POWER

BEYOND THE BALLOT

57
Democratic Innovations
from Around the World

A report for the Power Inquiry
by Graham Smith

POWER | An independent inquiry into Britain's democracy

Beyond the Ballot was generated as evidence to, and published by, the PO**WE**R Inquiry – an independent inquiry into the state of Britain's democracy, chaired by Helena Kennedy QC.

The POWER **Inquiry** was established in 2004 to explore how political participation and involvement might be increased and deepened in Britain. Its investigation into Britain's political processes is based on the belief that a healthy democratic system requires the active participation of its citizens and that without this the vitality and legitimacy of its democracy is undermined.

The Inquiry is undertaking extensive research and a comprehensive consultation with specialists and the public. All evidence will be considered by a commission of ten chaired by Helena Kennedy QC. Full details can be found on the inquiry website.

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Dr Graham Smith is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at the University of Southampton

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This pamphlet does not represent the collective views of the Commission of the PO**WE**R Inquiry, but will be presented to the Commission to be considered alongside other submitted evidence in their inquiry.

The Commission's findings will be presented in the PO**WE**R Inquiry's final report in 2006.

FOREWORD

The evidence submitted to the Commission of the Power Inquiry has been crystal clear on one thing above all others: there is a serious problem of disconnection between the governed and the governors in Britain's democracy. Indeed this is a problem afflicting many of the established democracies across the globe. What this wonderfully detailed and rigorous report shows is that, in many parts of the world, there is an admirable readiness to address this situation by experimenting with citizen participation in political decision-making. The Commission has learned a great deal from Graham's work, I hope it can do the same for others who share our interests and concerns.

Chair of the Commission, POWER
May 2005

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is an impressive level of commitment to reinvigorating democracy through the use of innovations and an equally impressive community of activists, practitioners and researchers. Too many individuals and organisations provided information for this report to be named individually. I would like to thank them all for their time, contributions and generosity of spirit.

Graham Smith
Salisbury
April 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to provide The Power Inquiry with details and assessments of democratic innovations that might increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process. The study analyses fifty-seven different innovations – eleven of these are considered in more depth in case studies.

The innovations are assessed according to the following criteria:

Selection mechanism:
- To what extent does the innovation increase the number of citizens engaged in political participation?
- Is the innovation open to all or is there a selection mechanism such as election, random selection, self-selection or appointment? Is the selection mechanism fair?
- Is the innovation inclusive – to what extent are politically-marginalised groups engaged?

Form of involvement
- To what extent are citizens able to set the agenda for the innovation?
- To what extent are citizens informed about the policy area or issues explored in the innovation?
- To what extent do citizens have the opportunity to debate and discuss the policy area or issues explored in the innovation?

Role in decision-making
- To what extent do citizens influence the final decision on the policy or issue considered within the innovation – do they have a final say on a decision, provide a recommendation or generate preferences?

Scale and transferability
- Is an innovation suitable for different levels of governance?
- Can an innovation be transferred effectively to our own political system?

Resource Implications
- What are the financial, administrative and political costs of an innovation?

The innovations are categorised, described and assessed under the six headings detailed below.

2. Electoral innovations

These are innovations that aim to increase electoral turnout. Eight innovations are studied.

Two broad conclusions are drawn from the survey of electoral innovations:

- the extent to which any of the innovations will increase turnout is unclear;
- the innovations may improve the 'experience' of voting – in some senses deepening participation.

3. Consultation innovations

These are innovations that aim to inform decision-makers of citizens' views. Twelve innovations are studied.

The broad conclusions drawn from the survey of consultation innovations are as follows.

- Standard techniques for eliciting public opinion on services and policies can be used in highly creative and innovative ways.
- Open forms of consultation tend to attract citizens who already have a strong political interest; whereas more statistically representative techniques tend to lack depth.
- The relationship between consultation and decision-making is not always clear and feedback is rarely provided.
- There is often widespread scepticism that consultation is being used to legitimate decisions that have already been made.
- More innovative approaches offer interesting developments but they will only be effective if citizens believe that public authorities are genuinely committed to engagement.
- The best consultation exercises are run independently of government reducing suspicion of manipulation by authorities.

4. Deliberative innovations

These are innovations that aim to bring citizens together to deliberate on policy issues, the outcomes of which may influence decision-makers. Eleven innovations are studied.

The broad conclusions drawn from the survey of deliberative innovations are as follows.

- Deliberative approaches offer advantages over many traditional approaches to consultation:
  - innovations bring together a cross-section of the population so that deliberations reflect on a variety of experiences and viewpoints;
  - in principle, all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate – no social group will be systematically excluded;
  - events are run by independent organisations to ensure fairness;
  - outcomes reflect citizens' considered judgements.
- Evidence suggests that if a diverse range of citizens is brought together they have the capacity and skills to deliberate and make recommendations on complex public policy issues.
- Many deliberative innovations have relatively large resource implications.

5. Co-governance innovations

These innovations aim to give citizens significant influence during the process of decision-making. Eleven innovations are studied.

The broad conclusions drawn from the survey of co-governance innovations are as follows.

- Co-governance innovations can provide genuine access to political power and decision-making.
- Where assemblies are open, there is more opportunity to *increase* citizen participation; where a form of selection is used, participation levels will obviously be more limited.
- There are concerns that open access will simply lead to assemblies that reflect current patterns of political participation predominantly attracting the articulate middle class.
- However, the design of innovations *can* generate incentives that alter these established patterns of engagement.
- Where selection is required, some innovations show that the use of random selection can be a credible and effective alternative to elections.
- Co-governance innovations indicate that citizens are attracted to political involvement when it is clear that this involvement can lead to change.
- Citizens involved in co-governance innovations need dedicated support and resources if they are to engage effectively.

6. Direct democracy innovations

These innovations aim to give citizens final decision-making power on key issues. Six innovations are studied.

The broad conclusions drawn from the study of direct democracy innovations are as follows.

- There are innovative ways of increasing citizen involvement in the most important aspect of the political system – legislating. Three basic approaches can be taken:
  - open meetings which are limited in their scale;
  - direct voting through referendum, initiative and recall which can be used at all levels of governance;
  - randomly-selected citizens' assemblies which allow face-to-face discussions in large-scale democracies.
- Unlike many of the previous innovations direct democracy innovations offer the opportunity for citizens to take control of the political agenda and be directly responsible for shaping policy and legislation.

7. E-democracy innovations

These innovations aim to use information technology to engage citizens in the decision-making process. Eleven innovations are studied.

The broad conclusions drawn from the study of e-democracy innovations are as follows.
- There is disagreement about the potential of e-democracy; many commentators are concerned that it will simply reinforce existing patterns of political participation with hard-to-reach groups further marginalised.
- Evidence from some e-democracy innovations challenges this simplistic picture. Where innovations are carefully designed citizens with little or no experience of the internet can be engaged.
- The anonymity and security that can be built into discussion forums may itself promote engagement.
- E-democracy is not going to replace existing modes of engagement. More traditional forms of engagement will be needed to realise *deeper* levels of participation.

8. Lessons

Barriers to Participation

The report identifies several factors which may damage the efficacy of innovations designed to encourage democratic participation:

- conflicting policy imperatives for public authorities;
- poorly executed participation programmes;
- lack of dedicated resources for participation;
- a lack of clarity about the aims of participation at a national and local level;
- a lack of creativity and imagination in designing engagement strategies;

- organisational and professional resistance to participation;
- a tendency towards 'incorporation' of citizens into official and bureaucratic ways of working;
- a failure to respond to the outcomes of participation;
- lack of cultural change in public authorities;
- a tendency to engage 'natural joiners';
- often no incentive for citizens to participate;
- lack of awareness of opportunities to participate;
- lack of trust in authorities or scepticism that participation will make no difference.

Exceptional Innovations

While different innovations achieve different aims and have various strengths and weaknesses, it is possible to identify three innovations which are exceptional in the way they manage to both increase and deepen participation. These are:

- participatory budgeting;
- the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform;
- direct initiative and popular referendum.

General Recommendations

The following general recommendations are offered for consideration if democratic innovations are to be used more widely.

- Although the enhancement of participation is a political priority, public authorities currently lack the will, resources and freedom to embrace democratic innovations.
- Cultural change is needed within political authorities if systematic participation is to be embedded in our political system.
- Citizens are often suspicious of the motives of public authorities – consideration should be given to using independent bodies to facilitate participation.
- Effective participation does not come cheap – dedicated resources are needed.
- Citizens must be respected and given incentives to participate. This can be as simple as directly inviting citizens to be involved.
- Be creative and imaginative in designing and combining approaches to citizen participation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of the study

To evaluate democratic innovations that might increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process.

1.2. Background and approach to the study

The Power Inquiry's interest in democratic innovations arises directly from its early deliberations which have expressed concern over declining levels of electoral turnout, low levels of trust in political authorities and the decline in traditional networks and organisations through which citizens engage with the political system. Despite this negative background, the Inquiry has also become aware of the new global wave of experimentation in democratic processes and institutions which attempt to address these and other trends.

In policy terms this is a good time to be investigating the role of democratic innovations. Enhancing citizen participation has become an official priority in many countries, even if the rhetoric is rarely fully realised. The language of policy documents is full of references to, for example, active citizenship, partnership, collaboration and capacity building. The UK government has even made citizen participation compulsory in certain areas of policy, such as Best Value in local government, urban regeneration funding and community representation on Primary Care Trusts and local strategic partnerships.

This study provides examples of how democratic innovations might be used to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process. For the purposes of this report, democratic innovations are defined as *formal methods for involving citizens in the political decision-making process*. The definition is institutional in the sense that the report will review formal methods of engagement. The focus is also primarily on the citizen-political authority relationship. This means

that, for example, autonomous political activities by citizens within civil society, innovations that primarily engage voluntary groups rather than individuals, and democratic innovations within the workplace are not discussed.

Even limiting the study to formal methods for involving citizens in the political decision-making process is a large undertaking and it is difficult to do justice to the wide range of innovations that have been used in different countries and at different levels of governance. Given its scope, it is unsurprising that there appears to be no similar systematic study – excellent studies of individual or particular types of democratic innovations exist, but not one that attempts to cover the vast territory of democratic innovations.

The study draws on existing studies of democratic innovations – academic and policy-orientated – and on a large number of conversations and interviews with activists, officials, researchers and academics involved in promoting or studying innovations.

Obviously (due to time restrictions and available space) not all innovations could be included. Our hope is that the variety of different types of innovations discussed in this report manages to convey the amazing amount of energy, imagination and creativity that exists in this area of democratic practice.

The report is structured around six categories of innovation (for an explanation of the categories see 1.3.). In each of the following six sections of the report, a selection of innovations within each category is briefly described and evaluated. This is followed by more detailed case studies of some of the most interesting innovations, using the analytical framework described below in 1.4. The case studies focus on those innovations that have particularly striking features and/or that have generated widespread interest amongst practitioners and researchers. The final section of the report draws out some of the lessons from studies of democratic innovations, including a discussion of barriers to innovation, choosing between innovations and conclusions and recommendations.

While there is a clear line of development in the structure of this report, it is also possible to read each section independently. The detailed contents page lists all the innovations and case studies.

1.3. Types of innovations

Given the sheer diversity of democratic innovations that have been employed or proposed in the UK and further afield, the first task is to group innovations into a manageable number of categories with broadly similar characteristics. The typology used in this report divides innovations into six broad categories.

Electoral innovations – *aim to increase electoral turnout*. Examples include postal ballots, electronic voting, positive abstention, compulsory voting, reducing voting age, universal citizenship.

Consultative innovations – *aim to inform decision-makers of citizens' views*. Examples include public meetings, focus groups, planning for real, community visioning, standing forums, standing citizens' panels.

Deliberative innovations – *aim to bring citizens together to deliberate on policy issues, the outcomes of which may influence decision-makers*. Examples include citizens' juries, consensus conferences, deliberative opinion polling, America Speaks, national issues forums, study circles, deliberation days.

Co-governance innovations – *aim to give citizens significant influence during the process of decision-making*. Examples include Chicago community policing, youth councils, participatory appraisal, participatory budgeting, Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia.

Direct democracy innovations – *aim to give citizens final decision-making power on key issues*. Examples include New England town meetings, referendum, initiative, recall, citizens' assemblies selected by sortition.

E-democracy innovations – *aim to use ICT to engage citizens in the decision-making process*. Examples include e-voting, e-consultation, e-representatives, online deliberative polling, e-petitions, e-referendum, Minnesota E-Democracy, BBCiCan, HeadsUp.

These categories are not necessarily exclusive – some innovations may well fit in more than one category. However the categorisation acts as a useful heuristic – a way of bringing some order to disparate fields of activity.

The choice of categories follows a basic logic. The first category focuses attention on elections – the most basic and long-standing method of citizen engagement in decision-making. The next four categories focus on the role that citizens can play in the decision-making process outside of electoral activity. As we move from consultation to deliberation, co-governance and direct democracy, the potential impact of citizens on decision-making is increased – from simply providing citizens' views on proposals through to citizen control of policy design to citizens holding the final decision on a key policy.

The logic of including the final category – e-democracy – is slightly different. Given the many (positive and negative) claims made about the potential impact of information and communication technology (ICT), it is worth gathering ICT-based

innovations together to offer an overall sense of their potential. The motivation behind each category is discussed in more depth in the introduction to each section.

After a brief explanation and evaluation of each innovation, most sections offer one or more case studies of the most interesting innovations in that category. At the end of each section, a conclusion summarises the general lessons that can be learnt from each category of democratic innovation.

1.4. Analytical framework

A vast amount of academic energy has gone into developing ever more sophisticated analytical frameworks for evaluating democratic innovations.[1] Although drawing on insights from these studies, this report uses a fairly simple analytical framework that draws its criteria from the Inquiry's aim of evaluating democratic innovations that *increase* and *deepen* citizen participation in the political decision-making process. It also takes into account some of the themes that the Inquiry is particularly interested in, for example, improving opportunities for politically-marginalised groups such as black and minority ethnic (BME) communities, people with low socio-economic status and young people. Increasing and deepening citizen participation are understood in the following ways.

1.4.1. Increasing participation

The Inquiry has developed a working definition of increased participation as 'any growth in the numbers involved in political participation'. If innovations are to increase levels of participation, then close attention needs to be paid to its effect on political equality. Political equality can potentially be realised in democratic innovations in two ways: participation open to all citizens or a selection mechanism that provides equal opportunity for all citizens to participate. However, open access and equal opportunity will not necessarily lead to participation by politically-marginalised or hard-to-reach groups – just because an opportunity is available does not mean that participation takes place (think, for example, of differentiated participation by social groups in elections). Therefore this basic principle needs to be supplemented by a second consideration – social inclusion.[2] Thus consideration needs to be given to whether innovations enhance participation of excluded social groups.

Criteria for evaluating *'increasing participation'*

Selection mechanism

To what extent does the innovation increase the number of citizens engaged in political participation?

Is the innovation open to all or is there a selection mechanism such as election, random selection, self-selection or appointment? Is the selection mechanism fair?

Is the innovation inclusive – to what extent are politically-marginalised groups engaged?

1.4.2. Deepening participation

The Inquiry has developed a working definition of deepened participation as 'any change which allows a more direct, sustained and informed participation by citizens in political decisions'.

One way of operationalising this definition for the practical world of innovation is to understand that citizen involvement can take place at different stages of decision-making. Any decision-making process is highly complex. However, for the purpose of this report, the two key stages of the decision-making process are taken to be initial agenda-setting and final decision-making – i.e. *who* is able to exercise power to influence the subject or scope of participation and *who* has decision-making power?

Agenda-setting is highly significant because a great deal of power is exercised in political systems by being able to decide which issues are to be debated and discussed. In the majority of examples of participation exercises, a decision has already been taken by a political authority as to the scope of public involvement. The experience of participation will be deepened if citizens are able to influence this prior agenda-setting process.

Similarly, the final decision on any policy or service is usually left to the political authority, after the participation exercise has taken place – citizen participation is simply one input into the final decision. However, there are some innovations where final decision-making power is either shared with citizens or handed over completely to citizens. One important question to ask then, is how much influence do citizens have on final decisions in different innovations?

Two other criteria are also relevant when thinking about deepening participation. The first is provision of information. Citizens are being asked to make judgements

about political issues – to what extent are those judgements informed? The second criterion focuses on the level of interaction between citizens and between citizens and decision-makers. In some innovations citizens are asked individually about their views. However, there is a school of thought that suggests that through deliberation with others, citizens are able to learn more about issues and the views of their fellow citizens and to develop their civic and critical skills.[3]

Criteria for evaluating *'deepening participation'*

Form of involvement

To what extent are citizens able to set the agenda for the innovation?

To what extent are citizens informed about the policy area or issues explored in the innovation?

To what extent do citizens have the opportunity to debate and discuss the policy area or issues explored in the innovation?

Role in decision-making

To what extent do citizens influence the final decision on the policy or issue considered within the innovation – do they have a final say on a decision, provide a recommendation or generate preferences?

1.4.3. Other criteria

Two further pragmatic criteria are also used to judge the practicality of innovations. 'Scale and transferability' provides an assessment of whether innovations are suitable to a particular level of governance and whether innovations from other countries could be transferred to our own political system. 'Resource implications' focuses on the financial, administrative and political costs of different innovations.

Thus, the above considerations suggest five criteria by which this study will assess the value of the various innovations presented below:

- selection mechanism
- form of involvement
- role in decision-making
- scale and transferability
- resource implications.

2. Electoral Innovations

2.1. Introduction

There is currently much concern about decreasing levels of voting and a growing disenchantment with electoral politics – arguably the basic building block of our political system. Given that electoral practice has hardly changed over the last century, this is an obvious area where innovations might be introduced. As Lawrence Pratchett recognises:

> The arcane and incremental nature of UK electoral law – and indeed, electoral practice – means that voting procedures have changed very little in over 100 years. Voting procedures are more or less the same as they were before the advent of universal suffrage, yet virtually every other part of our daily lives has changed out of all recognition. The practice of voting in public elections, the most fundamental component of our democracy, has not kept pace with social and economic change.[4]

This section focuses on a number of different types of innovations – some that are aimed at increasing the convenience and attractiveness of voting (e.g. postal and e-voting) and others that would entail more fundamental changes to voting practice in the UK (e.g. compulsory voting, reducing voting age).

There are no case studies offered in this section. This is not because electoral innovations are not significant; rather that the synopsis of each innovation provides enough detail to understand their specific function and effect.

2.2. Examples of electoral innovations

2.2.1. Postal ballots

In the last few years, the UK government has allowed experimentation with the electoral process in local, regional and EU elections. Pilots have been run using, for example, all-postal ballots, electronic voting, voting in alternative locations (e.g. supermarkets). The only experiment where there is consistent evidence for increased turnout is postal voting. For example, in the European elections in 2004 turnout was over five percent higher in the all-postal voting regions (42.4% as against 37.1%). Survey evidence for the Electoral Commission suggests that 'people in pilot regions were satisfied with all-postal voting by a margin of two to one – 59% against 29%. Underpinning this satisfaction is a strong rating of the convenience of all-postal voting.'[5]

Postal voting increases the convenience of voting by expanding the time-frame for voting – citizens are not required to attend a polling station on a given day. There are, however, some security concerns associated with postal voting, although in recent pilots there has been no evidence of systematic fraud or other irregularities. There is also potential for coercion since voting may no longer be private and secret (compared to voting in a polling booth).

Although e-voting is viewed as a more 'modern' approach to voting, it appears as if postal voting may actually be more effective in improving participation rates – this is particularly the case amongst older voters. Administration costs are also lower.[6]

While there is support for postal voting, a survey undertaken for the Electoral Commission suggests that there is also strong public support for choice: 'People demand choice and effectively swapping postal voting on demand with all-postal voting is not considered to be a satisfactory development.'[7]

2.2.2. Electronic voting

The E-envoy in the UK envisages that the first electronic general election (or e-election) will be the next one after 2005/2006.[8] Proponents of e-voting argue for its introduction on at least two grounds:

- Increase in turnout – convenience and attractiveness, especially for younger voters.
- Cost-effectiveness – reduces printing and counting costs; if remote e-voting (see below), removes costs of staffing polling stations.

As we shall see below, these claims do not always stand up to scrutiny.

E-voting can use different technologies:
- Electronic voting machines in polling stations – simply exchanging paper for electronic ballot papers
- Kiosks – special computers located in public spaces such as libraries, schools, shops, etc.
- Internet – remote voting using personal computers
- Landline telephones
- Mobile telephones – including text messaging
- Digital televisions

Most experiments with e-elections across the world have used the first method – electronic voting machines in polling stations (e.g. Belgium, Brazil, the Netherlands and the US). However, this simply exchanges electronic for paper-based voting and there would be no obvious reason for increased turnout on this basis alone.

The other five methods would alter the nature of voting – voting becomes a remote activity (c.f. postal voting 2.2.1.). The use of multiple remote channels – especially if used in conjunction with traditional polling stations – would provide flexibility and choice in modes of voting and allow for an extended period of time for participation. Recent research in the UK suggests that there is support for the use of remote electronic voting – although interestingly the option of using SMS text voting was perceived as trivialising the electoral process, even amongst those who use the technology.[9]

Empirical evidence on e-voting is 'scarce and generally inconclusive' – there is as yet little evidence to support the widely held assumption that electronic voting will increase turnout.[10] At most, Pippa Norris suggests, it 'would probably have a modest impact upon the younger generation'.[11] Survey evidence from the US 'strongly suggests that e-voting would be used most heavily primarily by people who are already most likely to participate, thereby still failing to reach the apathetic and disengaged'.[12] Technology can increase the convenience of voting; but inconvenience is not the major reason why people (including the young) do not vote – 'E-voting alone is unlikely to stimulate greater levels of democratic engagement.'[13]

Even if technically feasible, there are a range of concerns about the implementation of remote e-voting.
- The 'digital divide' in ownership and proficiency – there are social justice implications in using electronic techniques, in particular the internet where a significant proportion of the population do not have access and/or the confidence or ability to use the technology.[14] In a recent internet voting experiment in Sheffield, kiosks were used to allow voters without direct access to ICT to participate.
- Security risks – the reliability and robustness of the internet is vulnerable to fraud and external attacks. This can reduce public confidence in the process.

- Impact on secrecy – compared to the privacy of the voting booth, voting at home or work is 'uncontrolled' – there is potential for social pressure and even intimidation and coercion.[15]
- Cost – the hope that e-voting would reduce the cost of elections appears to be misplaced. Costs have been high because of the necessary security measures.[16]

Given these concerns, if remote voting is to be pursued, then multiple channels of voting – including the option of using electronic voting machines in polling stations and (almost universally-owned) landline telephones – is likely to be the most widely-accepted approach.

2.2.3. Positive abstention – the none-of-the-above option

At present citizens who do not wish to vote for any of the nominated candidates in UK elections have the option of not voting or spoiling their ballot. There are very few countries that use a form of positive abstention – the inclusion of a 'none-of-the-above' (NOTA) option on the ballot.[17] Examples include Russia, a number of the new democratic states in Eastern Europe and a small group of US states.

There are different approaches to dealing with the outcome that NOTA 'wins' the election:[18]
- positive abstention is non-binding – even if NOTA has the highest number of votes, the second place candidate is declared the winner (e.g. Nevada and Washington);
- positive abstention is binding – if NOTA has the most votes then
  (a) no candidate is selected; or
  (b) the election is re-run and the highest placed candidate (not NOTA) is declared winner (e.g. Massachusetts).

Advocates of the inclusion of a NOTA option argue that there is no opportunity for citizens to express their dissatisfaction in a *positive* manner. The advantage of including a NOTA option is that it provides unambiguous evidence of the level of dissatisfaction with existing candidates and parties. Because of the various other reasons why citizens do not vote or spoil their ballot, it is difficult to ascertain the level of positive abstention in elections. The Hansard Society provides evidence that there would be support in the UK for positive abstention amongst citizens who currently do not vote.[19] However, it is an open question as to whether this support would turn into action and increased voter turnout.

