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Responsible participation and housing: restoring democratic theory to the scene

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**During the drafting of this paper, Robina was unexpectedly taken ill and sadly died..

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Abstract

Tensions between individual liberty and collective social justice characterise many advanced liberal societies. These tensions are reflected in the challenges posed for representative democracy both by participatory democratic practices and by the current emphasis on (so-called) responsible participation. Based on the example of 'community' housing associations in Scotland, this paper explores these tensions. It is argued that the critique of responsibility may have been over-stated – that, in particular, 'community' housing associations offer the basis for relatively more inclusive and effective processes of decision-making than council housing, which relies on the traditional processes and institutions of representative local government for its legitimacy.

Responsible participation and housing: restoring democratic theory to the scene

Introduction

From the late 1960s, a resurgence of interest in participatory government developed out of critiques of contemporary liberal representative institutions and practices (Pateman, 1970). These critiques pointed to the distance between government and governed, the weaknesses of welfare institutions in meeting need, the insensitivity of bureaucratic procedures to individual differences, and the evidence of disaffection with formal political institutions reflected in low electoral turnouts and distrust of politicians (Held, 1996; Hirst, 2002). From these critiques, two new perspectives on the governance of welfare emerged: one based on the positive idea of 'participatory democracy' in which citizens are empowered through their community involvement, and another subtly different model of 'responsible participation'. The latter frames participation as more of an obligation to be exercised in response to the state's provision of the social rights of citizenship. This broadly communitarian rhetoric of balancing rights with responsibilities is said to have become 'central to the policy documents and literature of the (British) Labour Party' (White, 2003, p. 12). Despite their differences in emphasis, both approaches are normatively linked to deepening democratisation, the distinction between them reflecting the varying emphasis given to participation as a right or obligation by different theorists (Fung and Wright, 2003).

This 'responsible' participation and the parallel idea of participatory democracy are explored in the first section of this paper, along with critiques of these forms of participation. The paper argues that there are characteristics of advanced liberal societies that create tensions between (individual) liberty and social justice, and challenges for democracy within both of these forms of participation. These tensions and challenges are explored in the particular case of 'community' housing

associations in Scotland, which have become the favoured form of social rented housing since 1997 and can be seen as borrowing particularly heavily from the rhetoric of responsible participation. However, they also grew out of earlier experiments in tenant participation that are traced from their roots in ideas about participatory democracy. 'Community' housing associations are compared with participation in council housing. Using this example, the paper discusses the implications for social housing and welfare provision of an emphasis on responsible participation. For its advocates, such an emphasis did not just address the wider ambition of creating 'active citizens' but, in targeting the improvement of social housing, promises benefits not just to the individual but also to contribute to good neighbourliness. The scope to capture benefits at the neighbourhood scale by addressing anti-social and irresponsible behaviour is seen as particularly important.

Participatory democracy and responsible participation

Two competing visions of participation have recently vied for dominance in debates about extending representative democracy and modernising the welfare state. Both *participatory democracy* and *responsible participation* are promoted as a response to perceived weaknesses in representative democracy, the model that dominated the middle decades of the twentieth century. It is argued that, despite an absence of credible alternatives to representative liberal democracy, a 'crisis of democratic governance' (Hirst, 2002, p. 410) and a decline of non-electoral participation has occurred (but see Hall, 1999; Warde et al, 2003 and Curtice and Syed, 2003). The distancing of people from large bureaucratic organisations creates a low sense of political efficacy that requires to be addressed through the promotion of participation (Pateman, 1970). But, beyond this, the two visions disagree on what the problem is. Participatory democracy sees low electoral turnouts and the resulting unrepresentativeness as a symptom of several ills: a loss of government capacity arising from globalisation and the fragmentation of public services; the exclusion of particular groups from the institutions of representative government; and the loss of

trust in large, unresponsive bureaucratic structures. The erroneous 'assumption of political equality on which liberal representative institutions are frequently defended' (Smith, 2003) is to be addressed through widening the range of voices heard to include groups such as women and disabled people, for example (Young, 1990, 2000; Lister, 1997).

Forms of participatory democracy have drawn on Marxist, communitarian and pluralist roots (Held, 1996) to develop applications in a number of settings, including the workplace (Pateman, 1970), environmental decision-making (Smith, 2003) and politics at local level (Philips, 1993). Deliberative democracy, in the form of mediation, consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polls and citizens' juries, is seen as the 'new orthodoxy within contemporary democratic theory' (Smith, 2003, p. 53). In the UK since 1997, local government has been the focus for many experiments under the banners of 'modernising local government' and 'democratic renewal'. Local government elsewhere has also engaged in a search for 'the best combination of complementary procedures of representative and participatory democracy (including direct democracy)' (Buček and Smith, 2000, p. 3; Hoggart and Clark, 2000). Boosting participation through new avenues and giving voice to the powerless are therefore strong and distinctive claims of advocates of participatory democracy.

In sharp contrast, a new emphasis on *responsible participation* emerged from neo-liberal welfare reforms in Britain, the USA and Australia. The most influential statement of what became known as contractualism, or 'civic conservatism' in the USA, is Lawrence Mead's *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (1985). Reforms including participation are seen as solutions to several problems of the welfare state including the distance between citizen-users and collective decision-making; and the threat to individual liberty represented by the scale and

organisation of a large public sector. Consumerist and market-based approaches to welfare are prescribed to enable citizens to secure their own welfare. The most needy recipients of welfare are a particular focus with participation seen as a solution to the dependency that bureaucratic forms of welfare is said to inculcate. Participation is 'seen as the means through which individuals can achieve responsible social conduct' (Jayasuriya, 2002, p. 312).

