
We recommend you cite the published version.
The publisher’s URL is: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2011.642948

Refereed: Yes


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COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SPATIAL PLANNING: EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND LAY STAKEHOLDERS.

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Acknowledgements

The research from which this paper derives was conducted with the help of a grant from the National Empowerment Partnership. The views expressed in this paper do not necessarily represent those of the Partnership and any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the author. Gratitude also is expressed to Professor Stephen Owen of the Countryside and Community Research Institute, for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SPATIAL PLANNING: EXPLORING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND LAY STAKEHOLDERS.

ABSTRACT

The literature that explores relationships between lay and professional stakeholders in community participation generally suggests that professionals perceive five main difficulties in working with lay people: it is unnecessary within democracies; lay people lack expertise; they are not representative; there is commonly a lack of trust, and decision-making is made more complex. In respect of spatial planning in South West England, from survey evidence these difficulties are not so apparent except in respect of complex decision-making. It is likely that the variation between the literature and the survey is influenced by the longer heritage of community participation in the spatial planning process in England, than in most other local authority services.

112 words

1. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES IN COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Principles and practices of community participation have been subjected to academic scrutiny for over 30 years as western societies have moved from strong centralised models of government to a differentiated polity (Rhodes, 1997) where greater numbers of people – public sector, private sector and voluntary sector alike – have had an increasing role in the making of public decisions (Kooiman, 2003). Societies are becoming increasingly self-governing in a range of formal and informal contexts (Dean, 1999).

A popular theme of research within this area has focused on understanding models of community participation (Paddison et al (2008), Curry (2009)) and explorations of how
communities are organising themselves to respond to both the opportunities and responsibilities that this challenge brings (Cherrett (1999), Imrie and Raco, (2003)). There has been an interest, too, in the ways in which communities have moved from being consulted on public domain decisions (representative democracy) to being active participants in community action (participative democracy) (Owen, et al, 2007) as well as the outcomes that can be achieved by such active community effort (McAreavey (2006), Owen and Moseley (2003), Owen et al (2007)).

Rather less attention has been paid within this differentiated polity to ways in which professionals are responding to (and feel about) an increasing community influence over ‘their’ decisions (Franklin and Ebdon, 2005). In many domains they are having to make significant changes to their modus operandi, not only in respect of ceding power and authority to communities, but also in taking on the extra tasks of ‘nurturing’ communities in a number of respects, into such roles of influence.

This paper focuses on the views of these professionals about community involvement in the wake of the Statutory ‘duty to involve’ communities in most local authority domains, which came into force in England in April 2009. It reports on the views of professional local authority spatial planners about a number of aspects of community involvement, reporting on a telephone survey of sixteen local authorities (with some triangulation from the community sector) in the South West region of England conducted in November and December 2009. These authorities were identified, through a number of different methods, as being ones in which ‘good practice’ in community involvement in planning could be observed. Anonymity was assured to all respondents of the survey, to allow more candid discussion.

The paper is structured in the following manner. First, the Statutory Duty is outlined and then set in the context of concepts of community participation as a means of describing the Duty as a relationship between professionals and the community. This relationship is
reviewed in general before being explored in the specific context of spatial planning using three vehicles: expert vs. lay knowledge; equity, and trust. Conclusions are drawn about the relationship between professionals and the lay community in respect of community involvement in spatial planning.

2. INSTITUTIONS OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND THE 2009 STATUTORY DUTY

In England there is a panoply of what North (2005) calls ‘institutions’(1) for community participation. A range is reviewed, for example in Burns and Taylor (1998). This range has been considered, by some of the survey respondents in the survey reported below, to be sufficiently large actually to be confusing to both communities and professionals alike.

Whilst there is a long history of policies for community participation and empowerment in England, the trigger for this paper has been the institution of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 in England which, under Section 138, introduces a legal obligation: a Statutory ‘duty to involve’ the community on the part of local authorities. It came into force in April 2009 and embraces citizen involvement in all local decision making and service provision within the purview of the local authority (and health authorities) and not just spatial planning. Authorities are required to take steps to co-ordinate activities and to inform, consult and involve local people and organisations so that these activities take place in an integrated way through the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). The purpose of the Duty is to: ‘embed a culture of engagement and empowerment’ in local communities. (DCLG, 2008a).
3. FORMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Within the literature on community participation, three dominant forms are articulated. Firstly, there is a genuine motivation on the part of ‘governors’ to empower people in public decisions so that populations (societies, communities) play an active role in their own self-government (Dean, 1999). This is commonly termed deliberative democracy (Dryzek, 2000), associated with ‘modernising local government’ and ‘democratic renewal’. Key in this approach is getting more (hitherto marginalised) people to take part in ‘pubic’ decisions. In the context of spatial planning, this form is exemplified by the production of village design statements and parish plans, where communities have the opportunity to take part in an initiative that is likely to enhance their well-being, but were there are no immediate negative consequences of not taking part.