When the Electoral Commission ran a consultation on the design of ballot papers, there was strong opposition to the inclusion of a NOTA option. Critics argued, that 'electors would not actually avail themselves of the opportunity to abstain positively, thereby providing an unreliable reflection of the electorate's views. Moreover, respondents argued that the concept of 'positive abstention' runs counter to the whole purpose of elections in that electors should, as a civic duty, choose who is to represent them; to introduce positive abstention undermines the importance of the

democratic process and encourages a flippant attitude to what is an important act.'[20] The strength of opposition to NOTA may reflect the interests of the majority of respondents to the consultation, most of whom were from the political class and therefore are the most vulnerable to the proposal.[21]

Where there was broader agreement in the Electoral Commission consultation was on the proposition that NOTA is most justifiable in compulsory voting systems, although at present no mandatory system includes the NOTA option.

2.2.4. Cumulative voting

Positive abstention is one form of discretionary voting – another would be the ability of voters to record the intensity of their preference for a particular candidate or party. This could be achieved through cumulative voting – citizens would be given a number of votes that they would be able to distribute across candidates or party lists. Citizens can then give their votes to a single candidate or spread them around a number of candidates. Such an innovation would certainly make the voting process more sophisticated and sensitive to the plurality of values that most citizens hold, although critics contend that it can be confusing for voters.

The proposal for cumulative voting is usually combined with arguments for multi-member constituencies – not only are there multiple votes, but also multiple representatives. It is argued that such an approach is more likely to increase the number of candidates from politically-marginalised groups such as women and BME communities – minorities are able to concentrate their vote on specific candidates.[22]

There appears to be no evidence to suggest that this ability to concentrate or distribute votes has any effect on electoral turnout since there appear to be no liberal democracies that utilise cumulative voting in large-scale elections. However, cumulative voting is used fairly widely in corporate governance for the selection of boards of directors in order to give minority shareholders more power.

A different approach to incorporating preference intensity, in this case in referendums, is discussed under 'preferendums' (see 6.2.3.).

2.2.5. Compulsory voting

The Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance lists around 30 countries where some form of compulsory voting takes place (either at national or regional level).[23] Compared with a turnout in the UK of 59.4% in 2001, the general election in Australia (where voting is compulsory) in the same year had a turnout of 94.9%. Most mandatory processes allow for some form of abstention. For example, in Australia voters are only required to attend a polling station and pick up their ballot – in the 2001 election there were 4.8% invalid (spoilt or blank) ballots. As yet no compulsory process provides for positive abstention through the inclusion of a none-of-the-above option on ballot papers (see 2.2.3.).

Although there may be a law mandating voting, the level of enforcement varies. In a number of countries including Australia, if a citizen cannot provide a legitimate reason for abstention, then a fine is imposed. In other countries, non-voters can be removed from the electoral register (Belgium, Singapore) and may be denied services and public sector employment (Peru, Bolivia). Elsewhere, formal sanctions are much weaker or non-existent – however, in the two Austrian regions where voting is compulsory, turnout remains higher than the national average even though enforcement is weak.[24] In Greece turnout is around 75% even though the imprisonment penalty is not generally enforced: 'Public awareness of the legal requirement appears to be sufficient in itself to secure general compliance.'[25]

Faced with low electoral turnout, compulsory voting can be seen as an attractive option. Advocates offer a number of reasons why voting should be compulsory, including:

- voting is not simply a right, but also a duty or responsibility that citizens must fulfil;
- low turnout decreases the legitimacy of the government's mandate;
- those participating in elections tend to be unrepresentative of the broader population – unequal turnout equates to unequal political influence;
- a requirement to vote raises political awareness amongst citizens and encourages more informed debate;
- voting may lead to increased participation in other political activities;
- political parties can concentrate on promoting their policies – they do not have to spend resources convincing citizens to vote.

Critics of compulsory voting also offer a range of arguments:

- it is contrary to British political culture;
- it would be unpopular amongst the public;
- compulsion undermines the freedom associated with democracy – the right to vote implies the right not to vote;
- it would be difficult and expensive to enforce;
- reluctant voters would cast ill-considered votes.[26]

The public in the UK appears to be evenly split over the question of compulsory voting. A MORI poll carried out for the Electoral Commission in 2001 found that compulsory voting was the most frequent response to the question how could turnout be improved. However, 49% of respondents opposed the suggestion, whereas 47% were in support.[27]

2.2.6. Reducing the voting age

Most liberal democracies have a minimum voting age of 18 – only East Timor, Brazil, Cuba, Indonesia, Iran, Nicaragua, North Korea, the Seychelles and Sudan have voting ages lower than 18 for national elections.[28] A small number of regional and local governments have reduced the voting age to either 16 or 17, including Lower Saxony in Germany. In the first municipal elections in Hanover and

Braunschweig, the turnout for 16 and 17 year olds was about 5% higher than among 18-24 year olds. Unfortunately there appears to be no follow-up research to investigate whether turnout remains higher amongst this cohort.

There are a number of arguments for reducing the voting age to 16, including:
- 16 year olds are mature enough to vote – they are able to leave school, get married, join the armed forces and are liable to taxation;
- citizenship education in schools will increase the political maturity of young people;
- voting rights would encourage political participation amongst young people.

Based on consultations with 14-19 year olds, a 2002 report for the Children and Young People's Unit stated that 'a majority of young people thought that the voting age should be lowered to 16, largely on the grounds of the other rights and responsibilities that apply from that age'.[29] Similarly, in a recent internet debate run by HeadsUp (see 7.2.6.) young people voted by a small majority for lowering the voting age.[30]

However, in polling carried out for the Electoral Commission, a majority of people (including 15-19 year olds) favoured the current age of 18.[31] Following an analysis of international comparisons, the question of maturity and the disputed long-term effects, the Commission recommended that 'the minimum age for all levels of voting in public elections in the UK should remain at 18 years for the time being.'[32]

2.2.7. Universal citizenship

Universal citizenship provides full rights of membership of the political community from the moment of birth. Given that children are generally viewed as incapable of exercising their formal right to vote, parents would act as proxy – they would be empowered to vote on their child's behalf until the child reaches the required voting age.

According to the Council of Europe's green paper on the future of democracy in Europe, universal citizenship would make elections more 'future-orientated': 'Not only would allowing children the vote constitute a symbolic recognition that the polity has a responsibility for its future generations, but it should also provide a real incentive for the young to develop an early interest in politics.' There is an expectation that this could increase turnout since children would put pressure on their parents to vote. The report also suggests that 'politicians would recognise this fact and orient their appeals and policies towards this (often neglected) segment of the population.'[33]

Universal citizenship offers an ingenious way of engendering an interest in politics amongst young people. However, there are obvious problems. There is an assumption that parents would use their children's vote in their children's interest. This may not be the case. Second, this proposal is likely to be highly unpopular amongst childless adults who would cast less votes than parents.

2.2.8. Race-consciousness districting

A highly controversial innovation used in the United States that directly aims to compensate for and to increase the relatively low level of electoral participation by BME communities is race-consciousness districting.[34] Constituency boundaries have been redrawn in areas where BME communities have been in a permanent minority. The new boundaries ensure that BME communities will form the majority of the electorate and thus be able to elect a representative of their choice. The assumption is that such changes are not only just, but will also lead to a re-engagement with the electoral process. Most of the material on race-consciousness districting tends to deal with its constitutional status – no information on whether redistricting leads to an increase in voter turnout amongst BME communities was forthcoming.

2.3. Conclusions

The voting procedure in the UK has changed remarkably little over the last century. Given that there is general concern about falling levels of voter participation, it may be time to reconsider one of the fundamental practices of our democracy. The innovations discussed in this chapter offer different approaches to revising electoral practice by altering:

- the channels by which we vote (postal, e-voting);
- the options available on the ballot paper (positive abstention, cumulative voting);
- who votes (compulsory, lowering minimum age and universal citizenship); and
- the relationship between the constituency and candidates (race consciousness districting).

Two broad conclusions can be drawn from this survey of innovations.

- Aside from compulsory voting, the extent to which any of the innovations will increase turnout is unclear. As MORI research suggests:

  > There is a substantial segment of the population who make a decision not to vote for reasons of political disconnection […] for this group, the mechanics of the voting process is not a critical factor, and even though they may recognise that the new arrangements offer advantages in terms of simplicity and convenience, this alone will not encourage them to vote.[35]

- Many of the innovations may improve the 'experience' of voting – in some senses deepening participation (but obviously only for the group of citizens who actually vote).

Finally we need to recognise that voting is only one (although crucial) mode of engagement. The role of electoral processes needs to be understood in the context of broader forms of democratic practice – the subject of the rest of this report.

3. Consultation Innovations

3.1. Introduction

Elections only provide an occasional and limited snap-shot of citizens' views and preferences. The majority of public authorities engage in numerous consultation exercises in order to illicit the views and preferences of citizens on the quality of services and policy proposals. As the UK Prime Minister states in the introduction to the government's *Code of Practice on Consultation*: 'Effective consultation is a key part of the policy-making process. People's views can help shape policy developments and set the agenda for better public services.'[36]

In certain areas such as local government and health, consultation is required under statute. The discussion of approaches to consultation in this chapter includes some of the most familiar techniques, including consultation documents, open public meetings, public opinion surveys and focus groups. By definition they are not really innovations since they are widely used, but there are important reasons for their inclusion in this report:

- to ensure knowledge of the basic approaches to consultation used by public authorities;
- to understand how these simple approaches have evolved into more innovative techniques such as planning for real, community visioning, standing citizens' panels;

- to understand how they can be combined to create more innovative consultation exercises, e.g. GM Nation?

3.2. Examples of consultation innovations

3.2.1. Consultation documents

This is the most basic form of consultation – the public authority produces consultation documents (often a combination of detailed report and shorter leaflet) requesting comments from interested citizens and groups. On their own the impact of consultation documents on public participation is fairly limited – only those with a knowledge or interest in the particular issue are likely to know of its existence and be inclined to respond. The use of the internet has made access to consultation documents easier (see 7.2.2.). Consultation documents provide the basic background information on which other more participatory techniques build.

3.2.2. Public opinion surveys

Public opinion surveys (face-to-face, telephone or postal) are a common mechanism for gathering information on public attitudes and values. Surveys can provide standardised information from a statistically representative sample of the affected population – the same questions are asked of all respondents. A well-designed survey can potentially offset the bias that often results from the limited and self-selected participation in public meetings and other consultation exercises.[37] It can also be used to monitor changes of opinion over time.

There are well-recognised limitations to surveys however. Questions must be simple and thus cannot convey complex technical information. Also the design of questions can affect response. Critics charge that surveys are too simplistic and superficial. Citizens are asked their immediate opinions, but often with no knowledge of the subject and with little or no opportunity to reflect on relevant information. It is for this reason that James Fishkin has promoted the use of deliberative opinion polls (see 4.2.3.). In addition, surveys may engage a relatively large number of citizens, but the form of engagement is limited – there is little or no opportunity for empowerment.

3.2.3. Public meetings (or hearings)

Public meetings (or hearings) are an extremely common form of consultation, since they are relatively quick and cheap to organise. There is no single format for public meetings, although they are typically open forums where citizens are invited to hear proposals from public authorities and are given the opportunity to respond. Meetings are usually organised by the public authority in question.

Public meetings are typically dominated by groups and citizens with a particular interest in the issue, and then by articulate and confident individuals. Rarely do they attract a cross-section of the affected population, in particular disadvantaged groups. They are often held during weekday working hours and in 'intimidating' surroundings (e.g. official buildings). There is minimal evidence that such meetings actually affect the decisions of public authorities, rather than simply legitimating earlier decisions. As Daniel Fiorino comments, public meetings serve several purposes for authorities: 'They give at least the appearance of individual and community involvement, legitimate decisions already made, warn the agency of potential political and legal obstacles, satisfy legal or procedural requirements, and defuse the opposition.'[38]

One way of increasing the legitimacy of public meetings is for public authorities to hand over coordination to an independent organisation. One of the most impressive uses of public meetings was in the development of the Oregon Health Plan in 1990.

- The non-profit organisation, Oregon Health Decisions (OHD), was commissioned to 'actively solicit public involvement in a community meeting process to build a consensus on the values to be used to guide health resource allocation decisions.'[39]
- OHD organised 47 meetings across the state which attracted a total of 1048 citizens.
- Each meeting followed the same format: half hour briefing, an hour of small group discussions led by volunteer facilitators where priorities were debated; and a final half hour where discussions were reported to a plenary gathering.
- Collating reports from the various meetings, OHD was able to prioritise values to guide the prioritisation of health care services.

While health care reforms in other states collapsed, the consultation exercise appears to have helped legitimate substantially more generous Medicaid coverage in Oregon.[40] However, the Oregon process has had its critics, in particular because 'the community meetings failed to attract anything like a representative sample, either of Oregonians in general or of people most affected by the Medicaid reform […] most participants at these 'grassroots' meetings were well-educated and occupationally involved with health care'.[41] Nagel suggests that the imbalanced participation could have been partially rectified by running a series of focus groups 'to represent specially-affected groups' (see 3.2.11. below).[42]

A similar independently run consultation exercise undertaken in the UK – GM Nation? – combined public meetings and focus groups. This is discussed in detail in Case Study 3.3. below.

3.2.4. Public inquiries (or commissions)

Public inquiries are a fairly familiar part of the British political system. They are a particularly formal and highly legalised mode of participation, typically used to make large-scale infrastructure decisions (e.g. roads, ports, housing, etc.) or investigate miscarriages of justice. It is normal practice for a judge to preside over the inquiry, hearing evidence from interested parties.

Like public meetings and many other forms of consultation, public inquiries tend to attract citizens with a specific interest in the issue – in fact many only seek submissions by parties with a substantive interest. Evidence is heard from all sides by an independent judge and the relationship with decision-making is clear – the outcome of a public inquiry will typically shape the final decision or the direction of policy-making.

There are questions about the independence and fairness of many public inquiries, particularly inquiries into large infrastructure projects promoted by government itself.

- The presiding judge is chosen by the public authority, raising questions about bias in selection.
- Resources are unfairly distributed – compared to the full-time legal representation employed by the relevant government department or agency, citizens have relatively little financial resources or research capabilities.
- The format of inquiries can be intimidating – they are highly formal and legalistic.
- There are often limitations on what can be challenged in the inquiry. For example, in inquiries on road construction, objectors are typically not permitted to challenge either government policy or the government's use of particular decision-making techniques.

Critics of public inquiries point out that they rarely go against government policy – in a five year period in the early 1990s, only 5 out of 146 public inquiries went against the Department of Transport.[43]

One of the most celebrated and innovative public inquiries that attempted to overcome some of the familiar problems of consultation, was the Canadian 'Berger Inquiry' established in 1974 to review plans to build an oil and gas pipeline down the Mackenzie Valley. Justice Berger was given a high degree of flexibility to analyse the impact of the pipeline. He took three years to produce a report, taking evidence from all over Canada. There were a number of interesting innovations in the inquiry to make it as accessible as possible:
- resources were provided to marginalised groups to support their participation;
- participants were required to share all information – Berger had the authority to compel testimony and evidence;
- formal and informal meetings were held in all 35 communities along the Mackenzie River Valley, as well as in cities across Canada; and
- evidence could be given in native languages – all hearings and reports were translated and made accessible to all parties.[44]

3.2.5. Open House

The Open House approach to consultation is based around an exhibition of proposals that is open to all. Citizens can drop-in at any time, read the displays and other consultation materials and offer comments. Staff are available to discuss

issues and there is space to form discussion groups. The main strength of the Open House approach is that it allows citizens to learn about and discuss proposals in a more informal environment – best practice involves establishing the exhibition in an accessible and familiar location for the target population. However, the process can be expensive as it involves intensive use of staff resources. Typically open houses are used in parallel with other consultation techniques.[45]

3.2.6. Planning for Real

Planning for Real is a technique developed by (and a registered trademark of) the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation and is often used to engage the public in neighbourhood regeneration.[46] This approach to consultation makes more creative use of public meetings and involves the creation of a 3D model of the community, usually built by local community groups or school children. A series of events are then held where participants place option cards (or fill in blank cards) on to the model to represent changes that they would like to see. Often the model is taken to community groups which do not usually engage in consultation exercises, allowing participation at a time and place convenient to participants. The use of cards also means that citizens who may not be confident enough to voice their views in open meetings can offer suggestions. At the end of meetings, suggestions are prioritised and an action plan may be developed. Planning for Real offers a highly visual approach to consultation. The possibility of using new information and communication technology (ICT) is being explored – for example, the virtual experiment undertaken in Slaithwaite, West Yorkshire.[47]

3.2.7. Community visioning / planning techniques

There is a broad range of community visioning / planning approaches that aim to generate ideas from across the community, leading to the development of a vision and action plan. One of the most well-known approaches was originally developed in Chattanooga and New Haven in the US and has been used in the UK by the independent organisation Choices for Bristol, established in 1994.[48] The community visioning process in Bristol generated over 2,000 ideas from around 450 groups and individuals. Two meetings involving over 300 people then grouped these ideas together to produce a vision for Bristol published in 1997.[49] An evaluation of Choices found that although many citizens 'have commented favourably on being invited to participate in an exercise that allows them to make a contribution to thinking about the future of their city, and express optimism at this development… they are often sceptical about the motives behind the involvement of the established service providers and political institutions and about the capacity of these organisations to listen to what they, the public, might have to say'. At the same time there are some concerns inside public authorities about community visioning exercises 'opening up a Pandora's box of demands that cannot possibly be fulfilled' – raising public hopes and expectations in a way that cannot be matched by authorities.[50]

Proponents of this type of participation have generated a range of techniques and approaches specifically to encourage citizens to generate a vision or build scenarios for their communities. Some of these techniques are specifically aimed at engaging citizens; others aim to involve all relevant stakeholders. The best summary of the different approaches is probably *Participation Works!* published by the New Economics Foundation.[51]

3.2.8. Participatory Theatre

Participatory theatre is based on the 'theatre of the oppressed' developed by the Brazilian Augusto Boal who believes that imaginative theatre can promote awareness of citizens' social situation and opportunities for change.[52] The players perform a short play that shows a protagonist failing to achieve a goal. The play is repeated and members of the audience are invited to offer suggestions of how the protagonist could have acted differently and to come onto the stage to replace the actors to try out their ideas. Participatory Theatre can work particularly well as a way of engaging individuals and groups who are alienated from more formal and traditional approaches to participation.

3.2.9. Standing Forums – community, issue or user

Public authorities and partnerships frequently consult through standing (or on-going) forums that may be based on geographical communities or on particular issues. These are often independent, autonomous forums, although they may be established by the authority itself. Examples include:
- local residents and tenants forums
- environment forums, often established as part of the Local Agenda 21 process after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992
- BME community forums
- women's forums
- youth forums (or councils) – see case study 5.4.
- old people's forums
- disability forums
- patient forums in the NHS
- community forums in regeneration areas, etc.

In many cases these forums are used to fulfil statutory consultation requirements, e.g. health authorities are required to engage patients about service provision; local authorities are required to consult users as part of the Best Value process.

Authorities have often provided resources to develop forums for engaging politically hard-to-reach groups such as BME communities and young people. For example, in the late 1980s, Birmingham City Council established nine ethnicity and faith-based Umbrella Groups and an overarching Standing Consultative Forum (SCF) in order to improve consultation with BME communities. Controversially, the Equalities Division ended the funding for the SCF in the late 1990s, arguing that community

representatives failed to represent the diversity of perspectives within their communities (see also Case Study 5.5.).[53]

This is indicative of one of the problems with many of these forums – they tend to attract the most politically active and confident citizens; the 'usual suspects' is a disparaging term often used by critics. The 'representativeness' of many of these forums is therefore questioned. However, such forums can provide valuable information and feedback to public authorities from often knowledgeable and highly committed citizens.

2.2.10. Standing citizens' panels

A standing citizens' panel is a large and statistically-representative sample of citizens, often weighted for gender, age, ethnic background and occupation. Panels usually contain 1,000 or more citizens.[54] A panel is recruited to act as a sounding board for public authorities – citizens are surveyed on a regular basis to assess local services and policies and to test policy proposals. A proportion of the membership of the panel is changed periodically. A number of public authorities established standing citizens' panels in the late 1990s, but only for a limited time – this includes the 5,000 strong UK government's People's Panel which ran for four years from 1998.[55] It is unclear why the Panel was terminated. Other authorities continue to use the technique – examples include the citizens' panels in Lewisham[56] and Wolverhampton.[57]

Standing panels have a number of strengths. They involve a relatively large number of citizens on a fairly regular basis and provide trend data, i.e. they allow the authority to track the impact of services and policies over time. The results of panel surveys can also be broken down to focus on the views of particular groups, including those that are traditionally hard-to-reach. Although setting-up the panel initially can be expensive, they are relatively inexpensive compared to a series of one-off public opinion surveys. For example, the 1,600 strong panel in South Lanarkshire has a budget of £20,000 per annum to finance administration and organisation of the panel, the survey process and attracting new members.[58] For those citizens involved in the panel it provides an opportunity to learn about the activities of public authorities. Panel members are often also invited to engage in other forms of consultation and engagement.

There are problems with panels however. Most panels find it difficult to recruit and retain more politically-marginalised groups, especially young people. As Lawrence Pratchett recognises, 'there are real concerns that those who are recruited from some recalcitrant groups may well not be typical and are thus not qualified to express the interests of the category they are recruited to represent.' He also points to the problem of how 'dispassionate' citizens remain once recruited – involvement in a panel may make citizens more sympathetic to the activities of public authorities and therefore less representative of the views of the wider population.[59] Such an effect may undermine valuable trend data.

3.2.11. Focus groups

The use and popularity of focus groups has transferred across from the private to the public sector. A focus group is usually made up of a small group of citizens selected because they share a particular interest or social background. It is typically a one-off meeting where discussions take place in an informal setting, although there may be a series of different focus groups running at the same time. If the group meets over time it can be used to track changes in opinions.

Public authorities commonly use focus groups to investigate citizens' needs and values and to assess the quality of services. Focus groups are often undertaken as a complement to public opinion surveys – they offer a mechanism for generating more detailed information on a particular group of citizens. Focus groups are also frequently used as a way of engaging more marginalised groups. Critics of focus groups argue that discussions tend to be rather superficial – there is no time to deal with the complexities of most political issues.[60]

3.2.12. Petition

Petition does not comfortably fit under the definition of 'consultation innovation' offered in this section. However it is arguably closer to this group of innovations than any other covered in this report. Petition can be considered as a method for 'open' consultation – it provides a mechanism for citizens to raise issues directly to parliament, the executive or their local authority. The Scottish Parliament has one of the most effective petition systems, coordinated by the Public Petitions Committee (PPC). The Parliament is required to consider any petition on a subject within its powers that is submitted in the appropriate form. There is no minimum number of required signatures – this would be seen to discriminate against sparsely populated rural areas of Scotland.

As the independent Scottish Civic Forum recognises, 'The Public Petitions system is regarded as a way for individuals outside existing networks of power and influence to raise issues in Parliament, and this is born out by an inspection of the sorts of people who have sent in petitions.' Of the first 418 petitions to the Parliament, 51% were from individuals, 16% from protest groups and 11% from community groups. 'The distribution of places from which petitions are sent roughly matches the population distribution in the country.'[61]

The Civic Forum argues that the petition system has five general benefits. It:
- promotes direct engagement of the public with the parliament;
- generates media interest;
- alerts politicians to new issues;
- adds credibility to a cause;
- draws more people into the debate on issues.[62]

Given the range of impacts on the development of any policy, it is difficult to gauge the particular impact of petitions. However, a number of petitions have had a noticeable impact in Scotland, resulting in, for example:

- committee reports or inquiries, or stimulating a committee to take further evidence on a subject;
- debates in parliament;
- changes to legislation or regulations;
- local groups having their voices heard on local issues, or directly affecting solutions to local issues.[63]

The Scottish Parliament and other public authorities have also introduced e-petition systems – these are discussed in 7.2.10.

3.3. Case study: GM Nation?

Description

GM Nation? was the consultation exercise on genetically-modified (GM) food that took place in the UK in the summer of 2003.[64] As an independent evaluation of the consultation process states, the 'public debate was, for the UK, an unprecedented experiment in public participation […] Here was an attempt to generate widespread interest and considered discussion about complex matters of science and policy amongst relatively large numbers of the lay public. Such a development would have been unthinkable in policy circles a decade ago.'[65]

Following public hostility to the introduction of genetically modified (GM) foods and crops in Britain, a government advisory body, the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC), was influential in persuading the government of the need for a widespread public debate on the future of GM technology. The AEBC argued that any credible public debate needed to be carefully structured and facilitated independently of government. The AEBC had hoped to include innovative approaches to public engagement, such as consensus conferences (see 4.2.2.),[66] but adequate funds were not made available by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

However, enough resources were provided for the independent steering committee to develop an innovative approach to consultation that included:

- Nine foundation discussion workshops to identify questions for the broader debate. These workshops were held around the country to ensure geographical spread and each involved 18-20 participants and two facilitators. Eight of the workshops recruited members of the public representing different stages of life and two broad socio-economic groups. The ninth workshop involved participants 'actively involved' in GM.[67]

- An estimated 675 regional and local community open meetings, many of which were stimulated by a specially made film and other materials.