These ideas have been adapted under centrist and centre-left governments in Britain and the USA. Ideas about communitarian governance (Etzioni, 1995) intermingled with exhortations to civic engagement (Putnam, 1995; Tam, 1998) have been used to respond to the continuing high levels of social exclusion and alleged lack of social cohesion following the economic and welfare restructuring of the 1980s and early 1990s: 'The dominant metaphor for capturing this idea is that of the *welfare contract*: social rights are one side of a contract between citizen and state on the other side of which stand certain responsibilities' (White, 2003, p. 12; original emphasis). Such a shift towards a more formal definition of citizens' responsibilities, in addition to rights,, has led some to favour the term 'discipline' over 'responsibility' (Somerville, 2004). Whilst not denying its disciplinary intent, the rhetorical emphasis on responsibility is also important in defining the assumed shift in the contract between the citizen and the state. Thus, 'responsible participation' or 'community' requires welfare recipients to engage 'in the active management of their lives' and is portrayed as 'empowerment', with the individual recipient of services expected to join in mutual partnership with the organisation or individual providing 'the entitlement or service' (Jayasuriya, 2002, p. 309).

Despite the strength of support for both forms of participation, strong critiques of both have also emerged to challenge their capacity to overcome the observed limitations of representative liberal democracy (for a recent review of the alternative discourses

challenging the dominance of representative democracy, see Barnes, Newman and Sullivan, 2007). Although some authors do not distinguish between the distinctive theoretical underpinnings of different approaches to participation (for example, Cochrane, 2003), a common strand of the critiques is that any widening of participation favours the strongest and excludes groups with few resources and low status (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Imrie and Raco, 2003). Thus consumerist, market-based and participatory approaches to welfare are all criticised for compounding disadvantage and therefore preventing equality of access to decision-making. Some critics question the conceptualisation of community as used in policy rhetoric: as Taylor (2003) argues it is 'not the way most of us live now' (p. 53). Also questioned is whether community associations or deliberative institutions can be trusted to represent the diversity of local populations or interests (Taylor, 2003), with evidence adduced of the exclusion from participatory processes of disabled people (Edwards, 2001; 2002), ethnic minority groups (Brownill and Darke, 1998), the poorest people (Morrison, 2003; Burton et al, 2004). Whether controlled by the state or by community organisations themselves 'there is some justifiable scepticism about the extent to which excluded groups really will be given significant influence or involvement in the new arrangements' (Cochrane, 2003, p. 230).

Specific critiques of participatory democracy argue that it puts too much emphasis on (majoritarian) democratic processes and neglects distributional inequalities and individual liberty. Further, Held (1996) argues that much is left unclear about how bureaucratic accountability is to be achieved, representative and participatory institutions be combined and globalisation dealt with. Further, although extending the number of voices in small ways, participatory democracy can be dismissed as too similar to traditional representative democracy in creating 'substitute forums in which the voices of some of the people come to stand for the whole' (Hirst, 2002, p. 414).

More attention has been devoted recently to responsible participation, with critics asking whether participation or community is what poor people need or want. Critiques influenced by Foucault argue that 'community participation' is promoted with rhetorical and strategic purpose as a technology that has the effect of extending management of the poorest people and of increasing state sponsored regulation (Cruikshank, 1994). Poverty is not only neglected – it is concealed and reinforced, along with other oppressions and injustices: the 'political narrative of community and individual responsibility is one that deliberately deflects attention from the causes of poverty' (Imrie and Raco, 2003, p. 30). Participatory projects are meaningless 'window-dressing' exercises that protect the political status quo and reproduce inequality in a tyrannical fashion. Structural inequalities are not recognised, rather personal weaknesses are used to explain welfare 'dependence' (Imrie and Raco, 2003). Further, critiques see inappropriate moral rather than social need judgements made about welfare provision; it is 'a peculiarly moralised form of agency that lies at the heart of the new neo-liberal contractualism' (Jayasuriya, 2002, p. 312). The UK's Labour government is said to believe that poor communities will only make progress if their members become 'informed and knowledgeable citizens (as empowered consumers) who can make the decisions to overcome whatever personal problems they have' (Imrie and Raco, 2003, p. 24).

A lot is asked of participation if it is to satisfy the critiques of representative and participatory democracy and responsible participation. Participatory structures must be open equally to all citizens and not adversely affected by unequal social relationships that prevent formally recognised rights from being realised in practice; thus they must achieve a sense of self-fulfilment and political efficacy amongst well-informed citizens while at the same time nurturing a concern for addressing collective problems (Held, 1996). The difficulty with existing models is that in emphasising the need for one attribute of a political system, theorists neglect others. While

participatory democracy privileges democratic and collective processes over individual liberty and a concern for equal access to decision making, responsible participation neglects them entirely in favour of a narrowing of what is political or collective, and inappropriate moralising.

The empirical questions that arise in particular cases of participation therefore centre on the extent to which participation resolves these tensions between liberty, equality and democracy (Held, 1996). These are crucial questions in considering the experience of 'community' housing associations but before we turn to address them we trace the development of tenant participation from its emergence as a form of participatory democracy to more recent forms that borrow at least in part from the idea of responsible participation. However, although the two currently dominant philosophical models can be detected, we cannot assume that they retain their shape and purpose in the interplay of ideas, institutions and interests that occur in particular cases.