Secondly there has been an increasing recognition that the spiralling cost of ‘welfarism’ is not sustainable. Pushing the responsibility for public decisions away from the State and onto communities allows smaller bureaucracies and reduces exchequer cost (Hunt and Wickham, 1994). This has been described as responsible participation (Harbermas, 1984) where citizenship is an ‘obligation’ rather than an ‘opportunity’. It can be considered to be a process that brings communities into conformity with state objectives (Cochrane, 2003). In the spatial planning context, the most commonly cited example of this form of community participation is the shift of local authority housing into the ‘housing association’ sector, where the voluntary sector has been given the responsibility of taking on a former state role, but many other examples can be observed in the movement of service provision more generally from the state to the community sector.

The third dominant strand discussed in the literature is the emergence of neo-liberalism in modern democracies that espouses shifting the ‘opportunity’ for the provision of hitherto publicly provided goods and services onto individuals as part of personal freedom (Lemke, 2001). State bureaucracies here give way to individual rights,
responsibilities and freedoms that offer the potential for reshaping the lives of all (Rose, 1999). This differs from concerns about the costs of welfarism in that it asserts the freedom of the individual rather than the need to reduce bureaucracies. Again in spatial planning terms, the relaxation of the need for planning permission on smaller scale householder developments from the mid 1980s provides a good example of this shift in ‘rights’ from the state to the individual, but more commonly in the context of this survey, the ‘right’ of individuals to object to planning applications in general (invariably for self-interested reasons) is firmly within this neo-liberal tradition.

In the context of these forms and the community participation movement generally, the Statutory ‘duty to involve’ under the 2007 Act in respect of spatial planning is curious one for at least two reasons. The first is that is places obligations on local authorities (to involve the community) but provides only opportunities for communities to become involved: it is a kind of inverse of responsible participation. This would seem to place an unreasonable burden on local authorities as ultimately they have no control over the propensity for communities to become active irrespective of mechanisms of inducement.

Secondly, as a number of respondents in the survey were keen to point out, the Statutory Duty per se has little force in spatial planning since the requirements of the Duty have existed at least since the 1965 Planning Advisory Group (Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1965). One survey respondent suggested that the 2009 Statutory Duty was actually designed to bring other public service provision up to the level of public involvement that has been enjoyed by spatial planning – in many ways spatial planning is seen as an exemplar of increased community involvement in all domains of local authority decision-making.
4. PROFESSIONALS AND LAY INVOLVEMENT: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP

Of course the founding legislation of post war spatial planning did not hold to the values of the 1965 Planning Advisory Group: otherwise it would not have been necessary. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 did not encourage public involvement, even to the extent of denying information to communities about planning proposals in their formative stages (Ward, 1994). The architect Minister of Town and Country Planning of at the time of the 1947 legislation, Lewis Silkin, the then Minister of Town and Country Planning, was sceptical about the abilities of the public to make a useful contribution.

“It is necessary to lead the citizen – to guide him. The citizen does not always know exactly what is best”

Lewis Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning, 1950

But by the late 1960s, the principle of public participation in planning had become accepted as part of a more general governmental move to disperse power within society. The 1965 Planning Advisory Group (Ministry of Housing and Local Government 1965) maintained that public participation in the planning process would be necessary for it to achieve its purposes satisfactorily and specifically stated that local planning authorities “must provide an opportunity for local comment or objections to be made and must consider these views before adopting a plan” (ibid p. 44). These precepts found their way in to the 1968 Town and Country Planning Act.

Developments in public participation in the Skeffington Report (Skeffington Committee, 1969) were ambivalent, but did suggest more public involvement at plan preparation stage. Commentators have since suggested that this required greater preparation and articulation and because of this, it increased the scope of organised interest groups to influence the planning process (Ward, 1994). Outside of this, Skeffington, like Silkin
before him, was not keen that public participation should diminish the control of planning professionals:

“Participation involves doing as well as talking and there will be full participation only when the public are able to take an active part throughout the plan-making process. There are limitations to this concept. One is that responsibility for preparing a plan is, and must remain, that of the local planning authority. Another is that the completion of plans...is a task demanding the highest standards of professional skill, and must be undertaken by the professional staff of the local planning authority“ (Skeffington, 1969, p.1)

Thus, Skeffington saw public participation nesting within the existing framework of representative democracy, improving the flow of information between planners and the public. The report, however, did open the door to the growing realisation that spatial planning was no longer regarded as a purely technical or scientific exercise, acknowledging that it rested to an extent on value judgements about desirable futures, including the judgements of the communities that such decisions affected (Taylor, 1998).