Participants completed a questionnaire, the results of which were collated nationally.[68]

- A series of 10 closed focus groups involving a total of 77 citizens (chosen to represent different stages of life and socio-economic groups) to provide more structured analysis of issues and to act as a control to compare with the results of the local meetings.

Background material and the questionnaire were available by post or on the internet for citizens who were unable to attend local meetings. The website received over 2.9 million hits and 24,609 unique visitors, 60% of whom submitted feedback forms.[69]

In total 36,557 feedback forms were returned and analysed.

The results of the debate conclusively showed the general unease about GM crops and food amongst the public, with little support for early commercialisation of GM crops in the UK. There were noticeable differences between the results from the open community meetings and the focus groups – the former were more strongly opposed; the latter more uncertain, although their views hardened as they learnt more about the issues.[70] In March 2004 the government provided a rather guarded response to the GM Nation? debate, although it acknowledged that 'people are generally uneasy about GM crops and food, and that there is little support for early commercialisation of GM crops in this country'.[71] It is unclear to what extent the public debate has affected government policy towards GM since the publication of their response.

Assessment

Selection mechanism
The initial foundation discussion workshops involved a range of citizens with different demographic characteristics in order that the information and materials for the main debate would reflect different perspectives on GM.

The participants in the open community meetings were self-selecting and were far from representative of the general public. Independent analysis of participants found, for example, that educational levels were higher than the UK average and that attitudes tended to be more negative about GM foods and crops.[72] This should not be surprising because citizens with an environmental commitment had a strong incentive to engage in the process. Environmental groups, such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, encouraged supporters to establish and attend local meetings.

The recruitment process for the focus groups ensured that they broadly represented the wider population and excluded 'people who were employed, or did research in biotechnology and/or GM or who did any active campaigning for or against GM'.[73]

Form of involvement
The large number and geographical spread of open meetings meant that citizens who were interested in participating had a reasonable opportunity to attend a debate. However, this advantage was tempered by the short time-scales provided for running events. The structure of local meetings varied (since they were organised independently) – some featured a debate between experts with opposing views followed by questions from the audience; others used the GM Nation? video and more informal discussions. Most of the people attending meetings already had a negative attitude to GM, so it is unclear how 'balanced' many of the debates were.

The focus groups provided an opportunity to analyse the views of citizens who were generally less informed about GM issues and were unlikely to have attended local meetings. This offered the steering committee a useful control group whose views could be compared to the results from the local meetings.

Role in decision-making
Alongside the GM Nation? debate, the government also commissioned a review of the science behind GM issues and a study of the overall costs and benefits associated with growing GM crops.[74] The government provided an official response to the three strands, recognising the widespread public opposition to early commercialisation.[75]

It is significant that the government agreed to an independent steering committee. However, during the process the government were not silent on GM – an independent evaluation of the GM debate suggests that, 'whilst a difficult matter to judge, many actions and statements by government around the time of the debate had the potential to undermine the credibility of the debate process. This effect may go some way towards explaining widespread cynicism among both participants and the wider public about the likely impact of the debate on government policy.'[76]

Scale and transferability
The debate was a useful experiment in consultation on a complex and controversial public policy issue and shows that large-scale national-level consultation exercises can be undertaken. It offers an interesting approach to blending different consultation mechanisms together (open meetings, focus groups and survey materials).

Resource implications
The government were unwilling to fund the full cost of the more expansive consultation process suggested by the AEBC which would have included deliberative techniques (see Section 4). The debate programme cost £511,500 and support costs were £138,500.[77] Many of the costs of organisation were reduced by allowing local organisers to run debates – GM Nation? simply provided materials and advice. However, this means that there was no consistency in how meetings were run.

Concluding remarks

The GM Nation? consultation exercise was certainly unprecedented in the UK. The debate was methodologically innovative, in particular:

- the government recognised the need for an independent steering committee to avoid charges of manipulation;
- the debate combined different consultation techniques to provide a better understanding of public opinion;
- the process involved a large number of citizens.

However, there were weaknesses in the process. For example:

- the debate was insufficiently resourced – in particular finances were limited and time-scales were too tight;
- the process failed to engage the 'uncommitted public' – the focus groups were a relatively small part of the debate with most resources used to support the community meetings which tended to attract citizens with an interest in the issue;
- participants remained sceptical of the government's position and were not convinced that the process would have any effect on decision-making.

3.4. Conclusions

This chapter has shown that standard techniques for eliciting public opinion on services and policies can be used in highly creative and innovative ways. There are general concerns, however, about many consultation exercises – open forms of engagement tend to attract citizens who already have a strong political interest; whereas more statistically representatives techniques (such as opinion polling and focus groups) tend to lack depth.

Even with a revised government *Code of Practice on Consultation* that stresses the importance of clarity, accessibility and suitable timescales,[78] critics often contend that:

- the relationship between consultation and decision-making is not always clear and feedback is rarely provided;
- there is often widespread (and warranted) scepticism that consultation is being used to legitimate decisions that have already been made;
- many consultation exercises tend to attract those with an interest in the issue and fail to engage politically marginalised groups such as young people and BME communities;
- consultation can be rather superficial.

More innovative approaches, such as community visioning, Planning for Real, participatory theatre and standing citizens' panels, offer interesting developments in consultation techniques, but they will only be effective if citizens believe that public authorities are genuinely committed to engagement. The best consultation exercises are run independently of government reducing suspicion of manipulation by authorities.

4. Deliberative Innovations

4.1. Introduction

In recent years there has been growing interest not only in increasing participation, but also in the *quality* and *form* of the engagement between citizens in participatory forums. Theorists of deliberative democracy stress that the nature of engagement is crucial to democracy. Theorists of deliberative democracy typically highlight two crucial characteristics of the democratic process:

- political equality or inclusivity – all voices should be heard; and
- unconstrained dialogue – deliberation should be protected from strategic manipulation by powerful interests and promote mutual understanding between citizens.

It is argued that if the decision-making process is inclusive – e.g. engaging politically-marginalised groups – and dialogue between citizens is unconstrained, it will lead to greater understanding of different perspectives, more informed debate and decisions and outcomes and recommendations that are more widely accepted by participants. A small number of consultation innovations discussed in the last section – e.g. community visioning and the Oregon Health Plan meetings – could be classified as 'deliberative' in that they promote discussion between citizens. That said, deliberative innovations have often been explicitly promoted in response to the

perceived weaknesses of traditional consultation exercises and electoral mechanisms which tend to attract the politically-engaged and/or simply aggregate preferences or votes.

The interest in deliberative approaches is not only academic – there is much interest within policy circles, particularly on policy issues that involve scientific uncertainty. For example, the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration makes the specific case for the introduction of more deliberative mechanisms to engage the public in the policy-making process. The report states that rather than using techniques such as opinion polling that seek only a 'snapshot' based on pre-defined questions framed by policy-makers, the emphasis should shift to more deliberative procedures: 'We believe that deliberative techniques should be routinely employed to explore the views of citizens on appropriate issues of scientific uncertainty.'[79] Similar sentiments are expressed by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.[80]

A report by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology – *Open Channels: Public Dialogue in Science and Technology* – provides an overview of the arguments for increased deliberation and the use of innovative engagement techniques.

> Around the world there is widespread and growing interest in engaging the public in more deliberative and inclusive processes linked to policy and decision-making. This is occurring for a number of reasons, but principally in response to a wider social trend away from automatic deference to, and trust in, institutions of authority. Increasingly, public dialogue is being applied in many areas, including science, technology, engineering and medicine; central and local government; health planning and education.[81]

Over the last decade there has been particular interest in 'micro-forums' that select citizens by forms of statistical or random sampling to ensure participants reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences. Examples include citizens' juries, consensus conferences and deliberative opinion polls. These have usually been one-off events, but experiments using on-going or standing micro-forums have been undertaken.

The deliberative ideal has also been associated with a range of innovations that do not directly produce recommendations, but which simply aim to bring citizens together to deliberate on (often controversial) public issues – for example national issues forums, study circles, democracy cafés, democs, etc. Their role can be seen as more educational – an opportunity for citizens to develop their political knowledge, skills and virtues.

4.2. Examples of deliberative innovations

4.2.1. Citizens' juries (see also Case Study 4.3)

Citizens' juries bring together a small group of citizens to deliberate on a particular issue. Typically juries have the following features:
- 12 to 24 citizens selected by a stratified random selection process to ensure a diversity of demographic criteria (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, etc.);
- citizens are paid a small honorarium for participating;
- over a period of 3-4 days citizens hear evidence, cross examine selected experts and deliberate on the question(s);
- the event is run by an independent organisation and a facilitator ensures fair proceedings;
- at the end of the process citizens produce recommendations in the form of a report;
- the sponsoring body (e.g. a public authority) is expected to respond to the recommendations.

Although there are obvious differences, analogies are often drawn with legal juries: 'in common with the legal jury, the citizens' jury assumes that a small number of ordinary people, without special training, is willing and able to make important decisions in the public interest.'[82]

Citizens' juries have been run since the 1970s in the United States by the Jefferson Centre.[83] Planning cells have also been used over this period in Germany – planning cells are rather more formal in the way in which information is provided and are often run concurrently or in series, so as to include more citizens in the process.[84] Citizens' juries were first used in the UK in the mid-1990s, when a series of citizens' juries were promoted by the Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR), the King's Fund Policy Institute and the Local Government Management Board (LGMB).[85] Juries have been used on a range of policy issues, including planning, technology, environment and health.[86] There have been a small number of experiments with juries made of all women and young people in the UK and poor farmers in India.

The strength of citizens' juries is that citizens are given the time and space to deliberate on significant public issues. Evidence from the UK, US and Germany suggests that citizens take their role seriously and are willing and able to deliberate on often complex and controversial issues.[87] The obvious weakness of citizens' juries is that only a small number of citizens can participate and they are relatively expensive to organise. However, Vivien Lowndes and colleagues report opinion poll data collected for the government that suggests, 'not only are people prepared to join 'juries', but the public at large is willing to trust their decision-making – even over that of elected representatives'.[88]

For further discussion on citizens' juries and other deliberative micro-forums, see case study 4.3.

4.2.2. Consensus conferences (see also Case Study 4.3.)

Consensus conferences have been run regularly since the 1980s by the Danish Board of Technology as a means of incorporating the perspectives of the lay public within the assessment of new and often controversial scientific and technological developments which raise serious social and ethical concerns.[89] Consensus conferences share many characteristics with citizens' juries, but there are at least two important differences:

- citizens are selected on the basis of socio-demographic criteria from a pool of volunteers who have made written applications in response to advertisements – thus the first stage of the procedure is more self-selecting;
- there is a series of pre-conference meetings where citizens learn about the issue and frame questions: 'evaluations of this phase show that by the time of the actual conference, the participants are remarkably knowledgeable about the issues at hand.'[90]

In Denmark, the lay panel's recommendations have no statutory authority, but have sometimes had direct impact on the legislative process in parliament. For example, the recommendations of the panel on genetic engineering in industry and agriculture led to the exclusion of transgenic animals from the first governmental biotechnology research and development programme.[91] Experiments with consensus conferences have also occurred in the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland and the UK, although without the level of media and public interest or political impact observed in Denmark.

In an evaluation of consensus conferences, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (an advisory body to the UK government) argues:

> The usefulness of consensus conferences can be shown by contrasting UK and Danish experience over food irradiation. The Danish Parliament had available a very negative report by a lay panel and decided that irradiation of food should not be approved for general use. In the UK the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes decided that the process should be introduced. There was a hostile response from the public, and industry was unable to use plant it had installed. That outcome might well have been avoided if there had been appropriate public debate before the decision was taken.[92]

For more on deliberative micro-forums, see Case Study 4.3.

4.2.3. Deliberative opinion polls (see also Case Study 4.3.)

Deliberative opinion polling (DOP) is the brainchild of American political theorist James S. Fishkin.[93] Like citizens' juries and consensus conferences, DOPs establish an environment within which citizens can deliberate about public policy issues.

However, DOPs differ in important ways:
- a random sample of around 250-500 citizens is selected (stratification is unnecessary with this number of citizens);
- citizens complete an opinion poll at the beginning of the process;
- over 2-3 days citizens hear evidence from specialists and deliberate in small groups;
- at the end of the event, a second opinion poll is taken – the deliberative poll.

Fishkin has been involved in running an impressive number of DOPs on a variety of different public issues. Many have been run in partnership with media outlets. Fishkin has provided clear evidence from the various polls that citizens frequently change their views during the deliberative process having reflected on evidence and the perspectives of other citizens.[94] Unlike traditional opinion polls (see 2.2.2.) where citizens are asked for 'top of the head' views, the results of DOPs reflect their considered judgements.[95] For further discussion of deliberative opinion polls, see Case Study 4.3.

4.2.4. Deliberative mapping

Deliberative mapping (DM) is a relatively recent innovation that attempts to combine both citizen and specialist evaluations of complex problems where there is no single obvious way forward.[96] DM uses a combination of citizens panels, interviews with specialists and joint workshops between citizens and specialists to identify possible courses of action. As with other deliberative approaches, citizens are recruited from a diversity of socio-economic and demographic backgrounds. Specialists are selected from different disciplines and organisations to ensure a range of relevant views and approaches.

In the DM approach, the citizen panel(s) meets on a number of occasions to learn about the problem, to agree a shared set of criteria to be used to judge different options and then to score the options against their chosen criteria. The specialists also appraise the options, but in individual interviews and using multi-criteria mapping techniques. The citizens and specialists then participate in a joint-workshop where views are exchanged about issues raised in the earlier citizen panel meetings. After the joint workshop, the citizen panel and specialists revisit the criteria and re-evaluate the options.

The first application of DM focused on the disparity between the number of people who are waiting for kidney transplants, and the much lower number of available donor kidneys. 34 citizens and 17 specialists took part in the process.[97] As the proponents of the process recognise, 'Deliberative Mapping is complex, time consuming and expensive. It needs strong project management and high quality facilitation. This places significant demands on sponsors, practitioners and participants.'[98] However, it is an interesting method for not only evaluating options, but also analysing the criteria used for evaluation and bringing lay citizens and specialists into dialogue.

4.2.5. Citizens Council (National Institute of Clinical Excellence) (see also Case Study 4.3.)

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is part of the NHS. It is an independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on treatments and care for people using the NHS in England and Wales. NICE decisions are based on evidence from clinicians, researchers and patient and user groups. However, in recognition that there was little or no input from the general public, NICE decided to set up a Citizens Council in 2002. The aim of the Citizens Council is to help NICE 'find out what members of the public think about key issues informing the development of the guidance NICE issues on the treatments and care that people can expect in the NHS.'[99]

The Citizens Council in many ways resembles a citizens' jury or consensus conference.

- It has 30 members (chosen from around 4,400 individuals who applied) drawn from all sections of the population.
- Meetings are facilitated by an independent organisation which then produces a report of the Council's decisions.
- The Council takes evidence from experts within the NHS and the wider healthcare community.
- Councillors are paid £150 per day and travelling and accommodation expenses.

The main difference is that it is a *standing* or *on-going forum* – the Council meets twice a year for 3-day sessions. Each year 10 councillors are replaced so that the Council is continually refreshed and does not become a group of quasi-experts.

An independent evaluation of the Citizens Council by a team from the Open University and College of Health has recently been completed, but, as of yet, has not been made public. One observation that can be made about the Council is the nature of the questions it has been asked to deliberate on. NICE makes a sharp distinction between technical issues and social values: 'NICE already has experts to provide the technical input. The Citizens Council is an opportunity for a 30-strong group of people, drawn from all groups in the population, to have their say about social values.'[100] Thus questions to the Council have been rather general – the first was 'What should NICE take into account when making decisions about clinical need?'[101] There are two comments to make about these sorts of questions. First, their generality makes it very difficult to respond to. Second, NICE may be drawing a false distinction between 'technical' and 'value-based' input. In other words, the best use of the Council may actually be in setting it more specific and controversial questions. Further reflections on the council can be found in Case Study 4.3.

4.2.6. America Speaks 21ˢᵗ Century Town Meeting (see also Case Study 4.3.)

In terms of scale, America Speaks 21ˢᵗ Century Town Meeting is arguably the most impressive of the deliberative approaches.[102] These one-day events have involved between 500 to 5,000 citizens in deliberating on local, regional or national issues. The most widely discussed America Speaks event is 'Listening to the City: Rebuilding Lower Manhattan' that took place in the aftermath of September 11ᵗʰ and attracted 5,000 citizens.

America Speaks attempts to combine small-scale face-to-face deliberations with large-scale interactions and collective decision-making. To this end it employs a variety of methods and technologies, including:
- small group dialogue – tables of 10 to 12 demographically diverse citizens with an independent facilitator;
- networked computers – instant collation of ideas and votes from each table;
- theming – a team distils comments from tables into themes that can be presented back to the room for comment or votes;
- electronic keypads – each citizen has a keypad for voting and providing demographic details;
- large video screens – present data, themes and information in real time for instant feedback;
- specialists and stakeholders – experts help produce balanced materials to guide citizen deliberations and are on hand on the day to provide advice when necessary. A clear link to decision-makers is established from the start of the process and key stakeholders (e.g. from public authorities) are present on the day itself.[103]

Although applications to take part in America Speaks events are open to all, the organisers will usually engage in targeted outreach to attract hard-to-reach sectors of the population. The 'Listening to the City' event successfully engaged equal numbers of males and females, with a good mix of age groups (except for young people) and socio-economic diversity. Although racially diverse, the assembly did not match the regional census.

America Speaks 21ˢᵗ Century Town Meeting is seen as particularly applicable for engaging citizens in planning, resource allocation, and policy formulation – there are examples of America Speaks events in all three of these areas.[104] The scale of the meetings means that they often generate substantial interest from the media and public authorities. The very name '21ˢᵗ Century Town Meeting' evokes the traditional New England town meeting, but updated 'to address the needs of today's citizens, decision-makers and democracy.'[105] This is an ambitious claim and there are obvious discrepancies – for example, New England town meetings have legislative power over certain issues (see 6.2.1.). There are also questions about the role of the organisers in collating and synthesising ideas at speed generated in the face-to-face discussions on individual tables – the power of including so many citizens in the process appears to be at the expense of citizen control over the agenda and direction of the meeting. However, America Speaks offers an innovative example of

how small-scale face-to-face deliberations can take place within larger-scale events. More detail on America Speaks is given in the case-study in 4.3.

4.2.7. National Issues Forums

National Issues Forums (NIF), initiated by the Kettering Foundation in the US, is 'a nonpartisan, nationwide network of locally sponsored public forums for the consideration of public policy issues.'[106] Every year the NIF Institute identifies major issues of concern and develops 'issue books'. These issue books identify three or four options or approaches to the issue (never just two polar opposites) which provides a framework for deliberations and the investigation of conflicting options. Discussions are led by a trained moderator. The NIF Institute states that forums are 'rooted in the simple notion that people need to come together to reason and talk — to deliberate about common problems. Indeed, democracy requires an ongoing deliberative public dialogue.'[107] Some NIFs are run independently by local citizens, churches, community organisations and other civic groups; others are part of adult education or school programmes. The size of forums varies.

The Kettering Foundation regularly collates detailed feedback from forums across the country and compiles and publishes reports – the most recent include reports on America's role in the world and health care.[108] These are presented to elected officials at the local, state and national level to give them an insight into the considered views of the public.

Large-scale evaluations of the effect of NIF deliberations are not available: 'Despite the energy that private foundations and public agencies have devoted to promoting public deliberation, little empirical research has examined the extent to which participating in face-to-face deliberation influences participants' subsequent political beliefs and behaviors.'[109] A small-scale evaluation of two forums suggests that such deliberative forums do have value as a means of civic education, but stresses that their impact will vary depending upon how they are run and who participates.[110]

4.2.8. Study circles

Study circles share a number of similarities to National Issue Forums (4.2.7.). A study circle is a facilitated group of people (usually around 8-12) from different backgrounds and perspectives who meet several times to discuss a timely and often controversial issue. It is an opportunity for citizens with different opinions to try to understand the views of others and to look for ways to improve the situation. The study circle movement emerged from cooperative education programmes in countries such as Sweden[111] and the United States.[112]

The Study Circles Resource Center in the United States promotes programmes within communities where multiple study circles meet over a period of months working on the same issue. At the end of the process, all participants take part in an Action Forum to create strategies for the future.[113] The process shares certain

similarities with the community visioning exercises discussed earlier (3.2.7.). Study circle programmes have been organised on a wide range of community issues, including race relations, neighbourhood crime and urban sprawl.

Proponents of study circles argue that they can make a unique contribution to strengthening the community and solving public problems. A large-scale evaluation of community-wide study circles, which focused particular attention on their role in overcoming racism, provides evidence of the impact of study circles at the individual level – there is evidence to suggest that citizens involved in study circles become more informed, aware and attached to their communities, gain courage to take direct stands for racial equality and against racism and form new relationships across racial and other divides. There was less agreement on the extent to which study circles lead to institutional changes, e.g. combating institutional racism.[114] An evaluation of a youth study circle programme in Maine offers evidence that they provide a meaningful and attractive mode of engagement for young people.[115]

4.2.9. Democs

Democs is a participatory card game developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) that enables small groups of citizens (between 5-9 players) to learn about and discuss complex public policy issues.[116] Democs can be used to simply explore an issue or to find common ground – cards provide information and stimulate discussions between citizens. Games last between one and half to two and half hours and can be self-facilitated (although they are often facilitated). Democs games are developed with the help of experts representing all sides of the particular issue and have been held on topics including homelessness, global trade, GM food, climate change, genetic testing, xenotransplantation and stem cell research.

Although democs may not appeal to all citizens, it offers a flexible, informal and inexpensive mechanism for engagement, since it can be played in almost any location (which may be particularly attractive for engaging hard-to-reach groups). A preliminary evaluation (reported by NEF itself) suggests that the value of democs is that it promotes collective learning and 'the development of a greater appreciation for the diversity of opinions and the complexity of the issues.' There appears to be evidence to suggest that democs breeds confidence and interest to investigate topics further after the game has finished.[117]

4.2.10. Conversation café / democracy café

A conversation café is a one-and-a-half hour hosted conversation, held in a public setting like a café, where anyone is welcome to join.[118] The topic is usually set by the 'host', although it can be generated by the group itself. Conversation cafés do not focus on action, rather on establishing a place where citizens can talk openly about public issues and learn from and reflect on the views of other citizens. There is a simple set of guidelines that participants are asked to agree to: acceptance, listening with respect, curiosity, diversity, sincerity and brevity. Conversation cafés

are sponsored in the United States by the New Road Map Foundation, 'a non-profit educational and charitable organisation teaching people skills to be effective human beings, citizens and agents of social change'.[119] A similar initiative – democracy cafés – was launched in 2003 by the New Economics Foundation and Charter88.[120] Proponents of both Conversation Café and Democracy Café view them as part of the revival of the tradition that goes back to eighteenth-century coffee houses in London.

4.2.11. Deliberation day (see case study 4.4.)

Deliberation Day is a proposal for a new national holiday two weeks before major national elections in the United States. The idea has been proposed by the political theorists Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin (the latter is also the inventor of the deliberative opinion poll – see 4.2.3.).[121] Registered voters would be invited to neighbourhood meetings where discussions on the central campaign issues would take place throughout the day in small groups of 15 and also in larger groups of 300. As an incentive, citizens who attend would be paid $150 on condition that they turn out to vote two weeks later.

Deliberation Day is an explicit attempt to:
- renew citizenship and encourage deliberation and reflection on political issues;
- challenge the domination and presentation of politics by candidates, the media, interest groups, spin doctors, lobbyists, etc.[122]

In October 2004, PBS – a private, non-profit media enterprise owned and operated by the 349 public television stations in the US – coordinated a scaled-down version of Deliberation Day prior to the presidential elections involving a random sample of 1,500 people in 17 sites across the country.[123] Further details and discussion of Ackerman and Fishkin's Deliberation Day proposal is in Case Study 4.4.