Understanding participation in housing

Tenant participation as an activity sponsored by government can be dated in Britain to the 1970s, when it developed as a response to critiques of insensitive and unresponsive service delivery (Richardson, 1977). Previously, as Gyford (1991) has suggested for public service provision more generally, those catered for by social housing were largely 'passive recipients' of the service; people for whom the combined influences of the privileging of representative democracy, organizational bureaucracy and the power of the professional effectively excluded expectations that they would wish to influence how their own housing was delivered. Yet, a growing dissatisfaction with the way in which social housing was being delivered, managed and maintained was to change recipients' expectations. A steady growth in the number of formal structures and policies for tenant participation was accompanied by

a widening in the subject matter of discussion between tenants and social landlords (Cole et al, 2000; Goodlad, 2001). The nature of tenant participation has been more varied than user involvement in some sectors, ranging, for example, from individual tenants choosing a type of heating system to tenant involvement in neighbourhood or city-wide issues (Cairncross et al., 1997). Triggers included the tenants' charter of the 1970s, the Citizen's Charter (HMSO, 1991), the moves towards compulsory competitive tendering and tenant's choice of landlord after 1987, 'the Housing Corporation's *Tenant Participation Strategy* in 1992' (Riseborough, 1998, p 226), and Best Value, a scheme intended to improve the quality of management (Vincent-Jones, 1999). In practice, the rhetoric of national policy is filtered through local policies and interactions between policy makers, housing managers and tenants to create a varied pattern of participation (Cairncross et al., 1997). However, this apparently progressive development towards a more sensitive and participatory democracy cannot be understood in isolation of the context: 'the polarising effect of housing tenure and welfare restructuring ... has left tenants both more involved in housing management but simultaneously less likely to be strong negotiators within contemporary welfare debates. Tenant participation therefore illustrates well the key distinction between formal and substantive citizenship rights' (Goodlad, 2001, p. 193).

Housing appears to be implicated in responsible participation in a variety of ways, for example the emphasis on good neighbourliness, with housing organisations playing a key role in governing anti-social and irresponsible behaviour (Flint, 2002a). Recent neighbourhood regeneration initiatives, primarily the national neighbourhood renewal strategy, also could be seen as promoting responsible participation as a way of fostering social cohesion, 'community', and social order (Foley and Martin, 2000; Burton et al, 2004; Wallace, 2001; Flint, 2002b).

A specific form of community participation plays a big role in housing policy in Scotland. 'Community ownership' housing emerged as the favoured institutional form for social housing after the election of the Labour government in 1997. A green paper in 1999 projected a vision for 'community ownership' housing as: 'a way of empowering tenants' (Scottish Office, 1999, p. 51). This idea was taken up by the post-devolution Labour and Liberal-Democrat Scottish Executive, following the definition of community ownership housing as that resulting from the transfer of public sector rented housing to a non-profit body with tenant, local authority and 'community' representation; and with 'effective tenant involvement' in key decisions (p.52). In response to opposition from trade unions and some tenants' organisations, the policy argues that 'community ownership' would not involve 'privatisation' – the housing 'would continue to be available to let at affordable rents to those in housing need' (Scottish Office, 1999, p.52).

Although clearly resonating with the philosophy of responsible participation, this community ownership model cannot be seen only as a radical new attempt to introduce participation to traditional housing management structures. It was not new, having emerged over ten years before from the work of 'community-based' housing associations in inner city neighbourhoods in Glasgow. These associations were developed from the mid-1970s when the city council was faced with unmanageable obsolescence and disrepair in older areas of mainly *private* housing. The 'community-based' housing association provided a mechanism to involve residents in a regeneration process by putting them in control of management committees that were able to access resources and steer renewal. Membership is typically restricted to residents (of any tenure) in a locality of several thousand people and the management committee is elected from the members each year.

Within a decade, from the mid-1970s, this model of tenant-dominated 'community-based' housing came to characterise housing associations in Scotland, although specialist associations also operate at regional and national level. In the early 1980s, Glasgow city council began to explore with *council* tenants whether the idea could be transferred to areas of council housing by now suffering intolerable levels of disrepair. Council tenants disaffected by the rate of progress with council housing renewal were attracted to the model and a series of relatively small transfers (typically around 200-300 houses) to housing associations and co-operatives took place in the outer estates. This marks the start of community ownership housing, not the election of New Labour. The idea was taken up initially by local authorities and tenants in Edinburgh and other parts of Scotland and was included as 'a distinct category' in the Approved Development Programme of Scottish Homes, the former government agency that funded a large proportion of their development programme (Clapham and Kintrea, 1992, p. 82).

Both 'community ownership' and 'community-based' housing models are attractive to government for a variety of reasons: to 'empowerment' is added the capacity of such organisations to maximise 'the resources available for investment in public sector housing' (Scottish Office, 1999, p. 51) by leverage of private finance. Another feature of the 'community-based' and 'community ownership' housing models, together called 'community' housing below, is that taking responsibility for housing leads to a desire to take responsibility for other local issues. 'Community' housing associations tend to expand 'beyond their mainstream housing activities' (Scottish Office, 1999, p. 53), to job creation schemes, childcare, community care and work-space management. The significance of the extra push to create such housing associations after 1997 can be attributed to 'Third Way' responsible participation ideas and earlier ideas about participatory democracy but also to the determination of the new

government to deal with disrepair by accessing private as well as public investment (Goodlad, 2000a).