From the early 1990s, community involvement in planning became more pro-active through a number of informal exercises such as ‘planning for real’ ‘community development systems’ and not long after, parish planning. Here, communities were beginning to lead in the plan making process rather than just responding to the efforts of professionals as Skeffington had advocated. Two respondents from the survey reported here suggested that these initiatives had mixed success but noted that one of their hallmarks was a considerable increase in the amount of time that planning authorities (and indeed communities themselves) devoted to community participation: the public and the professional alike were on a steep learning curve.
Although not a sea change, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act of 2004, consolidated this more pro-active community involvement through the introduction of the Local Development Framework (LDF) which required a Statutory Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) that set out the means by which communities would be actively involved in planning. This has become pivotal for informing both the LDF and development control decision-making. The 2004 Act too, suggested some of the respondents to the survey reported here, formalised a shift in community involvement from what had been an ex post process – consultation once a plan had been developed, to an ex ante one – active involvement at the beginning of plan-making. This was something, they felt, that the public had taken a while to adjust to.

Commentary on the 2004 Act (for example, Baker *et al.*, 2006) has suggested, however, that such public involvement often did not equate to empowerment and was susceptible to being exploited differentially by a range of both communities of place (more articulate and affluent communities often seeking to resist development (Curry, 2001)) and communities of interest (house builders, the CPRE, and other well organised pressure groups (Leach *et al.*, 2005)). Thus whilst pro-active community involvement in spatial planning was well established by this time, it was not without its limitations.

The relationship between professional spatial planners and the lay public has undergone considerable maturation in the intervening 60 years to the 2009 Statutory Duty. But in more general terms the negative sentiments of Silkin are nevertheless reported in the literature in the context of professionals and lay people working together for common public policy and implementation ends (King and Stivers 1998).

Mathews (1984), for example, cited in Yang, (2006) suggests that there are four inherent ‘resistances’ on the part of professionals to community involvement. The first is that it is not necessary, as public services are provided through a representative democratic process and elections are all that is required to involve the citizen fully. The
second is that the community is not ‘expert’ enough to be able to make appropriate decisions about complex issues. The third is that it is considered difficult to secure the views of the community collectively, in terms of what it wants, without running the risk of responding to only those who express their views. The fourth is that the values of the public are difficult to understand in terms of the language that is used to express what people mean. It cannot be assumed that they all mean the same thing.

In addition to these factors, Kweit and Kweit (1981) suggest that professionals are apprehensive about citizen involvement because it can lead to and increased complexity in policymaking, increased conflict within the community and increased inequality because of an uneven distribution of resources, power and competency. Rosembaum (1978) also notes that it is perceived to lead to professional staff overload and a lack of time and resources. In sum, Yang (2006) suggests that professionals commonly view community participation as:

“time-consuming, costly, unwieldy, chaotic and unproductive. Sometimes (it) can exacerbate conflicts, result in undue influence of uninformed or unqualified individuals and become antidemocratic.” (page 574)

These five reported groups of attitudes were explored in the telephone surveys through questions about professionals’ perceptions of the purposes of community participation, who the principal activists were perceived to be, and what their motivations were. In respect of the view that community participation is unnecessary because existing democratic processes involve the citizen fully, none of the survey authorities felt that community participation could not improve on existing democratic processes, with three authorities suggesting that the low voting turnout for both national and local elections did beg questions about the representative mandate of elected members anyway. In contrast to election turnouts, one of the ‘triangulation’ interviewees noted that nearly all of the parish planning exercises that the community organisation interviewed had been
involved in, had been built on surveys that embraced upwards of 90% of the local population: much more representative than election percentages in these local areas.

Six of the authorities legitimated community participation with principles of deliberative democracy: it gives people the opportunity to be actively involved and to influence their local environment. It gives them more control, makes them more empowered and therefore potentially makes them more resilient as local communities. A slightly greater number made recourse to responsible participation principles, exemplified by:

“the public sector spending cuts will mean that the community will need to do more to help themselves and community involvement is part of the way to achieve this” (TI 7)

But more subtly in respect of community responsibility, three professionals reported that community participation allowed the development of consensus and gave them validation for their actions: buying in to planning decisions requires communities also to take some responsibility for them. The role of democratic processes in community participation is developed further in the conclusions to this paper.

In respect of the feeling of professionals that communities lacked expertise, the opposite view prevailed in the survey. Three interviewees certainly suggested that communities found it more difficult to contribute to discussions about higher level strategic plans (and planning principles) than to local site issues. But the prevailing view was that communities brought particular knowledge to planning decisions in two min ways. Lay people provided important ‘local expertise’ but, secondly, the way that local communities were commonly constructed, particularly through the development of Local Strategic Partnerships, meant that ‘community’ members brought particular specialist knowledge by being members, for example, of the fire service, police, National Health Service, church and the like. Add to this the active role of government agencies (Natural England, Highways Agency) to the ‘community’ planning process and it summed to a greater
available expertise than that which was available only to spatial planners. The significance of lay and professional knowledge in developing this relationship is considered further in section five below.

