnstein’s ladder of participation the level of participation on the SPCs as local government participative mechanisms by members of the Community and Voluntary sectors were examined. The focus of this examination has been whether or not the local governance mechanisms in Ireland are of little value in providing a voice for local community actors. The outcome of this research would suggest that the SPCs as local governance mechanisms fail to give adequate voice to the community representatives.

Overview of Approach Taken

This research has taken a qualitative interpretivist approach in researching this topic. From the outset this research required desk research and applied a semi-structured interview method. Nine interviews were conducted with members from the Community and Voluntary sectors which sit on the SPC processes. It is from this primary research data analysis that we can interpret the voice and therefore level of participation present from the perspective of the Community and Voluntary members.

Main Findings

The main findings of this research reveal that the SPC process has not provided the Community and Voluntary sectoral members with a voice in the local policy process. In supporting this contention this body of work has provided the evidence that strongly indicates
• Little value in terms of participation exists from the Community and Voluntary sector in the SPC process.

• There is a lack of balanced capacity in terms of respect for the Community and Voluntary sector members within the SPCs.

• The SPC mechanisms remain wholly ‘top down’

• The SPCs within local government are non-consultative and non-collaborative processes.

• There still remains a high level of clientelism with Community and Voluntary sector members still relying on personal links and ties in achieving a minimal amount of success.

• The main positive arising from this research seems to be that Community and Voluntary activists gain access to elected councillors and local authority officials and learn who to interact with regarding issues they are seeking to address. However this is unilateral rather than undertaken within the group fora.

• The main finding interpreted from this body of work is that the SPC structures as mechanisms for participation give inadequate voice to the Community and Voluntary sector and the indication is that the structures are closer to the non-participation and tokenistic elements of Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation (1969).

Recommendations

From the information accrued by the body of work, it is apparent that issues around open participation and collaboration exist with the SPC structures. Are the sentiments expressed through this research echoed by other sectoral members of Ireland’s SPCs. Indeed further research incorporating the experiences of other sectoral interests may prove beneficial in evaluating local participatory voice.
Reference List:


Taskforce on Active Citizenship (2007) *Report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship*, Dublin, [Online], available:

Bibliography:


Appendix 1.

List of Interview Questions:

1. How did you come to be a representative on the SPC process? What route did you take?
2. In your opinion is the participative forum provided by the SPCs useful? Can you give me an example of any success you have had as a member regarding a policy outcome?
3. In your opinion as a Community and Voluntary sector member of the SPC process, what level of influence do you have on the SPC?
4. How have you found the experience as a member of the SPC process?
5. Are the SPC meetings well attended?
6. Is there any process of team-building, training or support in place?
7. How do you report back or provide feed-back to your representative organisation?
8. Do you receive adequate information regarding the issues under discussion? What level of information do you receive?
9. From the Community and Voluntary Perspective, how could the SPC process be improved?
10. From your perspective, is the SPC process restricted or confined in any way?
11. What level of input do you have regarding setting the agenda or how do you ensure the Community and Voluntary sector issues are addressed?