'Community' housing associations provide a contrasting institutional form of participation to that offered by local authorities in council housing (Scott et al, 2000). In particular, these housing associations provide an opportunity to explore some of the factors that critics of responsible participation find so perturbing, including tensions between individual autonomy, equality, and democracy. Does their experience support or undermine the argument that responsible participation is oppressive and neglects the collective nature of public issues? Should Scottish 'community' housing be distrusted as a distraction from deprivation or welcomed as a democratic and progressive response to the problems of council housing? We now examine these questions drawing on results of a study of citizen participation in neighbourhood governance in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

The study areas

The data reported here were collected in 2000/01 in four neighbourhoods selected to represent two types of socio-economic characteristics, one deprived and one more prosperous, 'mixed', neighbourhood in each city. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used: interviews with key actors, including community activists at neighbourhood and city levels; focus groups in three neighbourhoods and a household survey of around 200 householders in each of the neighbourhoods. Specific questions on participation and its links to social and community housing were posed within a wider range of questions addressing people's perceptions of their neighbourhood as a place to live. The average response rate to the sample survey across the four neighbourhoods was 55% ranging from a low of 44% in the mixed Edinburgh area to 64% in the deprived Glasgow neighbourhood. A visual

inspection combined with interview data from local professionals and residents confirmed that the housing association households in the sample lived mainly in 'community ownership' housing, previously council-owned but now in the housing association or housing co-operative sector, with a handful in community-based housing association housing in one of the mixed neighbourhoods. The survey results here therefore report comparisons between the attitudes expressed by 'community' housing association tenants and council tenants. The differences between the two groups are in all cases but one (identified separately) statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

The two deprived neighbourhoods ('Edinburgh SIP' and 'Glasgow SIP') were both designated as Social Inclusion Partnership (regeneration) areas (SIPs) in 1999 by the Scottish Executive. They had been subject to previous area regeneration initiatives and had a long history of participatory practices and experiments and public funding for the voluntary sector. They have been anonymised here at the request of some respondents. Both were developed from the late 1950s in peripheral locations, to provide council housing for people displaced from demolition areas. Both have since acquired a more mixed tenure structure due to a combination of new building by private developers and housing associations, right to buy, and transfers to housing associations. Both neighbourhoods continue to suffer from the poverty, unemployment, poor health, and poor housing and environments of many deprived urban areas. The two other neighbourhoods ('Mixed Edinburgh' and 'Mixed Glasgow') were more typical of the population of the wider conurbations as their tenure profile shows, though in the case of the 'mixed Edinburgh area – and largely reflecting its much more central location within the city by contrast to its Glasgow counterpart – the private rental sector is significantly higher (Table 1).

< Table 1 here >

Tenant participation in four neighbourhoods

A number of structures for tenant participation were found in the neighbourhoods in addition to 'community' housing associations, including liaison between tenants' associations and local managers of council housing. An important part of the context for this study is that, at the time of fieldwork, tenants of Glasgow city council were being consulted about the future of the council housing stock. A proposal to transfer all the housing to a new Glasgow Housing Association (and hence to smaller 'community ownership' associations in 'second stage transfers') was engendering debate and uncertainty. A tenants' forum was established in each neighbourhood office area and meetings between tenants and housing managers were taking place throughout the city, including in the two Glasgow neighbourhoods studied. The Scottish executive ultimately approved the transfer after a majority of tenants supported the proposal in a ballot and the first stage transfer took place in 2003.

The 'community' housing associations provided one of the most developed and visible forms of community involvement in the four neighbourhoods. They had renovated former council housing and in some cases built some new housing. Their staff operate from local offices, and their management committees are made up largely of local residents. They operate typically at the scale of 200 to 500 housing units, very much smaller than the scale – several thousand units – of the city councils' decentralised housing offices at the time. In the Glasgow SIP, the housing associations were represented on bodies such as the SIP by means of their own forum.

Council and housing association tenants reported very different experiences and attitudes. From the household survey and in interviews and focus groups a picture emerged of housing associations providing a more responsive service in which

tenants felt their views were valued and that it was worthwhile participating. Members of housing association committees seemed more self-confident about their capacity to achieve results from public bodies, although frustrated that the rate of progress was slower than they desired. The household survey showed that council tenants in the two SIP areas in particular tended to be less content with their city council than people in the mixed neighbourhoods, largely it seemed because they perceived housing services to be poor and unresponsive. Tenants of Glasgow city council reported long delays in getting repairs carried out. In contrast, tenants of housing associations had reasons for being more satisfied than council tenants – they could see renewal activity taking place even if their home had not yet been reached. These results could be seen as reflecting funding regimes that delay investment in council housing while supporting it in housing association housing, rather than being a consequence of different forms of participation.

Participation as social and political cohesion

With differences of emphasis, participatory democracy and responsible participation share a desire to foster a sense of community that aids the acceptance of collective decisions and is conducive to further participation. Yet critics see this ‘incorporation’ in political structures as dangerous. It is said to compound social inequality, suppress dissent and lead to trade offs and accommodations with public policy constraints. Regulatory and new public management systems impose onerous requirements, for example, tenants who take on management responsibility for their homes have to ‘comply with public service principles of accountability, confidentiality, financial propriety and working within the relevant statutory and regulatory constraints’ (Imrie and Raco, 2003, p. 27). The ‘origins of the recent rise of tenant involvement may be understood as incorporation of tenant activity by the state’ (Riseborough, 1998, pp. 239-40) and there is ‘concern that, by becoming involved (such as in delivering

services on behalf of the state), organisations and their leaders may simply be incorporated, gaining little for their constituencies' (Cochrane, 2003, p. 230). Tenant participation is therefore seen as bringing dilemmas and tensions for tenants (Hague, 1990; Somerville, 1998).