The resistance on the part of professionals to lay people in respect of *community representativeness* was more mixed. Most acknowledged that where partnerships with communities worked well community groups could be characterised as being made up of a wide spectrum of local people, community groups, town and parish council representatives, local businessmen and people involved with the local community. One authority suggested, that many ‘partnerships’ tended to be seen as “*balanced, moderate and neutral*” (TS1). In contrast to communities of place, however, five authorities noted that single interest groups (communities of interest) tended to adopt positions of ‘opposition’ to local authorities born of their preoccupation with a particular issue, and this was not necessarily representative of the views of the wider community. Several authorities also noted that community views were likely to be more or less representative depending on their participatory context. Participation in development control decision making was likely to be driven more by self-interest than involvement in community-led planning for example, a point that is considered further in section six below.

The third ‘resistance’ in the literature in respect of professionals working with lay people is that *the values of communities are obscure*. Four authorities did note that it was not always clear what communities were trying to achieve with their proposals or that there was not any clear ‘community’ view distinct from the views of dominant individuals. But the majority view expressed by twelve authorities was that these values were effectively conveyed when appropriate *intermediaries* were used to express them. Most commonly these were considered to be either elected authority members or parish councils. At the core of the acceptance of values between lay and professional people is the trust that is held between them and this is considered further in section seven below.
Concordance between the literature and the survey was, however, to be found in the fourth ‘resistance’, that community participation led to increased complexity and resource use. All authorities reported considerable increases in the time required to involve communities fully and most noted that this time was often necessary ‘outside of normal working hours’. Some also pointed out that time and resources were also part of the contribution of communities themselves and that in negotiating new relationships between professional and lay people, transactions costs could be high. The institutions for community participation also were reported as being numerous and diverse adding to the complexity of processes. Four authorities suggested that the costs of embracing community participation were hardly justifiable in respect of what was being achieved, certainly within their authority.

5. PROFESSIONAL VS LAY KNOWLEDGE

One cornerstone of the relationship between professional and lay people in community participation is the possession, manipulation and use of knowledge to bring about change. The power associated with knowledge invariably influences behaviour as particular knowledges become assimilated by groups within the population (Foucault 1997). Foucault (1978) also suggests that such power through knowledge leads to more effective forms of social ‘control’ enabling individuals more effectively to govern themselves. Knowledge allows self-regulation.

The extent to which communities therefore possess sufficient knowledge to make an informed contribution to spatial planning, will have a significant influence over the success of their involvement. The extent to which communities actually have such knowledge will influence the quality of the outcomes of the decisions with which they are involved. The extent to which they are perceived to have such knowledge (by planning professionals) will influence the process of decision making. In this context, Yang (2005)
suggests, it is invariably the professionals themselves that seek to educate the communities so that the knowledge they use in making decisions is ‘their’ knowledge.

Two knowledge-based tensions can be discerned in the literature: that between expert knowledge and lay knowledge; and that between technical knowledge and local knowledge. In respect of the former, much of the early scepticism of professionals relating to community participation centred on the inability (in their view) of the lay public to understand expert knowledge and to use it meaningfully either inductively or deductively (Rosenbaum (1978), Bok (2001)). Others have suggested that lay knowledge is hugely variable across the community as is the ability to assimilate and use it (Beck, 1992).

In respect of technical vs local knowledge, Fischer (1995) suggests that professionals tend to hold a ‘technocratic’ view of knowledge that favours generalisable positivist knowledge over specific local knowledge. It also favours reason-based, abstract, scientific expertise over open, interactive, concrete common sense: ‘local knowledge’ held by community groups is often mistrusted by professionals (Zanetti, 1998). Yang (2006) suggests that the more that professionals trust the knowledge of lay people, they more likely they are to involve them in decision-making.

But Harbermas (1984) suggests that this involvement actually enhances the knowledge base because the ‘negotiated’ (between lay people and professionals) development of knowledge is superior to technocratic (or scientific) knowledge in the resolution of complex social problems. Dryzek (1987) suggests three reasons for this. Firstly, scientific knowledge tends to break down complex problems into a set of more simple ones and then reassemble them. With complex social issues, it is the linkages between the disaggregated problems that are important as well as the problems themselves. Negotiated knowledge is better at addressing the linkages. Secondly decision-making involving lay people and professionals working together can accommodate more than
one value system at a time, whereas ‘systems’ thinking assumes only one value system. Similarly, third, it can accommodate different viewpoints and can even be used in situations where there are no articulated viewpoints (Ostrom 1990). This kind on negotiated knowledge also has advantages where the nature of the ‘problem’ is unclear (Fisher, 1993).