4.3. Case study: deliberative micro-forums

Description
Deliberative micro-forums are one of the more recent innovative developments in citizen participation and involvement. It is difficult to single out one model as best practice, so this case study will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of three basic 'types' of micro-forums outlined above:
- citizens' juries – which will also include the consensus conference and NICE council model;
- deliberative opinion polling (DOP);
- America Speaks 21st Century Town Meetings.

All three types share similar characteristics:
- they involve a diverse range of citizens in order that deliberations reflect on a variety of different perspectives and viewpoints;
- deliberations occur in small groups – even in the large-scale events;
- events are run by independent organisations and deliberations are facilitated to ensure fairness;
- they have been used to tackle a wide range of different issues, including scientific controversies, planning, health, economic and environmental issues.

Where the micro-forums differ is in terms of numbers of participants and outcomes:
- DOPs and America Speaks involve large numbers and result in opinion polls/ votes.
- Citizens' juries, consensus conferences and the NICE citizen council involve smaller numbers and produce a collective report.

The NICE citizen council is the only on-going or standing forum – all the others are one-off events.

Assessment

Selection mechanism
In the small-scale deliberative micro-forums (e.g. citizens' juries) it is necessary to use stratified random selection to ensure a diversity of participants. In contrast, DOPs use random sampling – the size of the forums means that a diverse group will be present. Citizens appear to be keen to accept invitations to participate – the fact that they have been formally 'invited' is a motivating factor.

Both consensus conferences and America Speaks use advertisements to attract citizens – thus there is a higher level of self-selection. Whereas the panel for consensus conferences is selected by stratified random selection from the pool of applicants, the open door approach of America Speaks means that organisers have to engage in outreach to ensure a reasonable level of participation from hard-to-reach groups. The sheer number of participants does mean that even where there are discrepancies in the proportions of participants from certain background, voting can be broken down to reflect different demographic characteristics.

It is important that the participants in micro-forums should not be considered as *representatives* in any strong sense – they are not representing people like themselves. The fundamental idea is to draw together a diverse group of citizens with a variety of experiences to deliberate freely.

Form of involvement
All three models provide strong evidence to suggest:

- Citizens from diverse backgrounds are generally willing and able to participate in deliberations on often complex and controversial areas of public

policy – evidence from consensus conferences, in particular, indicates that citizens are capable of dealing with highly technical and scientific problems.

- A 'safe' environment provides conducive conditions for deliberation – even in the larger-scale events (e.g. America Speaks and DOPs), citizens are broken into small groups which are carefully facilitated to ensure fairness.

- Deliberation provides an opportunity for citizens to reflect on new information and their own and others' perspectives and often leads to changes in opinions and viewpoints.

However, there are potentially important differences in the form of involvement offered in each innovation.

- Consensus conferences – out of all the innovations, more effort is expended in informing citizens about relevant issues before the conference itself. Citizens are also able to be part of the agenda setting process – in the pre-conference meetings they are able to generate questions and raise issues they wish to focus on in the conference. The 3-4 day conference means that citizens are able to discuss issues in depth and the collective report entails working together to find acceptable recommendations.

- Citizens' juries – like consensus conferences, juries last 3-4 days, although there is generally less opportunity to set the agenda.

- Deliberative opinion polling – the significant differences in this model is the number of participants (up to 500), the shorter period of deliberation (2-3 days) and the outcome which is a (post-deliberation) opinion poll rather than a collective report.

- America Speaks – by far the most impressive in terms of scale (involving up to 5,000 people). It is a one-day event which places limits on the type of question and the level of detail of deliberations.

- NICE Citizens Council – the council provides evidence that the deliberative micro-forum need not be a one-off event, but can provide recommendations on an on-going basis.

Role in decision-making
None of these deliberative micro-forums discussed above are decision-taking institutions, rather they provide recommendations in the form of a report or end in votes / opinion polls. Where the forums are run to provide recommendations for public authorities, there is normally a contract which requires the authority to respond to the recommendations – either accepting them or explaining why they will not be implemented.

The power of deliberative micro-forums rests on the fact that a diversity of citizens have spent much time discussing and reflecting on the relevant issues – more time than most other citizens, bureaucrats and political leaders.

There is at least one example of a deliberative micro-forum that has been given significant power within the decision-making process – the 160-strong Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia. This is discussed in later sections of this report (5.2.12. and 6.4.)

Scale and transferability

Deliberative micro-forums have been run at most levels of governance and on a range of different public policy issues. There are at least four significant factors in running forums effectively.

- A variety of stakeholders are drawn into the process, helping to develop the questions and background information and providing evidence where necessary.
- They are facilitated by an independent organisation to avoid charges of manipulation by the sponsoring body. In some cases (often to save money) public authorities have facilitated their own citizens' juries thus compromising their independence.
- Citizens are given a meaningful question to deliberate on.
- There is a contract requiring the sponsoring authority to respond to the recommendations or findings.

Resource implications

Deliberative micro-forums require substantial investment in terms of time and money. Selection processes (to ensure diversity of participants) and independent facilitation are expensive, but necessary. Additionally, in most deliberative micro-forums citizens are paid a small honorarium and their expenses are covered. Rough costs are £16,000-£30,000 for citizens juries; £100,000 for consensus conferences. Although only one day long, America Speaks can cost over £200,000 because of the sheer numbers of citizens and facilitators and the ICT expertise and hardware. DOPs cost a similar amount.

The UK government is less than enthusiastic about the use of deliberative micro-forums – the Cabinet Office repeats the line that deliberative techniques are generally too expensive.[124] However, in response the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration has reaffirmed its commitment to deliberative techniques, arguing that the government's attitude 'fails to take proper account of the cost – sometimes a very high cost – which can be attached to rushed government decisions based on contested scientific judgments'.[125]

If micro-forums were to be used regularly within the political process, they could be organised by a government-funded, but independent agency that ensures standards of fairness and independence in the running of deliberative exercises. Efficiency gains could be made – for example rather than having to generate a pool of willing citizens for each micro-forum from which participants are sampled (an expensive

operation), the independent body could hold details of citizens who are willing to participate in such forums.

Concluding remarks

Deliberative micro-forums provide strong evidence that citizens are willing and able to participate in debates and draw up recommendations on public policy issues *if* the conditions are carefully structured.

The variety of forums also highlights how innovations have to balance competing demands. For example, citizens' juries, consensus conferences and the NICE Citizens Council fail to engage large numbers of citizens, but provide an environment in which participants are able to deliberate on an issue in some depth – the selected citizens are given time and freedom to explore issues and to come to collective recommendations and suggestions. This is a depth of engagement that is rarely found in most other innovations.

America Speaks and DOPs are designed to increase the numbers of citizens who can engage in deliberation. A question remains as to whether the depth of engagement experienced in America Speaks and DOPs is equivalent to that experienced in citizens' juries and other small-scale deliberative forums. The outputs also differ because of the numbers – post-deliberative votes and opinions rather than collective, agreed recommendations.

What these differences highlight however is the adaptability of deliberative micro-forums. If enhancing *deliberation* between citizens is the significant factor, then the various models offer different approaches to realising this goal.

4.4. Case study: Deliberation Day

Description

Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin's proposal for Deliberation Day would create a new national holiday two weeks before major national elections in the United States.[126] The central idea is that on this day citizens would gather in neighbourhood meetings to discuss the issues surrounding the forthcoming election. The process of deliberation in these meetings would help cultivate citizens' political knowledge and civic competence and therefore lead to more informed voting. There would be an incentive of $150 for citizens to take part in Deliberation Day and then vote two days later. Recognising that there could be a potentially negative effect on the economy and other services if all citizens attended meetings on the same day, Ackerman and Fishkin propose that the holiday should be split over two days, with all citizens having the right to take one day off to participate in a neighbourhood meeting.

Ackerman and Fishkin provide detailed proposals of how Deliberation Day would work. Prior to the neighbourhood meetings, a balanced briefing document would be made widely available that summarised the basic positions of the principal candidates on selected issues. On Deliberation Day itself, each meeting would

involve around 300 people. On arrival citizens would be assigned to small groups of 15.

The itinerary for the day would be:
AM
- Citizens watch a live television debate on the main campaign issues involving the principal national candidates.
- Small group roundtable discussions agree on three questions for the afternoon session in response to the issues raised in the televised debate. A facilitator ensures each citizen is guaranteed 5 minutes to speak if they wish.

PM
- All 300 citizens come together. 15 questions are selected by lot and responses given by local party representatives.
- Final meetings of the small groups where citizens share their reactions to the responses.[127]

According to Ackerman and Fishkin, not only would Deliberation Day increase civic competence, it would also have a leverage effect on campaign strategies – the quality of political information would be improved as candidates, lobbyists, interest groups, the media, etc. would have to 'adapt to a more attentive and informed public. When the election arrived, the people would speak with a better chance of knowing what they wanted and which candidates were more likely to pursue the popular mandate.'[128]

Assessment

Selection mechanism
Unlike most deliberative proposals, Deliberation Day is open to all citizens. The payment of $150 is designed as an incentive to mobilise people to participate and then to vote. Whether it would be enough to encourage participation is another question – citizens may rather use the day for some other activity. It is unclear whether the financial incentive will help alleviate the differences in rates of participation by different socio-economic groups.

Form of involvement
Ackerman and Fishkin have attempted to design a process that enables different types of activities, including provision of information from candidates and their local representatives and small group deliberations. The small group discussions are not as structured as in deliberative micro-forums (see case study 4.3.), but nonetheless guarantee that anyone who wishes to speak is able to.

Criticisms of Deliberation Day tend to challenge the deliberative model of politics on which the proposal rests. Arthur Lupia, for example, questions the connection between deliberation and civic competence and asks whether other strategies, 'such as encouraging target audiences who need more information to read a book or an article or visit a well-designed website […] may outperform Deliberation Day or have an effect so similar that they call into question the day's bang for the bucks and

return on the man-hours it requires'.[129] Richard Posner questions whether collective deliberation would add anything to the US political system, but is clear that it 'would subtract from the time that people have for their other pursuits – personal, familial, and commercial […] Widespread deliberation by citizens at large on issues of politics would mainly just reduce the civility of our politics by raising the temperature of public debate, making our politics more ideological and therefore more divisive.'[130] Advocates of deliberation can offer evidence to challenge these criticisms, but it is important to recognise that there are radically different views about the nature of politics, civic engagement and political debate.

While sympathetic to the idea of deliberation prior to elections, the one-off approach could also be questioned. It may be more effective to have a series of events as the political campaign progresses. However, this may have further resource implications and may not have the desired public and media impact of all citizens deliberating together over a two-day period.

Role in decision-making
Decision-making may be affected in two ways. The first aim of Deliberation Day is to improve citizens' civic competence so that they are more informed when they vote – their individual decisions should be more reflective and considered. Second, Deliberation Day is likely to affect the decisions made by political parties and other actors in the political process. Deliberation Day demands clear and reasoned statements on policy issues. Ackerman and Fishkin are explicit in their aim that their proposal will have a leverage effect on the standard of political discourse in the US, challenging the domination and presentation of politics by candidates, the media, interest groups, spin doctors, lobbyist, and others.

Scale and transferability
Deliberation Day could be used for local elections, but it is national, high-profile elections that are likely to raise citizens' and media interest. Ackerman and Fishkin's proposal is as applicable to the political process in the UK as it is the US.

Resource implications
Resources implications for Deliberation Day are high, particularly for the first couple of election years where there would be extra start-up costs. Ackerman and Fishkin provide a fairly detailed estimate of permanent administrative costs, off-site costs incurred during Deliberation Day years and on-site costs. Overall costs depend on the number of participants, but their total cost estimate of a 4-year cycle is just over $1.2 million for 30 million participants; just over $2.3 million for 70 million participants.[131]

Conclusion
Deliberation Day is an impressive proposal for citizen involvement and one that could potentially catch the public imagination. The proposal combines some interesting incentives:
- a financial incentive for citizens to participate and then to vote;
- a leverage incentive to change the manner in which political elites present political information.

The obvious weakness of the proposal is the sheer cost – however this should be weighed against the positive impact on political life that its advocates suggest.

4.5. Conclusions

Deliberative approaches certainly offer advantages over many traditional approaches to consultation.

- Innovations aim to bring together a cross-section of the population so that deliberations reflect on a variety of experiences and viewpoints.
- In principle, all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate – no social group will be systematically excluded.
- Events are run by independent organisations to ensure fairness.
- Outcomes (reports, votes, opinion polls) reflect citizens' considered judgements.

The fundamental idea behind deliberative innovations is that if a diverse range of citizens is brought together they have the capacity and skills to deliberate and make recommendations on complex public policy issues. Evidence suggests that this assumption holds.

Many deliberative innovations have relatively large resource implications since they typically involve independent facilitation in order to protect and nurture deliberation and to ensure against criticisms of manipulation by sponsoring authorities. In short, *quality* of participation costs.

5. Co-governance Innovations

5.1. Introduction

In the innovations discussed so far in this report citizens tend to have little control over agenda setting or final decision-making. Co-governance innovations begin to rectify this situation – they aim to give citizens significant influence during the process of decision-making. The term 'co-governance' refers to the idea that citizens and public authorities in some way 'share' political power. Co-governance innovations generally have the following characteristics.

- Innovations are usually on-going forms of engagement – i.e. they are not one-off events.

- Innovations typically have a degree of agenda-setting power – citizens are able to shape the priorities for a policy area and the scope of their

participation in the process rather than simply responding to the proposals of public authorities.

- Innovations often have decision-making authority or a high degree of influence on final decisions.

It is this combination of characteristics that distinguishes co-governance innovations from (most of) the innovations discussed so far in this report – these have tended to be one-off events and at most decision-recommending.

There is a wide variety of approaches to engagement within the category of co-governance. One of the ways of distinguishing between approaches is to focus on the method of selection – the examples that follow are ordered according to the way in which citizens are recruited. The first innovations are open to all (relevant) citizens; the latter involve some form of selection process – e.g. election, self-selection, random selection, etc.

Given the promise, diversity and innovative structure of many of these co-governance initiatives, there are five case studies at the end of this section, highlighting contrasting designs.

5.2. Examples of co-governance

5.2.1. Chicago Community Policing

Since 1995, the Chicago Police Department has been holding monthly community beat meetings in 285 neighbourhood beats across the city. In these beat meetings police officers and local citizens discuss how to improve public safety in the neighbourhood. The meetings generate priorities and strategies for action and review progress. Successful strategies will often involve coordinated action by local citizens and the police. Not surprisingly, the quality of meetings and strategies is uneven across the city – although all officers receive relevant training, much depends on their skills of facilitation. On average 17 citizens attend each beat meeting which equates to a city-wide attendance of around 5,000 citizens per month. According to surveys, 14 percent of citizens attended at least one meeting in 1997;[132] 79% are aware of the programme.[133]

Community Policing is particularly interesting because there is a strong incentive for disadvantaged citizens to attend. Evidence shows that this innovation reverses the typical participation bias – citizens from within poor and less well-educated neighbourhoods (which suffer from higher levels of crime) turn out at higher rates.[134] One of the strengths of community policing is that the potential for citizen empowerment is high – they are able to participate directly in shaping priorities. As Archon Fung recognises, the 'short feedback loop between planning, implementation, and assessment increases both the practical capabilities and the problem-solving success of residents and police officers in each beat.'[135]

5.2.2. Lambeth Youth Council (see Case Study 5.5. for more detail)

The Lambeth Youth Council was established by the Borough Council in 2002 as an attempt to engage a 'hard to reach' group in the improvement of services and policy and to encourage the development of a new generation of community leaders. Meetings are open to all young people aged between 11 and 24. Around 100 young people have signed up, with 30 involved on a regular basis. The majority are from BME groups. The Council has been involved in projects on stop and search and teenage pregnancy. The innovation won the IPPR and Guardian's Young People's Involvement Award in 2002. The structure and work of the Council is discussed in more detail in Case Study 5.5.[136]

5.2.3. Participatory Appraisal (see Case Study 5.4. for more detail)

Participatory Appraisal (PA) emerged in developing countries as a method for including the voices of poor communities within the development and implementation of poverty assessment policies and strategies. The principle is clear and highly attractive: those who suffer deprivation should be involved in understanding the nature and causes of poverty and generating priorities and strategies for intervention.

There is a variety of participatory techniques used to engage citizens, such as preference ranking, mapping and drawing. Their design often has to take into account the fact that participants may be illiterate. PA differs from basic consultation (section 3) and deliberative approaches (section 4) because its advocates claim that it is explicitly linked to government action. However, evidence suggests that PAs do not always result in positive change.

Donor agencies, such as the World Bank, have promoted the use of PAs as a mechanism of empowerment. The use of PA has recently transferred to developed countries. Oxfam GB, for example, has promoted the use of PA in the development of regeneration projects in the UK.[137] Case Study 5.4. analyses the extent to which the ambitions of PA practitioners translates into effective practice.

5.2.4. People's Planning Campaign, Kerala

Small-scale, face-to-face assemblies have proved particularly popular in developing nations where their introduction is often an explicit element of a political strategy aimed at confronting entrenched relations of patronage and corruption. The People's Planning Campaign is one example of how deliberations and decisions of local assemblies can be integrated into higher-level plans.

The process begins with popular village meetings that generate ideas and proposals followed by a series of development seminars and task forces that draw up and

integrate village plans into a broader planning process. There are a number of interesting developments within the Campaign. For example, mass training of thousands of citizens has taken place to increase their knowledge and understanding of the planning process. Also retired experts (e.g. engineers, planners, etc.) have been drawn into the process to facilitate and support the deliberations and decisions of citizens – it was realised that citizens lacked the technical knowledge to design sophisticated projects.

In 1997 some 2 million people attended initial local meetings although it is recognised that the process has not been effectively established in all areas of the state. As with many innovations, the embedding of the process relied heavily on the active support of a particular political party. With a change in state government, the future effectiveness of the campaign is in some doubt.[138]

5.2.5. Participatory Budgeting (see Case Study 5.3. for more detail)

Participatory Budgeting was initially established in Porto Alegre in Brazil in 1989. Of all the participatory initiatives used in developing nations, it is Participatory Budgeting that has caught the imagination of practitioners and academics. Like the Kerala example, it manages to combine popular engagement at the local level with the development and monitoring of a city-wide budget.[139] It achieves this by mixing open assemblies with representative bodies.

Participatory Budgeting begins with a series of neighbourhood and regional popular assemblies that generate investment priorities and select citizens to sit on decision-making bodies which present a city-wide budget to the city legislature. Participation levels are impressive – over a five year period in the late 1990s, as many as 8.4% of the adult population stated that they had participated in the process during the last 5 years.[140]

PB has spread to other Latin American localities and there is growing interest in its use in the UK (for example in Salford).[141] A more detailed analysis of the process is offered in Case Study 5.3.

5.2.6. Espoo Youth Council (see Case Study 5.5. for more detail)

The Espoo Youth Council was established in 1997. It differs from the Lambeth Youth Council (5.2.2) in that members are elected – at present the Council has 30 elected members aged between 13 and 20. Youth Councillors serve a two-year term. Although the Youth Council is independent, it has significant access to different parts of the city's administration – youth representatives sit on the City Council committees and its resolutions are taken to the City Board. Beyond standing for election and voting for candidates, the youth of Espoo are able to discuss and develop proposals on an 'Ideas Factory' on the internet. These ideas can form the basis of resolutions that are taken to the city administration. The Finnish government

has begun establishing youth councils throughout the country – by 2002, there were around 80 in existence.[142]

The Hastings Youth Council in the UK also runs youth elections to select representatives, although its engagement with the local council is not as well established as in Espoo.[143]

A more detailed comparison of the Lambeth and Espoo Youth Councils is provided in case study 5.4.

5.2.7. Vigilance Committees

Vigilance Committees in Bolivia are one element of broader participatory reforms that empower registered community-based organisations (including neighbourhood councils) to participate in the development of municipal plans. The Vigilance Committees are seen as a highly progressive part of the framework – 6 elected leaders from community-based organisations act as a 'watchdog' to ensure that policy and investments reflect decisions made in the municipal plans. Committees have the power to call for regular audits and to petition congress to freeze funds in cases of irregularities.

Although in principle this is an extremely interesting innovation, in practice there are limitations. For example, the Institute of Development Studies suggests that 'many civil society organisations have no experience contesting issues in front of important government officials and do not feel they have the skills to conduct meetings and negotiations as required.' There is some concern that (unpaid) Vigilance Committee members are at risk of co-option by powerful local elites. It is also argued that certain groups – such as indigenous movements – lack representation on vigilance committees.[144] Many of these shortcomings can be explained in relation to Bolivia's social and political environment – the Vigilance Committee model may work better in other political contexts. However, opportunities to participate on a Vigilance Committee remain limited to leaders of community organisations.

5.2.8. Lille Community Councils

Lille Community Councils offer one model of how locally elected politicians and citizens can cooperate within the same forum and share decision-making power.[145] Community Councils were initiated in 1973 and operate at the equivalent of ward level, each serving a population of 5,000-20,000 people. The seats of the Councils are divided between representatives of the town council (50%), representatives of local associations (25%) and citizens elected by the local population (25%).

Although on a formal level Community Councils appear to be an excellent example of decentralisation, the concentration of power at the national level in France means that the impact on decision-making in many policy areas is limited. However, the structure adopted within Lille provides a good example of how decentralisation

initiatives might combine the mandate of elected councillors with the demands of community participation.

5.2.9. Citizen participation on partnership boards (see Case Study 5.6. for more detail)

'Partnership' has, in recent years, been the dominant approach for dealing with some of the most difficult and intransigent policy problems in local areas. In urban regeneration, for example, deprived areas have witnessed a range of initiatives – including City Challenge, the Single Regeneration Budget and most recently New Deal for Communities – that have required local stakeholders and institutions to collaborate in the development of local projects. The key decision-making forum for such partnerships is typically a board with representatives of local institutions (e.g. local authority, health authority, police) and some form of community representation.

Government guidance often requires partnerships to engage local citizens – not just in consultation but as members of the decision-making board itself. A problem facing any partnership is how citizens are to be selected to sit on the board. A number of ways are possible, including 'democratic elections; nomination by community groups; self-selection; or co-option by councillors and other partners'.[146] Often citizen representatives are politically-active individuals – they are frequently accused of being self-appointed community leaders who do not represent the wider views of the community. In some situations this might be the case; however, criticism of community representatives is often used as a strategy by other board members to undermine their legitimacy and impact.[147]

Although in principle partnership boards offer an example of co-governance, most are dominated by institutional stakeholders – organisations that have a high degree of bureaucratic support and experience. Citizen representatives typically have little opportunity to set the agenda and find themselves marginalised in the decision-making process. The question of selection and the impact of citizen participation on partnership boards will be discussed in more detail in case study 5.5.

5.2.10. Community Fund regional boards

The Community Fund is a non-departmental public body (also known as a Quango – quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation) responsible for distributing lottery money to 'good causes.' In England, the Community Fund has devolved its grant-making powers to nine regional panels. As with almost all Quangos, membership of these panels is by appointment. This is highly contentious – many people feel that it is an unjust extension of the power of patronage.

Following a pilot and evaluation, the Fund introduced a system of 'appointment by lot' for one or two places on each regional board. Individuals selected randomly from the electoral register are approached to see if they are interested in becoming a member of their regional panel. If interested, citizens are then interviewed before an

appointment is made. According to the Community Fund, there are no restrictions on the people who can be selected by this process in respect of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, or any other grounds. They are required to display:

- an awareness of the region;
- fairness to all branches of society;
- knowledge of equal opportunities;
- the ability to be flexible;
- a readiness to question.[148]

The Community Fund recognises that appointed citizens require substantial support, at least initially, in order to play a full part in proceedings. However, the Fund regards this innovative participation initiative as effective: 'This process has been successful in bringing in a number of people who would not otherwise have considered public service.'[149] More than 25 citizens chosen by random have served on regional boards, serving between one and four years.[150]

A recent report by the House of Commons Select Committee on Public Administration – *Government by Appointment: Opening Up the Patronage State* – supports the idea of appointing more lay members of Quango boards through lot.[151] The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (5.2.11. below) takes the idea of random selection one stage further. See also the discussion of lot (also known as random selection or sortition) in Case Study 6.4.