The contention that participation engenders social cohesion is not easily tested using quantitative methods since the direction of causality is at issue in reports of associations between measures of social cohesion and participation. However, Maloney et al. (2000) argue that the state *can* promote the conditions in which trust (as a measure of cohesion) can emerge. This research sought to explore whether any differences between tenants of different types of landlord could be attributed to participatory arrangements. The proponents of responsible participation would hypothesise that 'community' housing association tenants would display higher measures of social cohesion than council tenants, while their critics would be concerned at the implications of this.

As expected, housing association tenants in the household survey reported higher scores on a number of indicators of social cohesion compared with council tenants. Three are reported in Table 2. We found that a higher proportion of housing association tenants (47%) than council tenants (33%) reported they would, most of the time, trust the council 'to do what is right'. A second measure of trust – willingness to work together with others to improve their neighbourhood – showed another similar divergence. Seven in ten (70%) of council tenants compared with three-quarters (76%) of housing association tenants agreed they would be willing to work together with others on something to improve their neighbourhood. A third measure of cohesion found similar results with a greater proportion of housing association (78%) than council tenants (70%) agreeing that they like to think of themselves as similar to people who live in the neighbourhood (Table 2). This finding

raises the issue of whether in thinking of themselves as similar to their neighbours, residents are acting to exclude people they do not consider to be like them. We will return to this issue below.

Further measures of social and political cohesion could have been provided in Table 2. For example, housing association tenants were more likely than council tenants (83.6% and 76.6% respectively) to report that they would regularly stop and speak with people in the neighbourhood, more likely to feel they belonged to the street they live in (79.3% and 68.6%), more likely to plan to remain resident for a number of years (80.2% and 75%), more likely to borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours (48.3% and 41.9%) and more likely to say that they had voted in the previous two major elections (65.5%, 52.6 and 62.5% and 51.6 for the 1997 general and 1999 Scottish Parliament elections respectively). Further, and most powerful since based on multi-level analysis, a neighbourhood inclusion index developed from answers to three questions found that residence in housing association housing was independently associated with a sense of inclusion, whereas council renting was not (see Docherty et al, 2001). Reflecting these differences are the variations in turnover rates – (Iain do we have the data to demonstrate turnover rates lower in Has or is the statement 7 lines earlier on future intentions indicative enough of ref 3 point 1, and something to be re-emphasised?)

< Table 2 here >

A degree of trust in official bodies is arguably necessary for participation in governance, but it is not sufficient. Implicit in contemporary models of participation is a reliance on community groups to represent the interests of the residents of an area to public officials and this role is acknowledged in the funding and other support provided for groups in renewal areas and elsewhere. But do residents trust activists

in our neighbourhoods? To a varying degree, it seems: yet again, housing association tenants were more likely (43%) than council tenants (35%) to disagree that 'people who are active in local community groups are out for themselves'.

So there is evidence that responsible participation in 'community' housing associations engendered social cohesion more effectively than council housing. But at the same time as building social cohesion, can 'community' housing associations avoid excluding the weakest, promote the interests of those who are poorly housed, enable individual development and fulfilment and provide a participative forum for collective decision-making? We will approach these important questions by examining the evidence about whose interests are being advanced by community housing associations.

Participation for instrumental gain

The protective or instrumental value of political participation has long been recognised by theorists in the republican tradition. This sees participation as a route to individual liberty, since the outcomes of democratic political processes – decisions and resource allocations – reflect the interests of those who participate in the process of decision-making (Held, 1996). However, as the critics of representative democracy, participatory democracy and responsible participation all point out, inequalities of access to political processes undermine the capacity of political structures to provide equal access to such instrumental gains. Factors that predispose people to participate are related to economic status; and, especially, educational background (Parry et al., 1992; Curtice and Seyd, 2003).

Hall's review of associational activity in Britain is also relevant and shows that the two groups 'left out of civic society and increasingly marginalized from it are the working

class and the young' (1999, p. 455; see also Warde et al, 2003). Political exclusion demonstrates a distinctive socio-spatial segregation, with exclusion concentrated in 'inner cities, on peripheral housing estates, or in poor rural communities' (p. 8; Geddes, 1995; cited in Percy-Smith, 2000, p. 148; see also Docherty et al, 2001). Social rented housing tenants typically have characteristics that place them amongst those least likely to be engaged in civic participation or to be inclined to consider participation worthwhile. Representative democracy has been found particularly wanting in this respect by many critics, but questions remain about whether participatory democracy and, especially, responsible participation can do better (Held, 1996; Jayasuriya, 2002). Do community housing associations themselves offer any comfort to those concerned about overcoming the inequalities that prevent equal access to participation and its material rewards?