The influence of knowledge on the professional/lay relationship from the survey appears more subtle than these two bilateral polarities. Firstly, a number of professionals acknowledged that single interest community groups commonly held more expert knowledge than they themselves did. They had the time and enthusiasm to become experts and were often used as such by local authorities. The knowledge issue here appeared to be slightly different: whilst they were experts in their field of interest, their knowledge was partial. They lacked the ability to contextualise their expert knowledge with other knowledge domains and were therefore unable to ‘see the bigger picture’. This was thus likely to lead to sub-optimal decision-making: their positions were characterised as ‘unreliable’.

Second, in the survey, about a third of those professionals interviewed acknowledged that they felt that they did not have a complete grasp of the full range of policies and guidance available in the realm of community participation: they did not possess full expert knowledge themselves. Indeed a number of authorities who elected not to take part in the survey did so because they acknowledged that they had not yet ‘caught up’ with the Statutory Duty and its implications.

Third, in the survey, there was much less scepticism about the value of ‘local knowledge’ amongst professionals than the literature might suggest. Indeed in the main, local knowledge appeared to command a premium value because of the genuinely perceived importance of local distinctiveness to planning outcomes. One authority suggested that local knowledge was itself a mandate. Indeed much of the criticism of ‘technocratic’
knowledge came from the professionals themselves: top down guidance, particularly national PPSs and the Regional Spatial Strategy did much to thwart the needs of localities because of its ubiquitous nature and its lack of ability to be adapted to local circumstances.

6. EQUITY

Foucault, M (1978) introduced the term ‘responsibilisation’ to help describe neo-liberal freedoms, where developing what he termed ‘technologies of the self’ (such as self belief, self-esteem and the pursuit of ideals) was, he felt, a useful technique for leading and controlling individuals without being responsible for them. Societal risks (such as ill health and unemployment – and indeed poor quality land use planning) in his exposition become the responsibility of the individual rather than the State and this leads, in principle, to the culture of ‘self-care’ (Lemke 2001). Seen in this way, at least one of the dominant motivations for community participation (the pursuit of freedoms) has an inherent tendency to increase inequalities in society as ‘technologies of the self’ are unevenly distributed within communities and, in the absence of any (State) welfare support to correct for this uneven distribution, it will lead to an inexorable shift in ‘resources’ to those more able to indulge in ‘self-care’.

But Young (2000) suggests that as well as neo-liberalism, deliberative democracy also tends towards inherent inequalities. It favours the more articulate and not everyone wants to participate anyway. Indeed, King and Stivers (1998) stress the importance in community participation generally, of individuals being able to exercise their right not to take part in community decision-making, and Williams et al 2001 report a view of professionals that there is considerable unwillingness on the part of the ‘citizenry’ to participate when asked. Young (2000) also argues that deliberative democracy is a reasoned and rational means of getting voices heard and therefore precludes more
chaotic and disruptive mechanisms – often more natural means for those whose voices are less often heard.

A criticism common to all three types of community involvement (deliberative democracy, responsible participation and neo-liberalism), however, is that any increasing participation favours the strongest and excludes groups with few resources and low status (Imrie and Raco, 2003, Gordon, 1986), which gives them unequal access to political processes (Faulks, 1998). In turn, the unequal participation in community activities is influenced by a range of socio-economic factors, particularly educational background but also economic status (Curtice and Syed, 2003, Parry et al, 1992). In this context, the most marginalised groups tend to be the working class and the young (Warde et al, 2003). Here, Peel (1998) notes a particular scepticism on the part of professionals towards disadvantaged groups in respect of their ability to articulate their own community problems and affect appropriate solutions.

Transferring all forms of participation into the political domain, claims Mouffe (1992), tends to carry with it the marked social and economic inequalities evident in civil society generally: social inequality tends to carry through into community participation. But in addition to this, even when community groups are formed (unequally across society) there is uncertainty as to whether they are actually ‘representative’ of the diversity of local populations or interests (Taylor, 2003).

The telephone survey elicited responses that suggest that perceptions of inequity in community participation in spatial planning are not as stark as the literature posits. In respect of education, for example, at an undifferentiated level, most authorities acknowledged in some way that active community participants tended to be well educated. At a finer grain, however, interviewees suggested that levels of educational attainment differed according to the kind of participation being undertaken. As one interviewee expressed it:
“Educational attainment is irrelevant if you are going to object to something” (TI 15).