5.2.11. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia (see case study 5.7. for more detail)

The Citizens' Assembly was established by the government of British Columbia in January 2004 to review the current system of voting in the province. The Assembly shares many features with deliberative innovations discussed in section 4 (see in particular case study 4.3.). However, it is a rare example of a randomly-chosen citizens' forum that has been given significant political power in the decision-making process – if the Assembly favours a new electoral system, its recommendation will frame a province-wide referendum. In December 2004, the Citizens' Assembly finished its work, producing a report – *Making Every Vote Count* – that recommended the single-transferable vote (STV).[152]

The Assembly was composed of 160 randomly-selected members (plus an independent chair to facilitate meetings) – one man and one woman from the 79 provincial electoral districts plus two Aboriginal members.[153] During 2004, the Assembly met regularly to learn about different electoral systems and discuss their relative merits. Members received an honorarium of $150 per meeting day and childcare and other special needs were catered for. Following the apparent success of the BC experiment, Ontario has announced that it intends to follow a similar strategy to review its electoral system.[154]

The Citizens' Assembly represents one of the most impressive experiments using a randomly selected group of citizens: 'nowhere else in the world has such an

independent and non-partisan group of citizens been so empowered.'[155] Although it is too early for any independent evaluations of the process, the widespread support for the Assembly suggests that citizens are willing and able to deliberate and decide on significant areas of public policy. The details of the Assembly are discussed in more detail in case study 5.7.

5.3. Case study: Participatory Budgeting

Description

Participatory Budgeting (PB) first emerged in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989. As it established itself as an effective mechanism for engaging citizens, it spread to about 180 other Brazilian municipalities, one Brazilian state and to a number of other cities across Latin America.

Taking the Porto Alegre model as our primary guide, there are three distinct levels of citizen engagement in the annual PB cycle: popular assemblies at regional and neighbourhood level; regional budget forums; and the municipal budget council.

Popular assemblies
- Regional and neighbourhood assemblies are the most participative element of PB in the sense of large-scale attendance by citizens – assemblies are open to all.
- The process begins in March with the first regional assemblies in each of the city's 16 regions reviewing the previous year's budget allocation.
- After the first regional assembly, neighbourhood assemblies draw up their lists of investment priorities (e.g. sanitation, paving, health care) which are formally presented at the second regional assembly.
- Also at the second regional assembly delegates are elected to the Regional Budget Forums (the number of delegates from each region is proportional to the number of citizens attending the first regional assemblies) and two councillors are voted onto the Municipal Budget Council from each region.
- A parallel process to the regional assemblies occurs for city-wide thematic issues that are not neighbourhood-specific, such as education, health and social services and transportation. Five thematic forums generate priorities and elect delegates and councillors.

Regional Budget Forums
- Each of the 16 regions has a Budget Forum where delegates work with the administration to coordinate the priority lists from the various neighbourhood assemblies into an overall list of investment priorities for the region as a whole.
- Decisions are usually based on needs-based criteria and direct negotiation between neighbourhood representatives.
- The Forums are also responsible for on-going negotiations and the monitoring of implementation by the various city agencies.

Municipal Budget Council

- The Municipal Budget Council is responsible for deciding the relative distribution of resources among the various regions of the city and the overall distribution of resources between the various city agencies.
- Decisions are guided by needs-based criteria and the priority lists generated by the regions.
- The MBC presents the budget to the Municipal Council assembly by the end of September.

PB has made the budgetary process much more transparent and led to a transfer of resources and investment to the poorest regions of the city.

Assessment

Selection mechanism

PB involves a combination of approaches to engaging citizens. The popular regional and neighbourhood assemblies are open and involve impressive numbers of citizens. In 1995, for example, 7,000 people participated in the first set of large regional assemblies while 14,000 participated in the intermediary neighbourhood meetings. In the late 1990s, as many as 8.4% of the adult population in Porto Alegre stated that they had participated in budget assemblies at some point in the last 5 years.[156] There is a strong incentive to participate in these assemblies since investment priorities and delegates and councillors are chosen by direct voting and the number of delegates in each region is decided in relation to the turnout at regional assemblies. If more citizens are mobilised, investment is more likely to follow.

The more detailed, complex deliberations with public authorities occur in the two elected assemblies. Councillors are limited to two-year terms and subject to immediate recall.[157] Many of the delegates and councillors are well-known community leaders – however, regular electoral competition ensures that they must continue to mobilise people and work hard during the year to win representative positions. Their leadership status is not guaranteed.

PB has been particularly effective at engaging the more marginalised segments of the population – in particular women and people on lower incomes. In 2002, the lowest 20th percentile of the population accounted for 30% of the participants in the popular regional assemblies. This figure drops off to around 20% for forum delegates and 15% for councillors.[158] The regional and neighbourhood assemblies are crucial for engaging those citizens who are less able to find time for participation. There remain problems with engaging the very poor, often transient element of the population.

Form of involvement

The capacity for citizens to set the agenda is high in this model. They are informed of the previous year's budget allocations and are able to decide on their

neighbourhood's priorities. Their success in achieving investment is to a certain extent tied to their ability to mobilise votes within their neighbourhood (although needs-based criteria also have an impact). This incentive to participate is one of the striking features of PB. Although many neighbourhoods were originally sceptical of the PB process, they witnessed investment occurring in other areas of the city and thus had a clear incentive to mobilise. Evidence suggests that the introduction of PB has actually facilitated the development of associations and mobilisation of citizens, particularly in poorer areas where they had been particularly scarce.[159] Interaction with other citizens is clearly promoted and there are opportunities to engage with administration officials. The elected delegates and councillors are given training to develop their ability to negotiate with the administration and deal with technical budgetary issues. The on-going nature of this democratic innovation means that citizens are able to develop their civic and critical skills over time.

Role in decision-making

PB involves the delegation of executive, not legislative, power. The final budget is presented to the municipal authority for its agreement and then approval from the Ministry of Finance. While the majority of the municipal council in Porto Alegre has often been hostile to PB, popular pressure and support for the process has protected most of the decisions and budgets tend to be approved.

Scale and transferability

The Porto Alegre innovation has been transferred to other locations, although not always successfully – in some cities the process has been undermined 'when participants made colossal lists of investment demands that eclipsed financial resources'.[160] The success of the Porto Alegre approach is in part tied to the practicability and realism of the early years of the process – the administration only delegated those powers and finances that it had the capacity to respond to within a year, i.e. small-scale street and sanitation investments. As the process proved to be effective, the administration expanded the areas covered by PB. This approach also meant that citizens witnessed immediate returns on their participation, giving them the confidence and incentive to continue their involvement and for new groups to engage in the process. Although PB is usually associated with municipal budgeting, it has also been established in one Brazilian state – Rio Grande do Sul, with a population of 10 million.[161] The state-level success of PB provides important evidence that direct participation is not necessarily limited to small-scale political environments.[162]

There is growing interest in PB in the UK. In partnership with Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme, the community-based organization Community Pride in Salford has worked with activists from Porte Alegre to learn about the PB process and how it might be transferred to the UK. The local council is currently 'shadowing' participatory budgeting alongside its established budgetary process. This is primarily an exercise in increasing the budgetary literacy of local citizens and groups. Community Pride has also worked with partnerships in Bradford and Sunderland in its attempts to promote participatory forms of budgeting.[163]

Resource implications

No assessment has been attempted to compare the costs of PB to traditional budgeting processes. As a Harvard evaluation notes: 'Such a study is technically feasible but its practical relevance should be questioned. In many ways, appraising the [PB] by the standard techniques of economic analysis would fail to capture the multifaceted impacts of a system that is primarily an instrument of empowerment.'[164] What is clear is that for PB to be a success it requires high levels of commitment and support from both citizens and the political administration.

Concluding remarks

The success of PB rests in part on the incentives it generates. Investment priorities and effective community representation are more likely where citizens are mobilised and engage in the process. There is a significant and visible relationship between participation and outcome. This is not to say that PB only works because it appeals to individuals' self-interest. The level of support in a neighbourhood/region is only one criteria on which decisions are made – needs-based criteria are also used in the decision-making process in the Regional Forums and the Budget Council. PB is based on an interesting mix of self-interest and social justice. As an innovation PB appears to have successfully delivered a number of significant outcomes, including:

- transparency in decision-making and trust in the process;
- high levels of participation including the engagement of politically-marginalised groups;
- emergence of new associations;
- transfer of resources to poorer areas of the city.

5.4. Case study: Participatory Appraisal

Description

Participatory Appraisal (PA) aims to empower poor people to generate an understanding of the nature and causes of their deprivation, identify their needs and agree priorities for intervention. It is an approach that is increasingly popular in developing nations – international donor agencies such as the World Bank often require a PA within their loan and aid agreements.[165] In recent years, there has been growing interest in how PA could be used within the UK, particularly in regeneration work.[166] In principle, PA can empower communities and influence and alter the allocation of resources, the way services are delivered and the very processes of governance.[167]

There is a family of approaches that is being summarised here under the term PA, including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), Participatory Action Research and Beneficiary Assessment. All of these approaches share a similar philosophy.

- The nature of poverty is multi-dimensional and needs to be understood from the perspective of the people who suffer deprivation.
- The process of generating an understanding of poverty and priorities for action can empower local people.

- The legitimacy of poverty reduction strategies is increased if there is community input through PA.

In some ways PA might best be understood as a 'philosophy' or a broad methodology since there is a range of methods that are used in the process. These include, for example, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, group discussions and exercises and biographies, often using techniques such as preference ranking, mapping and drawing to make the process as accessible as possible to all participants (many of whom in developing countries may be illiterate). Many of the approaches mirror innovations that we have already discussed in earlier chapters ('consultation' and 'deliberative innovations'); however, the difference is that, at least in principle, PA is explicitly connected to *action* and the sharing of power between communities and public authorities. Whether this is achieved in practice in most PAs is debatable.

There is also a widespread recognition that an effective PA must be sensitive to the relationships of power *within* communities. Good practice requires that the process is structured to ensure that the voices of the most marginalised and vulnerable within communities are heard e.g. children, women, older people, people with health problems or disabilities.[168]

Assessment

Selection mechanism
Because PA is an overarching term that includes a variety of different techniques, the approach to selection will vary according to the particular mix of techniques. However, PA aims to ensure that all voices are heard from within a community, so many exercises will specifically engage vulnerable groups.

Form of involvement
Again, the broad range of techniques and tools used within PA means that it is difficult to generalise about the nature of involvement. Although a PA may be national in scope (e.g. the Uganda Participatory Poverty Assessment Process) most of the engagement takes place at the local level (neighbourhood or village). Given that many of the participants in developing countries have little or no education, many of the techniques such as mapping and drawing exercises have been developed to ensure that they are easily accessible and understood. Confidence is typically generated by small group work and using venues that are familiar to the community.

As many of the participants in PA have no prior experience of participation, the behaviour and attitude of PA practitioners can be a crucial factor in its success.[169] It is also important that researchers are reflective about their own role in the process, since they are heavily involved in the interpretation of results.

Role in decision-making

Within the literature on PA, the significance of the relationship between appraisal and action is frequently highlighted – otherwise the process is little more than information gathering on the part of researchers and public authorities. If the process is simply 'extractive', then community empowerment is likely to be undermined.[170] As a recent Oxfam report suggests: 'If participatory work is undertaken badly it will be much harder for the next piece of participatory work to engage the same people. People who have the experience of not being listened to are less likely to want to be involved a second time round.'[171]

Although PA is widely endorsed and practised by development agencies, there is a growing number of critics who suggest that PA fails to achieve its aims and that any empowerment is superficial, or even illusory. Critics question, for example, whether there is any real connection between PA and decision-making – what evidence is there to suggest that local level participation has any effect on broader macro-level inequalities and injustices?[172]

Scale and transferability

PA typically takes place at the local level and it is this local approach that has been particularly attractive to regeneration partnerships in the UK – see, for example, the work carried out in Easterhouse, Glasgow.[173]

However, one of the most celebrated PAs was launched in Uganda in 1997 as part of the national Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). PAs were carried out at a local level and then results were collated into larger-scale plans. The success of the Uganda PA process highlights the importance of strong commitment and leadership from within government.

Resource implications

Costs will clearly be dependent on the scale and ambitions of the particular PA. A PA that took place in Mongolia over a 5 month period (including training, engagement and assessment) with 32 rural and urban communities cost $108,100. A Gambian PA that involved a similar number of communities, but involved five studies over a three-year period cost $134,000.[174] The costs for a more localised project should be much less, although costs would be higher in the UK.

Concluding remarks

If PA proceeds as practitioners suggest, then the process has valuable strengths, including:

- empowerment of citizens and communities; and
- legitimate poverty reduction strategies that reflect citizens' own understandings of their situation and needs.

However, for PA to be something more than an innovative form of consultation, there needs to be a clear relationship between assessment and action; an ongoing relationship between community participation and the decision-making process of public authorities. How this is to be achieved is not always made clear within the PA literature.

5.5. Case study: Youth Councils

Description

The lack of engagement with the political process on the part of young people in the UK is often noted amongst policy makers. Thus any innovation that increases the involvement of young people is likely to be of interest. This case study focuses on two youth councils in Lambeth and in Espoo, Finland. The contrast between the two initiatives raises interesting issues for the design of youth councils.

Espoo Youth Council
- The Youth Council was established independently of the city administration in 1997.
- 30 representatives are elected (with an equal gender balance) – candidates must be between 13 and 19 years old and serve two-year terms.
- Proposals can be generated and discussed by young people in the city on the online 'Ideas Factory.' Feasible suggestions are presented to the three-weekly general assemblies of the youth council.
- The Youth Council has significant access to the decision-making process in the city – members sit on the various city committees responsible for running local services and are able to take their proposals to the City Board.
- Approximately 25% of the proposals generated by the Ideas Factory have been enacted by the city administration.

Lambeth Youth Council
- Lambeth Borough Council established the Youth Council in February 2002 in an attempt to make services and policy more responsive to young people and foster future community leaders.
- The Youth Council meets once a week in Brixton Town Hall and is open to anyone between the ages of 11 and 24. Around 100 young people have signed up and around 30 attend regularly. The majority are from BME groups.
- The Council is chaired by a youth development worker (from the Borough Council).
- The Council has worked on a number of issues such as stop and search, teenage pregnancy and HIV-aids. Members have gone into local schools and helped train new police recruits.

Assessment

Selection mechanism

This is a significant difference between the two Youth Councils – in Espoo selection to the assembly is by election; in Lambeth the Council is open to all. The different approach to membership reflects broader social trends in the two urban areas. According to the Ministry of Education in Finland, there is a high degree of interest in social and political participation among young people – for example, 51% of young people are involved in civic activity. As the IPPR suggests: 'This propensity of Finnish youth to be inclined to civic activity may be the reason why the youth council

was able to develop organically without the initial intervention of formal political structures.'[175]

In comparison the Lambeth Youth Council was specifically set up to engage what is viewed as a 'hard to reach' group. There is no comparable civic tradition amongst young people. The 'open door' policy means that one barrier (election) is removed if young people show an interest in engaging.

Form of involvement

There is little information available about the quality of debates and the manner in which decisions are made in Espoo. It is significant that the Council is an independent organisation – it can choose the issues it wishes to debate and take forward. There are significant opportunities for representatives to gain political experience in the administration of the city since members are able to sit on city committees and take proposals to the city board. Although only elected representatives are involved in assembly decision-making in Espoo, the Ideas Factory provides an avenue for wider participation for young people.

In Lambeth, the Council is chaired by a youth development worker from the Borough Council. The Borough Council offers a wide range of training opportunities for the young people to help them develop their civic skills. The issues discussed and developed by the Youth Council appear to be those of direct interest to young people – stop and search, teenage pregnancy, and the state of youth centres.[176] On stop and search, for example, the Youth Council has interviewed key figures including the Chief Superintendent, provided feedback to the Home Office and been involved in the training of police recruits. This outreach role of the Council seems to be particularly important.

Role in decision-making

The Espoo Youth Council has highly developed mechanisms for influencing official decision-making – it has direct access to committees and the city board. The ability of the assembly to represent views of the wider youth population appears particularly efficient: approximately 25% of the proposals generated by the Ideas Factory have been enacted by the city administration.[177]

The relationship between Lambeth Youth Council and public bodies is still developing, although where the Council has taken a particular interest – e.g. stop and search and teenage pregnancy – their impact has been fairly impressive. The Council often takes part on consultations on youth issues and is developing its links with the local strategic partnership and the Borough Council.

Scale and transferability

The two Youth Councils perhaps represent extremes in terms of transferability – Espoo is a model suitable for localities where there are high levels of civic engagement amongst young people, whereas the Lambeth model will be more effective where there is little existing civic engagement amongst young people.

Larger-scale versions of local youth councils have been developed – for example, the UK Youth Parliament.[178]

Resource implications
It has been difficult to gain a clear picture of precisely how Espoo Youth Council is resourced. Officials within the city administration certainly provide guidance to youth representatives on policy issues and how decisions can be influenced. In Lambeth there is a dedicated development worker from the local borough council who chairs and supports the work of the Youth Council.

Concluding Remarks
The political disengagement of young people is a major area of concern, so the potential role of Youth Councils should be interest. The different approaches taken in Espoo and Lambeth offer models that are sensitive to differing social contexts.

5.6. Case study: Citizen participation on local partnership boards

Description
Local partnerships have proliferated across the UK in a search for 'joined-up solutions' to policy problems often associated with social exclusion, e.g. poor education, crime, health, and regeneration.[179] For many years within the urban regeneration field, government funds have often only been made available to local partnerships. Recently the government has required the establishment of local strategic partnerships (LSPs) – again specific funding streams can only be accessed through such partnership arrangements. The logic is clear – the government wishes to see local institutions and stakeholders combine their resources to tackle problems that cannot be dealt with by one organisation alone.

The core decision-making forum of partnerships is the board. Members of the board will be the relevant stakeholders – depending on the issue it is tackling, this may include institutions such as local government, health authorities, the learning and skills council, the police and local businesses. The government is particularly concerned that these partnerships engage local communities. For example, government guidance on the most recent urban regeneration programme states: 'the New Deal for Communities places a particular emphasis on involving all elements of the local community from the outset […] Partnerships that don't clearly involve the local community and that don't respond to their needs and aspirations won't be supported.'[180] Partnerships often use the sorts of techniques we have already discussed in this report (under 'consultation' and 'deliberative innovations') to engage citizens. However, local communities are also 'partners' and thus are generally directly represented on actual partnership boards. The question that has haunted policy makers and practitioners is how can this be done effectively? There are two separate issues that will particularly interest us in this case study.
- How should representatives of citizens be selected?
- What problems do citizens face once they are on the board?

Assessment

Selection mechanism
What is the legitimate mechanism for selecting citizens to sit on partnership boards? The most common approach has been to draw community representatives from existing community-based organisations, such as residents associations. This has the advantage of engaging already active community leaders who have a well-defined constituency. However, this approach tends to engage existing community leaders ('the usual suspects'), rewarding those individuals and groups that are already relatively well-organised.[181] The partnership may be engaging with the most politically-astute and committed individuals, but they may fail to represent the interests of more marginalised and less organised groups within the local community.

In a number of areas – in particular those recently established under the New Deal for Communities programme – community elections have been held. What is noticeable is that in many deprived areas the vibrancy and turnout for community elections has been higher than local authority elections. Given that institutional partners often question the legitimacy of community representatives, this finding turns the tables – it is the local authority that may need to be on the defensive. Elections have also attempted to be more inclusive of the population the partnership is serving – in Sheffield, for example, young people aged 15 and 16, asylum seekers and other non-British citizens were allowed to vote.[182]

An alternative and controversial approach to selection is that taken by Birmingham Race Action Partnership (BRAP) established in 1998. Previously Birmingham City Council had primarily consulted on race equality issues with community representatives who had been elected from within ethnic- and faith-based associations (see 3.2.9.). There was some concern that many of these representatives were not able or willing to represent the diversity of perspectives within their communities (particularly women and young people). Instead, BRAP – a multi-sector partnership – selects 'community auditors' through an interview process. Interviews allow the appointment of individuals who BRAP believes are committed to taking forward the race equality agenda and working in partnership. Not surprisingly this has proved controversial, but has engaged a group of citizens with a variety of backgrounds who had often not previously been involved in local community politics.[183]

Finally, partnership boards could follow the example of the Community Fund where lay members of regional boards are selected by lot (see 5.2.10. and 6.4. for further discussion of this approach), although there appear to be no examples of regeneration or strategic partnerships that have taken this path.

Form of involvement
Participation on partnership boards provides an opportunity for a deep level of engagement for a small number of selected citizens – often partnerships have access to a wide range of resources that can make a considerable difference to the

quality of life in often deprived localities. However, numerous studies of partnerships raise questions about the capacity of citizens to engage effectively.

One of the key questions is the extent to which citizens sitting on boards are able to shape the agenda of partnerships. There are at least two barriers. The first is the context within which partnerships operate. It is a familiar criticism of regeneration partnerships, for example, that the short timescales within which they are established leaves little opportunity for citizen participation in shaping the agenda.[184] Citizens are only involved after the overall framework of activity has been decided. This problem has been recognised in more recent programmes such as New Deal for Communities. Equally citizen impact can be limited by constraints laid down by government – the rules within which the partnership operates – or the willingness of other bodies to respond to citizens' demands and suggestions.

A second problem relates to citizens' capacity to engage with institutional partners on equal terms. Very often the language of discussions and debates is technical with a great deal of assumed knowledge. Even where training and support is provided, it cannot match the experience, resources and bureaucratic support of established decision-makers and citizens can be overwhelmed. This relative disadvantage means that citizens are not always able to follow discussions and therefore they are rarely able to set the agenda. This often gives the appearance that the citizens on partnership boards are 'co-opted' or 'incorporated' into the ways of working and approaches of the larger institutional partners.[185]

The mechanisms for ensuring the accountability of citizen representatives can also cause problems – are citizens in the position to make decisions on behalf of the community or do they need to consult first? Adequate accountability mechanisms are not always in place and institutional partners are not always sensitive to the requirements of effective community representation, putting pressure on citizens to make immediate decisions.[186]

Role in decision-making
In principle, partnerships provide an opportunity for citizen representatives to share responsibility and decision-making power with a range of institutions operating in the locality. However, we need to recognise that in practice citizens are often marginalised on partnership boards – power imbalances tend to favour the interests of institutional partners.

Scale and transferability
Many of the existing partnerships are based around regeneration areas – the most recent – New Deal for Communities – tends to focus on neighbourhoods. Recently government has pushed for the establishment of local strategic partnerships (LSPs), most of which operate at city-level, although some areas have established 'mini-LSPs' at a more local level.

Resource implications
The most obvious resource implication for citizen participation in partnerships is support and training for citizen representatives.[187] This is crucial if they are to have

an effective impact on discussions and decisions. Mechanisms also need to be put in place for citizen representatives to engage with the broader community.

However, it is not only the capacity of citizens that needs to be developed. Resources also need to be provided to build the capacity of partner institutions to work with citizens on boards. Their expectations and working methods need to change in order that citizens are not marginalised from discussions and decisions.[188]

Concluding remarks
Partnerships are an ever more present feature of governance, particularly at the local level. They offer the potential to draw resources together from a range of institutions within a locality to deal with difficult policy problems. It is recognised that citizens need to be part of the decision-making process and most partnerships provide seats for citizens on their boards. However, evidence suggests that citizens tend to be disadvantaged and marginalised in the ongoing activities of the board. More institutionalised stakeholders tend to dominate proceedings, setting the agenda and controlling decisions. This raises questions about whether partnerships as they are presently organised should be considered to be a type of co-governance innovation.

5.7. Case study: Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia

Description
The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform was established by the government of British Columbia (with full support from the legislature) to review the BC electoral system and, if necessary, to recommend an alternative system.[189] The BC government committed itself to holding a referendum on the Assembly's recommendations. The Assembly was made of 160 randomly-selected citizens – one man and one woman from each electoral district plus two Aboriginal members. An independent Chair – Jack Blaney – oversaw and directed the Assembly's work.

The Assembly began its work in January 2004. Its work can be divided into three aspects.
- Initially Assembly members spent a series of weekends learning about different electoral systems.
- The Assembly then took evidence during 50 public hearings attended by around 3,000 citizens and received 1,603 written submissions.
- Finally, the Assembly spent a period of time deliberating over the merits of different electoral systems before voting on different options.