For 'community' housing association tenants, already amongst the poorest members of society, the primary motive for taking control is to secure capital investment (Clapham and Kintrea, 1992; Clapham, Kintrea and Kay, 1996). Clapham et al (1989; 1991) conclude in their study of six of the earliest community ownership associations and comparator neighbourhood management arrangements, that the former achieved several instrumental gains over their comparators. Our qualitative results tend to suggest the same. These instrumental gains were also clear in results from a question in our survey about how the neighbourhood had changed over the previous two years. Table 3 shows that tenants of housing associations tended to have a more positive view of neighbourhood change, with 37 per cent of them feeling their neighbourhood had got better as a place to live, compared with 21 per cent of council tenants. While 15 per cent of housing association tenants felt it had got worse, many more council tenants (36%) took that view. This provides one of the most direct indicators that community housing may be able to deliver gains from the perspective of residents. Further, a connection between instrumental gain and social cohesion

was found in the inclusion index reported above (Docherty et al, 2001). Residents who perceived that conditions had stayed the same or got worse were significantly more likely to feel excluded. Housing association tenure was more likely than council tenure to be associated with a feeling that the area had improved.

< Table 3 here >

The instrumental benefits to 'community' housing tenants are not only found in capital investment. During transfer negotiations, tenants have often secured better tenancy conditions than operate elsewhere in the social rented sectors, in the sense of the balance between tenants' individual rights and the association's rights (Mullen et al, 1997). In addition, tenants also feel that their new landlords are effective housing managers, and contribute to community development. The carrot of access to investment funds gives way typically to higher levels of continuing tenant participation and tenant satisfaction than in the council sector (Clapham et al, 1991; Clapham et al, 1995; Clapham, Kintrea and Kay, 1996; Clapham and Kintrea, 2000).

These results may reflect the greater satisfaction felt by housing association tenants with the council's service provision role in the neighbourhoods. For example, 59 per cent were satisfied with how their last enquiry was dealt with compared with 41 per cent of council tenants. The same proportion (59%) feel the council is efficient in its service delivery compared with 42 per cent of council tenants; and 34 per cent compared with 23 per cent of council tenants felt that the council gives good value for money for the council tax they pay. These results appear to reflect the fact that tenants of the council were particularly dissatisfied with the repairs service they received from the council as landlord.

It might be argued that 'responsible' participation comes at a cost, that the prize of better housing for 'community' housing tenants is won at the cost of council tenants' poor housing. There is indeed a false rhetoric of choice for some tenants between poor quality council housing and funded 'community' housing. However, it might further be asked whether 'community' housing organisations are any more effective at defending social housing than council tenants. Arguably they are, and they do so from a resource base that provides premises, staff and other resources for defending the sector as well as managing programmes and services. Their mixed private-public funding regime provides higher grants on average than in the rest of the UK (Scottish Office, 1999). As a consequence, Scottish tenants of housing associations benefit from rents that are roughly equivalent to those in the council sector and lower than their counterparts in England. Part of the reason for this is that, although operating at neighbourhood level, 'community' housing organisations do not restrict their activities to that scale. For example, one director told of a series of incidents associated with lobbying the local authority and government ministers when public spending constraints threatened their development programmes. Action included boarding an aircraft and lobbying a minister during the flight to London. The housing politics of Scotland mean that Conservative as well as Labour ministers do not want newspaper headlines that vilify them for insensitivity to the problems of poor housing and homelessness (Goodlad, 2000b).

Further, the record of community housing associations in housing disabled people, ethnic minority groups and other disadvantaged social or cultural groups appears to be at least as good as that of local authorities (Mullen et al, 1997; Scottish Homes, 1997; Communities Scotland, 2002). This is partly because their willingness and capacity interacts with national policy and funding, and social trends that have concentrated poorer groups into social rented housing. Although evidence shows that tensions can occur in their response to some groups (Mullen et al, 1997), the tension

is about which form of need should be accorded most priority, not between a government seeking to meet need and a housing association seeking to do otherwise. Clapham and Kintrea (2000) conclude that community ownership associations are heavily constrained by their regulatory body, for example in relation to which needs are met and how. This was supported in our interviews but so too was the view that government has a legitimate role in ensuring that housing associations are accountable for the public money they receive and are inclusive of weaker and less powerful groups in their allocation of resources (see also Mullen et al, 1997).

Participation and individual effects

A third set of issues arises from the demand that democratic theorists make that participation should involve a trade-off between individual and collective wills that enables the fulfilment of self within collective decision-making processes. Supporters of responsible participation and participatory democracy differ in the meaning they attribute to fulfilment and liberty. Advocates of responsible participation are said to minimise the public sphere and hence the possibility of participation, limiting it to the pressure for, and the exercise of, morally appropriate conduct (Imrie and Raco, 2003). Supporters of participatory democracy call for economic conditions that do not lead to 'the distorting nature of economic power in relation to democracy' (Held, 1996 p. 308) and want to democratise the polity and society. Both, however, 'share a vision of reducing arbitrary power and regulatory capacity to its lowest possible extent' (Held, 1996, p. 299) and point to the possibly insensitive and repressive character of state action and the possible value of the law in protecting citizens from arbitrary power. How far then do 'community' housing associations provide the opportunity for satisfactory debate and deliberation? The emphasis here is on the

process of participation and whether tenants feel it is worthwhile and fulfilling (Richardson, 1983).

First, do 'community' housing organisations meet the standards that are commonly set for democratic engagement? Are they suitable vehicles for participation? Are they able to engender participation beyond the management committee? This was not a study of the methods used or effectiveness of housing associations as vehicles for participation. However, our and other evidence suggests that 'community' housing associations achieve higher levels of satisfaction with opportunities and experiences of participation than local authority landlords. Studies have concluded that 'community' housing associations can be better at promoting involvement (Clapham and Kintrea, 1992; Goodlad and Kintrea, 1997) than councils.