Several interviewees suggested that consultation exercises elicited responses from a “good cross-section” of the population but combining several responses, an hierarchical pattern seemed to emerge. Articulate and well educated people tended to dominate the plan-making arena (for example, commenting on statutory plans and developing things like village plans, but also plan bargaining) because this requires a degree of organisation and conceptual thought. Involvement in development control decisions is quite different. If people feel that their livelihood is under threat or that development is threatening their amenity, they will ‘have a go’ irrespective of their education because they feel threatened. This latter situation, interviewees felt, often has little to do with ‘community’ in the spirit of the legislation. Community-led planning, it was felt, when done well, invariably embraced a full cross-section of the population.

The dominant perception from the survey of the most active participants was not that of highly educated affluent middle class white collar workers, but, older people of all types, principally because they had the time to make a commitment. Some interviewees too, suggested that older people also had a greater longevity in, and sense of belonging to, particular places, which engendered commitment:

“There is a reasonable mix, although we have a high proportion of retired people who have a lot of time to devote to the process and are regular engagers – and are articulate, well researched, and actively try to find out what’s going on.” (TI 10)

Across the survey, persistent absentees in involvement were considered to be BME groups, migrant workers and travellers.
Several authorities also noted that those who currently do not have a voice commonly do not particularly want to make a contribution and hard to reach groups often remain silent. Others noted considerable geographical variation in the development of community activity and also variation in the ‘issues’ covered, particularly by single interest groups. One authority noted that in remoter rural areas, understandings of community are still quite feudal. There are certainly parishes where powerful local individuals – lords of the manor types – are seen as the ‘voice’ of local people. This is not through any particular coercion on their part, but rather through tradition. Significant numbers of the local population defer to these people because that is the way it has always been. It is not the ‘place’ of these locals to be ‘involved’.

7. TRUST

It is acknowledged by several authors (Yang, (2005), Tyler and Huo, (2002)) that high levels of trust enhance the relationship between professionals and lay people. It improves the willingness of professionals to embrace lay people in their decisions and can lead to improved government performance through increased political participation (Fukuyama, 1995). But trust can pay out in at least three different ways. Personal trust is the way in which individuals relate to individuals: a trust in all of those who are participating (Luhman, 1979). System trust concerns, in the context of this study, a trust in North’s (2005) institutions of community empowerment (Mollering, 2001): how robust and reliable (trustworthy) are these institutions considered to be?

A third notion of trust in this kind of relationship between professionals and lay people has been termed instrumental trust (Curry, 2009) were trust can be effectively imposed on stakeholders because the consequences of not trusting are high. This third notion is best understood through the consideration risk (what is the risk associated with trusting or not trusting – Baum, 1999)) and risk is best managed through knowledge (Coleman, 1990). Because knowledge already has been considered above, this section concentrates
on the roles of the other two forms of trust, personal trust and system trust in the professional/lay relationship.

In relation to personal and system trust, Adabor (2005) notes that within professional and community groups alike different people have a different propensity to trust even with the same amounts of information and experience. Yamagishi (2001) suggests that those who become actively involved in community participation tend to have a naturally high propensity to trust. People with a lower propensity tend to be less commonly involved.

*Personal trust* requires a mutual acceptance of an individual’s (or group’s) vulnerability and a willingness to place this vulnerability in the hands of others with the expectation of a positive outcome (Yang, 2006). Uncertainties and transactions costs both act as deterrents to this process, limiting the inclination of professionals to become involved in processes of community participation. Adams (2004), here, asserts that in this context, personal trust increases where professionals consider communities to have values and principles (integrity, honesty) that most closely resemble their own. This can become significant when the vested and local interests of communities are perceived by professionals, to distort their decisions.

Without this common sense of values, Adams (2004) suggests, communities can be considered to have the potential to ‘hijack’ issues to their own ends and pursue their own agendas – reducing personal trust. Yang (2006), here, articulates a limitation to this personal trust:

"*In the citizen participation literature, citizens are often viewed by public administrators as, and sometimes they actually are, selfish and focusing on short-term personal gains rather than long-term community interests*” (page 578).
Giddens (1990) suggests that high levels of system trust are at the core of the political processes of a successful differentiated polity. Confidence in institutions (such as village design statements, community strategies and the like) tends to give professionals confidence in the whole process (Luhmann, 1979), and creates an upward spiral of affirmative experiences (Tyler and Huo, 2002).

An number of authors have noted that in the general relationship between professionals and lay people (ranging from an overall trust in government to direct local relationships) system trust tends to be higher than personal trust on the part of all stakeholders. Yang’s (2006) empirical evaluation of professional attitudes to community participation, found that their trust in the robustness of the institutions available for community participation was a much stronger trigger to successful community involvement than trust in the members of the community themselves. But communities too, have been found to trust professionals less than the institutions that they represent. Palmer et al., (2009) for example found, in the context of the implementation of bio-security regulations in Australian agriculture, the regulations themselves were trusted more than the extension services that were charged with implementing them.