In December 2004, it produced a report – *Making Every Vote Count* – that recommended the introduction of the single-transferable vote (STV) electoral system.[190]

To ensure that citizens were able to attend, meetings were held at weekends, childcare and other support services were available to members with special needs

and all expenses associated with serving on the Assembly were covered. Members also received an honorarium of $150 per meeting day.

In many ways the Assembly resembles many of the deliberative micro-forums discussed in the previous section (see 4.3.). However, the Assembly differs in a number of important ways from innovations such as citizens' juries and deliberative opinion polling:

- a relatively significant number of citizens were involved in an on-going process rather than a single one-off event;
- there was a guarantee that recommendations would be taken seriously and have an impact on the decision-making process (i.e. frame a referendum).

At the end of the process, Jack Blaney, the Chair of the Citizens' Assembly, stated that:

> Never before in modern history has a democratic government given to unelected, "ordinary" citizens the power to review an important public policy, then seek from all citizens approval of any proposed changes to that policy. The British Columbia Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform has had this power and responsibility and, throughout its life, complete independence from government.[191]

Assessment

Selection mechanism

Obviously not all citizens could sit on the Assembly – therefore a fair form of selection was required. The choice of random selection – also known as sortition (see 6.4.) – offers an alternative selection mechanism to elections. Whereas elections are a popularity contest, random selection means that every citizen has an equal opportunity to be selected – it embodies a form of political equality. Since the group selected was fairly large, then the variety of different characteristics of the wider society was likely to be reflected within the group. The selection of one man and one woman from each electoral district as well as two Aboriginal members, ensured that the group had fair geographical, gender and cultural representation.

Form of involvement

The Citizens' Assembly was carefully designed to ensure that Assembly members were able to learn about the policy issue, take evidence from citizens and other interested parties and deliberate amongst themselves before coming to a decision. Although participation in the Assembly was time-consuming, evidence suggests that the citizens took their role extremely seriously and that they were able to competently discuss and make decisions about a complex policy problem. As Jack Blaney, the Chair of the Assembly has argued:

> The members of the Citizens' Assembly – British Columbians who unstintingly gave their time and energy – demonstrated how extraordinary ordinary citizens are when given an important task and the resources and independence to do it right. Over the eleven-month course of the Assembly,

only one of 161 members withdrew and attendance was close to perfect. Their great and lasting achievement is the birth of a new tool for democratic governance. With an impressive commitment to learning so many new concepts and skills, and with a grace and respect for one another in their discussions that was truly remarkable, the Assembly members demonstrated a quality of citizenship that inspired us all.[192]

No doubt one of the reasons why citizens were so willing to engage in the process was because the government had committed itself to a referendum based on the Assembly's recommendations – they knew that their deliberations and decisions would have an effect on the political decision-making process.

Perhaps the one obvious weakness of the Assembly is that it did not set its own agenda – the government decided what questions the Assembly would tackle and the limits of its competence – for example, it was not allowed to recommend changes to the size of the legislature. However, once it began its work, the Assembly was independent of government.

Citizens who were not chosen to sit in the Assembly were able to feed in their views through the public hearings and written submissions. They were also able to follow the work of the Assembly via their website and the media.

Role in decision-making
One of the criticisms of many deliberative initiatives (section 4) is that they provide an effective environment in which citizens are able to learn about and discuss difficult policy questions, but that their outputs and recommendations typically have no clear and obvious impact on the decision-making process. The Citizens' Assembly is quite different. Here the government of British Columbia committed themselves to a referendum on the Assembly's recommendations even *before* the Assembly had begun its work. This is why the Citizens' Assembly is one of the most innovative co-governance innovations seen to date – the government has trusted a group of ordinary citizens to make a significant political recommendation that would then be acted upon.

Scale and transferability
There is no reason why the Citizens' Assembly model cannot be transferred to other political units and be used on different scales. The apparent success of the Citizens' Assembly certainly shows that deliberative approaches can be used on a large-scale – British Columbia is a large province with a population of around 4 million people. The Province of Ontario has recently committed itself to following a similar process for reviewing its electoral system.

Resource implications
A Citizens' Assembly does not come cheap – resources are required to initially select citizens and to service the Assembly – for example, provide childcare and special needs, educate the Assembly on electoral issues, run public hearings and deal with written submissions and hire facilitators for group discussions. The budget

for the 16 months of operation (from selection through to publication of the report) was $5.9 million (Canadian dollars).

Conclusion
The Citizens' Assembly represents one of the most impressive innovations using a randomly-selected group of citizens: 'nowhere else in the world has such an independent and non-partisan group of citizens been so empowered.'[193] Certainly, deliberative innovations (4.3.) that share similar features have not had this level of political power. Although it is too early for any independent evaluations of the process, the widespread support for the Assembly suggests that citizens are willing and able to deliberate and decide on significant areas of public policy. The use of sortition offers an alternative method of selection to elections, one that creates an assembly of citizens rather than political elites.

5.8. Conclusions

The attractiveness of co-governance innovations is clear – they provide access to political power and decision-making and allow for ongoing monitoring and assessment of change. Depending on the structure of the innovation, this can be decision-making by citizens alone (e.g. youth councils, participatory budgeting, Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform) or in collaboration with political representatives (e.g. Lille Community Councils) or other local bodies (e.g. Chicago Community Policing, local partnerships).

Where assemblies are open, there is more opportunity to *increase* citizen participation; where a form of selection is used, participation levels will obviously be more limited. There are some concerns that open access will simply lead to assemblies that reflect current patterns of political participation – they will be dominated by articulate citizens who tend to be relatively wealthy, educated, middle-aged and male. Equal access does not necessarily equate to equal voice. However, it is clear from at least two examples – participatory budgeting and Chicago community policing – that the design of innovations can generate incentives that alter the established patterns of engagement. In both of these cases the innovations tend to attract citizens from poorer neighbourhoods. Where selection is required, the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform and the Community Fund regional boards show that the use of random selection (lot / sortition) can be a credible and effective alternative to elections.

The fact that citizens are involved in actual political decision-making and have some degree of power should lead to a *deepening* of participation and act as an incentive to take engagement more seriously. Certainly most of the examples discussed in this chapter indicate that citizens are attracted to political involvement when it is clear that this involvement can lead to change. What is also abundantly clear from the examples and case studies is that citizens need dedicated support and resources if they are to engage effectively. The active and sensitive support of public institutions is essential.

6. Direct Democracy Innovations

6.1. Introduction

6.2. Examples of direct democracy innovations
      6.2.1. New England Town Meetings
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      6.2.3. Multi-choice ballots / preferendum
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      6.2.6. Citizens' assemblies selected by sortition (lot/random selection)

6.3. Case study: Direct Initiative, Popular Referendum and Recall.

6.4. Case study: Selecting assemblies by sortition (lot/random selection)

6.5. Conclusions

6.1. Introduction

If the depth of citizen participation can be related to influence over decisions, then forms of direct democracy – final decision-making power on key issues in the hands of citizens – will be of significant interest. It is widely assumed that in complex, large-scale democracies, citizens cannot be directly responsible for decisions – rather that role is left to elected representatives. But, three forms of direct democracy do have a place in a number of democratic political systems.

- The simplest form of direct democracy is the open town meeting, which is particularly prevalent in New England in the United States. The town meeting is a legislative body and is open to all citizens to attend. However, the use of open meetings is limited to relatively small-scale settings.

- On a larger-scale, direct democracy is possible through the use of the family of innovations that allow citizens a direct vote on legislative matters – referendum, initiative and recall. Size need not be an impediment for direct citizen decision-making.

- Writing on direct democracy typically offers us this stark choice: small-scale open assemblies or large-scale direct voting. However, there is a third option that is rarely discussed – the use of sortition (or random selection) to choose a citizens' assembly. Thus it is possible to create a face-to-face assembly with legislative power over a large geographical area.

6.2. Examples of direct democracy innovations

6.2.1. New England Town Meeting

The simplest method of direct democracy is an open assembly with legislative powers. The classical precursor is the Athenian assembly where all citizens (read Greek males) gathered to debate and decide policy. A more modern equivalent is New England town meetings which were much admired by Alexis de Toqueville when he visited the United States in the mid-nineteenth century: 'Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they bring it within the people's reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it.'[194] Town meetings still take place in a number of New England settlements (and in some Swiss communes), although their governing autonomy has been much eroded as powers over roads, schools, police, welfare and zoning have transferred to state and federal level. That said, town meetings still retain certain powers in these areas that can have a significant impact on the lives of local citizens, including the right to levy a local tax to pay for services.[195]

Attendance at town meetings varies and there is no reliable and regular collection of data. One study of attendance in 1996 estimated that attendance ranges from an average of 7 percent of registered voters in Connecticut towns, to 26 percent in Vermont towns.[196] A study of meetings between 1970 and 1997 suggests that on average 14 percent of a town's eligible voters will go to meeting and 7 percent (36 percent of the attendees) will speak out at least once.[197] Small towns have the highest percentage turnout for meetings – attendance rates drop as the size of town increases. Survey data on attendance highlights the familiar problem that 'young voters have an exceptionally low attendance rate' – it is middle aged and older voters who are significantly more likely to attend.[198]

The tone of the meetings can vary considerably with much resting on the skill of the moderator (who is elected from within the community). In her influential study of a meeting in Vermont, Jane Mansbridge highlights how face-to-face engagement tends to privilege the interests of those who are most comfortable speaking in public and that pressure to achieve agreement and consensus will often silence those in the minority.[199]

Some New England towns have moved away from the traditional open town meeting to the use of ballot referendum meetings (a deliberative meeting with decisions made by referendum), representative town meetings (voting restricted to elected members) and town or city councils. However a significant number of towns continue with traditional practice. Advocates argue that there is no empirical evidence that alternative forms of governance – e.g. elected councils – take better decisions and that the traditional town meeting has comparative advantages over other forms of government, for example:
- political education and socialisation of citizens;

- choice of whether to participate in debates and decision-making;
- training ground for future state and national elected officials;
- democratic scrutiny of town administrators;
- potential to place any issue on the agenda of the meeting.[200]

To be effective, town meetings are obviously restricted by scale – they work best in relatively small communities. Their continued existence shows that direct, face-to-face debate and decision-making can be effective under the right conditions.

6.2.2. Referendum (see Case Study 6.3. for more details)

A referendum refers a proposed or existing law to voters for their approval or rejection.[201] The process can be advisory or mandatory – in some countries a popular vote is required before certain laws or constitutional changes can be made. In a few countries – e.g. Switzerland and some US states – referendums are a regular part of government. However, in most places they are occasional, ad-hoc occurrences. Worldwide, the use of referendums has increased, although turnout tends to be lower than in general elections.[202] The emergence of new information and communication technology means that it is now more convenient and technically possible for an increased level of direct voting by citizens (see 7.2.11. on e-referendum and e-initiative).

There are two distinct types of referendum:
- Legislative referendum – this is the most common form where the legislature submits a proposition (e.g. constitutional amendment, law, proposal) to voters for their approval or rejection. This may be mandatory or advisory.
- Popular (or petition) referendum – a less commonly-used form of referendum where citizens have the power to force a vote on specific legislation that has been enacted by the legislature through a petition (i.e. collecting a certain number of signatures from citizens). The popular referendum is often confused with the initiative (see 6.2.4. below and case study 6.3).

Critics offer a range of arguments against the use of referendum, including:
- citizens do not have the capacity to make wise decisions;
- referendums do not protect the rights of minorities;
- the results of referendums are influenced by political, economic and social inequalities;
- referendums weaken representative democracy.

As we will see in case study 6.3., these arguments are contested by advocates of referendums and initiatives, who argue that the referendum is the best means of defending political equality and improving responsive rule – direct voting increases the correspondence between political decisions and the equally weighted interests of citizens.

6.2.3. Multi-choice ballots / preferendum

One of the criticisms of the use of referendum is that the simple yes/no option on the ballot is generally insensitive to the complexity of most policy issues. There are two suggestions on how popular voting in referendums could be made more sensitive: the multi-choice ballot and preferendum.

Benjamin Barber, who suggests the use of multi-choice ballots for referendums, suggests that the simple yes/no option should be replaced with a range of options, including:
- Yes in principle – strongly for the proposal
- Yes in principle – but not a first priority
- No in principle – strongly against the proposal
- No with respect to this formulation – but not against the proposal in principle, suggest reformulation and resubmission
- No for the time being – although not necessarily opposed in principle, suggest postponement.[203]

Barber argues that a more varied set of choices would elicit more nuanced and thoughtful responses, yielding vital political information. Even though the yes and no options would be counted in aggregate to achieve a result, significant information on the electorates' views would emerge and would help shape policy.

The preferendum is similar in that a range of options are available, but slightly more complicated in its application. There also seem to be a number of different versions of the preferendum. The approach taken by the de Borda Institute in Northern Ireland uses a points system of voting:

> If, say, there are five options on the ballot paper, voters would be asked to give 5 pts to their most preferred option, 4 pts to their second favourite, 3 pts to their next choice, 2 pts to their penultimate option and 1 pt to their least favoured option. In the count, we add up all the points cast by all voters, to see which option gets the highest.[204]

This approach means that the most divisive option which has a significant number of 5s and 1s could have an average score of 3 and be beaten by a compromise option that attracted very few 5s, but a significant number of 4s. Advocates of the preferendum argue that it is particularly effective in situations of contentious social change – hence the interest from groups in Northern Ireland.

6.2.4. Initiative (see Case Study 6.3. for more detail)

Often confused with referendums, the initiative allows citizens to propose a legislative measure (statutory initiative) or a constitutional amendment (constitutional initiative) if they are able to submit a petition with the required number of citizen signatures. The initiative has mostly been used in Switzerland and some states in the US.

There are two basic types of initiative.
- Direct initiative – if the required number of signatures is collected, the proposal goes straight to a ballot.
- Indirect initiative – the proposal initially goes to the legislature. If it fails to approve the proposal, it can then be submitted to a popular vote if a further number of signatures are collected.

There is no common figure for the number of signatures required on a petition for an initiative – the typical requirement of US states is about 8% of those who voted for the governor in the previous election.[205]

The initiative is one of the few democratic innovations that allows citizens to directly set the political agenda and the process of collecting signatures requires citizens to mobilise supporters. The initiative is typically criticised on the same grounds as referendums – see case study 6.3. for further discussion.

6.2.5. Recall (see Case Study 6.3.1. for more detail)

In the same democratic 'family' as referendum and initiative, recall provides citizens with a method of removing a public official from office. By filing a petition with the required number of valid signatures, citizens can force a vote on the official's continued tenure in office. Recall requires a higher number of signatures than initiative or popular referendum – usually about 25% of citizens who voted in the last election. If the recall is successful, a special election typically follows. The most high-profile recall undoubtedly occurred in California in 2003 when the existing state Governor, Gray Davies, was removed from office – a process which led ultimately to the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as the new Governor.

As Thomas Cronin notes: 'Few democratic 'reforms' have sparked such sharp division of opinion as the recall'.[206] The main argument in favour of recall is that it provides for continuous accountability – voters do not need to wait until the next election to remove an incompetent, dishonest, unresponsive, or irresponsible public official. Critics, on the other hand, argue that it is an expensive, disruptive and polarising innovation.[207]

6.2.6. Citizens' assembly selected by sortition (see case study 6.4. for more detail)

Deliberative innovations such as citizens' juries, deliberative opinion polling and America Speaks (4.3.) are attractive because all citizens have an equal opportunity to be selected and they show that citizens are willing and capable of making reasoned judgements on complex policy issues. If we are looking to institutionalise direct democracy – giving citizens final decision-making powers – then deliberative innovations are lacking because they are only decision-recommending. However, random selection (or sortition) could be used to select a citizens' assembly that had

final decision-making powers over key policy issues. No such assembly has been established to date – the closest is arguably the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia (5.2.11. and 5.7.) whose final recommendation will frame a popular referendum.

Proposals have been made for the establishment of citizens' assemblies with decision-making (rather than recommending) powers. For example, Anthony Barnett and Peter Carty have argued that rather than selection by election or appointment, the House of Lords should be replaced with a permanent Citizens' Assembly, with the majority of members chosen by random selection.[208] Along similar lines, the Council of Europe's Green Paper *The Future of Democracy* argues that a random selection of citizens should be selected to serve on a Citizens' Assembly that would review particularly controversial bills passed by parliament.[209] Such proposals typically argue that the length of service on such an Assembly would be time-limited – part or the whole of the assembly would be replaced on a regular basis (e.g. every couple of years or so). This is commonly known as lot and rotation.

Sortition or random selection offers an innovative method for creating decision-making bodies. If the assembly is large enough random selection will produce a group of citizens which reflect the broad characteristics of the wider population – no social group will be systematically marginalised. It realises the principle that citizens should not only be subject to laws, but also have the right and capacity to make those laws. The use of sortition to create direct democratic institutions is discussed in more detail in case study 6.4.

6.3. Case Study: The direct initiative, popular referendum and recall

Description
The direct initiative (7.3.4.), popular referendum (7.3.2.) and recall (7.3.5.) share two significant characteristics which make them particularly interesting innovations:

- if citizens are able to collect the requisite number of signatures, they are able to place their proposal on a ballot;
- the decision on whether to accept or reject the proposal rests on a popular vote.

Hence, the underlying idea is one of political equality, realised both in the right to generate proposals and the right to participate in final decision-making. This is what distinguishes these three innovations from other forms of referendum or initiative which leave a substantial role to state authorities in generating proposals and making decisions. In principle, power rests firmly with the citizen body.

The three innovations affect different elements of the political process.
- Direct initiative – generates new proposals (legislative or constitutional).
- Popular referendum – challenges laws already enacted by the legislature.
- Recall – challenges the tenure of public officials.

There is a large hurdle to overcome in collecting signatures – around 8% of the number of voters in the last election for initiative and referendum and around 25% for recall – so most attempts at generating a valid petition fail.

Assessment

Selection mechanism
The (in principle) realisation of political equality in agenda setting (choosing the issue) and decision-making (popular vote) means that initiative, referendum and recall are potentially the most inclusive of all democratic innovations.

However, the actual practice of initiative, referendum and recall raises some interesting issues. The power of money is often highly significant in raising signatures – campaigns that can afford to employ professional petition circulators are more likely to generate the required number of signatures for a valid petition.

In terms of numbers voting, much depends upon the nature of the issue and also the type of innovation. Turnout in recalls in the US is often higher than in the equivalent normal election – the opportunity to remove or save a public official appears to mobilise citizens.[210] The turnout on initiatives and referendums is often lower than in general elections, except where they are on particularly controversial or emotive issues.[211]

As with ordinary elections, there are uneven participation rates by different social groups. Studies of both American and Swiss use of direct voting find that middle-aged males with higher incomes and levels of education are more likely to vote.[212] 'The most important restriction on the democratic norm of equal and general participation […] lies in the unequal representation of social classes.'[213] Low participation rates is one problem; but of more concern is the uneven participation rates – as in other elections, politically marginalised groups, such as BME communities, low income earners and young people are less likely to vote.

Form of involvement
The potential advantages of initiative, referendum and recall are clear:

- agenda-setting – any citizen is, in principle, able to place an issue before their fellow citizens in a popular vote;

- mobilisation – citizens must mobilise fellow citizens if they are to collect the required number of signatures for an issue to go to a popular vote.

Very few (if any) democratic innovations are able to combine these different ideals of participation.

Supporters of the initiative particularly highlight its agenda-setting function. It allows new issues to be put on the agenda which may otherwise have been ignored by the

political establishment. Evidence suggests that issues such as universal suffrage and environmental protection were taken more seriously by political elites after initiative campaigns. Many of these campaigns were initially unsuccessful in changing laws, but they raised the issue in the public consciousness.[214]

We have already noted that these innovations tend to disproportionately engage different social groups in the same way as ordinary elections. Additionally critics argue that citizens do not have the competence to make sound judgements, that votes will discriminate against minorities and that political elites, money and the media are able to manipulate and distort public debates and hence results.

Thomas Cronin directly challenges the question of competence. He argues that:

> Voters have been cautious and have almost always rejected extreme proposals. Most studies suggest that voters, despite the complexity of measures and the deceptions of some campaigns, exercise shrewd judgement, and most students of direct democracy believe most American voters take their responsibility seriously.[215]

There is some concern that initiatives in particular are more likely to produce outcomes unfavourable to minorities. Although there are a small number of well documented examples of successful discriminatory initiatives, it appears that voters are more tolerant than critics contend. It is important to compare the decisions made using this mechanism with those passed by legislatures that do not use initiatives: there is no clear evidence that the former leads to less tolerant judgements.[216]

Finally, the recent history of initiative, referendum and recall shows the growing influence of money, paid petition circulators, direct mail deception and deceptive advertising campaigns: 'the side with more money too often gets to define the issues and structure the debate in an unbalanced way.'[217] Media manipulation is rife particularly when business interests are threatened. However we need to remember that this is a criticism of our political system in general and the existing practice of initiatives and referendums, not of their potential. Advocates argue that institutional safeguards need to be developed to ensure that information is balanced and that the influence of money is limited – for example, an independent 'initiative and referendum agency' to ensure some equality in agenda setting and a 'notification and information agency' that would play a critical role in the provision of reliable information on which citizens can base their judgements.[218]

Role in decision-making
The strength of direct initiative, popular referendum and recall rests on the direct and deciding role that citizens play in decision-making.

Scale and transferability
In terms of scope and scale, initiative, referendum and recall – in principle – know no boundaries. Initiatives and referendums have been used successfully at local through to national levels of governance. In the US there are no mechanisms at federal level – all activities take place at state level or below. Transnational initiative,

referendum and recall are conceivable.[219] For example at the European level valid petitions could require a certain percentage of signatures from citizens from different European member states.

Resource implications
Unfortunately it is difficult to find costings for the different forms of referendum, initiative and recall. It is also difficult to compare costs – states and localities that commonly use this direct democratic innovation often have a specific agency responsible for overseeing the process. In other places without a culture of referendums, they have to be organised from scratch. There are also differences between what different states fund – for example, the level of independent information provided to citizens and funding for campaigns.

Conclusion
What initiative, referendum and recall highlight is that direct democracy need not be face-to-face and therefore limited to a small-scale community. The main attraction of these innovations is without doubt their potential to realise political equality in agenda-setting and decision-making.

However, there are problems associated with these innovations, in particular the general problem of unequal voting patterns across social groups – a problem shared with more traditional forms of voting. Also, the fairness of results is questioned given the influence that money can play on outcomes. For many advocates of these innovations, this is a general criticism of contemporary politics, rather than something particular to initiative, referendum and recall. What is needed is more careful attention to the rules under which these innovations operate. Reflecting on the use of these innovations in the US, Cronin argues that 'the record suggests that the public can […] act responsibly […] The fear that populist democracy via initiative, referendum, and recall would lead to irresponsible, mercurial, or even bizarre decision-making has not been borne out.'[220]

6.4. Case Study: Selecting assemblies by sortition (lot / random selection)

Description
A common criticism of large-scale democracies is that it is impossible to give citizens direct decision-making powers without compromising political equality. Referendum, initiative and recall (6.3.) represent one set of mechanisms for overcoming this challenge. An alternative and perhaps more radical suggestion is the creation of a citizens' assembly with decision-making powers whose membership is chosen by sortition – the use of lot or random selection. If an assembly is large enough, it will reflect the variety of characteristics within the wider population – no social group will be systematically excluded. Combined with rotation (limited terms for citizens), then every citizen has an equal opportunity to be selected. Sortition offers an alternative to the use of competitive elections to select decision-makers. Potentially it reduces the power of political parties to dominate assemblies.

Although the use of competitive elections has come to embody the democratic principle, sortition (or random selection or lot) has a much longer and impressive democratic heritage – for example political officials in Athens were selected by lot. In more modern times its use has diminished.[221] The only institution where a form of sortition is regularly used in the British political system is in the selection of legal juries.

Random selection as a method of selecting citizens has already been discussed in this report – it is used, for example, to select citizens in many deliberative innovations such as citizens' juries, consensus conferences and deliberative opinion polls (see 4.3.); by the Community Fund to select citizens to sit on regional panels (see 5.2.10.); and most imaginatively for the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia (see 5.2.11. and 5.7.). The Citizens' Assembly is arguably the closest innovation to a citizens' assembly with real decision-making powers. However, its recommendations will frame a popular referendum rather than becoming law in their own right.