Our study tends to lend weight to these conclusions. 'Community' housing association tenants felt a stronger sense of political efficacy than council tenants (Table 4). A much higher number of housing association (45%) than council (26%) tenants agreed that community groups are generally effective in influencing the council. Further, 53 per cent of housing association tenants and 65 per cent of council tenants agreed that 'individually people like me can have no say in what the council does'; and 50 per cent of housing association tenants agreed that 'a group of people like me can have no say in what the council does', compared with 55 per cent of council tenants (Table 4). One committee member of a housing association with previous experience as a council tenant seemed to speak for many: 'It's chalk and cheese (the difference between council and housing association)...we can have a go at anything (here in the housing association) but they, up there, it's hopeless, you can't get nothing done ... it's meetings, meetings, talk and more talk ... I just had enough'. The problems encountered by tenants in their dealings with the city council were spelt out more fully by an experienced participant in a tenant's association:

‘(The city council) doesn’t understand the difference between the three words of information (of which there is lots), consultation(of which there is some) and participation (of which there is none!)

(Interview, Tenant’s Association member)

< Table 4 here >

If judged against tenant participation in council housing, ‘community’ housing appears to be more extensive and more sustainable. Meetings may not always be well-attended – but sometimes they are and, in contrast with council housing, they happen more regularly. ‘Community’ housing association tenants are more likely to attend meetings called by their landlord than council tenants (Clapham et al, 1991). Committee members may struggle at times to find new volunteers to serve on management committees – but such committees exist and extend the level of participation. There is some falling away of interest amongst tenants after their homes have been improved and the number of activists relative to the population is not very large – but the level of participation is greater than in the council sector (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000; Goodlad and Kintrea, 1997). Participation in community ownership associations was sustained over a long period ‘around 46 per cent of all residents had been to a meeting during the (previous) year ... (these) figures are quite similar to the earlier ones’ from a study carried out six years previously (Clapham and Kintrea, 2000, p. 544). Further, there was evidence in our study that residents appreciated the opportunity to be involved even though they often did not take it up (Docherty et al, 2001).

Some striking self-development outcomes were apparent in the reports by committee members of ‘community’ housing associations (and other activists) of increased self-esteem, learning and status from participation. As one activist put it, becoming more

involved in local management issues brought the realisation that the city's organisations, including the city council, have a "difficult job to do". Yet attitudes demonstrated significant ambivalence: on the one hand, participation for its own sake was valued, yet if activists felt their contribution was ignored, they thought the effort not to have been worthwhile. This brings us back to the instrumental purpose of participation. The results of our analysis at neighbourhood level supported the view that instrumental gains from participation will themselves engender more participation (Docherty et al, 2001). This does not mean that council housing is intrinsically less able to deliver instrumental gains for tenants, but suggests that the contingent circumstances of low investment, apparently unresponsive management and uncertainty made it so at the time of fieldwork.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the concepts of 'responsible' participation and participatory democracy. These have been the subjects of powerful critiques that argue that all efforts to engender political participation are fraught with difficulty since attempts to extend participation carry the danger of transferring to the political domain the marked social and economic inequalities of civil society (Driver and Martell, 1997). Powerful critiques of responsible participation have in addition made much of the limitations of an approach that seems to see 'community' as crucial to social inclusion; asserts that what poor people need is participation rather than material advance; and puts all the emphasis on liberty and individual autonomy to the neglect of collective democratic processes for dealing with public issues.

There appear to be reasons from our evidence for arguing that the critique of responsibility as it is experienced in social housing may have been overstated. What our evidence suggests is that 'Community' housing associations achieve greater

social cohesion, stronger instrumental gains for tenants, and more inclusive and effective collective processes of decision-making than council housing. But any conclusion that they undermine the critique of responsible participation needs to be qualified by consideration of the context of continuing residualisation of the social rented sector, low levels of overall public investment in social housing and the cost for tenants of accepting a regulatory system that requires adherence to national standards, legislation and funding constraints. On one hand, the action and work of 'community' housing associations reported here to defend their spending programmes makes it hard to see them as dupes who acquiesce in their own oppression. On the other hand, social housing struggles to maintain its place in the priorities of government in competition with health and education, for example. The argument is more difficult to conclude than some accounts suggest. Although tenants of 'community' housing consider the trade offs worthwhile, questions remain about the nature of the compromises involved. More contentiously, the fragmentation of social housing into more autonomous community housing associations may weaken the lobbying ability of the sector to wrest resources from central governments. In other words, the rise of community housing associations, perhaps unwittingly, is stoking the residualisation of council housing.

In trying to draw conclusions, we need to be clear that 'community' housing associations are not a direct representation of an abstract model of responsible participation. 'Community' housing associations are the outcome of a complex interplay between previous experiments with tenant participation, national and local policy, economic and social trends, laws and regulations, funding regimes and anti-discrimination statutes that structure their work. They illustrate Held's call for democratic theory not only to consider principles but also 'the conditions for their realization' since not to do so 'may preserve a sense of virtue but it will leave the actual meaning of such principles barely spelt out' (1996, p. 304). However, to

consider 'community' housing associations only with reference to their empirical form and context is equally inappropriate: 'A consideration of social institutions and political arrangements, without reflecting upon the proper principles of their ordering, might, by contrast, lead to an understanding of their functioning, but it will barely help us to come to a judgement as to their appropriateness and desirability' (Held 1996, p. 304).