In the survey, personal trust appeared to be reasonably high. All interviewees suggested that communities were completely or generally trustworthy because the institutions of community participation were reasonably transparent and agendas were difficult to hide as a result. This did not mean that the authority would agree with the views that are nevertheless trusted from either a policy or an ethical perspective. Whether or not communities shared the values of professionals was less clear cut. Three authorities suggested that it was often difficult to understand ‘community’ values as opposed to the values of individuals who may or may not purport to represent the community. Some noted too, that officers of the authority didn’t necessarily share all of the values of the authority itself, some of which are ‘imposed’ by dominant national government policies.
In this context, it was quite possible for professionals to hold values closer to those of the community than those of their authority.

The trust of professionals by communities (again as perceived by professionals) was bifurcated. This tended to be high where all authorities had prepared for participation in advance and where contact was on-going and iterative. Instances were cited however, where this trust had been ‘breached’ because authorities did not appropriately acknowledge community effort, for example, in not adopting policies contained in parish plans. This breaching was problematic as interviewees suggested that there was commonly a lack of understanding on the part of the community (and some councillors) about what was admissible in planning terms. Councillors vote against officer recommendations using community views, and then appeals are lodged and won. This both alienates the community and is expensive for the authority.

Other authorities noted that they spent much time engaging the community in various ways, listening to their views and then finding themselves having to make decisions against community views because the community views are inadmissible in planning terms, were nothing to do with planning at all, or even illegal. Explaining this to community groups can be difficult: “If you give the community a voice, it expects to be heard” (TI 4). Local media invariably side with the community, it was reported.

In general terms in a further departure from the literature, personal trust tended to be higher than system trust because professionals and lay people alike were commonly daunted or confused about the panoply of institutions for community participation that were available and expressed a degree of uncertainty as to which would be likely to be most appropriate in particular circumstances.

**8 CONCLUSIONS: PROFESSIONALS, LAY PARTICIPATION AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST.**
Overall, the telephone survey creates a more positive picture of the relationship between lay people and professionals than the literature might suggest, in the conduct of community participation. This could well be due to a longer tradition of community participation in spatial planning than in other local authority domains and because of this, the relationship may well be a more solid one than for other services.

To what extent, however, does this relationship enhance the pursuit of the public interest? Kramer (2001) notes that public professionals have particular responsibilities for ensuring the ‘public’ interest in general and not necessarily the interest of specific communities, where these are not coincident. This can often cause tensions in community participation as communities may, legitimately from their point of view, seek to achieve ends that are at variance with the objectives of the local state (Taylor, 2003). On the other hand, Muers (2004) suggests that it is legitimate within democracies that communities pursue outcomes that are desirable to specific communities at a local level, where they might be inappropriate for whole societies. This characterises local difference.

The survey did, collectively, demarcate a difference between self-interest, community interest and public interest. In the survey, community participation was felt in practice to exhibit different degrees of self-interest according to the type of planning being considered. Development planning required a more conceptual thinking, a certain type of ‘public’ interest on the part of those lay people involved, but also more self-interested ‘plan bargaining’ was observed. Even here, some degree of altruism was perceived by one authority as ‘extended self interest’: what benefits the community also benefits me.

Development control involved a wider spectrum of the population with a clearer self-interest in resisting development that was not favoured. Such self-interest is largely driven, it was claimed, by the desire to protect residential amenity or to preserve and
enhance the value of private property. It is therefore more usually about stopping things from happening rather than making things happen. Some interviewees characterised this as NIMBYISM and others as entirely rational. At one extreme here, one authority simply considered that “the general public like to stuff things up” (TI 5) and another, that involvement was driven by “a desire to tell planners to keep their hands off” (TI 6).

Village planning through things such as parish planning and village design statements, thirdly, was felt to have quite a different representative structure to participation in development planning and development control. This was possibly the closest to the notion of proper ‘community’ involvement as the other two had quite a large component of self-interest within them. The first two are best described as a ‘community involvement’ in planning and the third as ‘community-led’ planning.

Community interest was characterised in three different ways by professionals, one negative and two positive. Several authorities provided examples of communities getting together specifically for the purposes of opposing the local state. Communities seeking to oppose local needs housing development where it was proposed and propose it were it was not, were the two most commonly cited examples here. Most of this community opposition to the local state concerned disagreements about policies contained in Local Area Agreements.

More positively, secondly, professionals reported community articulations that were at variance with the regional and national state, specifically the Regional Spatial Strategy and National Planning Policy Statements. Here, professionals of the local state commonly had some sympathy (and in cases overt support) for these objections on the basis that community wishes better reflected local circumstances. Thirdly, four authorities simply shared Muers’ (2004) view that if communities are invited to hold a view about planning matters then this implied a tacit acknowledgment that such a view should have priority over the views of the local, regional and national state. In the words of the Rural White

The dynamic of community participation, thirdly, was acknowledged by several authorities to have positive consequences. Whilst most community involvement started off as self interest, once people had become familiar with the planning system they took a genuine interest in the community benefits that the system could bring. Two authorities considered successful community-led parish plans to have had a genesis in self-interested objections to planning applications that has spawned a much more ‘creative’ interest in the development process leading to the formation of a parish plan group.