A challenging proposal for extending the use of sortition is offered by Anthony Barnett and Peter Carty. They suggest that the House of Lords should be replaced with a permanent Citizens' Assembly: 'The reformed second chamber needs an impartial, non-party political character. This can be obtained by selecting a proportion – ideally, ultimately the majority – of its members by lot from among registered voters on the lines of a jury.'[222] This proposal would bring citizens into the heart of the political system and provide a meaningful form of participation. Evidence from deliberative innovations and British Columbia's Citizens' Assembly suggests that citizens have the capacity to take on this role. Selecting citizens at random for time-limited service offers one way through the current interminable debate about whether the second chamber should be elected or appointed.

The Council of Europe's Green Paper *The Future of Democracy* makes a similar suggestion arguing that a random sample of citizens should be selected to serve on a Citizens' Assembly that would meet for one month each year to review and vote on a couple of bills passed by the parliament, 'for which at least one third of the deputies in the lower house have explicitly requested a stay of implementation.'[223]

Assessment

Selection mechanism
The use of sortition implies that all citizens have an equal opportunity to be selected for positions of political authority – an expression of equality. If the positions are few in number, some form of stratified random selection is usually required to ensure demographic diversity (e.g. citizens' juries). However, where an assembly is large and where citizens are rotated over a period of time, a more simple form of random selection can be used – the membership of the assembly will reflect the wide range of characteristics of the wider population. No section of the population is systematically over- or under-represented.

The rotation of citizens on a regular basis also means that the potential to be selected increases. At regular intervals all citizens have the chance to be selected.

If there is a minority group whose presence is seen as essential (for whatever reason), it is possible to reserve seats and then randomly select citizens from this group. This was the approach taken for Aboriginal members of the Citizens' Assembly in British Columbia (5.2.11. and 5.7.).

Sortition does not lead to a representative body in the sense that we are used to – selected citizens would not be accountable to a particular set of constituents. Individual citizens are not expected to represent 'people like themselves.' Rather the idea is to create an assembly of citizens with a diversity of backgrounds and experience to draw upon.

Form of involvement

A citizens' assembly chosen by random selection offers citizens the opportunity to participate at a level not possible in most other innovations – citizens not only deliberate, but they are able to make binding decisions. Sortition offers an innovative way of overcoming the problems of scale implicit within New England Town Meetings (6.2.1.).

An assembly comprising citizens chosen randomly would increase the variety of viewpoints and perspectives in a decision-making assembly. It would also potentially undermine the strategic influence of political parties and reduce the distance between the political class and citizens. Unlike professional politicians, participation in a citizens' assembly cannot be a career – participation is time-limited. The use of sortition realises the democratic principle that citizens can both make the law and be subject to its strictures.

Role in decision-making

Quite simply, randomly selected citizens become decision-makers.

Scale and transferability

Sortition can be used at any level – local or supranational. By using random selection, citizens' assemblies are not restricted to small geographical areas. Following the example of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia (5.2.11. and 5.7.), it is possible to ensure gender equality, presence of marginalised social groups and selection of citizens from different geographical areas.

Resource implications

Costs differ depending on the nature of the innovation – the resources needed for a one-off assembly (e.g. Citizens' Assembly in British Columbia) will be different from establishing a randomly selected second chamber. For the latter innovation, compensation would need to be paid to employers whilst citizens were acting as lawmakers. However, the costs would not be too great since we already support the House of Lords – it is a replacement chamber rather than a new one.

Conclusion

Sortition challenges many of our preconceptions about democracy. It is challenging because it offers a completely different way of selecting decision-makers. Our political system is based on elections and the representative form of accountability. Citizens' assemblies work on a different principle – all citizens have the right to and are capable of taking part in political decisions. Innovations using random selection need not only be decision recommending – they can be decision-making. Citizens can be legislators.

6.5. Conclusions

It is often assumed that because we live in a large-scale complex democracy, direct citizen involvement or control of decision-making is impossible. However, this section has shown that there are ways of increasing citizen involvement in the most important aspect of the political system – legislating. There are three basic approaches that can be taken:

- open meetings which are limited in their scale;
- direct voting through referendum, initiative and recall which can be used at all levels of governance;
- randomly-selected citizens' assemblies which allow face-to-face discussions in large-scale democracies.

One of the limitations of many of the innovations that we have looked at to date is that citizens have little or no agenda-setting or legislative power – public officials decide what is to be discussed and how recommendations are to be used. The forms of direct democracy discussed in this chapter offer the opportunity for citizens to take control of the political agenda and be directly responsible for shaping policy and legislation.

7. E-democracy Innovations

7.1. Introduction

Is e-democracy a panacea – the answer to overcoming problems of political engagement; or will it further reinforce differentiated patterns of political engagement – creating a 'digital divide'? Both perspectives are well represented in the literature. It is easy to overstate the potential of e-democracy – by looking at a number of the most interesting innovations that use information and communication technology (ICT), this section will try to offer a more nuanced account of its potential impact on political involvement.

Although ICT includes radio, television, telephones and the internet, this section will primarily focus on the use of the internet, accessed primarily through computers, but also via new generation mobile phones and digital TV.

Online political engagement can take a number of forms, including:

- e-voting in elections or referendum / initiative;
- internet access to consultation documents and information;
- e-mail contact with officials;

- moderated asynchronous discussion – contributions are emailed to a moderator who either posts them on a website or collates contributions before posting;
- live, real-time discussion – contributions are posted as soon as they are sent.

The use of ICT can have a number of benefits. In particular it means that debates can transcend time and space – citizens do not have to be gathered together in the same physical space. Citizens will be able to engage with other citizens who they would be unlikely ever to meet. One politically marginalised group – young people – show particular enthusiasm for online life.

However, there are potential problems associated with the use of ICT, the most obvious being the digital divide – some citizens may not have access to or lack confidence or knowledge in using ICT. In particular, BME communities and older people are less likely to own or use ICT. There is also a tendency towards fragmentation in cyberspace – citizens are attracted to sites that reinforce their interests and prejudices. Careful consideration needs to be given to designing innovations that are attractive to a wide range of citizens.

A number of governments have put a great deal of resources into the development of e-resources – the Scottish Parliament, for example, has a well-deserved reputation for increasing transparency of its proceedings through the use of ICT. However, many e-innovations are not directly related to democratic engagement – ICT tends to be used in the provision of information or services. Our interest here is with the way in which ICT might be used to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process.

7.2. Examples of e-democracy innovations

7.2.1. E-voting

E-voting has already been discussed earlier in this report (see 2.2.2. for a more detailed discussion). There is, as yet, little evidence that remote e-voting (e.g. via the internet, landline and mobile phones and digital television) has much effect on voter turnout. There is general support for the use of remote electronic voting in the UK,[224] particularly amongst young people.[225] A recent report on ICT and youth engagement suggests that 'as a generation, young people are far more accustomed to using information and communication technologies to enable them to perform basic functions, and see voting as no exception'. The report cites an example of voting for a youth parliament in the Scottish Highlands where a higher percentage of students used their votes in schools using the electronic online voting system compared to those that used traditional paper ballots, 'suggesting that this method of voting had an impact on levels of engagement and participation'.[226]

However, survey evidence from the US 'strongly suggests that e-voting would be used most heavily primarily by people who are already most likely to participate, thereby still failing to reach the apathetic and disengaged'.[227] The introduction of e-voting alone is 'unlikely to stimulate greater levels of democratic engagement'.[228]

There are at least two problems that need to be overcome for effective implementation of e-voting:

- the 'digital divide' in ownership and proficiency – otherwise e-voting is likely to have a detrimental effect on turnout amongst BME communities and older people;[229]
- technical problems associated with security – overcoming potential technical problems is likely to be expensive, but is essential if e-voting and other innovations such as e-referendum / e-initiative are to be effective and trusted by the public.

7.2.2. E-consultation (see also Case Study 7.3. and 7.4.)

According to a recent survey of government use of the internet in Europe, the UK government and parliament ranks highly in its use of ICT to consult citizens.[230] There is a range of ways that ICT can be used to engage citizens, from the provision of information through to online deliberation. However, the general tendency has been to 'move existing procedures online, rather than to use the interactive potential of the Internet to design innovative consultation'.[231] Examples of e-consultation innovations include:

- *Publication of official documents* (including consultation documents) on the internet, thereby enhancing transparency of the political process and making access to political information easier. In the UK, both government and parliament publish official documents and other information on a variety of official websites. There is also a single dedicated portal providing access to government information: Directgov – www.direct.gov.uk.

- *Electronic submission of comments* on consultation documents. GM Nation? (see 2.3.), for example, allowed citizens to complete the consultation survey online.

- *A single, accessible government consultation portal* where all open consultations are listed and accessible – see for example, the UK government's 'Consultation Index': www.consultations.gov.uk.

- *An email 'consultation alert' facility* which provides citizens with information on new consultations. When registering with the facility, citizens would indicate which issues they would like to be informed about. The closest facility in the UK is www.info4local.gov.uk run by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). This facility provides daily email alerts on official documents and announcements from government departments and agencies that are of relevance to local government.[232] Users are able to personalise

the information they receive e.g. topics, agencies and types of document. A more sophisticated system would coordinate information from national and local government and agencies. (N.B. This is one of the potential functions of the 'Civic Commons in Cyberspace' proposal – see Case Study 7.4.).

- *Message board* – previous comments on the consultation process from citizens and other parties can be read and commented on.

- *Interactive discussion forum* – the creation of a forum allows citizens to discuss issues with each other and with public officials. Most government-run consultation forums are asynchronous rather than real-time. Forums can also be open or closed – secure, closed sites can be particularly useful for sensitive policy issues, such as the consultation on domestic violence that took place in March 2000 (see Case Study 7.3.). The potential anonymity of e-discussion forums has similarly allowed an online consultation into hate crime in Northern Ireland. Hoogeven 'digital city' in the Netherlands runs online debates prior to municipal elections, an online discussion platform and a *digital consultation hour* during which a local official answers questions from local residents on a particular policy issue.[233]

These different methods have been used to complement or even replace traditional forms of consultation. For example, the GM Nation? consultation successfully used web-based materials and a questionnaire alongside a series of public meetings (see 2.3.); the domestic violence consultation used the security of an internet site to consult with a hard-to-reach group (see 7.3.) The UK government has also experimented with using ICT for online pre-legislative scrutiny – providing an electronic avenue for submissions to parliamentary committees.

The Scottish Parliament is one of the world's leaders in the use of ICT for engaging citizens. The parliament has made great efforts to ensure that its webpages are accessible and easy to navigate and there are regular webcasts of parliamentary sessions and committee meetings. It has run a number of e-consultations and hosts online petitions (see 7.2.10.).

Simply putting consultation online 'does not necessarily mean that they will be any more far-reaching, open or accessible than traditional consultations'.[234] However, opinion poll data gathered in the UK in 2002 'revealed that young people were significantly more likely to engage in online participation than offline forms.'[235] In addition, recent evidence from the UK parliament does suggest that some new voices have been heard and the quality of evidence and discussion in e-consultations has been relatively high. Although MPs have found the process valuable, participants have been disappointed by the lack of feedback from MPs – a typical criticism of consultation exercises.[236]

7.2.3. E-representatives

A significant number of political representatives have embraced the new technology. Almost all MPs, for example, have websites providing information about their activities and an email address so that constituents and other citizens can contact them. More sophisticated approaches have been taken by a small number of political representatives. These include:

- *Virtual surgeries* – rather than meeting with an MP in person, constituents are able to discuss their problems or concerns online.

- *Interactive forums* – providing the opportunity for citizens to engage and contribute to ongoing discussions with their MPs.

- *Blogs* – blogs (or weblogs) are similar to an online diary in which political representatives make regular (often short) entries.[237] The idea is that they are more lively and informal than static websites, keeping citizens up to date with their representatives' thoughts and activities and providing relevant links to further information. Strictly speaking blogs should be interactive, although currently many do not allow for feedback. A small group of citizens facilitated by the Hansard Society reviewed the use of political blogs and saw their potential to become 'a credible addition to the array of new media tools available to elected representatives interested in stepping up interaction with their constituents.'[238] Although the group liked the 'look and feel' of blogs, they tended to be put off by the content and were frustrated by the sites that did not allow interaction.

Given that citizens often feel far removed from their representatives, internet communication may offer one possible response. Evidence suggests that there is interest amongst citizens in using the internet as a method of interacting with their MP; younger people are apparently particularly enthusiastic about the introduction of interactive facilities.[239]

The other useful 'e-representative' function that the internet can play is in the provision of information on representatives' activities, e.g. an online database with profiles of voting behaviour.[240] An innovative experiment along these lines is 'a tool which matches website visitor's preferences with the stated political stance of candidates or political parties'. Visitors to the website answer a series of multiple-choice questions on current affairs issues. These are then compared with the responses of candidates and political parties. 'The e-technique identifies the candidates and parties that are closest and furthest from the visitor's political preferences.'[241] The Dutch system developed for the parliamentary elections in January 2003 was consulted over two million times; a similar tool in Finland again attracted high rates of usage – several thousand hits during the electoral campaign in the same year.

7.2.4. Minnesota E-Democracy

Minnesota E-Democracy (www.e-democracy.org) is a non-partisan, independent organisation established in 1994 that aims to enable internet-based dialogue and debate between citizens and groups in Minnesota.[242] It claims that its MN-POLITICS is 'the world's largest state-level political e-mail discussion and announcement network.'[243] Certainly Minnesota E-Democracy has become an internationally-renowned democratic innovation influencing the development of projects across the world.

MN-POLITICS has three separate email lists:
- announcements
- state political discussions
- national and world affairs discussions.

MN-POLITICS discussion forums are less anarchic than many other internet-based forums since they are (lightly) moderated by a list manager who ensures that basic rules and guidelines of engagement are followed by users.[244]

There is no data on the demographic characteristics of users, although recent research indicates that a significant proportion of users can be classified as 'activists' and have a high degree of interest in politics. A small, but significant proportion work in public administration or are journalists. Like many e-democracy initiatives, Minnesota E-Democracy appears to attract those already interested in political activities.

Although difficult to assess, there appears to be evidence that Minnesota E-Democracy has, at times, played an agenda-setting role – for example, the press has covered online debates. There is also anecdotal evidence that debates have had an effect on local political decisions.

In a recent survey (the representativeness of which is unclear), users state that Minnesota E-Democracy 'is a good forum to spot political undercurrents not appearing in other media' and that it provides 'quicker responses and interactions among political actors'. There is a recognition that the discussion forums provide 'much more equal access for all viewpoints and opinions than traditional media' – aside from a few strict rules set by moderators, Minnesota E-Democracy has no editorial filters. Participants report that Minnesota E-Democracy has increased their political interest and knowledge, as well as their understanding and respect of the viewpoints and opinions of other citizens.[245] Although there is a tendency to over-state effects in surveys, there appears to be evidence that Minnesota E-Democracy plays an important role in civic life and engagement in the state.

7.2.5. BBC iCan

BBC iCan (www.bbc.co.uk/dna/ican) is an interesting development of the Minnesota E-Democracy model: in the wake of falling voter turnout and other signs of

disaffection with politics, the BBC decided to explore the ways of using new technology to connect citizens to each other'.[246] iCan was launched in October 2003.

The iCan site 'aims to help people take first steps in addressing issues which concern them'.[247] iCan offers a number of facilities, including:

- information and advice on hundreds of social and political issues, including who to contact for help;
- details of what's going on in particular geographical areas – users are able to type their postcode on the homepage;
- a local noticeboard where users can post a notice on issues that are of concern or advertise local events;
- support for starting a campaign online with other iCan users;
- articles by activists sharing their experience and expertise.

Thus iCan has both a local focus as well as opportunities to engage on national (or supra-national) issues. Sian Kevill who jointly heads the project recognises that the way people engage with politics has changed: 'People don't approach politics through party allegiances any more […] they approach it through an issue, and this site makes it easier for people to connect into politics through an issue.'[248]

7.2.6. HeadsUp

HeadsUp (www.headsup.org.uk) was formally launched by the Hansard Society in June 2003 as an internet resource for raising political literacy and participation amongst young people under the age of 18 and providing a vehicle for consultation with a hard-to-reach group. The central feature of HeadsUp is a moderated online forum where young people deliberate on topical political issues that relate to the parliamentary and democratic process. There is a range of background information to support the online discussions. Access to the website is unrestricted, apart from the online forum which requires pre-registration (by teachers) to ensure security. The site has been designed not only to promote debate amongst young people, but also to assist teachers with citizenship education and for MPs to consult with young people.

Currently 248 schools and 1,700 students are registered to use HeadsUp. Following an evaluation of the first few months of usage, the site has been revamped in line with suggestions from students, teachers and parliamentarians. The site is highly attractive and user-friendly. HeadsUp has run a series of debates on topical issues, including the children's commissioner, politics in the media, UK in the EU, asylum, reduction in voting age, pupil participation in schools and whether MPs are out of touch.[249] An early evaluation by the Electoral Commission found that there was support for the project from teachers, students and parliamentarians.[250] However, until recently the verbal support from parliamentarians had not turned into action – very rarely did any MPs post comments on the site. However in the recent debate on the children's commissioner, Hilton Dawson, MP for Lancaster and Wyre, became heavily involved in the debate, often posting questions and comments two or three

times a day. HeadsUp was quoted on the floor of the House and in committee sessions.

There is a wide range of youth-orientated websites that promote political engagement – see for example, the report and virtual tour of US sites *Youth as E-Citizens: Engaging the Digital Generation*[251] and the Demos report *Logged Off? How ICT Can Connect Young People and Politics.*[252] However, HeadsUp differs from most youth-orientated sites – it not only provides political information and an online discussion forum, but also provides a facility for engaging with decision-makers, in this case MPs. As the Demos report stated:

> ICTs can enable young people to engage with adults on more equal terms and reduce some of the inequalities of power, self expression and access that currently hinder their public involvement. […] the anonymity of the internet can encourage young people to express politically sensitive or contentious issues that might not be brought out in face-to-face situations. It can also neutralise some of the advantages associated with age, race, faith, gender, ability and background. Anonymity can help to build confidence and empowerment.[253]

There is, however, a digital divide – at least in terms of ownership and use – across socio-economic groups. 'Over 65 per cent of middle-class children have access to a personal computer in the home, compared with just 40 per cent of working-class children. Some 14 per cent of middle-class children can go online at home, compared with a mere 2 per cent of their working-class counterparts.'[254] A limited amount of facilities do exist that expand access – for example the Interchill cyber drop-in centre in Liverpool.[255] However differentiated access remains a problem.

7.2.7. Civic commons in cyberspace (see also Case Study 7.4.)

Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman's proposal for a 'civic commons in cyberspace' attempts to marry the informal deliberations of the independent Minnesota E-Democracy and BBC iCan with broader participation in e-consultation exercises with government. They argue for the creation of a new public agency independent from government which would promote, facilitate and summarise online deliberations on public issues. Rather than different public authorities managing their own consultations with the public, the new agency would be the central access point for citizens to engage in deliberations on the activities and proposals of public authorities at all levels of governance. Authorities would be expected (or even required) to respond to e-discussions.

One of the main strengths to this interesting idea is that there would be one trustworthy location for official e-consultation and discussion on government policy. Further details and assessment of the proposal can be found in Case Study 7.4.

7.2.8. Online deliberative poll

James S. Fishkin, the originator of the deliberative opinion poll (4.3.), also promotes the idea of online deliberative polling (ODP). The real-time, interactive function of the internet can be exploited so that citizens who are geographically dispersed can deliberate with one another in the same virtual space. As Ackerman and Fishkin argue, the internet removes the restriction of bringing people together into the same physical location: 'these restrictions disappear if the face-to-face discussion can be mediated through technology.'[256]

As with the traditional approach to deliberative opinion polling, ODP draws together a random sample of citizens (up to 500) to deliberate on a particular policy issue – the first ODP in January 2003 was on foreign affairs;[257] the most recent in the run up to the 2004 presidential election as part of *PBS Deliberation Day.*[258] Participants are randomly assigned to small groups which deliberate for around 2 hours per week over a 4 week period. At the end of the period, the (post-deliberation) opinions of citizens are surveyed. Compared to traditional internet discussion forums that tend to attract like-minded citizens, the selection process for ODPs ensures that deliberations reflect a diversity of perspectives.

To overcome the 'digital divide', citizens without internet access have been given WebTVs or computers as an incentive to participate; other citizens have been given an honorarium. In at least one of the ODPs 'all participants had microphones, reducing the disadvantage of those who were less literate or less comfortable with text'.[259]

A traditional deliberative opinion poll was run alongside the ODP on foreign affairs in 2003. Although there were similar changes of opinion, 'changes from online deliberation were less pronounced than in the face-to-face version'. Ackerman and Fishkin argue that 'these parallel results suggest that online deliberations, if they continue longer, might someday produce even bigger changes than those resulting from the face-to-face process'.[260] However, it is also possible to argue that face-to-face engagement between citizens may have a greater transformative potential than ICT-mediated deliberations. At present there is a lack of evidence either way. Only by running ODPs over a longer time frame will we know the answer.

7.2.9. Online Deliberation Day

Deliberation Day (discussed in detail in case study 4.4.) would bring citizens together a couple of weeks before presidential elections to deliberate about the issues raised by candidates. As with the online version of deliberative opinion polling (7.2.8.), Ackerman and Fishkin have argued that Deliberation Day could potentially be transferred into virtual space.[261] Rather than coming together with citizens in their own community, citizens would be randomly assigned to small groups of citizens drawn from all across the country. Not only would this increase the variety of perspectives in the discussions, but it also has the potential of reducing the large costs associated with running Deliberation Day.

7.2.10. E-petitions

The Scottish Parliament is well-known for its use of petitions (see 3.2.12.) that allow citizens to raise concerns through the Public Petitions Committee (PPC). The PPC also provides an e-petitioner system.[262] The PPC's website will host a valid petition for an agreed period of time during which petitioners have the opportunity to attract wider public interest and gather more names in support of their petition. Each e-petition also has a dedicated discussion forum where the petition and related issues can be discussed and debated. After this process ends, the petition is formally submitted for consideration by the PPC.

The Prime Minister's Office in the UK also has an e-petition system, although it differs from the Scottish approach.[263] The PM's Office will accept electronic petitions with more than 300 genuine signatures. Unlike the Scottish approach (which has no minimum number of signatures), the British government will not host petitions. Although the PM's Office lists the valid petitions received, there is no indication that they have any effect – petitioning does not seem to have the same significance south of the border.

7.2.11. E-referendum / E-initiative

If the technical and digital divide problems associated with e-voting can be overcome, then there would be no practical reason why e-referendums could not replace the traditional form. The digital signature needed for each citizen if internet voting and e-referendums were to take place would also provide the security needed for collecting signatures for e-initiatives. The internet could be a valuable resource in mobilising support for electronic versions of the initiative, popular referendum and recall (6.3.).

To date, the only example of a binding e-referendum in Europe appears to have taken place in the small commune of Anières in Switzerland in January 2003. The administration took a pragmatic approach and did not attempt to introduce a digital signature for citizens on the grounds that such an approach is not yet well-understood or accepted.[264] Turnout for the referendum on the refurbishment of a local building was unusually high – over 65 per cent. Almost half the votes cast were via the internet, although slightly more people chose to use postal votes (only 6% chose to cast their votes at a polling station).[265]

A more radical vision of direct democracy based on the use of e-referendum and e-initiative is provided by Ian Budge[266] and Michael Saward.[267] Their vision is of parliament elected in the same way as present, but all legislative decisions would be taken by e-referendum with proposals either suggested by the majority party or by citizens through the use of the initiative. Whereas many visions of direct democracy attempt to 'wish away' political parties, this approach recognises the importance of political parties in mobilising citizens and facilitating public debate. However, rather than political representatives making legislative decisions, it is citizens who have the final say. Budge stresses that such direct involvement would increase responsive

law-making and is enabled by the 'evolution of electronically based debate and voting', thus reducing the 'extortionate time demands on ordinary citizens' typically expected within models of direct democracy.[268]

7.3. Case Study: Womenspeak – e-consultation on domestic violence

Description

A common criticism of e-democracy initiatives is that they tend to attract individuals and groups who are already politically active and e-literate – in other words, consultation using the internet is not suitable for engaging with marginalised, hard-to-reach groups. Womenspeak – an e-consultation on domestic violence – challenges this preconception.

Womenspeak was organised by the Hansard Society in March 2000 to allow survivors of domestic violence to give evidence to the All-Party Domestic Violence Group (APDVG). Around 200 women registered on the secure, moderated website and were able to exchange experiences with each other and respond to questions and contributions from MPs from the APDVG.