It follows that the regulatory and funding regimes that affect housing associations are *negotiated* rather than imposed by an omnipotent government, a factor outside the scope of some critics of responsible participation who assume that these regimes inevitably act against the interests of those expected to adhere to them. The outcome is contingent on more than national policy and legislation – it reflects the interest of other actors, including though not only 'community' housing associations (Goodlad, 2004). The outcome might support the inclusion of the weakest members of society and subvert any exclusionary practices, or it might not. 'Incorporation' into such regulatory practices might or might not be progressive in relation to equal opportunities, housing homeless people, financial probity and management standards, for example. The outcome is hard to predict from a formal statement of the relationship between 'community' housing associations and government. The dilemma for tenants is not between regulation or no regulation, but about the nature of the accommodation of different interests within a complex governance framework.

In negotiating the conditions for participation, 'community' housing associations and government are contesting the concepts of 'community' and responsible participation. Community is claimed not only by policymakers but also by residents: 'outside of the seminar room the idea of community appears to remain alive and well and people, misguidedly or not, continue to refer to it either as something *they live in*, have lost, have just constructed, find oppressive, use as the basis for struggle, and so on'

(Hoggett, pp. 6-7; stress added). For some commentators, there is space for 'developing proactive – rather than reactive – community involvement and fostering new forms of engagement in which participation, rights and responsibilities can be developed' (Raco, 2003, p. 249). For others, there is hope of challenging economic liberals' commitment to a strong central state dedicated to ensuring free markets. Hirst's vision of associationalism stresses the need to democratise welfare services in order to save them from neo-liberal attack and popular alienation: 'The problem is to devise a form of collective consumption that does not alienate control and responsibility from the individual' (p. 166). Participation within voluntary associations 'addresses the issue of democratic accountability in extensive public service states by separating funding and provision, making the state responsible for core decisions about the scope and cost of services but not attempting to perform the conflicting roles of provider and sources of accountability for provision' (Hirst, 2002, p. 409).

While our argument here has been to suggest that the critique of responsibility may have been overdrawn, and that community housing may be empowering tenants in the management of their housing, it is important to emphasise that our observations apply to a particular sphere of activity. In other words, participation in this sector may well not be matched by the opportunities for influencing how other public services affecting everyday life are delivered. Yet, even with these provisos, our findings suggest that responsible participation is not necessarily at variance with the goal of deepening democratisation, even if they may be insufficient to meet fully the conditions of empowered participatory governance Fung and Wright (2003).

There is wide consensus about the need to democratise the representative state and revitalise civil society (Hirst, 1994; Held, 1996; Taylor, 2003) but no prescription for avoiding the danger that social inequality will carry through into political participation. Given the embeddedness and multi-dimensional character of social inequality, it is

unrealistic to expect citizen participation at neighbourhood level to bring about radical social and economic change. However, it is possible to see that *in current circumstances*, this model offers some chance of addressing deprivation and assisting actors to defend welfare services. Further, although particular examples such as 'community' housing associations do not meet the rigorous standards that theorists of democracy might set, compared with other institutions of governance they may provide a favourable pattern of participatory advantages for residents. Research must provide a more complex picture than the view that sees them in dichotomous terms as a choice between staying outside the state and fighting for justice or coming inside and losing out. Such a view denies the complexity of multi-level governance and 'community'. This paper's approach shows the value of examining the practice of participation as well as the theoretical principles. This shows a continuous renegotiation of the boundaries and conditions of responsibility in play.

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Tables

Table 1 Tenure, by neighbourhood (percentages)

Tenure	Neighbourhood				
	Edinburgh	Mixed	Glasgow SIP	Mixed	All four
	SIP	Edinburgh		Glasgow	neighbourhoods
	%	%	%	%	%
Owned	27	67	19	73	46
Private	2	20	1	1	6
renting					
Public sector					
(mainly	49	3	51	25	32
council)					
Housing					
association	22	8	27	2	15
Other	1	3	2	1	1

Source: household survey (n = 780)

Table 2 Measures of social cohesion, by social rented tenure (percentages)

	Tenure		
	Housing	Local	All
Strongly agree/agree:			
	association	authority	tenures
	tenants	tenants	
most of the time you can trust the	47	33	33
council to do what is right			
I would be willing to work together with	76	70	73
others on something to improve my			

neighbourhood			
I like to think of myself as similar to the	78	70	70
people who live in this neighbourhood			
Source: household survey (n = 780)			

Table 3 Residents' perceptions of how neighbourhood has changed over last two years¹, by tenure (percentages)

	Tenure		
'how has this	Housing	Local	All tenures
neighbourhood changed	association	authority	
over the last two years?'	tenants	tenants	
got better	37	21	24
stayed the same	44	37	49
got worse	15	36	23
DK/not stated	5	6	5

¹ resident for at least two years

Source: household survey (n = 657)

Table 4 Residents' perceptions of political efficacy, by tenure (percentages)

	Tenure		
	Housing	Local	All
	association	authority	tenures
	tenants	tenants	

Strongly agree/agree:

- community groups in this neighbourhood			
are generally effective in influencing the	45	26	31
council			
- individually people like me can have no			
say in what the council does	53	65	55
- a group of people like me can have no			
say in what the council does	50	55	44

Source: household survey (n = 780)