Within all of these views of community interest, however, it was noted that the spatial distribution of active communities was quite partial. It was very active in some areas and completely absent in others.

The extent to which this community interest summed to public interest, however, was a complex one. Several authorities noted tensions between ‘elected’ representatives (particularly parish and town councillors) and non-elected groups within communities but it was not always clear which groups actually were more representative of the community as a whole. The role of elected local authority councillors was particularly complex here: should they represent the public interest or the interests of their constituency, particularly within the national government rhetoric of ‘empowering communities’ rather than ‘empowering the public’.

Two (almost opposite) views dominated here. The first was that, despite training, many councillors had failed to embrace wider community involvement, preferring to ‘do things as they had always done’ often along party political lines. Ultimately, they could not be ‘forced’ into a new role. The second view was that councillors had embraced community
views so fully that they claimed their ‘hands were tied’ by these views. One authority claimed that committee decisions were increasingly going against officer recommendations because the members were simply representing the views of their community, and this was not open for negotiation at committee.

Ultimately, there was a sense from the surveys, despite the difficulties that it might create, that if communities were being encouraged, even cajoled into active participation in spatial planning it was community views that should be accorded a priority. As one of the ‘triangulation’ groups expressed it:

“If a community plan is properly and inclusively produced and provides a consensus view of the community, why should it not challenge local authority proposals?”

**These difficulties of representativeness in the relationship between lay people and professionals is not likely to be made any less complex with the policies of the incoming Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government of 2011. The ‘Big Society’ aspirations of this government place significant emphasis on the further development of localism and of community responsibility in general. Indeed these are effectively the mantras contained in the Structural Reform Plan of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2010a), the Department responsible for spatial planning:**

“*our ambition is localism. Real change driven by local people working together in their communities*” *(Page 2).*

**And of the five departmental priorities that follow (page 3), number 3 is:**

“*make localism and the Big Society part of everyday life – by putting communities in charge of planning.*”
These two characteristics – localism and community – are of overwhelming importance in the document, but the meaning of community is clearly (if not purposefully) ambiguous: sometimes it is expressed as being the local state and sometimes it is clearly stated as excluding the local state. What is meant by being ‘in charge of’ planning in priority three above also remains unexplained.

Specifically in respect of spatial planning the Conservative’s (2010) manifesto paper ‘Open Source’ (2) planning also contains much rhetoric on ‘collaborative’ approaches to planning at the neighbourhood level. Such planning is to be rooted in civic engagement and collaborative democracy, where communities will be given the greatest possible opportunity to have their say and the greatest possible degree of local control. Local people and their accountable local governments will produce their own distinctive local policies from the ‘bottom up’ in a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. All local planning authorities and other public authorities will have a ‘Duty to Co-operate’ so that there is a sensible conversation between all those involved in shaping neighbourhoods and the landscape.

Whilst this manifesto perspective uses the language of co-operation and partnership between professionals and lay people, with professionals providing at least an enabling role, early policy manifestations appear less co-operative, shifting decision making power more firmly into the hands of communities. The Community Right to Build Programme, for example, simplifies the role of the planning professional by making it, under certain circumstances, entirely subservient to ‘community’ wishes. The programme is traded (DCLG, 2010b) as a model of how local people can work together to help shape their communities and provide the housing and facilities which they want. But within the distinctions (and even ambiguities) around the term ‘community’ noted above, the definition of which ‘community’ will get what it wants remains unclear.
Under this Programme, building may take place without planning permission “subject to the agreement of the majority of the community”, where the majority is considered to be 89% or more of the community at referendum. The size of the community also must not increase by more than 10% over a 10 year period by this means and sustainable and environmental criteria also must be met. The community can determine both size and quantity. The fact that such development can include market as well as social projects raises the spectre of coercion in the establishment of community wishes.

Thus, the complexity of the notion of ‘community’ as a lay stakeholder in spatial planning remains intact under this new Administration. Added to the complexities of this understanding is new set of permissive regulations in respect of community powers. This can only serve to further refine the relationship between professionals and lay people in the spatial planning domain.

1. This is a term used in New Institutional Economics to mean the full range of policy tools and instruments, both formal and informal and across public, private and community sectors, that are used to bring about change. It is defined thus to be distinct from ‘organisations’, which are the groups of people that use intuitions to achieve certain outcomes.

2. An explicit but unfortunate computer metaphor: open source computing is the means of transmission of computer spam, viruses and other infections.

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