The consultation was well-received by participants: 'Initial scepticism about the outcome and about politicians was often transformed to appreciation that politicians were online and listening […] 94% said it was a worthwhile exercise, 93% said that they would be willing to participate in such an event again and 92% felt they learnt something from each other's contribution. So the women participating not only offered MPs the benefit of their experience, a sometimes painful and therapeutic process, but also came to befriend and share advice amongst one another.'[269]

The success of the e-consultation rested on a number of features.

- The website was secure – it was only accessible to survivors of domestic violence who had registered and MPs from the APDVG. 'Only 5% of participants would have become involved if the site was not secure from outsiders.'[270] Not only were women given passwords, but also pseudonyms 'to provide an additional assurance that their identities would not be discovered by abusive partners'.[271]
- The website was moderated by a project coordinator with experience of working with survivors of domestic violence.
- A great deal of effort was taken to engage women through trusted intermediary organisations such as women's aid refuges, women's and disability groups.
- A high degree of support was provided to ensure access and ease of use of IT. Since many of the participants had little or no experience of IT, an easy-to-use manual and a phone advice system was provided. To ensure access, a network of free local IT providers was available along with translation services where necessary.

- The website not only included the discussion forum, but also information and advice on domestic violence policy and legislation.

Assessment

Selection mechanism
Given the subject of the consultation it was necessary for the process to be closed – only survivors of domestic violence (along with relevant MPs) were to be given access to the discussion forum.

In order to engage a diverse range of women, it was important that the organisers overcame the problems of the digital divide (lack of IT access and confidence) and distrust of public authorities, particularly politicians. Providing access IT and easy-to-use guidance and using trusted intermediary organisations to mobilise women were significant factors in gaining their cooperation in the consultation exercise.

Participants reflected a wide range of socio-demographic circumstance, geographical regions and social groups, including Irish travellers and Kashmiri and Pakistani mothers.[272]

Form of involvement
Any registered participant (survivor of domestic violence or MP) was able to post contributions – stories, comments, questions, etc. The significance of the secure website and the anonymity of participants in developing the ongoing discussions cannot be understated. As Margaret Moran, an MP involved in the consultation notes: 'The anonymity offered by the technology enabled women to tell their stories, often for the first time, without fear of identification and to receive support and advice without fear of reprisal.'[273]

It is also significant that MPs were involved in the process and it was not simply a discussion forum for survivors of domestic violence. Stephen Coleman from the Hansard Society states: 'We asked people why they participated and whether they felt more motivated to participate in the domestic violence consultation because they were speaking to parliamentarians. And they said yes, no doubt whatsoever.'[274]

Role in decision-making
The role of this consultation exercise was primarily to raise awareness amongst sympathetic MPs on the All-Party Domestic Violence Group. Many of the issues raised in the consultation were subsequently discussed in parliament.[275]

Scale and transferability
Womenspeak highlights how e-consultation can be used to engage marginalised, hard-to-reach groups across dispersed geographical areas. What is important is security and anonymity. Given the right support, secure and anonymous e-discussion forums could be utilised for a range of different issues. For example, the Hansard Society recently ran an e-consultation exercise on hate-crime in Northern

Ireland – this would not have been possible without ensuring security and anonymity for participants.[276]

Resource implications

E-consultation with hard-to-reach groups is expensive. Womenspeak was staff-intensive – a number of intermediary organisations were involved in mobilising participants, the project required a full-time project manager who moderated the discussion and IT advice and support was needed. As Margaret Moran MP notes: 'e-democracy cannot therefore be seen as participation on the cheap.'[277]

Conclusion

The success of Womenspeak highlights how new technology can be utilised to engage hard-to-reach groups. The design of the consultation was carefully considered and the needs of participants recognised. The anonymity, privacy and security of the site, along with confidence building measures for women who were unfamiliar with IT, meant that a silent minority were confident enough to 'talk freely and give honest and personal evidence about their experiences.'[278]

7.4. Case Study: Civic commons in cyberspace

Description

The Civic Commons in Cyberspace is an idea proposed by Jay Blumler and Stephen Coleman.[279] It is one of the most interesting and challenging ideas for an online democratic innovation. Their proposal builds on the popularity of independent e-forums such as Minnesota E-Democracy (7.2.4.), but combines this with the desire for e-consultation on the part of government.

Blumler and Coleman are arguing for the establishment of 'an entirely new kind of public agency', that would be:
- publicly funded, but independent of government; and
- the focus of public online discussion and consultation on the activities and proposals of public authorities.[280]

Public authorities would be expected to react formally to the outcomes of public discussions.

The main strength of this proposal is that the public agency would have independence from government and other public bodies. At present public authorities set the rules and agenda for consultation. An independent e-consultation agency would help remove suspicion of manipulation on the part of public officials.

Blumler and Coleman contend that an online civic commons agency would help reconnect government (local and national) and citizens and could be a facility for MPs to consult with their constituents. The agency would be a one-stop location for finding out about current consultations and citizen discussions on political affairs. This is likely to increase the level and diversity of participation in consultation exercises and the level of debate and discussion on government activity.

Assessment

Selection mechanism

Apart from consultations that by their nature need to be closed (for example, Womenspeak – see 7.3.), all discussion forums on the public agency website would be open. The fairness and effectiveness of the proposal therefore stands on universal internet access – the digital divide needs to be overcome if the facility is to be open to all.

Form of involvement

The advantage of an independent agency facilitating online deliberation and consultation is that agenda-setting by public authorities will potentially be diminished. Consultations will be coordinated by an independent authority. Citizens will know where they can join in discussions on local and national political issues.

Role in decision-making

In Blumler and Coleman's vision, public authorities will be expected to make formal responses to the outcomes of public deliberations. If this can be assured, then the model moves beyond the Minnesota E-Democracy innovation (see 7.2.4.).

Scale and transferability

The proposal is for a national 'clearing house' for all internet-based public consultation exercises at all levels of governance. There is no point replicating the model in localities since citizens can be directed to the sections of the website dealing with their local authority. Something similar is already done by BBC iCan (7.2.5.) – by inputting postcodes, citizens are directed to their local noticeboard.

Resource implications

The potential cost of such a public agency is high, although it would take over certain functions undertaken by national and local government and agencies. Rather than individual authorities and agencies developing their own approaches to e-consultation, Blumler and Coleman's proposal is to draw these together under one roof, alongside more informal opportunities for citizen e-deliberations.

Conclusion

Finding information on on-going consultations at different levels of governance can be time-consuming. Central government provides a one-stop facility for its own consultation exercises (see 7.2.2.), but this is not linked to local authorities and other agencies. Also this leaves control over consultation in the hands of the officials promoting particular policies.

Creating a single independent public body with responsibility for 'promoting, publicising, regulating, moderating, summarising, and evaluating the broadest and most inclusive range of online deliberation'[281] could provide citizens with a single point of entry into consultations and might also reduce suspicion of agenda-setting by public bodies.

The success of such an innovation depends firstly on government being willing to relinquish control of consultations to an independent body (an act that would increase public trust in engagement); and secondly on overcoming the digital divide – ensuring that all citizens have access to and are confident in their use of ICT.

7.5. Conclusions

There is much disagreement about the potential of e-democracy. There are many commentators concerned that the use of new technologies will simply reinforce existing patterns of political participation with hard-to-reach groups further marginalised by new technology. For example, Pippa Norris argues that a 'digital divide' is likely to emerge:

> the rise of the virtual political system seems most likely to facilitate further knowledge, interest and activism of those who are already more predisposed toward civic engagement, reinforcing patterns of political participation.[282]

These are justified concerns – there are social groups (for example BME communities and older people) who have low ownership rates and are not confident in the use of ICTs. Without tackling this problem, any concerted move to forms of e-voting and e-consultation would potentially further marginalise such groups.

However, evidence from some e-democracy innovations challenges this simplistic picture. Where innovations are carefully designed – e.g. Womenspeak and online deliberative polling – citizens with little or no experience of the internet can be engaged.

Equally, the anonymity and security that can be built into discussion forums may itself promote engagement. This is certainly the evidence that emerges from Womenspeak and HeadsUp. In both cases, participants (respectively survivors of domestic violence and young people) would be highly unlikely to engage effectively with public officials in any other way. Anonymity and security can help to build confidence and empowerment.

Finally it is worth repeating that e-democracy is not going to replace existing modes of engagement. If we look at the innovations discussed in this section, almost all of them are electoral, consultative or deliberative in form. The only innovation that moves beyond this is e-referendum and e-initiative. More traditional forms of engagement will be needed to realise *deeper* levels of engagement associated with, for example, co-governance and direct democracy. E-democracy is no panacea – it should be understood as only one (albeit significant) part of a broader strategy to increase and deepen citizen participation.

8. Lessons

8.1. Introduction

This final section of the report draws out some of the lessons that need to be learnt if democratic innovations are to be used as a method of increasing and deepening citizen participation.

The discussion begins with a summary of 'barriers to participation' drawn from a range of studies of citizen participation. The enhancement of public engagement has become a political priority and there appears to be interest in participation amongst the public. However, at the same time, there is public distrust and dissatisfaction with current opportunities for engagement and a lack of dedicated resources to support participation innovations.

We then move on to the question of which innovations work best. This turns out to be a very difficult question, because different innovations have different characteristics and therefore different strengths and weaknesses. Much depends on the prior question of the aim of participation. It is also important to realise that innovations do not have to be used alone – the best approaches to participation may well (and often do) combine different innovations and approaches.

Finally, this section and the report itself ends with some brief and broad conclusions and recommendations.

8.2. Barriers to participation

Previous sections of this report have analysed the wide range of democratic innovations that have been used or proposed to increase and deepen citizen participation. There are numerous examples of good practice where these innovations have been used effectively, but there are even more examples of ineffective participation. Drawing on a number of studies,[283] this section briefly considers some of the reasons why participation initiatives can be ineffective – after all, democratic innovations do not operate in a vacuum. The current rhetoric of participation – the language of partnership, capacity building, active citizenship, etc. – may not be translated into actual good practice on the ground.

Barriers to participation include:

- **Conflicting policy imperatives for public authorities** – participation is encouraged, but government-imposed targets and the need to demonstrate short-term performance improvements typically take priority and therefore limit the potential of participation.[284]

- **Poorly executed participation** – although the climate of compulsion requiring participation in certain policy areas can lead to positive developments, it can have 'perverse consequences in terms of producing short-term and inappropriate strategies for engaging the public.'[285] 'If those responsible only carry out consultation because of the need to satisfy funding conditions, it will be poorly-executed and half-hearted.'[286] In addition, consultation overload can occur as different agencies seek to justify their use of public money.

- **Lack of dedicated resources for participation** – democratic innovations cannot be effective on the cheap. Sustained and effective engagement can be time-consuming and hard-work. Capacity building is often needed, particularly to engage hard-to-reach groups which may have little or no experience, confidence and skills of participation. The Cabinet Office concern that innovative forms of engagement are too expensive fails to appreciate that poorly-resourced participation is likely to be ineffective.[287]

- **A lack of clarity about the aims of participation at a national and local level**.[288] The scope of consultation is not always clear and is not always what citizens wish to discuss. There is a tendency for participation initiatives to be either rather vague or very narrowly focused. There is generally a lack of opportunity for citizens to participate on strategic-level issues. Poorly focused engagement exercises are likely to deter citizens from participating in the future.

- **A lack of creativity and imagination in designing engagement strategies**. Participation tends to be thought of in terms of basic consultation – there is a lack of will to embed deeper forms of participation – e.g. deliberative, co-governance, direct democracy – and to use alternative forms of selection – e.g.

sortition. Very few participation initiatives provide any meaningful opportunity for citizens to set the political agenda.

- **Organisational and professional resistance to participation.**[289] While policies may promote participation, the attitude and practice of staff can be an obstacle for successful engagement. There is a commonly held belief in many agencies that citizen involvement is not suitable for strategic level decisions – these require, for example 'professional knowledge, managerial authority and political representation' rather than citizen participation.[290] The public is too often viewed negatively as 'passive consumers; as a naïve, childlike and clamorous public; and/or as lacking skills, capacities or trust'.[291] There is often a belief that participation will unrealistically raise expectations of citizens. However, it is more likely that citizens' *low expectations* of participation 'present a greater challenge for those pursuing democratic renewal'.[292]

- **A tendency towards 'incorporation' of citizens into official and bureaucratic ways of working** – i.e. 'enabling the public to operate within the norms set by the bureaucracy, rather than enabling bureaucrats to hear and respect the experience that participants bring to the process of participation.'[293]

- **A failure to respond to the outcomes of participation** – once a participation exercise has taken place, it is not clear how this affects decision-making within a public authority. Very rarely do authorities inform citizens of any impact. Worse still, there is evidence to suggest that the outcome of citizen engagement has little or no impact on decision-making processes. Systems are often not effective or even in place to ensure that the decision-making processes within public authorities take into account public opinion. For example, surveys of local authorities found that 'only one-third of local authorities felt that public participation had a significant outcome on final decision-making. In a survey of 'best practice' authorities the Audit Commission found that three-quarters failed to link the results of consultation with decision-making processes.'[294]

- **Lack of cultural change in public authorities** – we should not presume that staff possess the skills and understanding needed to undertake effective participation or that a public authority is structured so that participation affects all areas of its work.[295] It is often claimed that the capacity of citizens needs to be developed for effective participation – however, there is perhaps even more need to build the capacity of public authorities to both organise and respond to citizen engagement. Widespread cultural and institutional change is needed in order that public officials accept the legitimacy of citizen participation and are able to respond effectively to its outcomes.

- **A tendency to engage 'natural joiners'**, i.e. politically-active individuals. These individuals are the easiest for public authorities to engage and often do excellent work within their communities and organisations. However, they do not necessarily represent the wider views of citizens. Different methods are needed to engage the broader public and, in particular, hard-to-reach, politically

marginalised groups. For participation to be inclusive, 'it must ensure that all voices are heard, not just the loudest'.[296]

- **Often no incentive for citizens to participate**. Although citizens report that they are interested in participation we should not assume that this will be converted into actual involvement unless there are clear incentives. This is particularly the case for those citizens who have no habit of participation. Positive incentives can include:

    − a belief that participation will have an impact on policy or services;
    − self-interest – participation will lead to improved services for the individual or community (see for example, Participatory Budgeting 6.3.)
    − personal invitations – being asked to participate appears particularly significant for hard-to-reach groups;[297]
    − small group approaches rather than large open meetings – many people lack confidence to speak in large gatherings;
    − intangible benefits e.g. 'new skills and knowledge, greater self-respect or stronger community identification';[298]
    − payment – particularly popular amongst young people. This can be seen as a recognition of the time, effort and significance of participation.[299]

- **Lack of awareness of opportunities to participate** – even if citizens are interested in participating, they often do not know what opportunities are available.[300]

- **Lack of trust in authorities or scepticism that participation will make no difference**.[301] Citizens often believe that public authorities have already made up their minds or will not listen to the results of participation exercises.[302] There is often a frustration by participants that public bodies fail to respond to their concerns;[303] a lack of feedback on the impact of participation. Participants often express frustration with institutional inertia and the slow speed of change.[304] There appear to be very few examples of where citizen involvement has actually led to improvements in services or changes in policy.[305]

8.3. Selecting innovations

One of the obvious questions that follows from this report's analysis of innovations, is – which democratic innovations work best? This seems a reasonable question, but one that is extremely difficult (or even impossible) to answer. The reason why it is so difficult is because different innovations have different functions. This can be understood simply from recalling the way in which this report divides up innovations into different categories.

- Electoral innovations – *aim to increase electoral turnout.*
- Consultative innovations – *aim to inform decision-makers of citizens' views.*
- Deliberative innovations – *aim to bring citizens together to deliberate on policy issues, the outcomes of which may influence decision-makers.*
- Co-governance innovations – *aim to give citizens significant influence during the process of decision-making.*
- Direct democracy innovations – *aim to give citizens final decision-making power on key issues.*
- E-democracy innovations – *aim to use ICT to engage citizens in the decision-making process* (can be electoral, consultative, deliberative or direct).

The different categories have different aims. Within each category, we can begin to highlight innovations that are particularly effective – many of these are evaluated in more detail in the Case Studies and Conclusions at the end of each section. However, even within each category, different innovations will have different strengths and weaknesses.

What this study does show us, however, is the variety of ways that participation can be increased and deepened. Broad lessons can be drawn by reflecting on the simple analytical framework that has guided the evaluation.

Increasing participation

To what extent does the innovation increase the number of citizens engaged in political participation?

Most innovations aim to increase the level of participation by ordinary citizens. However, an increase in participation also needs to respect political equality. Increasing numbers does not necessarily equate to effective participation.

Is the innovation open to all or is there a selection mechanism such as election, random selection, self-selection or appointment? Is the selection mechanism fair?

Political equality is not necessarily achieved by innovations being open to all – engagement strategies may only attract the already politically-active and not a cross-section of the relevant public. High participation rates may involve differentiated levels of participation across social groups. Selection need not be based on elections – alternatives such as random selection can generate a more diverse group of citizens.

Is the innovation inclusive – to what extent are politically-marginalised groups (e.g. BME communities, young people, lower socio-economic groups) engaged?

Engaging politically-marginalised groups can be difficult. Certain innovations are designed to either ensure that social groups are not systematically marginalised (e.g. through random sampling) or to specifically target vulnerable groups (e.g. secure e-consultation).

Deepening participation

To what extent are citizens able to set the agenda?
In many innovations, political authorities set the terms of engagement. There are very few innovations (e.g. some co-governance and direct democracy innovations) that actually increase the influence of citizens in setting the agenda – i.e. deciding which issues to focus on.

To what extent are citizens informed about the issues?
Information is a prerequisite for citizens making good judgements. Deliberative innovations in particular place a high premium on the provision of accessible and balanced information, often in the form of expert witness submissions and cross-examinations.

To what extent do citizens have the opportunity to debate and discuss issues?
Again, this is very much a strength of deliberative innovations – they highlight how important it is to carefully design innovations to ensure fairness in deliberations between citizens (and citizens and public officials).

To what extent do citizens influence the final decision – do they have control, provide a recommendation or generate preferences?
The aim of most innovations is to generate opinions or recommendations from citizens that decision-makers then may or may not take into account. However, co-governance innovations offer arrangements where citizens have some degree of influence over decisions; direct democratic innovations give total control.

Thus when choosing between innovations, it is important to clearly specify the *aim* of participation. So, for example:

- *if the aim of participation is to find out the views of citizens on a particularly complex policy issue*, a standard opinion poll will be fairly worthless. Citizens will need to be informed about the issue and have time to reflect. Thus a deliberative innovation would appear to be the best option. Then there is the choice or what sort of deliberative innovation – small-scale or large-scale – and the different strengths and weaknesses these bring with them.

- *if the aim of participation is to give citizens some control over the political agenda*, the question is how much control? If complete control, the direct initiative (for example) provides a mechanism for citizens to generate proposals and put them to the popular vote. If authorities do not wish to hand over complete control, then co-governance innovations provide different approaches to sharing political power.

In other words, innovations need to be fit for purpose.

8.4. Exceptional innovations

Whilst it is impossible to state which is the 'best' democratic innovation, it is (arguably) possible to highlight three innovations that are particularly exceptional in the ways that they aim to 'increase' and 'deepen' participation. Each fulfils this aim in different ways. These three innovations are:

- Participatory budgeting (5.3.)
- Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia (5.7.)
- Direct Initiative and Popular Referendum (6.3.)

8.4.1. Participatory Budgeting (5.3.)

Participatory Budgeting (PB) offers a sophisticated engagement strategy that shows that high levels of participation can be sustained, particularly amongst some of the poorer social groups in Porto Alegre. PB provides an annual opportunity for citizens to engage in the process of investment decision-making. In the areas of the budget covered by PB, the citizenry is given a high degree of agenda-setting power – the distribution of the budget is fairly open (although needs-based criteria are taken into account). PB has proved to be redistributive, shifting resources to poorer neighbourhoods.

Perhaps the most interesting lesson that can be drawn from PB is the way in which it gives citizens an incentive to participate. First, levels of participation have an effect on the probability of investment – not only do citizens choose their own neighbourhood priorities, but they also elect representatives who decide on budget allocation – the number of representatives is related to levels of participation in local forums. Second, PB started small, with investments where return was quick and visible. Thus neighbourhoods who did not initially participate were able to see that participation could lead to investment. PB offers a clear response to the question 'why participate?.'

8.4.2. Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia (5.7.)

The Citizens' Assembly indicates the potential of randomly-selected, deliberative forums. Over eleven months, 160 citizens (two citizens from each electoral district in British Columbia, plus two Aboriginal citizens) were given the task of reviewing the province's electoral system. Compared to other deliberative innovations, the Citizens' Assembly was given a highly defined and influential role in the decision-making process – the government committed itself to a popular referendum based on the recommendations of the Assembly before the Assembly began its work.

The main lesson that can be drawn from this experiment is that it provides evidence that citizens are willing and able to deliberate on controversial policy issues and to provide a reasoned decision. The Assembly was carefully designed to ensure that

citizens were able to learn about the issue, receive evidence from the wider population and interest groups and deliberate effectively amongst themselves.

8.4.3. Citizen Initiative and Popular Referendum

Used widely in Switzerland and a number of states in the US, citizen initiative and popular referendum provide a mechanism for citizens to set the political agenda and for the whole population to make the final decision on their proposals. Most referendums held across the world are government-sponsored – in this innovation the government does not have the primary role in decision-making (although it can obviously campaign for or against proposals). Citizen initiative and popular referendum require citizens to mobilise support for their petition – without a significant number of signatures, the proposal will not be placed on a ballot.

The lesson from the actual practice of citizen initiative and popular referendum is that governments need to ensure that money does not affect the outcome – both in terms of generating petitions or in the campaigns once the proposal is on a ballot. If this can be effectively achieved then they are powerful democratic innovations – one of the few direct democratic innovations that can be used in large-scale democracies.

8.5. Combining innovations

Innovations do not have to be used in isolation – they can be combined in order to create more effective participation mechanisms. Some innovations discussed in this report are actually combinations of different innovations. For example:

- the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in British Columbia (5.2.11. and 5.7.) is actually a combination of two different innovations – the decision of the randomly-selected assembly will go to a popular vote in a referendum;

- GM Nation? – the national consultation on GM food – used local open meetings, focus groups and electronic materials to engage a range of citizens (3.3.).

If different innovations are able to increase and deepen citizen participation in different ways, then the creative and imaginative combination or sequencing of democratic innovations has the potential to improve the effectiveness of citizen involvement in decision-making processes.[306] For example, the strength of the citizen initiative and popular referendum is that they give citizens control over the political agenda and final decision. However there are concerns that citizens are not well-informed before voting on ballots and that well-financed campaigns are able to swing votes. One way of improving the debate prior to any vote could be to organise a (or a series of) high-profile deliberative events where randomly-selected citizens are able to learn and deliberate about the issue in question. The combination

improves the performance of the participation exercise against our analytical criteria (except resource implications!).

8.6. Recommendations and conclusions

This study cannot provide a recommendation as to which innovation works best – no innovation is 'perfect.' Different innovations will work in different environments. However, the following general recommendations are offered for consideration if democratic innovations are to be used more widely as a method of increasing and deepening citizen participation.

- Rhetoric is not enough – although the enhancement of participation is a political priority, public authorities lack the will, resources and freedom to embrace democratic innovations.

- Cultural change is needed within political authorities if systematic participation is to be embedded in our political system. Citizens must believe that participation will make a difference. Effective internal systems need to be developed within public bodies so that the results of participation exercises are able to influence decision-makers. Authorities must provide feedback to citizens to show how participation has affected policy and services.

- Citizens are often suspicious of the motives of public authorities – consideration should be given to using independent bodies to facilitate participation.

- Effective participation does not come cheap – dedicated resources (for staff, training, capacity building, etc.) are needed.

- Citizens must be respected and given incentives (or a reason) to participate. This can be as simple as directly inviting citizens to be involved.

And most importantly…
- Be creative and imaginative in designing approaches to citizen participation. There is a tendency to focus on electoral turnout and consultation – these are important elements of the democratic process, but, as this report highlights, there are more innovative and imaginative ways to increase and deepen citizen participation.

9. Endnotes

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[15] Kersting, Leenes, and Svensson, 'Conclusions: Adopting Electronic Voting – Context Matters*',* 285.

[16] ibid., 279.

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